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TURKISH AIR RAIDS ON IRAQI KURDISTAN

IN 8 January, the President of the Turkish Republic met George W. Bush at the White House. Turkish-American relations had cooled off in 2007 because of the threats of Turkish incursions into Iraqi Kurdistan and a resolution of the Armenian genocide passed by the US Congress. A Turkish diplomat described, off the record, the line of diplomatic relations between the two countries as “*more seemly*”

and welcoming “*American efforts regarding the PKK*”. Similarly, the chief foreign policy advisor of the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, expressed his satisfaction on the subject of “*Turkish-American cooperation against the PKK*”.

For the first time, George bush used the term “*common enemy*” with respect to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and

promised to provide real time intelligence on PKK movements in the Kurdish mountains: “*We are dealing with problems we have in common. One of these problems is to pursue our struggle against a common enemy, the terrorists*”, declared the US President. “*And this common enemy is the PKK. It is Turkey’s enemy, it is Iraq’s enemy, it is the enemy of people who log to live in peace*”.

The United States also invited Turkey to cooperate with Iraq for a “*long term political solution*” for putting an end to the PKK’s

actions. However Abdullah Gul has excluded any direct discussions with this party, comparing the Kurdish movement to al-Qaida and dismissing any negotiated political solution with the Kurdish guerrillas.

Since 16 December, several air raids have been launched against Iraqi Kurdistan from Turkey. On 11 January, fresh artillery shelling hit the Amadiyah region, North of Dohuk, s confirmed by General Jabbar Yawar, spokesman of the Peshmergas, and by Kurdish border guards. On 22 January, the Turkish Air Force violated Iraqi air space and bombed several villages in the Amadiyah, Dohuk and Irbil regions. On the same day, the Turkish army was put on maximum alert and raids continued till 30 January.

Since the beginning of winter, the Turkish Army has massed 150,000 troops all along the Iraqi borders. A surveillance system has also been set up along 280 kilometres of the Borders with Iraqi Kurdistan, with hundreds of infrared cameras. Also, on 19 January, about fifty Turkish tanks carried out manoeuvres with infantry units in the town of Cizre.

Last October, the Turkish Parliament had authorised the Army to cross the border for possible "incursions" against the PKK's bases in the Qandil, in Iraqi Kurdistan. But the Iraqi Kurds see this

as more of an expression of Turkey's determination to prevent the emergence of an autonomous Kurdish state by using the excuse of the PKK to occupy the region.

Furthermore, the eight soldiers, who had been taken prisoner by the PKK on 21 October 2007 and then been released unconditionally by the Kurdish movement, have been arrested and tried by a court martial at Van. The prosecuting counsel has called for prison sentences varying between three years and life. The heaviest sentence demanded is for a soldier of Kurdish origin, Ramazan Yuçe, who is said to have called out to surrender to the PKK fighters in Kurdish, and then answered questions by journalists of the television channel Roj TV, close to the Kurdish fighters. Ramazan Yuçe is charged with "apology of crime", "resistant insubordination leading to heavy losses",

"support for activities aiming at breaking the unity of the State and the country's integrity", "flight abroad", "propaganda in favour of the PKK and against military service" — according to the Turkish daily *Radikal*. This trial, moreover, is being held virtually in camera, and the Turkish media are forbidden to report it by decision of the Van court martial dated 13 November, "in the interest of national security".

The 21 October attack, which had caused 12 deaths amongst the Turkish soldiers as well as the 8 prisoners, had aroused the indignation of Turkish public opinion and stirred up the partisans of Turkish military intervention in Iraqi Kurdistan. The free soldiers, for their part, had stated that their arms were defective and almost inexistent and accused their officers of having "abandoned" them in the middle of the mountains.

IRAQ: 2007 BALANCE SHEET OF THE WAR

DESPITE the hanging of two former Baathist leaders, (Barzan Ibrahim al-Hassan al-Tikriti, one of Saddam Hussein's half-brothers, and Awad Ahmed al-Bandar, former President of the Revolutionary Court and assistant head of Saddam Hussein's inner cabinet) violence in Iraq has shown a slight tendency to drop compared with 2006. It was even possible to celebrate the New

Year without any serious incidents — apart from a suicide bomb attack that killed five children and six members of a volunteer patrol in the suburb of North Baghdad. In total, 481 civilians died of violence in December, compared with 1,930 in December 2006, according to the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior.

The sending to 30,000 extra men by the USA and the fact that several

Sunni Arab tribes have turned against al-Qaida, explain this drop. In addition, on the Shiite side, the six-month ceasefire ordered by the radical Imam Moqtada Sadr has helped, even if the overall loss of life in 2007 remains higher than in 2006 — 16,232 for 2007 against 12,630 for 2006, according to the Iraqi authorities.

In addition, 1,300 police and 432 soldiers were killed as against 4,544 insurgents, while in 2006 the losses were 602 soldiers and 1,231 police killed.

For its part, the World Health Organisation (WHO) published on 9 January, its first figures on the War in Iraq. It estimates that, on an average, 120 Iraqis have been victims of violent death every day between March 2003 and June 2006, making a total of between 104,000 and 223,000 deaths. WHO also points out that *“more than half of these deaths occurred in Baghdad”* — and that violence was the principal cause of death amongst men between the ages of 15 and 59. Armed actions are the main source of these deaths (80%).

As well as the death rate, the war has led to a great number of refugees fleeing violence and the UN High Commission for Refugees (HCR) has asked for \$ 261 million for 2008 to rescue the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who have fled their country to neighbouring countries, mainly

Jordan, Syria, Iran, Egypt the Lebanon, Turkey as well as some of the Gulf States. Ron Redmond, the HRC spokesman, points out that the total number of displaced persons in Iraq is close on 2 million, but that *“bringing help to a great number of them is extremely difficult because of the insecurity in a great part of the country. Most of the Iraqis who have fled their country live urban in areas in Syria and Jordan. Many of them are short of money and have more and more difficulty in surviving”*. The Iraqi government, for its part, has pointed out that 30,000 families that had left Iraq had returned home by 2007 — which the HCR has not been able to confirm. The funds for which the HRC has asked are due to be allocated to schooling 100,000 young Iraqis, as well as financing the most disadvantaged families.

As well as the Iraqi nationals, the HCR is responsible for 41,000 Iranian or Turkish and 13,000 Palestinian refugees living in Iraq under very difficult conditions.

However, the *“political progress in Iraq”*, was welcomed by Condoleezza Rice during an unexpected visit to the country mid-January. The US Secretary of State particularly welcomed the vote, on 12 January, enabling former Baathists to again hold civilian and military public office. *“This law is clearly a step forward in the direction of national reconciliation, it is clearly a step forward in the process of healing the*

wounds of the past”. As for George Bush, who was touring the Gulf at the time, he spoke of an *“important step towards reconciliation. It is an important sign that the leaders of this country must cooperate to satisfy the aspirations of Iraqis”*.

After the fall of the old regime and the UN vote that had confirmed the US as an occupying power, the coalition’s Provisional Authority, run by Paul Bremer had wanted to *“deBaathise”* the Iraqi state by removing Baathist from all public offices and army posts. This has had the effect of fuelling and reinforcing the Sunni Arab insurrection’s manpower by depriving hundreds of thousands of Iraqis of their jobs. Going back on this policy, the US has been urging Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki for several months to get this *“rehabilitation law”* passed.

Thus 143 of the members of Parliament present, out of 275, unanimously voted this *“Law for Justice and Transparency”*, the text of which had been drafted months earlier. Falah Hassan Shanshal, head of the Parliamentary committee on *“DeBaathisation”* presented it in these terms: *“This law gives members of the decision making circles of the Baath, who have not committed any crimes, the right to retirement pensions and the possibility of being reinstated”* in public office, except for certain *“leading positions”*. On the other hand, certain former members, found guilty of crimes,

will be tried and sentenced while special courts, to compensate victims of the Baath, will be set up at the demand of the Shiites. As for the "Justice and Transparency Council", which will be formed, it will have the task of fighting Baath ideology in public and political attitudes.

However, this law is not unanimously welcomed by the ex-Baathists, many of whom fear that the accusations and trials by "victims" might in fact be acts of personal vengeance against them, even though they had been compelled to join the Party to secure of keep their jobs.

Reconciliation between Shiite and Sunni Arabs is also being negotiated at government level. The Concord Front, the principal Sunni Arab party, that had left al-Maliki's government, says it is "ready to return under certain conditions", in particular a greater representation of Sunni Arabs within the power structure, both political and military, and the release of some prisoners.

For its part, the US Army is accusing Iran and Syria of responsibility for the civil war. The States particularly accuses the Iranian General Ahmed Foruzandeh, of the al-Qods force, an elite unit of the Iranian Guardians of the Revolution, of "directing terrorist operations" against the US Army and of initiating the assassination

of Iraqi public figures. It has imposed sanctions on him as well as the al-Zawra (al=Thawra) television channel and three Iraqis living in Syria. These sanctions include the banning of any business dealings between those subjected to them and US nationals, as well as the freezing of all their assets accessible to the US courts.

According to Stuart Levey, Under-Secretary of the Treasury responsi-

ble for terrorism and financial intelligence, "Syria and Iran are fuelling the violence and destruction in Iraq. Iran trains, finances and arms extremist Shiite groups, while Syria gives asylum to Sunni Arab insurgents and paymasters. Today's initiative throws a spotlight on the murderous activity of these characters and we call on the international community to act alongside us to insulate them from international economic relations.

IRAN: 13 EXECUTIONS SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE MONTH

ON 17 January, the Kurdish journalist, Ako Kurdnasab, who had been arrested six months ago and sentenced to 3 years imprisonment, was finally released. Similarly, the documentary film director, Mehrnusheh Soluki, was able to leave Iran to seek refuge in France two days after the ban on her leaving the country, to which she had been subjected, was lifted. She had also served a month's imprisonment.

Ako Kurdnasab was arrested on 21 July 2007, at Sanandaj, capital of Kurdistan Province, by the Iranian Intelligence services. He was sentenced to three years for "attempting to overthrow the government by journalistic means". On appeal, his sentence was reduced to six months, that is the term of imprisonment he had already served.

As for Mehrnusheh Soluki, she

remains charged with "propaganda" for a documentary on the 1988 cease-fire between Iran and Iraq.

Moreover, two other journalists, Ejlal Ghavami and Emadoldin Baghi, also in detention, have received permission to leave for medical treatment. *Reporters sans Frontières*, who have been keeping an eye on the case of these four journalists, welcomes the release of the first two buttresses that nothing is resolved for Ejlal Ghavami and Emadoldin Baghi, who must return to prison at the end of their treatment.

Emadoldin Baghi, who suffers from heart problems, was able to leave Evin Prison, in Teheran, where he has been detained for the last three months. Ghavami, a staff journalist on the weekly Payam-e Mardom-e Kurdistan, suffers from an eye

infection, aggravated by the unhygienic conditions of his prison cell in Sanandej.

On 15 January, Ebrahim Lotfi, a 27-year-old Kurdish student, died in detention, having been "suicided" in the same Sanandej prison according to the official version. His family contests the suicide, alleging that during their visits to the student, they were able to see that he had been tortured, and demanding his exhumation and an autopsy of the body, which the Iranian courts refuse.

Ebrahim Lotfi was arrested on 6 January last, for unknown reasons. Sean McCormack, US State Department spokesman, declared he was "deeply concerned by the tragic death and the suspect circumstances" of that death, relaying the call of many Human Rights organisations, including Human Rights Watch. "We call on the Iranian authorities to carry out a thorough enquiry", added Mr. McCormack.

In October 2007, a 27-year-old detainee, Miss. Zahra Bani-Ameri, died in the same circumstances, this time at Hamadan prison.


In general, a fresh upsurge of executions has been taking place in Iran since the end of 2007. According to Amnesty International, 297 people were hanged in 2007, as against 177 in 2006. The Iranian government has launched a "law and order" campaign over the last

year, which has expressed itself in an increasing number of executions.

On 2 January, 13 sentenced people were hanged, 8 of them in Evin prison, in Teheran, They had been found guilty of murder or drug trafficking. Amongst them was a woman of 27, mother of a 5-year-old girl and a boy of 3, sentenced for the murder of her husband. In Qom, 3 men were hanged for drug trafficking and 2 others at Zahedan.

Since drug addiction is having a devastating effect in Iran, anyone possessing more than 30 grams (one ounce) of heroin or over five kilos of opium faces a death sentence. Other offenses that carry the same penalty are "treason and espionage" — offenses that enable the authorities to hound political opponents — murder, armed robbery, drug trafficking, rape, adultery, prostitution, homosexuality and, for Moslems, apostasy.

STRASBOURG: THE EUROPEAN COURT AGAIN FINDS TURKEY GUILTY

 On 8 January, Turkey was found guilty of inhuman or degrading treatment, of the disappearance in 1997 of a member of the People's Democratic Party (HADEP) and for ill-treatment of a Turkish student while in detention.

Mehmet Ozdemir, a HADEP activist suspected of links with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, was abducted by men in plain clothes near Diyarbakir.

His wife took the matter to the European Court for Human Rights, which considered that this disappearance, without any enquiry being made by the Turkish legal system, was tantamount to "a violation of the right to life". It also

ruled that Mehmet Ozdemir's widow had suffered "inhuman and degrading treatment" when she tried to register a complaint with the Turkish authorities. The missing man's widow and eight children received 63,500 euro damages.

As for Ercan Ayaz, a Turkish student at the Free University of Berlin, he had been stopped and placed in detention at Istanbul Airport when he was on his way to Iraq as part of a university working party on Iraqi Kurdistan. Ercan Ayaz stated that he had been beaten and subjected to sexual abuse. The European Court considered "implausible" the affirmation of the Turkish courts that the student had "inflicted his injuries on himself" and awarded him 5,000 euro damages.

BAGHDAD: THE IRAQI PARLIAMENT AGREEDS THE 2008 BUDGET

THE Iraqi Parliament was shaken by stormy discussions over the 2008 budget and the management of oil resources. Despite the appeal of the Government spokesman, Mahmud Mashhadani, to the heads of the political parties at the Assembly, to pass the budget, alleging that delay would only harm the Iraqi people, they maintained their refusal in a declaration dated 21 January 2008. The Prime Minister's representative, Barham Saleh, and the Finance Minister, Bayan Jabr Solagh, were again obliged to defend their budget before the Iraqi Members of Parliament (the budget amounts to \$48 billion).

Some Shiite leaders, like the head of the Fadhillah Parliamentary Group, or that of the Sadrist block, Nassar al-Rubaie, criticised the budget for insufficiently taking into account needs of the Iraqis, particularly regarding education and supplementary assistance of free food, which the government had decided to reduce, as well as on the inadequacy of measures to fight unemployment and poverty. However, other Iraqi leaders, such as Osama al-Nujaifi, a Shiite close to former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, and Mahmud al-Azzawi, from the Independent Arab block, attacked the 17% allocated to the

Kurdistan Region, wishing to reduce it to 13%. There was also disagreement over the fact that the cost of maintaining the Peshmergas was now to be born by the Iraqi Ministry of Defence rather than by the Kurdistan Region. Finally, on 25 January, a member of the Kurdish Coalition in the Iraqi Parliament, Sami Atrush, announced that the parliamentary groups had accepted the principle of allocating 17% to the Kurdish Region for the year 2008, until a population census could be taken. As for the Peshmergas, the Iraqi M.P.s left the decision to the Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, to discuss with the Kurdish government.

Indeed, al-Maliki had accepted to cover the cost of the Peshmergas. According to the Peshmergas' spokesman, Jabbar al-Yawar, a meeting took place in 2007, between the Kurds, the Iraqi Defence Minister, Abdul Qader Muhammad, and David Petraeus, representing the US Command. This had resulted in the decision that Iraq would cover the cost of the 76,000 Peshmergas. Jabbar al-Yawar criticised the Prime Minister's about turn, who had then called for a reduction in the number of Peshmergas to 30,000. Still according to Jabbar al-Yawar, the Shiite government seemed to fear

that too many Kurdish armed forces would only serve separatist designs.

The Iraqi government spokesman, for his part, announced that the Iraqi armed forces would be able to ensure the country's security by the end of 2008.

At the same time, the Kurdish leaders in Baghdad tried to settle the question of the control of oil resources and their exploitation, an issue that has been divided the Baghdad government and Irbil governments for several months. The situation has become so tense that some Kurdish political leaders are openly demanding the resignation of Oil Minister Hussein al-Shahristani.

Indeed, the Kurds are defending their autonomy by the strategy of exploiting their natural resources whereas the Iraqi government wishes to strengthen its control over the extraction of oil and contracts made between the Irbil government and foreign companies. According to Kurdish observers, the disavowal of contracts between these companies and the Kurdish officials have had little effect in the field, where the foreign investors pay little heed to the stand taken by the Iraqi Minister al-Shahristani. The Kurdish Minister for Industry and Minerals as even announced the opening and start of operations of four small refineries with a total planned production

of 40,000 barrels by next August. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has signed an agreement with the South Korean National Oil Company, which allows the Korean company to import Iraqi oil to the value of three times that of their 2006 imports of Iraqi oil. The Regional government has also signed contracts with 20 other foreign companies, despite the Central Government's opposition.

Thus tension is thus rising between the Kurdish leaders and the Shiite Arab Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. The former accuse the Baghdad Government of dragging its heels on subjects that are crucial to Kurdistan such as the referendum on Kirkuk or the funding of the Peshmergas, though they insist they do not intend leaving the present government.

"I wouldn't call this a crisis, but there have been ups and downs and suspicion on both sides", explained, for his part, Qassim Dawud, a Shiite M.P. on al-Maliki's united list, while Mahmud Othman, an independent Kurdish M.P. recognises that the Kurds had been *"careless"* and committed *"mistakes"*, adding that federalism was a new thing in Iraq and that it was inevitable that its establishment would rise to some tension.

Thus 145 Iraqi members of Parliament, Shiite and Sunni Arabs, Turcomen and Yezidis signed a declaration of support for the Iraqi gov-

ernment's determination to control the management of the resources of the whole of Iraq.

At the end of the month, the Kurdish Alliance, a coalition of Kurdish parties in the Baghdad Parliament, which is the second largest parliamentary force in Iraq, with 53 M.P.s including some members in the government, announced the visit to the Iraqi capital of a top

level delegation from the Kurdistan Region, to discuss the contracts signed between the Kurdistan Regional Government and foreign prospecting companies. Ashti Hawrami, Minister of Natural resources of the Kurdistan Government thus again tried to resolve the conflict, which a recent visit by the Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani had been unable to end.

IRBIL: A CONFERENCE ON THE ANFAL CAMPAIGN AND HALABJA

FROM 26 to 28 January, an International Conference took place on the *Anfal* campaign and Halabja, on the initiative of the Regional Government and, in particular of Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani.

Twenty years after the launching of this campaign of genocide against the Kurds by Saddam Hussein, this conference had the following aims:

- In Iraq, to call for the execution of the sentences passed by the Court on the officials mainly responsible for the *Anfal*, who had been tried in Iraq; to secure the passing of a law of repentance and recognition of the crimes committed against the Kurdish people by the former Iraqi regime; to inform the Iraqis of the facts and the nature of the crimes, in particular through the education

system; to ensure the recognition of the genocidal character of the *Anfal* campaign and make it a subject of study and research in Iraqi universities; to create a national institute for collecting and translating documents, publications, research papers and information of the *Anfal* campaign and on all the other crimes committed against the population of the Region of Kurdistan; to form a committee to identify the companies and countries that had supplied the Saddam Hussein regime with the material means and the knowledge that enabled him to conceive and produce weapons of mass destruction; to provide help at national level for rebuilding all the regions affected by the *Anfal* campaign and all the other crimes against the population of the Region of Kurdistan; to ensure that a law be passed to compensate the victims of the *Anfal*

campaign; to organise a special conference on the Arab countries on the genocide and other crimes committed by the Saddam Hussein regime against the population of the Kurdistan Region and other peoples of neighbouring countries; to found an Institute that would work in coordination with international institutions on enquiries regarding crimes of genocide committed throughout the world, including those against the Kurds. This institute should, annually, organise a conference in different countries in turn.

- In the Region of Kurdistan, to form a special committee to promote information and understanding of the crimes committed against the population, with the help of international organisations, such as the United Nations, the European Union and its Parliament, some foreign Parliaments, the International Court of Justice at the Hague etc; to include the *Anfal* campaign in the research programmes of the Universities of the Kurdistan Region; to form a special committee to study and enquire into compensation of victims of the *Anfal* campaign; to speed up the process of resolving the legal status of the *Anfal* victims; to improve the living conditions of the victims' families; to conduct legal proceedings against those who had played a role in the genocide campaign; to obtain international recognition and aid for the areas hit by the *Anfal* campaign and the attendant chemical bomb-

ing and shelling; to provide adequate treatment for the survivors of the chemical bombing and to decontaminate the affected regions; to found a national museum to gather the personal effects of the victims, such as their clothes, identity papers etc.; to build commemorative monuments in all the regions hit by this campaign.

Research workers, writers, politicians and artists had been invited to this Congress. Shinar Saad Abdullah, Minister for the *Anfal* and the martyrs and daughter of Saad Abdullah, who was killed in the 2005 Irbil bomb attack, to whose memory this Congress was dedicated, gave a detailed report on the crimes committed against the Kurds, with precise statistics on the death rate in every Kurdish province hit by the campaign and on the high proportion of survivors still suffering from the psychological and physical consequences as well as the difficult material circumstances in which so many of the victims' families of were still living.

The Presidency's Chief of Staff, Fuad Hussein, declared that the goal of the conference was to "*discuss the genocide*" "*from every angle*" so as to supply clues to the origins and causes of the *Anfal* campaign. According to Fuad Hussein, "*the genocide against the Kurds is the most important aspect in the formation of the Kurdish nation. Not only must this tragedy become part of our histo-*

ry, but it must also guide us in building a society freed from hate and violence. Thus, we hope that one day we will be able feel sufficiently confident to be able to say to our children — and all the generations yet to come — that such massacres ... will never happen again".

A documentary film on *Anfal* was shown on the first day. Photographs and works of art were also exhibited. There was also concert by two singers, Diyari Qaradaght and Melek, who sang Kurdish songs about the *Anfal*.

There were 37 speakers, from all points of view and parts of the world, then presented their analyses on various aspects of the campaign, such as the Baath ideology, the crimes against children in the course of the campaign, the role of foreign countries in making the chemical weapons, the question of this genocide and international law, the economic, psychological and demographic effects of the campaign etc.

At the end of the *Anfal* conference, which took place in Irbil in January, Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani made a speech, on 28 January, to remind everyone of the gravity of the acts perpetrated by the Saddam Regime: "*It was a crime against Humanity, of savage mass killings whose aim was to wipe the Kurdish nation out of existence*".

Nechirvan Barzani continued by insisting on the fact that the inter-

national community must understand that the point of view and the attitude of the Kurds is influenced by their past history. *"The consequences and effects of this past oblige us to remain united and strong*

to protect our people from persecution and injustice". He added that Kurdistan was committed to being part of a democratic and plural Iraq because *"we cannot tolerate a bitter repetition of history"*.

A PLAN TO SAVE IRBIL'S CITADEL

THE Government of Kurdistan hopes to save and restore the Citadel in Irbil after evacuating and rehousing the refugee families that have been living there since the 1980s, when Saddam Hussein destroyed so many Kurdish villages.

The earlier inhabitants had left the area in the 1920s to build new, larger and more modern homes in the lower town according to Kenan Mufti, Director of Antiquities, who was himself born in the city, where his family has lived for nearly 500 years.

These refugees, packed into the 10 hectares (4 acres) within the city walls, have no sewage, nor any means of draining waste water. This is absorbed into the ground, eroding the citadel's slope. *"Every day 750,000 litres of water is thus damaging the site"*, explained Kenan Mufti. Moreover the work of altering the buildings, sub-dividing or enlarging the rooms is gradually destroying the original architecture.

In November 2006 the families that

were living there were rehoused outside the city, with water, electricity, and sewage and \$4,000 with which to rebuild a house. But to avoid a total break with the historic continuance of human habitation, the city authorities left one family on the site to maintain and supervise the pumping.

According to Mohamed Jelid, UNESCO's representative in Iraq, of the 800 dwellings that made up the citadel, there are only about 20 in an acceptable state. *"The site includes remains that bear witness to some 8,000 years of human occupation which make it the most ancient continuously inhabited place in the world"*.

Shireen Sherzad, recently appointed head of the Restoration Committee and advisor to Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, went one further: *"We have at the moment a very important monument in the heart of the city — and that heart is dead"*. Mrs Sherzad estimates the cost of the first three years if the restoration project at \$35 million, adding that they do not have the resources available for this.

Nevertheless, there is general agreement of the necessity of preserving this 650-year-old architectural complex of three mosques, a hammam and houses with arcaded exteriors and interiors decorated with paintings. *"The situation is critical"*, said Ihsan al-Totinji, a leading official of the Czech company Gema Art Group, which has been charged with the restoration of the site. All the houses are subsidising and in danger of collapsing with the rains. The Czech company has already taken over 200 pictures of the Citadel's interior and 250 exterior views as well as satellite pictures and 90 taken from an army helicopter. Before raking these pictures, all that was available were site plans dating back to the 1920s. The photos will enable a three dimension virtual reconstruction of the buildings to be created, which will help the restorers in their choice.

The Citadel is on top of a 30 metre high hill, formed of the many strata of successive occupations, including the Acadians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians and the Greeks. The defeat of the Persians by Alexander's army at Gaugamela in 331 BC took place not far from there, in the Irbil plain, 32 Km to the North of the city. Recent geophysical tests reveal vestiges of what could be the remains of a temple underneath the Citadel's centre.

VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION AGAINST KURDS IN KAZAKHISTAN

IN fear of their lives, the Kurdish community living in Southern Kazakhstan is considering leaving the region, where it has been living since being deported there by Stalin in the 1930s.

The Kurds have been feeling threatened in this country since last October, when a Kurdish teenager was accused of sexually assaulting a young Kazakh. In retaliation, groups then attacked Kurdish houses, setting them on fire and beating up their occupants. The violence spread throughout the region inhabited by Kurds. Since then, despite attempts at reconciliation between the two communities, the Kurds no longer feel safe and complain of an aggressive press campaign against them. According to Karim

Nadirov, who runs the Kurdish Cultural Centre at Chymkent, many Kurds are likely to leave the region for the North of the country. He adds that the attacks on Kurds have not stopped and that the Kurdish Cultural Centre has recorded 30 cases of aggression since October. These are mostly acts of arson on the supplies of winter forage of the stockbreeders, forcing their victims to sell off their stock. Other Kurds report acts of intimidation and criticise the indifference of the Kazakh authorities.

According to official statistics, nearly 46,000 Kurds live in Kazakhstan, 7,000 of them in the South. These Kurds, originally from Armenia or Azerbaijan, were deported by Stalin in 1937, while other Kurds from Georgia followed in 1944.

cially banned in the Kurdistan Region since 2006.

Although the Kurds have expressed some satisfaction, certain Iraqi circles disapprove the changes in the flag, which were decided without any national vote. Thus the Iraqi Association of Moslem Students has denounced this decision as being *"illegitimate"*. The Assyrian Congress, meeting on 26 January in Irbil, for its part considered, in a public statement, that *"amongst all the political crises that threaten the unity and destiny of Iraq"*, the Parliament had lost all sense of priority by legislating on issues so far removed from the crucial problems that the country is facing.

• **TURKEY: A BOMB ATTACK IN DIYARBEKIR.** The car bomb attack that took place in Diyarbekir's town centre on 3 January killed outright five students and injured nearly 70 people. The bomb was apparently aimed at an Army vehicle carrying soldiers. Hidden in a parked vehicle it was detonated by remote control as the Army vehicle was passing by a five-star hotel, the Hussein Avni Mutlu, and a hundred yards from an Army base. Four of those killed outright were students attending private lessons to prepare their university entrance exams. Another of the students was so seriously injured that he died in hospital on 8 January, thus bringing the death roll to six.

AS WELL AS ...

• **THE KURDISH PARLIAMENT ADOPTS THE NEW IRAQI FLAG.** At the request of the President of the Kurdistan Region, Mas-sud Barzani, the Kurdish Parliament, sitting in extraordinary session to adopt the new Iraqi flag, to be flown alongside the Kurdish flag. This new flag, which removes the three stars that recall the former Baathist regime, was

adopted by the Iraqi Parliament on 22 January by a majority of the 110 M.P.s present (out of 165). The phrase *"Allahu Akbar"* (God is Great), which was added by the Baathist regime in 1991, at the time of the First Gulf War, has been retained — but using the Kufic script, not that adopted by Saddam Hussein.

The former Iraqi flag has been offi-

The Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, immediately condemned the attack, accusing the PKK of it. On 5 January he went to visit the injured, while the Chief of Staff, General Yasar Buyukanit arrived at Diyarbekir the day before. For his part, the US Ambassador to Ankara attacked *"this horrible example of the senseless tragedies caused by terrorism"*, and added that the United States *"reiterated its determination to stand at Turkey's side in the struggle against all kinds of terrorism"*.

For its part, the PKK recognised that certain of its members, who have since been arrested, had carried out the attack but denied that its Presidential Council and party leadership were involved in planning the attack. Thus they *"apologised"* to the victims: *"this attack was not planned at the central level of our movement (...) We regret that civilians have lost their lives and offer full apologies to our people"* declared Bozan Tekin, a senior PKK officer, quoted by the Firat news agency that is close to the Kurdish fighters.

In the course of its enquiries, the police first arrested four suspected people on 5 January but released them on 6 January for lack of evidence. The searched and overall investigations carried out in the region enabled them to seize some 50 Kg of explosives, grenades and even a home made land mine in a car abandoned near Van, but not anything that could be connected

with the bomb attack. However, on 7 January, another suspect was arrested with six other alleged *"accomplices"*, all closely related to the principal suspect. Indeed, he had bought the car used for the attack a short while before.

Searches of the homes of the other suspects enabled the police to seize arms and explosives. Finally, on 10 January, the owner of the car, a 23-year-old Kurd, admitted to being the author of the attack and to have acted on the orders of two PKK members who had planned the attack and placed the explosives in the car before driving it into the town centre. Originally from Karapinar, a suburb of Diyarbekir, where he is living at present, he is said, according to the police, to have been trained in PKK camps based on North Iraq. He has already been twice sentenced to 5 months jail for *"terrorist propaganda"*.

• **HOLLAND: THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT LEADER CRITICISES THE TREATMENT OF MINORITIES IN TURKEY.** Pieter Van Geel, Leader of the Dutch Christian Democratic Party, returning from a visit to Turkey said he was *"shocked"* by Turkey's treatment of minorities: *"If Turkey want one day to be part of Europe, it must improve on the areas of religious freedom and freedom of expression"*. He also criticised the recent jamming of the YouTube Internet site by Turkey because of videos that

"offend" the memory of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Pieter Van Geet, who has already led four coalition governments since 2002, says that, he in favour of Turkey's membership of the European Union on principle, but has always laid down the condition of Turkey's respect and observance of Human Rights.

In September 2007 the Christian Democrats in the European Parliament had succeeded in getting a resolution passed encouraging Turkey to continue its efforts in the context of future negotiations.

For its part, *Reporters Sans Frontières* has criticised the legal harassment to which the media are subjected in Turkey. Thus, several journalists are facing prison sentences: Yasin Yetisgen, General Manager of the weekly *Coban Atesi* and Berkaut Coskun are being sued for an editorial published in the review entitled: *"Mother, don't send me to the Army"*.

They are accused of the crime of insulting Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, under Article 318 of the Penal Code. Haci Bogatekin, of the daily *Gerger Firat*, is accused of propaganda and apologetics in favour of the PKK for having drawn a parallel, in an article entitled *"Feto and Apo"*, between Fethullah Gulen, a religious leader, and Abdullah Ocalan.

• **THE KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT HAS SIGNED A CONTRACT WITH ENTERRA SOLUTIONS LLC.** The Regional Government of Kurdistan (RGK) is continuing its active policy of partnership and openness with foreign firms. With a view to making it easier for them to set up their activities, the Kurdish Ministry of Trade has signed a service contract with the firm of Enterra Solutions LLC, whose head office is in Virginia, USA, for setting up a Business Centre in Irbil. This Centre will be a contact point for any firm wishing to set itself up in Kurdistan.

"The Kurdistan Business Centre will be a centre for investments and dealings in the region", explained Stephen F. DeAngelis, President of Enterra Solutions. By helping the Iraqi business circles to operate *"transparently and in accordance with international criteria"*, the Business Centre aims to attract and provide active help to investors and to foreign firms in the Region.

The Business Centre will identify the international companies, help and ease the investment and company transactions and, jointly with the Kurdistan Region, will especially support a certain number of critical and strategic projects highlighted by the KRG. Moreover, the Irbil-based staff of the Centre will provide marketing, technical expertise and various services aimed at attracting investors to the

Region. Enterra also points out that it hopes to train five students from the Region every year in the area of economic development. It will also help Kurdistan's regional industries, as well as international organisations, to create jobs, either in agriculture, fuels and power, chemical and pharmaceutical products, banking and insurance, building materials, services, health and education.

• **SYRIAN KURDS DEMONSTRATE IN CYPRUS.** On 24 January, 100 Kurds of Syrian origin and members of the Yekiti (Unity) Party, demonstrated in Eleftheria Square in front of the Ministry of the Interior, calling for the freeing of Mohammed Ali Ahmed, one of the founders of this party, which is banned in Syria. According to Karyadi, an association for Kurdish-Cypriot friendship, M. Ali Ahmed faces a life sentence if he is sent back to his country of origin.

Mr. Ahmed, who has asked for political asylum, was sentenced to 45 days detention for driving without a licence. However, after having served his sentence, instead of releasing him the police cited a clause in the law that allows asylum-seekers who have been sentenced to be kept in detention pending a ruling on their application. Thus he was transferred to Bloc 10, where a number of asylum seekers, detained for various minor offences, are undergoing an extension of their sentence. The Karyadi

association states that he has been served with an extradition order.

"He is here quite legally. They want to expel him and force him to sign his extradition order. If he returns he will certainly be sentenced to life imprisonment for having founded the Yekiti party".

Mohammed Ali Ahmed has a wife and four children, who all live in Cyprus. The Minister of the Interior, Christos Patsalides, came out of the Ministry to discuss with the demonstrators, explaining that the country had to carry out the rules of international law on the right of asylum, and that this detention was in conformity with the law, without mentioning the possibility of extradition. The representative of a group of support for immigrants, KISA, criticised this *"colonial law"* that allows the police to keep indefinitely in detention someone who has only committed a minor offence. *"This man is no danger to public safety. Why must we retain laws that go back to the period of colonial rule?"* asked Doros Polycarpou.

The minister finally met the Syrian Kurd's wife and promised that he would examine the case.

• **NUCLEAR: IRAN IS REPORTED TO HAVE SUSPENDED ITS MILITARY PROGRAMME SINCE 2003.** A report of the US secret services dated December 2007 states that Iran's military nuclear programme has been sus-

pended since 2003. Thus these conclusions rule out the hypothesis of US military intervention. They also make harder the passing by UNO of a third resolution toughening the sanctions already inflicted on the Islamic Republic to force it to cease its work on uranium enrichment. Moreover, Iran openly recognises that it has received delivery of uranium fuel from Russia for its Bushehr power station, which has a 1000 MegaWatt capacity and is due to start operating at the end of 2008.

Iran has possessed 3000 centrifuges since September 2007. This would, in theory, allow it to produce enough enriched uranium to make an atom bomb. The bulk of the Western groups apply the economic sanctions against Iran that have been voted but, at the end of 2007, the Chinese oil group, Sinopec, signed a two billion dollar contract with Teheran for the Yadavaran field.

The Supreme guide, Ali Khamenei, for his part, considered the US demand to suspend the Iranian programme of uranium enrichment quite unacceptable. Ayatollah Khamenei reaffirmed that the programme was solely aimed at making his country's power stations self-sufficient in fuel and so free it from any dependency in this regard or vulnerability to embargo or blackmail. *"If the delivery of this fuel to Iran were one day to cease or be subject to conditions, would the nation*

have to submit?" he asked on the Yazd television channel.

Meanwhile, even though adopting the intransigent attitude of President Ahmedinjad, the Supreme Guide while excluding any re-establishment of relations with the United States at this time, nevertheless raised the possibility of re-establishing such relations: *"The breaking of links with the United States is one of the bases of Iranian policy. However we have never said that such relations must be broken for ever"*, adding *"The day when such relations will be of benefit to the Iranian people, I would be the first to approve"*. Teheran's conditions would essentially cover American security guarantees against any possible military intervention *"they attacked Iraq even though they had relations with it"*. Indeed, the Ayatollahs' regime suspects Washington of wanting to overthrow it, as they did with Saddam Hussein.

• **ANSAR AL-ISLAM THREATENS NORWAY.** The Reform and Jihad Front (RJF) threatened Norway with *"reprisals and boycotting of Norwegian products"* if it expelled Nejmeddin Faraj Ahmed, alias *"Mullah Krekar"*, founder of the Jihadist Islamist group Ansar al-Islam. This expulsion order was confirmed by the Norwegian Supreme Court on 8 November. The Norwegian authorities consider *"Mullah Krekar"* to be a threat to national security. He has repeatedly called for Jihad in Iraq against

the US occupation, but as Iraq at present offers no guarantee of his safety, this expulsion is suspended, for the moment.

Born in 1956, *"Mullah Krekar"* has been living in Norway since 1991. His movement, Ansar al-Islam, is on the US list of terrorist organisations. However, while the Kurdish chief recognises being the founder of this Islamist group, he claims not to have directed it since 2002. Yet in 2003, just before the US operation against Saddam Hussein, the mullah and his group were described by the Americans as intermediaries between al-Qaida and the Baathist regime. He has been arrested several times in Norway, suspected of terrorism and drug trafficking, but no court has yet sentenced him. His statements, whether on internet or to the press, clearly support Ussama ben Laden and describe the *"American aggression"* as *"Nazi"*.

In Iraq, Ansar al-Islam claimed a bomb attack in Nineveh Province that caused five deaths amongst the American troops, The Iraqi Prime Minister directly accuses this branch of al-Qaida of being the author of a bomb attack against a US Army building in Mosul that caused 50 deaths.

Ansar al-Islam is the author of several terrorist attacks in Kurdistan. The most murderous of these was at Irbil, in May 2005, when a suicide bomber blew himself up in the

Headquarters of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) killing 60 people and injuring 150 others.

• CLASHES BETWEEN THE PJAK AND THE PASDARAN. Clashes between Iranian forces and the PJAK, an Iranian Kurdish party linked to the PKK that is waging a guerrilla campaign in the Eastern Kurdistan provinces of Kermanshah and Western Azerbaijan, are continuing.

Thus, the deputy Governor of the Province of Western Kurdistan announced the dismantling of a *"band of saboteurs, equipped and organised by foreign intelligence ser-*

vices", adding that *"certain of these counter-revolutionary elements were killed in the clashes"*. The action, in which the casualty figures were not given, are said to have taken place between the towns of Ravansar and Kamyaran, some 100 Km from the Iraqi border (according to ISNA news agency).

In Kermanshah, the police raided a group of three Kurds suspected of murdering a local police chief and seven Pasdaran (Guardians of the Revolution).

One of the Kurds was killed during the action. The police seized some explosives and *"counter-revo-*

lutionary material", still according to the ISNA news agency. However, at Salmas, a town in Northwest Iran, it was the PJAK that, on 23 January, launched a series of successful attacks against the Pasdaran headquarters, killing 10 Guardians of the Revolution. PJAK stated it wished to avenge the execution, on 6 January, of one of its members, Hassan Hikmat Demirm, in the town of Khoy, the murder of three young Kurds by the Guardians in the villages of Gozeresh, Dilezi and Otonaus, and the death under torture of a student, Ebrahim Lotfollahi in Sanandaj Prison on 15 January.

Entretiens avec Gérard Chaliand, poète et gentleman baroudeur

Radio L'émission de France-Culture « A voix nue » donne la parole, toute la semaine, à ce spécialiste de géostratégie

Voyageur, spécialiste de géostratégie, auteur de plusieurs dizaines d'ouvrages individuels ou collectifs, Gérard Chaliand parcourt le monde depuis son plus jeune âge. Sur France Culture, l'émission « A voix nue » lui donne la parole toute la semaine, au fil de cinq entretiens avec Thierry Garcin, le responsable des « Enjeux internationaux » à l'antenne chaque matin.

Ce grand témoin des conflits armés de la deuxième moitié du XX^e siècle, né en 1934 dans une famille d'origine arménienne, raconte sa vie de gentleman baroudeur, dévoreur de littérature épique à 8 ans, docker, représentant en montres ou terrassier à 20 ans pour payer ses voyages, puis enquêteur chez les guérilleros de Guinée-Bissau ou du Kurdistan et enseignant invité à l'École nationale d'administration (ENA), à Harvard et à Montréal.

De l'aventurier, Gérard Chaliand a le verbe haut, le sens des anecdotes chatoyantes et, quand

il parle des institutions de recherche, la voix cassante. Du spécialiste, l'auteur de *L'Atlas stratégique, géopolitique des nouveaux rapports de forces dans le monde* (Complexe) a la précision et la patience pour fouiller ses sujets favoris : guérillas et guerres irrégulières, tiers-monde.

Le son des mots

L'Algérie, son voyage initial en 1952, lui ouvre les yeux sur le colonialisme. Trois ans plus tard, la conférence de Bandung (Indonésie), premier sommet des pays du tiers-monde, témoigne de la marche vers les indépendances.

« C'était enthousiasmant de soutenir l'Algérie ou de soutenir Castro à ses débuts. Quand il se rend à New York pour prononcer un discours aux Nations unies, il loge à Harlem et défend la lutte des Noirs pour les droits civiques », se souvient-il. Il travaille en Guinée-Bissau, à l'heure d'Amílcar Cabral, leader indépendantiste assassiné par les services portugais en 1973.

Par la suite, il observe la montée des nationalismes, les phénomènes islamistes, les nouvelles formes de guerres irrégulières. Il commence la rédaction d'un atlas, dans les années 1990, sur le nouvel ordre mondial, les diasporas ou le nucléaire. Il établit des anthologies poétiques ou littéraires, pour enfants et pour adultes (*Anthologie de la poésie populaire kurde*, L'Aube). Car Gérard Chaliand se veut aussi poète et qualifie de « poème en prose » *Mémoire de ma mémoire* (Julliard), son récit sur la trace de l'histoire familiale arménienne et sur ce « caillot que j'avais dans le poing au jour de ma naissance et dont, enfant, on m'a transmis la tragédie ». Il avoue avoir mis vingt ans à écrire ce livre. « La poésie, le son des mots, c'est ce qui donne un peu de sens à l'existence », affirme-t-il. ■

CATHERINE BÉDARIDA

« A voix nue », du lundi 31 décembre au vendredi 4 janvier à 20 heures sur France Culture.

Oussama Ben Laden menace les sunnites irakiens qui coopèrent avec les Etats-Unis

BEYROUTH

CORRESPONDANTE

Dans un message audio diffusé sur un site Internet, samedi 29 décembre 2007, Oussama Ben Laden, chef du groupe djihadiste Al-Qaida, a tenté de remonter le moral de ses partisans en Irak mis en difficulté par une coalition de tribus sunnites autochtones auto-dénommée « Al-Sahoua » (le Réveil).

Le message a été diffusé le jour même où le ministère irakien de l'intérieur annonçait que les forces irakiennes et américaines ont détruit 75 % des caches d'Al-Qaida en Irak. Parallèlement, le général David Petraeus, commandant en chef des forces américaines dans l'ancienne Mésopotamie, faisait état d'une chute de près de 60 % des actes de violence en Irak depuis juin, tout en admettant que cette embellie demeurerait fragile.

Al-Sahoua « a trahi l'oumma [la communauté musulmane] et

l'a couverte de disgrâce et de honte.

[Ses membres] connaîtront les souffrances dans leur vie et dans l'au-delà », a déclaré l'auteur du message, dont l'identité n'avait pas encore été authentifiée par les experts, mais dont le timbre et les intonations étaient nettement reconnaissables comme étant celles de Ben Laden. « Les plus vils des traîtres sont ceux qui troquent leur religion contre la sécurité de leur vie dans ce bas monde », a-t-il ajouté, en appelant les sunnites à se ranger derrière Abou Omar Al-Baghdadi, présumé « émir » de la branche irakienne d'Al-Qaida. « Abou Omar préférerait être décapité plutôt que de trahir les musulmans », a-t-il dit.

Critique du Hezbollah

Ben Laden a mis en garde contre toute participation à un projet de « gouvernement d'union nationale » que les autorités irakiennes et les Etats-Unis cher-

chent, selon lui, à mettre sur pied.

« Notre devoir est de mettre en échec » ce plan dont l'objectif est d'« empêcher l'établissement d'un Etat islamique en Irak qui serait un rempart contre la division du pays ». Le pouvoir saoudien continue par ailleurs, selon lui, à « tenir un rôle maléfique » en Irak et à faciliter la tâche des « croisés » qui cherchent à instaurer, « au pays des deux fleuves [l'Irak], un pouvoir à la solde de l'Amérique ».

Dans ce message, le cinquième et dernier pour l'année 2007, Ben Laden a également appelé à la libération de la Palestine, « du fleuve [le Jourdain] à la mer [Méditerranée] ». Il a critiqué à cet égard le Hezbollah libanais pour avoir accepté, après la guerre de l'été 2006, le déploiement au Liban sud d'une force des Nations unies dont la mission, selon lui, est la protection d'Israël. ■

MOUNA NAÏM

AFP

Turquie: 5 morts dans l'explosion d'une voiture Piégée dans le sud-est

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie) (AFP) 3 janvier 2008

Cinq personnes ont été tuées et environ 70 blessées dans l'explosion d'une voiture piégée jeudi à Diyarbakir, la principale ville du sud-est de la Turquie, ont annoncé des responsables de cette région majoritairement peuplée de Kurdes.

La déflagration s'est produite au passage d'un véhicule militaire sur une route du centre ville, à une centaine de mètres d'une base de l'armée turque, selon la police. Elle a été si puissante que les vitres de nombreux bâtiments aux alentours ont été brisées. Deux des personnes décédées sont des lycéens qui suivaient des cours privés dans l'un des bâtiments.

Le gouverneur de Diyarbakir, Huseyin Avni Mutlu, a précisé que les auteurs de l'attentat, pour le moment non identifiés, avaient fait exploser à distance une bombe placée dans une voiture. Plusieurs blessés sont très grièvement touchés, selon les autorités.

Le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan a condamné un "acte terroriste". "Le terrorisme a ressorti son horrible visage. Mais ce type d'événements n'infléchira pas notre détermination à combattre le terrorisme à la fois dans le pays et à l'extérieur", a ajouté le chef du gouvernement.

L'ambassade des Etats-Unis à Ankara a également dénoncé, dans un communiqué, cette explosion qualifiée d'"exemple horrible de ces tragédies insensées causées par le terrorisme". Les Etats-Unis "réitérent leur détermination à se tenir aux côtés de la Turquie dans la lutte contre tous les types de terrorisme", selon le communiqué.

Les rebelles kurdes du PKK ont récemment annoncé des représailles après des bombardements aériens de leurs bases dans le nord de l'Irak, menés avec l'assistance des services secrets américains.

La police turque a indiqué être à la recherche de deux personnes que des témoins ont vu fuir peu après l'explosion.

Les blessés incluent une trentaine de soldats et de nombreux civils dont des lycéens, selon des sources hospitalières. L'explosion a détruit cinq voitures en plus du véhicule militaire et a déclenché un important incendie qui a été maîtrisé.

La police a mis en place un périmètre de sécurité et a éloigné les journalistes, arguant d'une mesure de précaution pour le cas où surviendrait une autre explosion. Des artificiers ont été envoyés sur les lieux de l'explosion pour en déterminer les circonstances, a constaté un journaliste de l'AFP.



Diyarbakir se trouve au coeur d'une région peuplée en majorité de Kurdes et a déjà subi des attaques à la bombe revendiquées par les rebelles séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

En juin, sept personnes avaient été blessées dans l'explosion d'une bombe près d'un arrêt d'autobus dans le centre de cette localité. Les autorités avaient accusé le PKK d'avoir commis l'attaque.

En 2006, 10 personnes, dont 7 enfants, avaient péri et 14 autres avaient été blessées dans l'explosion d'une bombe placée dans un parc de la ville, un attentat imputé aussi au PKK.

Le conflit kurde a causé la mort de plus de 37.000 personnes depuis 1984, date du début de l'insurrection du PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne.

L'explosion de jeudi coïncide avec une multiplication des opérations de l'armée turque contre le PKK qu'Ankara accuse de mener des attaques depuis le nord de l'Irak voisin.

L'état-major turc a confirmé trois raids aériens contre des positions du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak depuis le 16 décembre ainsi qu'une opération terrestre pour empêcher un groupe de rebelles de s'infiltrer en Turquie. Des responsables du nord de l'Irak ont affirmé qu'il y avait eu deux autres raids aériens.

Au moins 150 militants du PKK ont été tués et plus de 200 positions des rebelles ont été détruites jusqu'à présent, selon l'armée turque

Le président turc aux Etats-Unis exclut toute discussion avec le PKK

AFP

WASHINGTON, 8 jan 2008 (AFP) –

Le président turc Abdullah Gül a exclu mardi toute négociation avec les rebelles kurdes basés en Irak, affirmant que leur parler serait comme inviter Al-Qaïda à sa table.

A l'issue d'entretiens à la Maison Blanche avec le président américain George W. Bush, M. Gül a indiqué qu'une solution politique avec les séparatistes kurdes du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) dans le nord du Kurdistan irakien serait impossible car ce sont des "terroristes".

"Il y a des attaques (du PKK) lancés sur la Turquie à partir d'un autre pays qui ont pour cible des civils et des forces de sécurité", a-t-il déclaré lors d'un forum à Washington.

"Aussi comment peut-on parler de solution politique quand les actes de terrorisme sont lancés extérieurement à partir d'un autre pays" a-t-il dit interrogé sur la possibilité d'une solution politique.

"C'est comme tenter de trouver une solution à une attaque d'Al-Qaïda à partir d'un autre pays" a-t-il dit, précisant que le sujet d'une solution

politique à la crise avec le PKK n'avait pas été abordé lors de ses entretiens avec le président Bush.

"Ni aujourd'hui, ni lors d'une autre rencontre, nous n'avons discuté de ce thème", a ajouté M. Gül.

Auparavant, M. Bush avait assuré que Washington continuerait à aider militairement Ankara contre le PKK.

"Nous avons affaire à des problèmes communs. L'un de ces problèmes est la poursuite de notre lutte contre un ennemi commun, les terroristes", a indiqué M. Bush. "Et cet ennemi commun, c'est le PKK. C'est l'ennemi de la Turquie, c'est l'ennemi de l'Irak et c'est l'ennemi des gens qui aspirent à vivre en paix".

La Maison Blanche a aussi encouragé mardi le président turc à coopérer avec l'Irak pour trouver une "solution politique à long terme" afin de mettre fin aux violences des rebelles kurdes, "ennemi commun" de la Turquie et des Etats-Unis.

New alliance brings Kurdish role under intense scrutiny

Baghdad: Many questions over the Kurdish role have risen in Baghdad after the emergence of a new political coalition that includes the Kurdistan Democratic Party led by Masoud Barazani, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan led by Iraqi president Jalal Talabani and the Sunni Islamic Party led by Tarek Al Hashemi.

The questions at the forefront are: Have the Kurds abandoned their alliance which was based on the concept of the Shiite and Kurdish suffering during Saddam Hussain's era? Will the new Talabani-Barazani-Hashemi alliance overthrow Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki's government? Will former Prime Minister Iyad Alawi join the new Kurdish Sunni alliance?

Abdul Qader Kamal, a Kurdish political researcher told Gulf News, "Despite President Talabani's reassurances during the tripartite agreement signing ceremony ... the Kurds deliberately send political messages to Prime Minister Al Maliki and the Shiite coalitions' leader Abdul Aziz Al

Hakeem which reveal that the coalition government is at the Kurds mercy," he said.

At the same time he added, "Al Maliki took a strict position towards the Kurdistan region especially concerning the oil contracts signed by the regional government with foreign companies. Also, Al Maliki evaded his former promises to normalise the situation in Kirkuk and to implement the 140 articles in the permanent Iraqi Constitution. This led Kurd leaders to reevaluate their attitudes and their political alliances."

The Iraqi government has objected to the oil contracts, however it cannot cancel them yet. While article 140 calls for the referendum on the future of Kirkuk, recently it has been announced that the Iraqi government and the Kurds have agreed to delay the referendum for another six months.

Alternative

The Kurdish-Shiite crisis may seem less

intense than the Shiite-Sunni disaccord specifically the dispute between Al Maliki and Al Hashemi, because Al Maliki refused the national political project submitted by Al Hashemi, which contains political and security reformatory steps.

Al Maliki did not only ignore that project but urged Al Hashemi to support the Sunni awakening councils politically as an alternative to Al Hashemi's party.

In this context, Shaker Al Samarraei, a writer and political analyst, said to Gulf News: "With Al Maliki delaying the general amnesty law and refusing to speed up the awakening members integration in the Iraqi Security forces and his guards continuous control and sectarian management of the security agencies and institutions, perhaps this led Al Hashemi to change his attitude towards the Kurds."

Have the Kurds abandoned their alliance ... based on the concept of the ... Kurdish suffering during Saddam's era?

Think tank: Turkish invasion would fail to uproot Kurdish militants

LONDON — The Kurdish Workers Party could survive a Turkish military invasion of northern Iraq, a report said.

The London-based Chatham House projected that the PKK would not be defeated by the Turkish offensive in northern Iraq. The British think tank said the PKK reflects rising Kurdish nationalism throughout the region and maintains the support of an estimated 30 million Kurds in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

"The PKK is a well-motivated force that enjoys local support and the protection afforded by the inaccessible terrain of the border regions," Chatam said in a report on Wednesday. "Turkey can probably never defeat the PKK and any further incursions across the border are likely to be futile."

Entitled "The Kurdish Policy Imperative," the report came in wake of a Turkish air and ground offensive in northern Iraq. The Turkish offensive has included F-16 air-

craft, artillery and special operations forces in the Kandil mountains.

Chatam said Turkey would not receive Iraqi government support in the effort to eliminate the PKK. The think tank said continued Turkish operations could further radicalize the PKK and open the door to Al Qaida-aligned elements.

"Even if it managed to flush them from the mountains, this might leave the door open for radical Islamists to turn the region into their own Tora Bora-style stronghold," the report said.

The report cast doubts on Ankara's claims that PKK fighters were moving from Iraq to Turkey. Chatam said the Iraqi-Turkish border area was difficult to traverse, and the PKK probably established a presence throughout southeastern Turkey.

"It is not certain that the autumn attacks were carried out by Iraq-based PKK units," the report said. "Movement across the mountainous border is difficult and if the

PKK claim of having more guerrillas based in Turkey than in Iraq is true, it is likely that the Turkish state's problem is closer to home."

Chatam urged the international community to examine the prospect of offering sovereignty to the Kurdish community. The report said this must include the Kurds of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

"There is no imminent prospect of an independent Kurdish state but it is possible that one may in time emerge as a late addition to the post-1918 political map of the Middle East," the report said. "These trends mean that the Kurdish situation has to be reappraised and reconsidered with reference to new political dynamics in Turkey, Syria, Iran, and of course Iraq, and more importantly, the new political and economic outlook of the Kurds themselves."

Turkey seeks to bolster a once-raging economy

By Selcuk Gokoluk

Reuters

ANKARA: Turkey hopes to increase its growth rate while reining in inflation in 2008, but economists say that the government's plans are insufficient during a time of tighter credit in global markets.

As part of its plan, the government led by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has vowed to raise the retirement age, shake up the labor market and increase aid for research and development. But such changes will have a positive fiscal effect on a slowing economy only in the long term, according to some analysts.

Drought, high energy prices and political wrangling prior to parliamentary elections in July — won again by Erdogan's pro-business AK Party — trimmed the growth rate for Turkey's gross national product to just 2 percent in the third quarter. Economic growth averaged a gung-ho 7.4 percent in the years 2002 to 2006, but was expected to come in well below that for 2007.

"Growth will be the most important economic indicator in the next five years instead of public finances," said Pelin Yenigun Dilek, chief economist at Garanti Bank, a midsize Turkish bank. "Growth of 4 percent will worsen unemployment and stoke social and even ethnic tensions."

Turkey needs to keep creating jobs for a fast-growing, young population. Its big cities are also surrounded by large shanty towns occupied by rural migrants, often from the impoverished, mainly Kurdish southeast.

Faruk Celik, the labor and social security minister, recently called 2007 a "wasted year" because of political opposition that stalled much of the government's agenda in Parliament.

At the same time, inflation for the year came in at 8.39 percent — double the target set by the central bank, which cut rates four times since September to try to head off a slowdown amid global economic turbulence.

The government is expecting a 5 percent growth rate for GNP for 2007 and has set a 5.5 percent target for GNP growth in 2008, and is counting on pushing through its legislative agenda to underpin that target.

The draft bills are still in Parliament and subject to change, but they currently call for gradually raising the country's retirement age to 68. Now there is no standard age, but it can be as low as 40.

The government proposals include a program of general health care for all citizens to help head off protests. It also plans to cut social security contributions paid by employers as a way to encourage hiring.

The economy minister, Mehmet Sim-

sek, also is planning to accelerate the pace of privatizations during 2008 and 2009, aiming to sell enterprises like Halkbank, the cigarette company Tekel, and energy production and distribution companies as well as highways and bridges.

Business groups and economists are not entirely convinced about the efficacy of long-term, gradual transitions.

"This is a 15-year plan and it will not have a serious positive impact in the short term," said Gulay Elif Girgin, an economist at Oyak Investment, a unit of Oyak Bank. "General health insurance will create an extra burden on the budget in the coming three to five years."

Business groups also fret that the deterioration in economic indicators might worsen as global liquidity becomes more scarce.

"Improvements in inflation, the budget deficit, the current account deficit and debt dynamics have stopped," Erdal Karamercan, a member of the leading Turkish business forum TUSIAD, said last month. "The improvements have gone into reverse in some areas."

Turkey could have difficulty financing its growth because of scarce liquidity in international markets, he said.

A government official said there were

no plans yet to revise the economic targets, because the final data on the last quarter of 2007 could still change the overall picture.

"There was uncertainty and worries due to elections but now these have disappeared and the economy has started to recover," the official said on the customary condition of anonymity. "Our growth targets are certainly within reach."

Economists agree that more privatizations in 2008 could help. Turkey was aiming to attract \$25 billion in foreign direct investment in 2007, but likely missed that target.

"Even if prices are not as high as in past privatizations, there will be interest," Girgin said. "There is serious money in the Middle East and Turkey is one of the markets" Arab investors like.



Hocine Zaourar/Agence France-Presse

A light snow casts a chill Thursday on a pedestrian shopping district in central Istanbul.

The New York Times January 4, 2008

Bomb Blast Kills 5 in Kurdish Area in Turkey

By SABRINA TAVERNISE

ISTANBUL — A bomb exploded near a shopping mall in the largely Kurdish city of Diyarbakir in southeastern Turkey on Thursday, killing five people and wounding more than 60, in the largest attack on a Turkish city in months, the authorities said.

The bomb was placed in a parked car and detonated by remote control shortly before 5 p.m., just as a shuttle bus carrying military personnel

region for the country's Kurds. Turkey says their claims amount to a threat to Turkish sovereignty.

"Unfortunately, terror has shown its bloody face in Diyarbakir once again," said the Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, speaking in Ankara, the country's capital. "Incidents like this will never stop us, or slow down our determination."

The 46-seat shuttle bus was full, its driver, Cahit Kara, told the Anatolian News Agency in Diyarbakir. The soldiers were being moved to their residential compound, not far from the area where the explosion took place.

"As we were moving on the Mimar Sinan Street close to the compound, a massive explosion happened," Mr. Kara said. "We were left in the middle of flames. I got injured in the explosion and was taken under treatment at the military hospital."

No one on the bus died, he said, but two students who were studying at an after-school tutoring program did. The blast occurred in an area near a parking lot, a hotel and a shopping mall, called Galeria, as students were leaving after-school lessons, said the privately owned Cihan News Agency.

There was no immediate statement from the Turkish military, and it was unclear on Thursday night how, if at all, military officials here would respond.

Mr. Erdogan, for his part, said the attack would not deter future military operations.



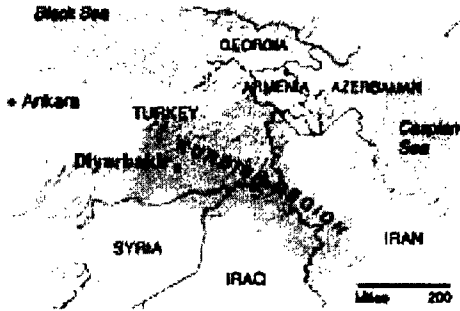
"Our decisiveness in this matter is intact and continuous," he said. "Our armed forces will continue this process with the same determination just as we continue with the same decisiveness on political and diplomatic levels."

The blast set a city passenger bus and several cars on fire, authorities said. Authorities reported that windows had been blown out of the buildings near the blast site.

It was the first major bomb attack in Turkey since an explosion in a busy shopping area in Ankara last spring, which killed six. The government blamed Kurdish militants for that attack.

Diyarbakir, the largest city in Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast, was last attacked in September 2006, when a bomb in a public park killed 10 people.

Authorities said they had reason to suspect the militants. A statement from the Turkish military on Dec. 31 said security forces had confiscated large amounts of bomb-making materials, including more than 1,000 pounds of ammonium nitrate, in an apartment in Diyarbakir.



passed, Turkish officials said.

The governor of Diyarbakir, Huseyin Avni Mutlu, said about half of the people who were wounded were soldiers, the state-controlled Anatolian News Agency reported.

The Turkish authorities did not immediately name a perpetrator, but the attack came shortly after a Turkish bombing campaign against Kurdish militants, and it seemed likely that the authorities would suspect the militants.

The militants, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, have fought the Turkish military since the 1980s, pressing for more rights and an autonomous

The Washington Times

January 7, 2008

EDITORIAL -

Washington, Ankara and the PKK

As President Bush prepares to welcome Turkish President Abdullah Gul to the White House tomorrow, Ankara believes the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) was behind yet another terrorist attack inside Turkey: Thursday's car bomb blast in the largely Kurdish city of Diyarbakir killed five people, four of them high-school students, and wounded at least 68 more.

The bomb was detonated by remote control as a bus carrying Turkish soldiers was passing, and at least 30 soldiers were injured in the explosion, the bloodiest strike directed at Turkish troops since a PKK ambush Oct. 21 killed 13 soldiers. (In the past two and a half weeks, there have also been a pair of explosions in Istanbul, in which one person was killed and nine others wounded. Turkish officials believe the PKK, which has reportedly declared Turkish cities a legitimate target, was responsible for those bombings as well.) Over the weekend, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Diyarbakir to visit soldiers injured in the blast and meet with families of the bombing victims.

The Turks quite understandably believe that they are under siege from PKK terrorism, much of it coming from bases in areas of northern Iraq con-

trolled by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) headed by Massoud Barzani. In November, Mr. Erdogan met Mr. Bush at the White House, where the American president described the PKK as a common enemy and promised Turkey real-time U.S. intelligence on PKK operations across the mountainous border between Iraq and Turkey, and Washington accepted Turkish raids against PKK bases. In return for this support, the Turkish military promised Washington to avoid remaining overnight on Iraqi territory and to try to limit civilian casualties.

Relations between the two democratic allies were damaged by Turkey's refusal to open a northern front five years ago when the United States led the invasion of Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein from power. Since that time, relations were further weakened by Washington's refusal to demand that the Iraqi Kurds, particularly Mr. Barzani — who spent much of the 1990s fighting the PKK — behave responsibly and deny them safe haven in KRG-controlled territory.

Mr. Gul's visit to Washington should serve as an opportunity to increase pressure on the Iraqi Kurds to rid themselves of the PKK — a terrorist menace

that endangers Turks and Iraqis, and has the potential to do grave damage to legitimate Kurdish aspirations as well.

It's time for Mr. Barzani to act. Turkish authorities have said they have photographs of senior PKK commanders receiving medical treatment at hospitals in Erbil and meeting with Barzani associates in nearby restaurants. And last spring, he threatened to unleash an insurgency inside Turkey. Most troubling of all, says Michael Rubin, an American Enterprise Institute scholar, is that during the Oct. 21 attack on Turkish troops, "PKK tactics mirrored those taught by U.S. Special Forces to Barzani's peshmerga fighters, suggesting its complicity in training terrorists."

It remains — as it should be — a priority of U.S. policy-makers to do their utmost to prevent Turkey from launching a large-scale invasion of northern Iraq to root out PKK terrorists. But it is past time for America's allies in the Kurdistan Regional Government to do their part as well. Mr. Gul's visit is an opportunity for Washington to remind its Iraqi Kurdish friends that the time for excuses about the PKK is running out.

AP Associated Press

Iraqi Kurd Warns Against Kirkuk Strife

January 7, 2008

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press Writer

BAGHDAD (AP) -- Iraq's Kurdish deputy prime minister warned Monday that failure to resolve the fate of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk could result in more strife and accused people within the government of blocking a solution.

"We have a choice," Barham Saleh told The Associated Press. "We can either turn Kirkuk into an example of national Iraqi unity ... or turn it into a battlefield for strife between the components of Iraq."

A referendum is expected later this year on whether Kirkuk will join the semi-autonomous Kurdish zone to its north, or continue to be ruled by Baghdad.

Saleh said it was unacceptable to leave the dispute unresolved and accused unnamed people within the government of Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki of trying to stymie a solution spelled out in the 2005 constitution.

"I am a Kurd and see Kirkuk as part of the Kurdish region," Saleh said, explaining that because Arabs and Turkomen - the other two main ethnic groups inhabiting the city - see it differently, the issue must be resolved under current law.

Kirkuk's Arab and Turkomen residents dispute the Kurdish claim to the city, which has over the past 4 1/2 years seen hundreds of deadly attacks with sectarian or ethnic motives.

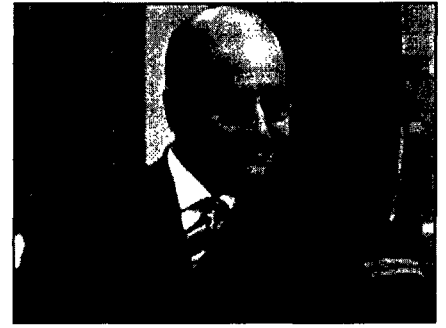
Leaders of Iraq's Shiite majority fear allowing Kirkuk to join the Kurdish region could undermine their new status as the country's dominant power, while the once-dominant Sunni Arab minority sees the loss of the city as a prelude to the

breakup of the nation along sectarian or ethnic lines.

Saleh, like President Jalal Talabani, is widely viewed as a moderate Kurd and his assertion that Kirkuk is part of the Kurdish region reflects a universal conviction among Kurds. But his charge that government parties were working against a solution in Kirkuk reflects tension between the Kurds and their close Shiite allies.

The Kurds and Shiites, who combine for about 80 percent of Iraq's population, have been close allies since Saddam's ouster in 2003, but recent Kurdish assertions of independence, like the conclusion of oil exploration deals with foreign companies, without involving the central government, have led to harsh public exchanges.

The constitution, which most of Iraq's Sunni Arabs voted against in a 2005 referendum, provides for the "normalization" of Kirkuk - allowing Kurds forcibly moved from the city under Saddam Hussein's "Arabization" program to return and inviting Arabs lured there decades ago by financial reward to leave in return for compensation.



Turkey's Kurds angry after blast, want more rights

January 8, 2008 By Selcuk Gokoluk

REUTERS

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey, Jan 8 (Reuters) -

Clearing debris from a bombing, residents of the largest city in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast say they are weary of the violence blighting their region and that more democracy and economic growth are the only answers.

"Someone must say stop to this war. Such things should never happen again. We only want to live in peace," said Mahmut Koyuncu, a 21-year-old student who was wounded and lost classmates in the bomb attack last week in central Diyarbakir.

Southeast Turkey, one of the poorest regions in the European Union candidate country, bristles with soldiers and security personnel locked in a decades-long struggle with separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) rebels that has claimed nearly 40,000 lives.

Six people, mostly students, were killed and more than 100 wounded in the latest bombing, an attack security sources say targeted military personnel.

The PKK said some of its members, working independently, may have been to blame. On Tuesday, police detained a suspect who Turkish media said had received training in PKK camps in northern Iraq.

Many shops were still boarded up on Tuesday and there were few customers around.

"I thought the day of judgment had come. Someone fell on me. I hid under a table, then jumped out of the window," Koyuncu said.

Turkey's military has been waging an aerial bombing campaign against PKK targets in northern Iraq over the past month, helped by intelligence provided by U.S. occupying forces. But eradicating the PKK remains an elusive goal.

"This is an organisation which lost 30,000 of its members and still survived. You cannot destroy the PKK only by force. If you could it would have been done by now," said Sezgin Tanrikulu, head of Diyarbakir's bar association.

"Only more democracy and moves to join the European Union will reduce the influence of the PKK among the Kurds."

Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's ruling AK Party has eased some restrictions on the Kurdish language and culture as part of Turkey's EU bid, but local people say it must do much more.

"Turkey should not fear breaking up. If Kurds find prosperity, democracy and freedom in Turkey, they will want to remain part of it," said Tanrikulu.

Many Kurds want the right to education in their mother tongue and further relaxation of curbs on radio and television broadcasts in their language.

LIVING STANDARDS

Diyarbakir had enjoyed nearly two years of relative calm before last week's bombing. Shopping malls and outlets of international fast-food chains have

sprouted up as growing trade with mainly Kurdish northern Iraq has stimulated business.

Many people voted for Erdogan's centre-right, pro-market reform AK Party in last July's parliamentary election instead of the pro-Kurdish DTP, believing the government is best placed to deliver improved living conditions and more cultural rights.

Abdurrahim Hatapoglu, an AK Party official in Diyarbakir, said the government might soon announce broader cultural rights for Turkey's estimated 12-15 million Kurds under a new constitution and also an amnesty for some PKK rebels.

"Our party is working on a civilian constitution which gives priority to citizenship for 70 million people living in Turkey rather than a single ethnicity," he said, as army helicopters whirred overhead.

"With implementation of the Southeastern Anatolian Project, there will be no terror left," Hatapoglu said, in reference to a large-scale dam building and irrigation project.

Local businessmen agree that the mood among Kurds has changed, noting criticism of PKK methods is now widespread. In the past, people would have stayed quiet, fearing reprisals or out of frustration with Ankara's heavy-handed approach.

But Kurds also fret about growing Turkish nationalism.

"We are treated as terrorists when we go to western Turkey and here in the east we who oppose violence are seen as stooges of the Turkish state and as traitors," said Fahrettin Akyil, head of a Diyarbakir commodities exchange.

Popular slogans in Turkey such as "One nation, one flag" leave many Kurds feeling alienated. Some still feel sympathy for the PKK and have relatives fighting with the rebels.

But the overwhelming desire, made clear to Erdogan when he visited the city after the blast, is for peace and normality.

"I told the prime minister he must do whatever necessary to stop this violence," said Akyil.



At the top in Iran, a falling out by leaders

Ahmadinejad losing Khamenei's backing

By Nazila Fathi

TEHRAN: A rift is emerging between President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Iran's supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, suggesting that the president no longer enjoys the full backing of Khamenei, as he did in the years after his election in 2005.

In the past, when Ahmadinejad was attacked by political opponents, the criticisms were usually silenced by Khamenei, who has the final word on state matters and who regularly endorsed the president in public speeches. But that public support has been conspicuously absent in recent months.

There are numerous possible reasons for Ahmadinejad's loss of support, but analysts here all point to one overriding factor: the U.S. National Intelligence Report last month, which said that Iran suspended its nuclear weapons program in 2003 in response to international pressure. The report sharply decreased the threat of a military strike against Iran, allowing the authorities to focus on domestic issues, with important parliamentary elections looming in March.

"Now that Iran is not under the threat of a military attack, all contradictions within the establishment are surfacing," said Saeed Leylaz, an economic and political analyst. "The biggest mistake that Americans have constantly made toward Iran was adopting radical approaches, which provided the ground for radicals in the country to take control."

Iran had been under increasing international pressure for its refusal to suspend its uranium enrichment program, which could be pursued for either peaceful or military purposes. In separate speeches last year, American and French officials did not rule out military attack against Iran if it continued its defiance. Those threats have stopped since the National Intelligence Report was released.

While the pressure was on, the leadership was reluctant to let any internal disagreements show. Senior officials, including Khamenei, constantly called for unity and warned that the enemy, a common reference to the United States, could take advantage of such differences.

The Iranian presidency is a largely ceremonial post. But Ahmadinejad



A poster with the faces of Ahmadinejad and Khamenei being held up during prayers two years ago at a university in Tehran.

used the office as a bully pulpit, espousing an economic populism that built a strong following among the middle and lower classes and made him a political force to be reckoned with. That popularity won him the strong backing of the supreme leader.

But the relationship began to sour even before the National Intelligence Report was released. A source close to Khamenei, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution, said Khamenei had been especially disappointed by Ahmadinejad's economic

The main factor appears to be the easing of the threat of a military attack.

performance, which had led to steep inflation in basic necessities, from food to property values.

"Mr. Khamenei supported Mr. Ahmadinejad because he believed in his slogans of helping the poor," the source said. "But his economic performance has been disastrous. Their honeymoon is certainly over."

Economists have long criticized Ahmadinejad's economic policies, warning that his reliance on oil revenues to finance loans to the poor and to buy cheap imports would lead to inflation and cripple local industries. Inflation has risen from 12 percent in October 2006 to 19 percent this year, according to figures released by the Iranian Central Bank.

Khamenei said Thursday in a speech in the central city of Yazd that "the government has certain unique characteristics, but like any other government there are mistakes and shortcomings."

He added that continuous criticism could undermine the government, but he refrained from praising it as he had in the past.

Recently, the supreme leader appointed a hard-line military leader, Mohammad Zolghadr, as deputy head of the armed forces for Basij, which is a volunteer militia force.

Ahmadinejad dismissed Zolghadr last month as deputy interior minister for security affairs. Ahmadinejad appeared angered last week by interference from Iran's former chief nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, who visited Egypt as Khamenei's representative at the Supreme National Security Council. Ahmadinejad said Wednesday that his government had a Foreign Ministry that determined the country's foreign policy, and a ministry spokesman said that Larijani's trip had been personal.

Larijani's trip was important because Tehran cut ties with Egypt, a major Sunni country, when Cairo signed a peace agreement with Israel in 1979 and provided asylum for the deposed Shah of Iran. Larijani, who is a close aide to Khamenei, announced that his talks with the Egyptian authorities had gone well.

In the face of rising criticism, Ahmadinejad has for the first time acknowledged that Iran was suffering from rising prices. Previously, he had called inflation a fiction invented by his political enemies.

But he blamed previous govern-

ments, Parliament and what he called a 36-percent increase in the prices of goods in international markets.

Mohammad Reza Katouzian, a conservative and onetime supporter of Ahmadinejad, said the president "should offer solutions instead of explaining past mistakes," the semi-official Mehr news agency reported.

Hassan Rassouli, head of Baran, a nongovernment organization created by the previous president, Mohammad Khatami after Khatami left office, said that Ahmadinejad tried only to justify inflation, not do anything about it.

"Either the president has no idea how inflation has affected people's lives or he prefers to talk unprofessionally, without referring to figures," he said, according to the Mehr press agency.

Alireza Mahjoub, a member of Parliament and the leader of a workers union, dismissed the government's claim that it had lowered the unemployment rate to 9.9 percent and said the real figure should be more than 16 percent, the Fars news agency reported.

"There are 4 million jobless in the country but a 9.9 percent unemployment rate suggests the figure is 2.2 mil-

lion, out of the 21 million active population," he added. "The figure has only decreased on paper."

The coming parliamentary elections will provide a stark test for Ahmadinejad and his popularity among the poor. The conservative politicians who supported him in 2005 have, in many cases, turned into his fiercest critics and are now worried chiefly that they will be disqualified as candidates before the vote, a power that the government has exercised in the past.

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune

January 8, 2005

U.S. vessels confronted by armed Iran boats

U.S. calls incident in Gulf provocative

By Thom Shanker and Brian Knowlton

WASHINGTON: In a confrontation in the strategic Strait of Hormuz, five armed Iranian boats approached three U.S. Navy warships in international waters, taking aggressive actions in a brief weekend confrontation described by the Pentagon as "reckless and dangerous."

The incident Sunday, which ended after about 20 minutes without damage, shots being fired or anyone being hurt, took place as the three American vessels were sailing into the Gulf, said Bryan Whitman, a Pentagon spokesman.

The Iranian government played down the episode, saying that it had ended immediately after the vessels recognized one another.

But Whitman and other U.S. officials described a tense confrontation in the strait, a narrow but vital passage through which millions of barrels of oil pass each day. Oil prices on world markets spiked briefly after the news, which was first reported by CNN on Monday morning.

In Iran, the Fars news agency posted an article based on the CNN report in both Persian and English. But only the English translation gave a motive for the Iranian actions, saying that they had been a warning to the American vessels to stay away from Iran's territorial waters.

The incident came at a time of considerable tension between the two countries, and a day before President

George W. Bush was to visit the region for a weeklong tour aimed both at encouraging Middle East talks and conveying a message that Iran continued to pose a serious threat.

The White House on Monday called the Iranian action "provocative" and warned Tehran against any repetition.

"We urge the Iranians to refrain from such provocative actions that could lead to a dangerous incident in the future," said Gordon Johndroe, a White House spokesman.

One Defense Department official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe early reports from the U.S. Navy's regional headquarters in Bahrain, said that the Iranian boats had made a radio threat that the American ships would explode.

The Defense Department official said the Iranian boats had dropped boxes in the waters behind one of the U.S. vessels, which could have been either mines or simply dummy boxes meant to test — and learn from — the American reaction.

"The five Iranian fastboats essentially came in and charged the ships," the Defense Department official said. The verbal warnings heard in English over the internationally recognized bridge-to-bridge radio channel said, "I am coming at you, and you will explode in a few minutes," the official said.

A few minutes later, one of the Iranian boats placed two white boxes in the wake of one of the U.S. ships, which caused another of the American vessels to take evasive action.

"Whether they're just testing us to learn about our procedures, or actually trying to initiate an incident, we don't know," the official said.

The five fastboats were identified by Defense Department officials as belonging to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Traditionally, the Guard's maritime forces have operated in a far more hostile manner than the regular Iranian Navy.

"We have found in the past that the regular Iranian Navy was a courteous and professional organization, and our relations are as we would have with any other navy in the world," said a Pentagon official who has studied the issue. "The IRGC navy has a tendency to act

in these unprofessional ways and to be very provocative at times."

Last March, Iranian Revolutionary Guard sailors seized 15 British sailors in waters that the British government insisted were international and held them for nearly two weeks.

In actions last year that brought immediate expressions of concern from senior navy and Defense Department officials, the Iranians began operating in ways that led American officials to believe that Iran had turned command of its naval missions in the Gulf over to the Revolutionary Guard and stripped the regular Iranian Navy of that responsibility.

As the Iranian boats approached, the U.S. warships issued warnings and "conducted evasive maneuvering," Whitman said. The U.S. warships, he said, were "prepared to take appropriate action."

The United States has conducted significant war games to prepare for the scenario that unfolded over the weekend, as navy officers have expressed concerns that the smaller Iranian fleet would choose to confront U.S. warships by swarming with larger numbers of smaller craft.

In an interview in Bahrain last month, Vice Admiral Kevin Cosgriff, commander of U.S. naval forces in the region, said that while Iran was unlikely to try to close the strait, it might take actions to intimidate U.S. allies in the Gulf and to illustrate its ability to damage global prosperity.

"I wake up thinking about Iran, I go to bed thinking about Iran," Cosgriff told reporters traveling with Defense Secretary Robert Gates during a visit to Bahrain.

Nazila Fathi contributed reporting from Tehran.

Bomber kills U.S.-backed Sunni

By Richard A. Opper Jr.

BAGHDAD: A suicide bomber assassinated a key leader of American-backed militia forces in a Sunni stronghold of Baghdad on Monday morning, the latest attack on nationalist Sunnis who have recently allied themselves with American troops. That attack, and a second bomb that exploded minutes later, killed at least six and wounded 26, hospital officials said.

The killing of the militia leader, Colonel Riyadh al-Samarrai, on the fringes of north Baghdad's Adhamiya district, was one of the most significant attacks so far on leaders of former Sunni insurgents who have banded into militias, known as Awakening groups, to fight extremist militants.

Samarrai was one of the leaders of the Sunni Awakening movement in Adhamiya and was also a close aide and a security adviser to the head of the Sunni Endowment, which oversees Iraq's Sunni mosques and is one of the most powerful Sunni institutions in Iraq.

According to witnesses and Awakening officials, the assassin, who they said may have been known to Samarrai, waited patiently at the offices of the Sunni Endowment until his target emerged from a meeting. The killer then walked up, tried to embrace Samarrai, and pulled the trigger on his explosive vest or belt.

Minutes later, as onlookers rushed to the scene, a car bomb exploded, killing several more people and damaging two trucks that were being loaded with victims of the first bombing to take them to the hospital.

The timing and execution of the twin blasts suggested that the attack had been very well planned. The perpetrators were able to plant a car bomb despite the heavy presence of Awakening fighters in the area.

There were conflicting initial reports of casualties. The Ministry of Interior said the two bombings had killed 14 people and wounded 18. But officials at the Numan Hospital in Adhamiya said they had received six corpses and treated 26 wounded, including four who

leader in Iraq

had been in critical condition.

Relatives of the dead and wounded were prevented from entering the hospital for several hours because of fears that another bomber would get through.

They stood outside, sobbing and trying to keep warm in the cold weather after they had rushed to the hospital without time to grab coats or heavy clothing.

Awakening fighters and American troops quickly locked down the area around the scene of the assassination.

"The martyrdom of Colonel Riyadh is a big loss," said Ayad Saad, an Awakening fighter in Adhamiya. "Al Qaeda is still there actively targeting us, and the proof is what happened today."

If Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, a mostly homegrown group whose members are overwhelmingly Iraqi but which U.S. military officials believe has foreign leadership, is behind the assassination, it would be the latest indication that it was trying to show that it could get to any Sunni who recently joined forces with the Americans.

Overall levels of violence have fallen significantly in Baghdad and in much of central and western Iraq in recent months. A principal reason is that thousands of Sunni militants who used to fight American forces have renounced their ties to insurgents and have been placed on the American military's payroll in the Awakening groups.

Standing guard in onetime insurgent strongholds like Adhamiya, they are organized into groups known as Awakening Councils or Concerned Local Citizens, which are working hand-in-hand with American ground troops.

Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia has been blamed for a rising series of attacks on Awakening fighters and leaders in recent weeks.

Late last month, Osama bin Laden denounced the Awakening movement as a plot "hatched by the Zionist-Crusader alliance" to "steal the fruit of blessed jihad" in Iraq.

Mudhafer al-Husaini, Khalid Al-Ansary, Karim Hilmi and Abeer Mohammed contributed reporting in Baghdad.

January 9, 2008

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

Bush meets with Gul before trip to Mideast

By David Stout

WASHINGTON: Just hours before President George W. Bush was to travel to the Middle East, he welcomed President Abdullah Gul of Turkey to the White House on Tuesday, praising his country as a friend as well as "a great strategic partner."

"I view Turkey as a bridge between Europe and the Islamic world, a constructive bridge," Bush said as he and Gul stood in the Rose Garden in the spring-like weather. Bush said Turkey sets "a fantastic example" of democracy co-existing with Islam.

Bush reiterated U.S. support for Turkey's admission to the European Union, saying, "I strongly believe that Europe will benefit with Turkey as a member." He made no mention of recent tensions between Washington and Ankara.

He said he and Gul, who has been in Washington before as foreign minister but never as president, had had a good visit in the Oval Office, exchanging views on a range of Middle East issues.

"All in all, we've had a very constructive conversation," Bush said. "That's what you'd expect when two friends are in the room together."

Gul, speaking through an interpreter, pledged that his country and the United States would "continue to work together to ensure that peace, stability and prosperity continue to grow around the world."

"And we are also working against our common enemy, the PKK," Gul went on, referring to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which has been a problem for Turkey for years and which the United States considers a terrorist group. "And we have once again underlined the importance of our cooperating in fighting against the PKK. And I would like to thank the president for his determination as well in this regard."

The PKK has bases in Iraq and Turkey and seeks an autonomous Kurdish region in eastern Turkey. But while Washington and Ankara have spoken of their "common interest" in stopping attacks by the group, as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice put it recently, there has been friction between the two capitals.

Turkey's recent moves against Kurdish militants in northern Iraq have placed the United States in a delicate position between Turkey, its longtime NATO ally, and the new Iraqi government that America backs.

While the United States has provided Turkey with intelligence to aid its pursuit of Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq, there has been grumbling within the State Department bureaucracy that not everyone in the chain of command was adequately informed before Turkey's incursion into northern Iraq in December.

Executions rise in Iran as penalties strengthen

By Nazila Fathi

TEHRAN: Iran hanged seven men convicted of murder and drug smuggling in different cities, newspapers reported Thursday, bringing the number of publicly disclosed executions in the first two weeks of this year to 23.

The daily newspaper Iran reported that two men, identified only by their first names as Mojtaba and Muhammad-Hossein, were hanged for murder Wednesday in the southern city of Jahorm. Three others, convicted of drug trafficking, were hanged in the eastern city of Birjand on Wednesday, the daily Jom-houri Islami reported. The paper added that two others convicted of murder were hanged in the northern city of Tonekabon but did not specify when.

The authorities hanged 13 people on Jan. 1 and three others after that.

According to a news agency count based on reports in local newspapers, Iran hanged 298 people in 2007, compared with 177 in 2006. If the increase in executions continued at the present rate, the number of hangings this year would surpass 400.

Human rights groups in Iran this week expressed shock after the judicial authorities disclosed they had amputated the left feet and right hands of five criminals convicted of armed robbery in the province of Sistan-Baluchistan.

A human rights group founded by Shirin Ebadi, the lawyer and Nobel peace laureate, condemned the executions and amputations.

"Unfortunately, the violation of human rights in Iran has not only been expanded in some fields, it has also found new dimensions," Ebadi's group, Defenders of Human Rights, said in a statement Wednesday.

While amputation punishments are not new in Iran — they were revived when the Islamic penal code was imposed after the 1979 Islamic revolution — the government has rarely publicized such sentences.

Moreover, amputation sentences have been for either hands or feet, not both. In the newly disclosed instances, the authorities cut off both the right hand and left foot, making it difficult, if not impossible, for the condemned people to walk even with a cane or crutches.

Turkish fright

The terrorist car bombing that killed five people and wounded 68 last Thursday in southeastern Turkey was a local event with larger meaning.

The lethal blast must be seen against the backdrop of a domestic struggle over the political and cultural identity of Turkey. As such, it also has a bearing on Iraq's stability; on regional relationships involving Iran, Syria, and Israel; on Turkey's bid for membership in the European Union; and on what has become Turkey's troubled interaction with the United States.

Turkish officials blame the Kurdish guerrilla group known as the PKK for the bombing. It appears to be retaliation for recent Turkish air raids and artillery attacks against PKK forces in northern Iraq — attacks for which the United States provided intelligence information. This is a dangerous game for all concerned.

For the sake of Turkey's democratic development as well as regional security, Turkey's leaders must not allow patriotic passions to overwhelm prudent statecraft. The progressive currents in Turkish society stand to lose a lot if the country tumbles backward into a reprise of the dirty war that the military conducted against the PKK in the 1980s and '90s.

America and the countries of the European Union risk losing a valuable partner if the car bombing heralds a revival of that dirty war, in which hundreds of Kurdish villages in southeastern Turkey were razed. If Turkey's Western friends

want it to continue the political, legal, and economic reforms required for accession to the EU, they must not only give Turkish leaders responsible advice, they must also be willing to give Turkey responsible assistance.

For the Bush administration, this means demanding that Kurdish leaders in northern Iraq — America's truest allies in Iraq — do everything they can to stop the PKK from using its mountain sanctuaries in the north of Iraq as staging areas for attacks inside Turkey. The adminis-

tration is setting a dangerous precedent by helping Turkish forces to bomb PKK targets inside Iraq and conduct cross-border assaults on PKK bands. Whether or not President George W. Bush intends it, he is practically declaring that, despite the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Iraq's neighbors have a right to violate Iraqi national sovereignty.

Turkey today is poised between civilian and military primacy, between pluralism and a chauvinist nationalism. Turkish fears that Kurdish independence in northern Iraq will lead to demands for Kurdish autonomy in southeastern Turkey must not be allowed to drive Turkey's leaders into the arms of Iran and Syria, whose regimes are likewise determined to suppress Kurdish independence. And PKK car bombs must not derail Turkey's progress toward liberal democracy and ruin its chances of joining Europe.

Terrorism, and injudicious warring against terrorism, can have that kind of corroding effect.

— The Boston Globe

Patriotic passions must not be allowed to overwhelm prudent statecraft.

The amputations were carried out in the southern province of Sistan-Baluchistan, near the border with Pakistan, where the authorities have faced increasing insecurity as a result of attacks by minority Sunni insurgents opposed to the Shiite government.

"We have constantly protested about

the existence of such punishments in our penal code," Ebadi said in an interview.

She added: "But the government ignores our protests. These laws are against international conventions Iran has signed, and must change."



Voice of America

Bush, Turkish President Discuss

Kurdish Rebels

08 January 2008

By Scott Stearns White House

U.S. President George Bush and Turkish President Abdullah Gul say their countries are working together to fight Kurdish rebels based in Iraq. VOA White House Correspondent Scott Stearns reports, the two men spoke to reporters following talks in the Oval Office.

President Bush says Turkey is a constructive bridge between Europe and the Islamic world and a great strategic partner for the United States.

"We deal with common problems," he said. "One such problem is our continuing fight against a common enemy, and that is terrorists. And such a common enemy is the PKK. It is an enemy to Turkey, it is an enemy to Iraq, and it is an enemy to people who want to live in peace."

The United States and Turkey both consider the Kurdistan Workers' Party - or PKK - a terrorist group. Turkish forces have recently launched cross-border raids into northern Iraq against the Kurdish rebels. The United States says it has been assisting Turkey with intelligence information on the PKK.

The PKK has been fighting for autonomy in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast since 1984. That violence has killed more than 30,000 people.



AP Images

President Gul thanked President Bush for his determination against the PKK and for Washington's continued support of Istanbul's efforts to join the European Union.

President Gul said the men also discussed energy security and Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

"The president is engaged very much in efforts to ensure peace in the Middle East, and we believe that these are important efforts which can yield results," he said. "We also discussed Iraq, and we will continue to discuss issues such as Iraq, the Balkans and other issues."

During his trip to the Middle East this week, President Bush will visit Israel, the West Bank, Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. In addition to trying to rally support for talks aimed at an independent Palestinian state, President Bush says he will also discuss efforts to counter what he says are aggressive ambitions from Iran.

Washington says Iran is enriching uranium for possible use in a nuclear weapons program. Tehran says it is enriching uranium solely for the peaceful civilian purpose of generating electricity.

09 January 2008



Six-month delay of Article 140 begins

The vital constitutional article remains strong in the minds of Kurdish lawmakers.

The Globe-Erbil

Kurdistan Region President Barzani ensures the people of Kurdistan that Article 140 will be implemented. "It is impossible to not carry out Article 140," asserted Barzani.

Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani assured people of the region that Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution will be implemented within the six months suggested by the UN envoy to Iraq.

Barzani insisted on Article 140's implementation during a joint press conference with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, held in Dukan resort in Suleimaniya on January 5.

"We consider the suggestion offered by the UN a positive step and certainly the article will be implemented in the six months," said President Barzani, explaining that this extension had international sup-

port due to the presence of the UN, which, according to Barzani, along with the strong will of Kurdish people guarantees the implementation of the constitutional article.

Two weeks before the constitutional deadline for holding a referendum according to Article 140, the UN Secretary-General's special representative, Stefan De Mistura, attended a session of Kurdistan Parliament and suggested that Kurdish leaders extend the implementation deadline for six months. This came after the High Committee in charge of implementing Article 140 already announced that they were unprepared to hold the referendum. Last December 26, Kurdistan Parliament voted to accept the UN suggestion. Some Iraqi political powers created fear among the Kurdish discourse as they called the

suggestion illegal to the Constitution.

Meanwhile, the High Committee decided to go ahead with the six-month extension. Additionally, the committee also prepared a law project including five decisions directed to Iraqi PM Nuri al-Maliki.

Frankly assuring the Kurdish people, Barzani made it clear, saying: "It is impossible to not carry out Article 140." He added, "The UN interfered with good suggestions, including the choice of working in accord with the 2005 elections as an alternative," for the expected referendum in case any further problems arise after the suggested six-month extension. The Kurdish Brotherhood bloc at the Kirkuk provincial council called on Iraqi PM al-Maliki to apologize

to the Iraqi people for not implementing the constitutional article in its promised time.

"The Kirkuk governor, Abdul-Rahman Mustafa, has demanded al-Maliki attend Iraqi Parliament to give his explana-



tion on postponing Article 140," said Muhammad Kamal, member of the Kurdish bloc at the Kirkuk provincial council, in a statement to The Globe.

Kamal also added that another one of the governor's demands is to hold the referendum in Kirkuk city and the areas surrounding it by next March. It was requested at an Iraqi Parliament session that the

High Committee for implementing Article 140 be dissolved because of the six-month extension. But the Kurdistan Coalition (KC) bloc in Iraqi Parliament rejected that.

"Such demands are stated only by those who oppose the implementation of Article 140. These are baseless and unconstitutional demands and the KC stands against them," said Sadi Barzinji, member of the

Kurdish bloc in the Iraqi Parliament, by telephone contact with The Globe. He pointed out that there are no guarantees on this issue except the will of the Kurdish people

KURDISHGL

BE

09 January 2008

Nechirvan Barzani remains in Kurdistan PM post PUK gives Barzani two more years to fulfill his work programs.

The Globe-Erbil

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani stated on Saturday that Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani will remain in his position as the region's prime minister.

The statement released by Iraqi President Talabani during a joint press conference held after a meeting between the PUK and the KDP in Suleimaniya on January 5, came at a time when Talabani's PUK was supposed to nominate a candidate to become the prime minister for the final two years of the current KRG cabinet, according to an agreement between the PUK and the KDP.

According to the agreement signed between the KDP and PUK in late 2004, the two political parties decided to ally as one bloc entering the Iraqi and Kurdistan parliamentary elections. The post of the KRG prime minister was given to

the KDP for the first two years, and the PUK was to run the government after that.

In the meeting, the two Kurdish main parties addressed recent disputed issues between the Iraqi central government and the KRG.

"The meeting focused on the key issues of Article 140 of the Constitution as well as the current possibility of the Iraqi political process," said Muhammad Mullah Qadir, member of the KDP politburo, by telephone contact with The Globe.

Talabani told reporters, "Principally, it is decided that Mr. Nechirvan will remain in his position" as the KRG PM.

President Barzani said that the KDP and PUK don't put conditions on each other, adding that Nechirvan Barzani could keep his current post so as to fulfill the work program he started. Regardless, President

Barzani made it clear that "the PUK will have right to change PM any time they want."

The formal spokesman for the PUK, Mullah Bakhtiyar, announced immediately after the press conference that both the PUK general secretary and political bureau are in agreement.

"We believe it is necessary that Mr. Barzani stay on in order to solve the current situations of Kurdistan Region and the problems between the region and the Iraqi central government," Mullah Bakhtiyar explained.

The PUK spokesman didn't give more details about the decision, but confirmed that they will announce the period of Barzani's administration.

He added, "If Mr. Barzani



stays as PM for the two years, confidently the right to change authority will remain, and for the term after that, the position will be handed to the PUK."

On May 7, 2006, Nechirvan Barzani formed the fifth KRG cabinet, which consists of 40 ministers, mostly from the two allied parties as well as other political powers in the region.

KURDISHGL

BE

09 January 2008

Globe Editorial

Where is Iraq going?

For the sake of Kurdish, Arab, and other ethnic groups in Iraq, the current al-Maliki government must go.

By Azad Aslan

Al-Maliki's reluctance and slackness on implementing key constitutional issues throughout his term deepened the ongoing crisis in Iraq rather than paved the way toward peace, stability, and security. Among the crucial issues, it was the Kirkuk issue that interested the Kurds most. Despite all the words, the subsequent Iraqi governments of post-Saddam failed to keep their promises.

Now the Iraqi Parliament is discussing whether Article 140 is to be counted as void since the article was not implemented on time. As if it were the Kurds who failed to implement the article on time. The delay and responsibility completely remains on the shoulders of al-Jafaari's and al-Maliki's governments. It is hard to believe that the failure resulted due to technical factors or general security problems that Iraq has been facing. Since Kurdistan Region enjoys relative security, peace, and an

economic boom compared to the rest of Iraq, it would have been in the interests of the people of Kirkuk to be part of Kurdistan Region in order to share the Kurdish success.

There are two fundamental reasons for the delay of Article 140. First, the Iraqi Arabs (both Shiite and Sunni), the main and dominant national groups, with some exceptions, are not sincere enough to push Iraq toward democracy, equality, and prosperity. They are not sin-



cere enough to accept the legitimate demands of the Kurdish nation, the second main national group.

The second is the interference of regional powers, most prominently Turkey, in Iraq's internal affairs. Turkey explicitly claims that it will not accept Kirkuk's incorporation into Kurdistan Region. It threatens to become involved militarily should the article be implemented.

Despite all these setbacks on the issue of Kirkuk and other unresolved problems between the Kurdistan Regional Government and Baghdad, the Kurds must be tough and determined to see the implementation of Article 140 through

and the resolution of all other issues.

These, however, cannot be done with the current al-Maliki government. A new Iraqi government must be formed specifically to resolve the fundamental issues of Iraq in order to establish a better and more peaceful country.

Should Iraq fail to pass this critical juncture, the outcome would be more disaster for the future of Iraq. There would be no justifiable reason for the Kurds to be part of Iraq. The only choice left would be for Kurds to separate from Iraq

and declare their independence.

Kurdistan Parliament approved one more time the six-month postponement of the implementation of Article 140, with promises by the UN representative to Iraq to assist in the preparation of technical conditions. This, however, is not enough. Kurdistan Parliament must develop an alternative plan should the Iraqi central government and UN fail to resolve the Kirkuk issue within six months as they have promised.

What should the Kurds do if the next six months prove to be fruitless? What is the alternative route for the Kurds to follow? These questions have not been answered yet. Without any more delay, Kurdish authorities must develop a coherent and serious plan for such an eventuality. It is worth mentioning that without Kirkuk, sustaining southern Kurdistan is not possible. In other words, the destiny of southern Kurdistan is closely linked with the destiny of Kirkuk.

The Washington Post

January 9, 2008

A Surge Against Maliki

By David Ignatius Wednesday

A new movement to oust Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is gathering force in Baghdad. And although the United States is counseling against this change of government, a senior U.S. official in the Iraqi capital says it's a moment of "breakthrough or breakdown" for Maliki's regime.

The new push against Maliki comes from Kurdish leaders, who, U.S. and Iraqi sources told me, sent him an ultimatum in late December. "The letter was clear in saying we are concerned about the direction of policies in Baghdad," said a senior Kurdish official. He described the Dec. 21 letter as "a sincere effort from the Kurdish parties to help the government reform -- or else."

The Kurds are upset that Maliki hasn't delivered on promises they say he made to them last summer, when he was trying to stave off an earlier attempted putsch. Maliki pledged then that his government would pass an oil law and a regional-powers law, and that it would conduct a referendum on the future of Kirkuk. None of these promises has been fulfilled, and the Kurds are angry.

The strongest anti-Maliki voice is Massoud Barzani, the dominant political leader in Kurdistan. Barzani agreed to back Maliki last summer after a personal telephone call from President Bush. Now, fuming about Turkish attacks across the border last month and the delay on Kirkuk, Barzani is on the warpath.

Ryan Crocker, the U.S. ambassador in Baghdad, met after Christmas in Kurdistan with Barzani and Jalal Talabani, the Iraqi president and the region's other ruling warlord. In a telephone interview yester-

day from Baghdad, Crocker said his message to the Kurds was: "We think everyone should be placing emphasis on making the government more effective, not on changing the government."

Although U.S. officials are counseling against removing Maliki, they agree that the prime minister must govern more effectively and inclusively in coming months -- or suffer the "breakdown" described by the senior U.S. official. "Clearly there is a sense among the Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites that the government isn't doing what it's supposed to do," he explained. "It needs to get better quick."

The anti-Maliki forces would like to replace him with Adel Abdul Mahdi, one of Iraq's vice presidents and a leader of the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, headed by Abdul Aziz al-Hakim. Mahdi's supporters think they can muster the 138 votes needed for a no-confidence vote in parliament, by combining 53 votes from the Kurdish parties with 55 from Sunni groups and 30 from Hakim's Islamic Council. Add another 40 votes from supporters of former prime ministers Ayad Allawi and Ibrahim al-Jafari, and you're close to the two-thirds majority needed to form a new government.

The rumor mill in Baghdad is already floating the names of officials who would take cabinet posts in a new government. The Kurds are said to want key security portfolios, perhaps including control over intelligence through the Ministry of National Security. Various candidates have been proposed to take over the Energy Ministry -- and halt what is said to be massive smuggling of oil from the southern Iraqi pipeline across the border to Iran.

The biggest obstacle to removing Maliki is the Shiite religious leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, who is said to be frustrated with Maliki's poor performance but wary of dividing the Shiite alliance. "Najaf [Sistani's headquarters] is unhappy," said one top Iraqi leader. But the senior U.S. official said he was "certain" that Sistani had not yet blessed any change of government.

Though Bush administration officials share the Iraqi frustration with Maliki, they fear that a change of regime would add delay and distrust to the already chaotic political scene in Baghdad. "How long would such a transition take? How long before they would form a new government?" worries a second senior U.S. official.

Rather than dumping Maliki, the administration hopes to work around him, by operating through a coalition known as the "three plus one." That group includes, in addition to Maliki, President Talabani and vice presidents Mahdi and Tariq al-Hashimi. "Our message to Maliki is that you can't govern solo. You have to govern as part of a group," says the second senior U.S. official. With a push from this governing alliance, Crocker hopes the Iraqi parliament will pass a law easing de-Baathification as early as the end of this week, and a budget by mid-January -- finally breaking the political logjam.

For an America caught up in its own political drama, the Baghdad primary seems remote. But what happens in Iraq during the next several weeks will shape events there for the rest of 2008. For Maliki, just back in Baghdad after a visit to London doctors for treatment for exhaustion, it's "make or break" time.

United Press International

BUSH TO GUL: NO MILITARY FIX FOR PKK WAR

January 9, 2008

WASHINGTON, Jan. 9 (UPI) -- President Bush has told Turkish President Abdullah Gul that Kurdish terrorism in southeastern Turkey and Iraq cannot be defeated by purely military means.

A senior Bush administration official, speaking to reporters on condition of anonymity Tuesday, said the two presidents had "a lengthy discussion" about the PKK, the Kurdish armed group both governments call terrorists.

"The discussion was along the lines of having a comprehensive solution to the PKK problem, which means not just military action, but also political action, including things within Turkey -- economic, political development, social development in the southeast," said the official.

The official said the two explored "a whole bunch of different solutions to the problem" and that "there was discussion, as there is when we deal with terrorists in different parts of the world, that you have to provide an alternative so that the terrorists are not as attractive" to local populations.

The official also touted the "increased intelligence sharing that we have been conducting with the Turks, and military cooperation to deal with the PKK issue" since November.

Bush addressed the issue more broadly in his own remarks, saying only that "our continuing fight against a common enemy" like the PKK was one of the issues they discussed.

"It's an enemy to Turkey, it's an enemy to Iraq, and it's an enemy to people who want to live in peace," he said of the group.

United Press International

Analysis: Turkey pits U.S. against Kurds

Jan. 10, 2008 By BEN LANDO, UPI Energy Editor

WASHINGTON, Jan. 10 (UPI) -- Turkey's president made it clear during his visit to Washington this week that his country will continue a hard-line approach in dealing with the Kurdish guerrilla campaign in his country and ensuring Kirkuk, Iraq's oil-rich northern city, doesn't fall under control of Iraq's Kurds.

After meetings with top officials, including President Bush, President Abdullah Gul exposed the fault line between U.S.-Turkey and U.S.-Kurd relations.

"Turkey and United States are partners in Iraq," he said Tuesday during a speech at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. "Needless to say, we both have great stake in Iraq's security and stability and welfare."

Turkey says the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, based in the hard-to-reach northern Iraq mountains, crosses the border north to carry out its violent strategy of Turkish Kurd autonomy. Turkey said U.S., Iraqi and Iraqi Kurdish leaders have not done enough to prevent attacks.

The future of Kirkuk, 180 miles north of Baghdad, is a struggle two decades in the making. Gul called it "a powder keg" that could enflame the region if the "international community fails."

After raising the issue with Bush, Gul met with U.N. Security-General Ban Ki-moon and pressed for the United Nations to take an active role in solving the Kirkuk issue.

Bulent Aliriza, director of the Center for Strategic & International Studies' Turkey Project, said Turkey basically holds a three-point position on keeping Kirkuk from the KRG: "the city and the oil resources around it belong equally to Turkomen, Arabs and Kurds who live there; its incorporation by the Kurds would provide the economic underpinning of an independent Kurdish state, which Turkey opposes; and it's contrary to the vital interest of the Turkomen who are ethnically related to the Turks."

Kirkuk is the capital of Iraq's northern oil sector, with adjacent oil fields holding up to an estimated 15 billion of Iraq's 115 billion barrels of proven oil reserves and the start of a pipeline feeding Iraq's largest oil refinery as well as sending oil exports to market when it juts north into Turkey.

Kurds, Turkomen, Arabs and others composed its population in the 1980s when Saddam Hussein forcibly moved Arabs in and others out and redrew the provincial boundaries to put the oil-rich lands out of majority Kurdish provinces.

Iraq's Kurdish leadership ensured the 2005 Constitution contained language, however vague, to reverse Hussein's brutal move. Kurds, Turkomen and others were to be resettled back in Kirkuk (and other disputed territories touched by the late dictator). Arabs brought in were to be brought out.

Then a census was to be taken to determine eligible voters in "a referendum in Kirkuk and other disputed territories to determine

the will of their citizens," according to a translation of the Constitution posted on the U.S. Commerce Department's Iraq Investment and Reconstruction Task Force Web site, "by a date not to exceed the 31st of December 2007."

A week before that deadline, the top U.N. envoy to Iraq, Staffan de Mistura, and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met in Kirkuk to negotiate a six-month timeline to work out a solution. Iraq's Kurds, intent and passionate about a referendum where residents could choose to join the disputed territories -- and its oil -- to the semiautonomous Kurdistan Regional Government, reluctantly agreed. They've been vocal in their critique of the national government for not putting enough effort into complying with the constitution's Kirkuk agenda and are ardently opposed to anything but the referendum in six months at the latest.

"As the primary Turkish goal is to prevent the incorporation of the city into the territory controlled by the Iraqi Kurds, they are happy with the postponement of the referendum and would not mind an indefinite postponement" Aliriza said. "It's as simple as that." However, he said they were now pressing for a U.N.-negotiated "special status" for Kirkuk, like a region unto itself.

"The U.S. government is taking the Turkish position seriously," Aliriza said, "and this was a major factor in the U.S. decision to punt by getting a six-month delay."

"Clearly the U.S. has taken some hits from the Iraqi Kurds on the bombing of PKK targets," Aliriza said when asked what the U.S.-Turkish warming means for U.S.-Kurd relations.

"Whether the relationship suffers further we'll see," he said, adding the United States will be forced to take sides if Turkey escalates its effort to "finish the PKK" at the end of the six months.

Top Kurdish leader and KRG President Massoud Barzani canceled a meeting with Rice during her brief Kirkuk visit. Turkey had just bombed and invaded northern Iraq using U.S. intelligence, promised by Bush in November when Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan was visiting.

The PKK, considered a terrorist organization by the United States, NATO, the EU and others, formed in the 1970s for the cause of Kurdish nationalism. Subsequent fighting and attacks are blamed on deaths in the upper 30,000s, both Turkish troops and civilians. Iraq's government, while calling the PKK terrorists, has also called on Turkey to work on improving the human rights of Kurds in Turkey. Iraq's Kurds have also said there is no proof attacks in Turkey were planned in or carried out by anyone based in Iraq.

A senior administration official said Bush and Erdogan didn't get specific in Kirkuk talks. For the PKK, Bush said support would continue, though he urged Ankara to talk with Iraq and Iraqi Kurds.

"We have (U.S.) cooperation," Gul said, "at the moment."

TODAYS ZAMAN

January 10, 2008

TURKEY'S KURDS LOOK TO NORTHERN IRAQ FOR JOBS, TRADE

By Selcuk Gokoluk (Reuters)

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey - Migrants seeking a better life in Iraq? It sounds bizarre but thousands of Turkish Kurds are finding jobs and trade opportunities across the border that are largely absent at home.

While Turkish warplanes bomb Kurdish PKK rebel targets in northern Iraq, Turkish businessmen and workers are busy making money in the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan, and Iraqi Kurds are coming to Turkey both for business and relaxation.

Firms based in Turkey's impoverished, mainly Kurdish southeast region also work as intermediaries between Western companies and the Iraqi Kurds.

"Iraq contributes seriously to employment in Diyarbakir. Our youths get the chance to find jobs there, in construction, in restaurants and the clothing industry," said Seyhmus Akbas, chairman of southeast Turkish business forum DOGUNSIFED.

Diyarbakir, with about 1 million inhabitants, is the largest city of southeast Turkey but its economy has long been hostage to separatist violence as security forces battle militants of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

The conflict, which dates back to 1984 and has killed nearly 40,000 people, scares off investors and helps keep unemployment at a staggering 60 percent of the local population against 9 percent nationwide, officials say.

Six people, mostly students, were killed in a bomb blast in the centre of Diyarbakir last week. Authorities have blamed the separatist PKK for the explosion and the group has signaled PKK members acting independently may have been to blame.

Per capita income in southeast Turkey is just one third of the national average. Half its residents hold a state "green card" which entitles the very poor to free health care and help in buying food and fuel oil.

ECONOMIC BOOM

Little wonder, then, that Turkish Kurds

have been keen to share in the economic boom in energy-rich Iraqi Kurdistan.

Construction sites in northern Iraq pay workers as much as \$2,000 a month. Similar work in southeast Turkey pays just 400 lira (\$345).

Turkish construction firms, active across the Middle East, Russia and central Asia, are eager to share in northern Iraq's infrastructure projects, estimated to be worth \$20 billion over the next 20 years.

Contracts won by Turkish construction firms in Iraq in 2007 topped \$4 billion. Turkey's total exports to Iraq neared \$3 billion and included capital goods such as electronics as well as consumer goods and food.

Turkish truck-drivers, many from southeastern Turkey, bring back crude oil, far cheaper in northern Iraq, to sell inside Turkey. Iraq also pumps crude oil to Turkey's Mediterranean coast via the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik pipeline.

Close cultural links and a common language help Turkey's Kurds find jobs in Iraqi Kurdistan.

"Western companies look for partners in Turkey's southeast to do business in northern Iraq because of the common language and culture. There are at least 20 such intermediary companies in Diyarbakir alone," said Mursel Tuncay, chairman of the Diyarbakir-based Murkan Group of Companies.

Tuncay said Iraqi Kurdish businessmen also prefer doing business with Turkey because of its open economy.

"They come here to work, strike deals and have fun in Istanbul. They cannot do this in Iran or Syria. They see Turkey as their gateway to the world," Tuncay said.

Some local businessmen fear the Turkish army's bombing campaign against PKK targets over the past month could hurt business. "You watch northern Iraq bombed live on TV. This breaks our hearts as human beings," Akbas said, who described Iraqi Kurds as cousins of the Turkish Kurds.

Businessmen in the southeast have urged the Turkish government to develop closer political ties with Iraqi Kurds, but Ankara prefers to deal directly with Baghdad.

Turkey is anxious to prevent the emer-



Close cultural links and a common language help Turkey's Kurds find jobs in N. Iraq and construction sites pay workers as much as \$2,000 a month.

gence of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq, fearing this could fan separatism among its own large Kurdish population and also destabilize the broader region.

"Turkey should assume the role of a father (to Iraqi Kurds). They are not a threat. We are the biggest country in the Middle East and their population is small compared to us," said the head of Diyarbakir's commodities exchange, Fahrettin Akyil.

"It is a very rich region. Its possibilities should be utilized effectively. Terrorism and northern Iraq should be kept quite separate. If we do not go there, businessmen of other nations will go and fill the vacuum," said Akbas.

But trade with northern Iraq can be risky. Several Turkish truck drivers have been killed in the past few years. Turkish businessmen face other risks too.

"Northern Iraq does not have an established authority. Many of our friends incurred losses there because they were not paid for the goods they delivered," Akyil said.

Iraq lets Baathists go back to work, US pleased

REUTERS

January 12, 2008

By Mussab Al-Khairalla

BAGHDAD, Jan 12 (Reuters) - Iraq's parliament voted on Saturday to let thousands of members of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party return to government jobs, winning praise from Washington for achieving a benchmark step toward reconciling warring sects.

The law is the first of a series of measures that Washington has long been pressing the Shi'ite Islamist-led government to pass in an effort to draw the minority Sunni Arab community that held sway under Saddam closer into the

political process.

"This law preserves the rights of the Iraqi people after the crimes committed by the Baath Party while also benefiting the innocent members of the party. This law provides a balance," Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh said.

Washington had introduced "de-Baathification" when it administered Iraq in 2003-04, but later acknowledged that the measures went too far and asked Iraqi leaders to ease them.

"It's an important step toward reconciliation. It's an important sign that the

leaders of that country understand that they must work together to meet the aspirations of the Iraqi people," U.S. President George W. Bush said.

He was speaking in Bahrain, where he is holding talks with leaders as part of a Middle East tour.

Iraq's failure to pass the bill last year had been seen as one of the main signs that political progress toward reconciliation was stalled even as security improved.



The United Nations envoy in Baghdad, Staffan de Mistura, told Reuters: "This is good news and a right step in the long overdue direction towards national reconciliation. It is important that this process is as inclusive as possible."

EFFORTS TO END DEADLOCK

The law is part of a wider effort to end a political deadlock that saw the main Sunni Arab bloc pull out of Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's government last August.

"The law has been passed. We see it as a very good sign of progress and it will greatly benefit Baathists. It was passed smoothly and opposition was small," said Rasheed al-Azzawi, a Sunni member of the committee which

helped draft it.

Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, the cabinet's senior Kurd, hinted at deeper political changes ahead. Boycotts by Sunnis and others had "undermined the government's ability to cope with challenges" and it was time for a shake-up, he told Reuters in an interview in the Kurdish city Sulaimaniya.

"Improvements in security will not last without a serious review of the makeup of the government," Salih said. "The Kurdish Alliance is calling for dramatic, serious reforms of the government. Otherwise the results could be catastrophic."

The Accountability and Justice bill replaces an existing law that Sunni leaders had complained amounted to collective punishment against their sect.

Thousands of Baath party members, many of them Sunni Arabs, were fired from government jobs after Saddam was toppled in the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, fuelling a long-running insurgency against Iraq's new Shi'ite rulers and U.S. forces.

Shi'ite and Kurdish leaders were reluctant to reward people they blamed for persecuting them under Saddam's regime.

The new law will allow thousands of former party members to apply for reinstatement in the civil service and military. A smaller group of more senior members will still be banned but can now receive their state pensions. Victims of repression under Saddam can sue Baath party members for compensation.

Some Shi'ite lawmakers said the new law was too lax and some Sunnis said it was still too severe, but a majority backed its main provisions in drawn-out, article-by-article voting.

Bush, who met his Iraq ambassador and top military commander during a visit to neighbouring Kuwait on Saturday, said a strategy of sending nearly 30,000 additional troops to the country in 2007 had proven a success.

"Iraq is now a different place from one year ago. Much hard work remains, but levels of violence are significantly reduced. Hope is returning to Baghdad, and hope is returning to towns and villages throughout the country," Bush said. He acknowledged that until last year "our strategy simply wasn't working". (Additional reporting by Sherko Raouf in Sulaimaniya, and Ross Colvin, Waleed Ibrahim, Ahmed Rasheed and Aws Qusay in Baghdad; Writing by Peter Graff; Editing by Caroline Drees)

The New York Times January 14, 2008

NEWS ANALYSIS

Ex-Baathists Get a Break. Or Do They?

By SOLOMON MOORE

BAGHDAD — A day after the Iraqi Parliament passed legislation billed as the first significant political step forward in Iraq after months of deadlock, there were troubling questions — and troubling silences — about the measure's actual effects.

The measure, known as the Justice and Accountability Law, is meant to open government jobs to former members of the Baath Party of Saddam Hussein — the bureaucrats, engineers, city workers, teachers, soldiers and police officers who made the government work until they were barred from office after the American invasion in 2003.

But the legislation is at once confusing and controversial, a document riddled with loopholes and caveats to the point that some Sunni and Shiite officials say it could actually exclude more former Baathists than it lets back in, particularly in the crucial security ministries.

Under that interpretation, the law would be directly at odds with the American campaign to draft Sunni Arabs into so-called Awakening militias with the aim of integrating them into the police and military forces. That plan has been praised as a key to the sharp drop in violence over the past year and as being the most effective weapon against jihadi insurgents like Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia.

There has been mostly silence from American officials, who have pushed Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's government hard over the past year to ease restrictions on former Baathists as a sign of political reconciliation between Shiites and Sunnis. The two highest-ranking Americans in Baghdad, Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker and Gen. David H. Petraeus, were with President Bush in Kuwait on Saturday when the measure was passed. And a day afterward, officials were still putting off questions about it.

"We still have to go through it," said a United States Embassy spokeswoman, Mirembe Nantongo. "We're not going to comment at this time."

Col. Steven Boylan, General Petraeus's spokesman, said he had not seen a translation of the legislation and was uncertain whether his boss had.

According to a translated copy received by The New York Times, a whole new rung of former party members could be allowed back into government. Where the old de-Baathification law barred members of the top four of the party's seven levels, the new measure would bar three, theoretically allowing as many as 30,000 people back in. And a vast majority of the ones still excluded, who held top national- and regional-level jobs, would become eligible for pensions if they had not been implicated in crime or corruption.

But interpretations of the measure's actual effects varied widely among Iraqi officials. In general, Shiite politicians hailed it as an olive branch to Sunni Arabs. But some Sunnis say it is at best an incremental improvement over the old system, and at worst even harsher.

"This law includes some good articles, and it's better than the last de-Baathification law because it gives pensions to third-level Baathists," said Khalaf Aulian, a Sunni politician who opposed the legislation. "But I don't like the law as a whole, because it will remain as a sword on the neck of the people."

"Maybe in the future they will use it to prevent anyone they like from keeping their job," he said.

The most extreme interpretations of the measure's effects actually came from Shiite officials. Some of them hailed it because it would ban members of even the lowest party levels from the most important ministries: justice, interior, defense, finance and foreign.

That would seem to preclude the government from keeping its promise to offer military and police jobs to the thousands of Sunni Arabs who have joined the Awakening groups.

Mr. Aulian, among other Sunni Arab politicians who opposed the measure, pointed out that the greatest risk could be that it would unravel successful efforts to draw more Sunnis away

from the insurgency, perhaps toppling the country back into open sectarian conflict.

"Many Baathists hated the Baath Party, but they were part of it to have a job," he said. "By this law, we will push them into the insurgency."

But the proof of the measure will come in how it is applied. Even the old de-Baathification process did not achieve its goal of purging all of the former high-ranking party members from the government. The process lost track of many and avoided prosecuting others, like the former interim prime minister, Ayad Allawi, out of political expediency.

Some officials pointed out that there was still room to interpret the legislation liberally, allowing more former Baathists in while still satisfying the pride of Shiites who have been dead-set against conciliation toward officials who worked for Mr. Hussein.

Sadiq al-Rikabi, a political adviser to Mr. Maliki, said the new bill was a result of compromises by both hard-line Shiites and Sunni Arabs.

One particular improvement, he said, was that de-Baathification cases would now be subject to judicial review, whereas the old de-Baathification committee's decisions were final.

And the Council of Ministers would have the right to make exceptions to the law in order to serve the public interest. "Before, we dealt with Baath Party members as a group," he said. "Now, being a Baath Party member is not a crime by itself. If someone has committed a crime in the old regime, that accusation should be made in court. And all of the members can get a pension."

In the meantime, Iraqi legislators said Sunday that they were making progress on two more key benchmarks urged by the Bush administration: the approval of an oil revenue sharing law and the settlement of competing claims to the contested northern city of Kirkuk.

Several Iraqi political parties — including the one led by the cleric Moktada al-Sadr, along with the National Dialogue Front, a Sunni Arab group, and several independent and secular groups — said they had formed a coalition of at least 140 legislators, of 275 total, to work on the issues.

While they have yet to propose a specific plan, the unusual alliance stands opposed to Iraq's powerful regional interests, including the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council, which dominates

the oil-rich south, and the Kurdish bloc, which has cut independent deals with foreign oil companies to exploit vast oil reserves in the northern region of Iraqi Kurdistan. Both groups favor more regional control of oil revenues and political power.

The sharing of oil revenues has been a major obstacle for Iraq's competing political groups, especially for Sunni Arabs in the western Anbar Province, which has little oil.

Salih Mutlaq, a member of the National Dialogue Front, said he hoped the coalition would promote nationalism.

"We are against creating regions," he said. "This bloc is against investment and oil contracting unless it is approved and consulted about with the central government."

Mahmoud Othman, a Kurdish politician, took a dim view of the alliance and said he suspected that Mr. Maliki, despite his own party's agreement with the Kurdish bloc, secretly supported the coalition. "I think he indirectly participated in this alliance and encouraged it to make problems for the Kurds," Mr. Othman said. "Maliki is a double-faced man."

Los Angeles Times

January 14, 2008

IRAQI POLITICAL FACTIONS JOINTLY PRESSURE KURDS

Onetime enemies sign a statement urging a political solution to the status of Kirkuk, and to regional oil contracts.

Ned Parker, Los Angeles Times

Baghdad -- Several Shiite and Sunni political factions united Sunday to pressure the Kurds over control of oil and the future of the city of Kirkuk, which the Kurds wish to annex to their self-rule region in the north.

The budding front, which include onetime enemies such as Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's secular faction, believes the country should have a strong central government.

In contrast, the Kurds and the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, a major Shiite party, have championed a federal system that would give a limited role for the national government and greater powers to the regions.

Officials from the factions that signed Sunday's statement said they want to find a political solution to the status of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, which Kurds wish to annex by referendum. The Iraqi Constitution had called for a referendum to be held by the end of last year, but that deadline passed, and the factions now question whether it is still required.

The groups also protested any contracts signed by provinces or regions with foreign companies to develop oil fields. The **Kurdish** regional government has signed such contracts in the past year, ignoring protests from

Baghdad.

The factions indicated that the communique does not represent the formation of a new political bloc but does commit them to promoting a strong role for Iraq's national government.

Usama Najafi, a lawmaker with Allawi's party, said at least 120 lawmakers in the 275-member parliament endorsed the statement.

The communique was signed by representatives of nearly a dozen blocs, including the Turkoman, Yazidi and Christian minorities. The Shiite Dawa-Iraq party and supporters of former Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari signed the statement as well in what could create greater stress on the parliament's leading 85-seat Shiite coalition, which has already seen two parties defect.

The communique also revealed divisions in the 44-seat Iraqi Accordance Front, the main Sunni bloc, between parties that support and oppose **Kurdish** regional ambitions.

"We are thinking that **Kurdish** demands have grown larger and larger gradually. ... Some of those demands are impossible to achieve, and this is a clarification for the Kurds that their demands are too large and irrational. They have to recognize their true size in the political process," said Sheikh Walid Kraimawi, a member of the al-Sadr

movement's political committee.

In a twist, the communique brings together both Allawi's faction and the Sadrist in demanding a timeline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops in Iraq. When prime minister in 2004, Allawi approved U.S. troops to fight al-Sadr's Mahdi Army militia.

Kurdish parliament member Mahmoud Othman said the Kurds were not surprised at the statement and have considered such groups hostile to their goals. But he cautioned it is hard to see how their positions would translate into a cohesive bloc.

"It's not a coalition or front," Othman said. "It's just a communique."

At a time when Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has come under political pressure from the Kurds, the statement might strengthen his political hand by giving him leverage to extract compromises from them on both the status of Kirkuk and the management of oil resources.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military reported Sunday that a U.S. soldier had died after a bomb struck his vehicle in northern Iraq. The attack, which occurred Saturday in Nineveh province, left another four U.S. soldiers wounded, the military said.

Rice, in Baghdad visit, hails law on Baathists

'Step forward' in reconciliation, she says

By Solomon Moore

BAGHDAD: During a surprise visit here on Tuesday, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice praised Iraqi leaders for making progress on several key goals of the troop surge, including the approval of a controversial new de-Baathification law.

Speaking alongside Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, Rice praised the passage of the law, which is intended to undermine the Sunni Arab-led insurgency and to draw more Sunnis into the political process.

"This law, the accountability and justice law, is clearly a step forward for national reconciliation," Rice said. "It is clearly a step forward for the process of healing the wounds of the past, and it will have to be followed up by implementation that is in the same spirit of national reconciliation."

Iraqi politicians have offered starkly different interpretations of the law. Some leaders said that it would systematize what had been perceived as a partisan purging of former regime elements. Other Iraqi politicians claimed that the law would provide more access to many ex-Baathists who had been shut out of the government jobs, or at least make them eligible for state pensions.

Some hard-line members of leading Shiite parties who supported the law, and minority Sunni political parties who opposed the measure, agree that it will be used to justify further purges of suspected former Baathists from Iraq's most important ministries, including foreign, interior and defense.

And critics of the law said that it could have the opposite of its intended effect, exacerbating tensions between Shiites and Sunni Arabs and rekindling sectarian bloodshed after a recent lull in violence.

American officials had been pushing the Iraqi Parliament to adopt a new de-Baathification law and billed it as a key benchmark for the U.S. troop surge. But since its passage Saturday, American officials had been conspicuously tight-lipped about its content as they studied the legislation closely and gauged its political impact in Baghdad.

Rice said that the fact that Iraqi politicians had built enough consensus to pass the law was in itself a major accomplishment for the country's fragile democratic process.

"I don't know of any law that has ever been passed that is everything that everybody wants," Rice said. "That's the nature of democracy. The law will be more than some people wanted, it will be less than some people wanted. That's

the nature of democratic compromise."

Rice and Zebari also addressed another key U.S. goal, a hydrocarbon-sharing law, and a resolution on the status of the northern city of Kirkuk.

On Sunday, a broad swath of inter-sectarian and ideological political parties created a coalition to push for more national controls on regional oil resources and condemned a planned popular referendum on the status of Kirkuk, a city regarded by Kurdish leaders as part of the semiautonomous region of Kurdistan.

Zebari, himself a prominent Kurdish leader, said that he wanted to resolve the Kirkuk issue within six months, and he described the alliance as a positive political development.



Sabah Arar/AP

Condoleezza Rice in Iraq on Tuesday. She hailed a "national reconciliation" step.

"There are new alliances being built and being formed," he said. "I don't think we should be terrified of such political developments. I think it is all healthy."

Turkey strikes at Kurdish rebels in north Iraq

The Associated Press

ANKARA: Turkish warplanes bombed Kurdish rebel hideouts in northern Iraq on Tuesday, as Turkey's deputy military commander visited Baghdad to discuss cooperation in fighting the rebels, the military said.

It was the fourth aerial attack on rebel positions in northern Iraq since the military began a bombing campaign Dec. 16. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan had vowed Monday to

"finish" the rebels soon.

The jets "effectively struck" at rebel targets in the Zap-Sivi, Avasin-Basyan and Hakurk regions, the military said on its Web site. NTV television, citing Kurdish officials in Iraq, said about 10 jets had participated in the raids.

The military said that the assault had targeted only confirmed rebel positions and that efforts had been made to avoid the civilian population.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, has battled for autonomy in

southeastern Turkey for more than two decades — a campaign that has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths. It uses strongholds in northern Iraq for cross-border strikes into Turkey.

Making a visit to Baghdad, the Turkish military's second-in-command, General Ergin Saygun, met with Lieutenant General Nasier Abadi, the deputy chief of staff of the Iraqi Army, and General David Petraeus, the U.S. commander in Iraq, the military said in a separate statement.

They discussed fighting the rebels and possible military cooperation, the army said. It was a first visit to Iraq by a high-ranking Turkish commander since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003.

In October, the Turkish Parliament authorized the military to strike at the rebels across the border.

Turkey began the bombing campaign Dec. 16 and claimed to have killed as many as 175 rebels in that first raid. Three further air raids and a brief ground incursion followed.

January 16, 2008

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

AFP

Excuses du PKK après un sanglant attentat à Diyarbakir

ANKARA, 8 jan 2008 (AFP) - -

Le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) a présenté ses excuses mardi après un sanglant attentat commis le 3 janvier à Diyarbakir, la principale ville kurde de Turquie, affirmant ne pas en être directement responsable, selon une agence proche du PKK.

"Cet attentat n'a pas été planifié au niveau central par notre mouvement (...) Nous regrettons que des civils aient perdu la vie et nous présentons nos excuses à notre peuple", a déclaré Bozan Tekin, un haut responsable du PKK (séparatistes kurdes de Turquie) cité par l'agence Firat.

"Notre enquête a montré que c'était une action d'unités indépendantes

locales en représailles à des attaques contre le peuple kurde (...) Elle visait un véhicule transportant des officiers de l'armée", a poursuivi M. Tekin.

La police turque a arrêté l'auteur présumé de cet attentat à la voiture piégée perpétré jeudi dernier dans le centre-ville de Diyarbakir au passage d'un véhicule militaire et qui a fait six morts, a annoncé mardi l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Celle-ci a précisé que le suspect était membre du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan et qu'il avait été entraîné dans un des camps dont disposent les rebelles dans le nord de l'Irak.

09 janvier 2008



Etats-Unis/Turquie

Le soutien de Washington à Ankara

Avec notre correspondant à Washington, Jean-Louis Pourtet

Le président turc Abdullah Gül a été reçu ce mardi à la Maison Blanche par son homologue américain. George Bush a encouragé Ankara à coopérer avec l'Irak, pour venir à bout des violences des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). De son côté Abdullah Gül a remercié Washington pour son aide dans la lutte contre les rebelles du PKK. Par ailleurs, le président Bush a plaidé pour l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union européenne afin de servir de pont entre l'Occident et le monde islamique. Le président turc Abdullah Gül a été reçu ce mardi à la Maison Blanche par son homologue américain. George Bush a encouragé Ankara à coopérer avec l'Irak, pour venir à bout des violences des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). De son côté Abdullah Gül a remercié Washington pour son aide dans la lutte contre les rebelles du PKK. Par ailleurs, le président Bush a plaidé pour l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union européenne afin de servir de pont entre l'Occident et le monde islamique.

Le président Bush n'a pas été avare de compliments à l'égard de ce qu'il a appelé « un pays ami



et un grand partenaire stratégique ».

« Nous partageons une vision commune », a répondu le président Abdullah Gül ajoutant que « la Turquie continuerait d'œuvrer aux côtés des Etats-Unis en faveur de la paix, de la stabilité et de la prospérité ».

Ces propos ont montré combien les relations

s'étaient améliorées entre Washington et Ankara après cinq ans de tensions qui avaient commencé en 2003 quand le gouvernement turc avait refusé l'accès de son territoire aux troupes américaines se rendant en Irak.

Le climat a commencé à se réchauffer après que les Etats-Unis ont offert de partager avec la Turquie, leurs renseignements sur les activités du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le nord de l'Irak et ne se sont pas opposés à des frappes aériennes turques contre les bases des rebelles.

Selon Dana Perino, porte-parole de la Maison Blanche, « le président Bush a, au cours de l'audience, encouragé les responsables turcs à rechercher une solution politique à long terme pour régler le problème du PKK et à coopérer avec l'Irak. »

Autre faveur de George Bush à Abdullah Gül, qui risque d'indisposer certains pays européens, son plein soutien à l'entrée de la Turquie dans l'Union européenne afin de servir de pont entre l'Occident et le monde islamique.

11 JANVIER 2008

TRIBUNE DE GENÈVE

Tirs d'artillerie turcs sur le nord de l'Irak

L'artillerie turque a bombardé vendredi des secteurs du nord de l'Irak, d'où Ankara tente de déloger des rebelles kurdes, a indiqué un responsable kurde irakien.

ERBIL (AFP) - Il y a eu des tirs d'artillerie dans le secteur au nord de Dohouk (430 km au nord de Bagdad)", a indiqué le général Jabbar Yawar, porte-parole des peshmergas, les combattants kurdes irakiens.

"Les habitants ont entendu les bombardements. Les garde-frontières nous ont confirmé ces bombardements", a ajouté le général Yawar. Les bombardements étaient localisés autour de la localité d'Amadiyah, a-t-il précisé, affirmant en ignorer le bilan humain.

Confronté à une intensification des violences des séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), l'armée turque a mené au moins trois raids aériens et une opération

terrestre de faible ampleur contre le PKK dans le nord de l'Irak depuis décembre.

Selon l'état-major turc, entre 150 et 175 rebelles ont été tués lors du premier raid le 16 décembre, qui a détruit quelque 200 cibles, dont des bases de commandement, d'entraînement et de logistique, des caches, des batteries anti-aériennes et des dépôts de munitions du PKK.

Ankara avait obtenu en octobre du Parlement turc l'autorisation d'intervenir militairement dans le nord de l'Irak, utilisé par les rebelles comme une base arrière pour leurs opérations dans le sud-est anatolien à la population en majorité kurde.



Fin décembre, le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan avait prévenu que ces opérations se poursuivraient. Le conflit entre le PKK et le pouvoir central à Ankara, dont les débuts remontent à 1984, a déjà fait plus de 37.000 morts.

Le président et le Parlement iraniens s'affrontent sur l'économie

UNE ÉPREUVE de force est engagée, en Iran, sur le terrain économique, entre le président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad et le Parlement, quelques semaines avant des élections législatives prévues le 14 mars.

M. Ahmadinejad défend une politique budgétaire destinée à « apporter l'argent du pétrole sur la table des Iraniens ». Il a présenté au Parlement, le 7 janvier, un projet de budget 2008-2009 en hausse de 17 %.

Ce projet, qui comprend les dépenses du gouvernement et celles des entreprises publiques, s'élève à 2 710 000 milliards de rials (198,5 milliards d'euros) contre 2 310 000 millions de rials (169 milliards d'euros) pour le précédent, déjà en hausse de 20 %.

« Le prix du baril est de 70 dollars en moyenne depuis le début de l'année, a déclaré le président. Les gens se demandent quel effet la hausse du pétrole a dans leur vie quotidienne (...). Il faut redistribuer l'argent du pétrole. »

L'Etat iranien continuera à consacrer les dizaines de milliards de dollars (51 milliards de dollars en 2006-2007) que lui rapporte la rente pétrolière à la subvention des produits de consommation courante, notamment le carburant. Deuxième producteur de l'OPEP, l'Iran doit en effet importer 40 % de sa consommation d'essence, faute de capacités de raffinage, ce qui lui coûte plus de 5 milliards de dollars par an.

Ces déficits forcent le gouvernement à ponctionner le fonds de stabilisation où sont cantonnés, en principe, les surplus des rentrées pétrolières. Dix milliards de dollars ont été ainsi prélevés en 2005 et 17,4 milliards en 2006.

Ce laxisme a déclenché une hyperinflation qui a atteint, en novembre 2007, le taux de 19,1 %. Les prix des fruits et légumes ont ainsi été multipliés par trois en deux ans.

Le laxisme a déclenché une hyperinflation qui a atteint, en novembre 2007, le taux de 19,1 %. Les prix des fruits et légumes ont ainsi été multipliés par trois en deux ans.

Valse des prix

Au Parlement, même les élus conservateurs ont pris conscience du danger d'une valse des prix qui suscite de plus en plus d'hostilité à l'égard du pouvoir. Proche de M. Ahmadinejad, le président du Parlement, Gholam Ali Hadad Adel, a tenu, le 6 janvier, des propos très critiques rapportés par l'agence Fars. Il a affirmé qu'« une grande partie de l'inflation est due aux décisions du gouvernement ».

Le même jour, le Parlement a pris la décision de rétablir le

conseil monétaire de la Banque centrale iranienne, supprimé par le président Ahmadinejad en raison du refus de cette instance d'approuver, en mai 2007, l'abaissement autoritaire du taux d'intérêt des banques privées à 13 %.

Malgré la renaissance de ce conseil, le quotidien proche des réformateurs *Etemad-e-Melli* s'est demandé si « le président de la Banque centrale pourra s'opposer aux projets "idéologiques" du gouvernement ».

Le gouvernement a logiquement annoncé la libération du marché monétaire. En effet, le coût de l'argent, inférieur au taux d'inflation, a contribué à orienter les capitaux vers l'immobilier, où les prix ont doublé depuis l'été 2007.

Des politiques budgétaire et monétaire aussi antagonistes augurent mal, selon les économistes iraniens, de la stabilité économique et politique du pays. ■

ALAIN FAUJAS

Le Monde
Jeudi 10 janvier 2008

IRAK MULTIPLICATION DES ATTENTATS À BAGDAD

Les auxiliaires irakiens de l'armée américaine sous le feu d'Al-Qaida

LES BAGDADIS n'auront pas soufflé longtemps. Après plusieurs mois d'un net recul de la violence dans l'ensemble du pays et, singulièrement, dans la capitale irakienne, celle-ci a subi une vague d'attaques faisant au moins 37 morts pour les seules journées du dimanche 6 et mardi 7 janvier. Depuis fin décembre 2007, Bagdad revit au rythme d'attentats meurtriers quasi quotidiens.

À l'origine de ce répit relatif – et désormais entre parenthèses –, le déploiement de quelque 30 000 soldats américains supplémentaires à Bagdad et dans ses environs, la trêve décrétée en août 2007 par le leader chiite anti-américain Moqtada Al-Sadr, ainsi que la multiplication des milices sunnites mobilisées contre les djihadistes affiliés à Al-Qaida. Baptisées Sahwa (« Réveil »), ces milices volontaires, financées et armées par l'armée américaine, sont, sans surprise, devenues les cibles désignées de ces attaques.

La mort du colonel Riyad Al-Samarraï, chef du Réveil d'Adhamiya, un quartier sunnite de Bagdad considéré il y a peu comme un bastion de l'insurrection islamiste, illustre la vulnérabilité de ces nouveaux auxiliaires de l'armée américaine. Selon des témoins de la scène, le colonel a été tué alors qu'il donnait l'accolade au kamikaze (qu'il connaissait visiblement) qui a actionné sa bombe.

Les milices du Réveil sont en partie constituées d'anciens insurgés, de fidèles au régime de Saddam Hussein et d'éléments de l'armée ou des services de renseignement démantelés après la chute de Bagdad en 2003. La ligne est ténue qui les sépare des combattants de la mouvance d'Al-Qaida en Irak. Les Brigades de la Révolution 1920, qui combattent actuellement au sein du Réveil, ont ainsi d'abord été des alliés d'Al-Qaida.

La stratégie de ces milices de quartier, a été étendue par l'armée américaine à certaines zones chiites de Bagdad, à l'instar du quartier de Chaab, situé non loin d'Adhamiya. Dimanche 6 janvier, Ismaël Abbas, chef du Réveil de Chaab a été abattu dans une embuscade. Le même jour, huit de ses miliciens étaient kidnappés au poste de contrôle qu'ils étaient chargés de surveiller. Les correspondants du *New York Times* rapportent que, précédemment, des tracts avaient été distribués dans ce quartier, menaçant les membres du Réveil de « mort » parce qu'ils « protégeaient les Américains ».

Le 22 décembre, c'était le chef du Réveil de Jamia, à l'ouest de la capitale, qui était abattu alors qu'il sortait de la mosquée. Récentes à Bagdad, les attaques contre les milices du Réveil dans les provinces où Al-Qaida est restée active – notamment à Diyala et à Ninive, dans la région de Mossoul – n'ont connu aucun répit.

Même s'il n'existe pour le moment aucune preuve formelle, ces attaques ont été attribuées à la mouvance d'Al-Qaida en Irak par des responsables de l'armée américaine et du Réveil. La multiplication des attentats intervient en effet après un message d'Oussama Ben Laden, diffusé le 29 décembre sur un site Internet généralement utilisé par Al-Qaida, qualifiant les nouveaux alliés sunnites des Américains d'« apostats » et de « traîtres », et leur promettant « des souffrances dans cette vie et dans l'au-delà ». L'armée américaine a annoncé, mardi 8 janvier, le lancement d'une vaste opération contre Al-Qaida et « autres extrémistes ». Baptisée « Phantom Phoenix », elle doit couvrir l'ensemble du territoire irakien. ■

L'armée américaine lance l'opération « Phantom Phoenix » contre Al-Qaida

CÉCILE HENNION

FORMATION D'UNE ALLIANCE ENTRE SUNNITES ET CHIITES POUR L'UNITE DE L'IRAK

AFP

BAGDAD, 13 jan 2008 (AFP) –

Des partis politiques irakiens, sunnites et chiites, avec une forte représentation au Parlement, ont annoncé dimanche une plateforme commune prônant l'unité du pays et le contrôle centralisé du pétrole.

Ces formations, si elles décident de former un bloc parlementaire, seront une force dominante avec plus de 100 députés, et le Premier ministre Nouri al Maliki, dont la majorité s'est effritée, devra compter avec cette nouvelle alliance.

Parmi les signataires de cette plateforme figurent les députés du jeune chef radical chiite Moqtada Sadr, le parti laïc de la Liste nationale irakienne de l'ancien Premier ministre Iyad Allaoui, et le Front national du Dialogue emmené par le sunnite Salah al-Motlak.

Dans un communiqué, les signataires assurent vouloir défendre "l'intérêt national, maintenir l'unité de l'Irak, et éviter les divisions sectaires et ethniques". Ils critiquent "les alliances étriquées, forgées pour diviser et monopoliser le pouvoir".

Ils assurent qu'ils veulent "répartir les richesses de façon équitable, et recouvrer la souveraineté et l'indépendance".

"Le pétrole, le gaz, et les ressources naturelles sont les richesses essentielles de l'Irak et elles doivent être sous le contrôle du gouvernement central, et gérées en coopération avec les régions".

"Nous nous inquiétons de toute initiative séparée dans ce domaine, comme la signature de contrats avec des compagnies étrangères", ajoutent les signataires en référence à 15 contrats pétroliers signés par le gouvernement autonome du Kurdistan irakien depuis août et dénoncés par les autorités de Bagdad.

En outre, assurent-ils, "la situation à Kirkouk est très compliquée et nous

voulons que les intérêts de chaque communauté soient respectés. Un accord politique national sur cette affaire fera de Kirkouk un exemple d'unité nationale".

La région pétrolière de Kirkouk (environ 250 km au nord de Bagdad), où cohabitent Kurdes, Arabes et Turcomans, est revendiquée par la région autonome du Kurdistan. Un référendum devait se tenir, selon l'article 140 de la Constitution irakienne, avant fin 2007 sur le rattachement ou non de Kirkouk au Kurdistan irakien, mais il a été reporté de six mois à l'initiative de l'ONU.

Le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, a dénoncé une "attaque contre l'article 140" qui, selon lui, "ne réussira pas". "Ces gens (qui s'opposent à l'article 140) sont les mêmes qui s'étaient opposés à la Constitution irakienne", a-t-il dit à la presse à Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan irakien.

La plateforme souhaite enfin que soient "mobilisées les ressources nécessaires pour reconstruire les forces de sécurité, sur la base de la compétence, de façon à ce qu'elles fassent appliquer la loi et protègent la patrie, pour aboutir à la fin de l'occupation de la terre irakienne".

"Il s'agit d'un protocole d'entente pour corriger certaines opinions exprimées par le Parlement et résoudre des disputes", a pour sa part déclaré à l'AFP le député sadriste Nassar al-Roubaie, estimant que cette plateforme pourrait à terme se transformer en coalition.

Une telle coalition viendrait concurrencer l'alliance soutenant le Premier ministre Maliki, formée en août et qui compte environ 110 députés.

Cette alliance comprend l'aile du parti Dawa emmenée par M. Maliki, le Conseil suprême islamique d'Irak --une des factions chiites les plus puissantes--, l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan du président Jalal Talabani, et le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan de Massoud Barzani.

IRAK : CHIITES ET SUNNITES S'UNISSENT CONTRE LES INITIATIVES KURDES

Ap Associated Press

14 janvier 2008

Associated Press (AP) Christopher Chester - BAGDAD -

Députés chiites et sunnites irakiens ont mis de côté dimanche leurs divergences et rivalités pour critiquer à l'unisson les récentes initiatives unilatérales du gouvernement autonome kurde dans le domaine du pétrole et ses prétentions sur la ville de Kirkouk.

Dans une déclaration commune adoptée à Bagdad, un groupe de 145 députés couvrant la quasi-totalité du spectre politique, ethnique et religieux du pays a exprimé son opposition à la décision de la région autonome kurde d'exclure le gouvernement central de ses négociations avec des firmes pétrolières étrangères pour la construction de deux raffineries au Kurdistan irakien.

"Il doit bien y avoir une formule pour maintenir l'unité de l'Irak et la distribution de ses richesses", estime le groupe des 145 parlementaires dans cette déclaration lue par le député laïque Oussama al-Nidjifi lors d'une conférence de presse à Bagdad.

"Le pétrole et le gaz sont une richesse nationale et nous sommes préoccupés par ceux qui veulent agir seuls quand il s'agit de signer des contrats", ajoutent les députés dans une allusion aux négociations en cours entre le gouvernement autonome kurde et deux firmes canadiennes pour la construction d'une raffinerie de pétrole et l'achèvement d'une autre.

La déclaration des 145 députés critique également les positions de plus en plus dures défendues par les partis politiques kurdes sur le statut de la

ville stratégique de Kirkouk: à l'approche d'un référendum local crucial prévu avant l'été, la classe politique kurde se montre de plus en plus intransigente dans sa volonté d'annexer au Kurdistan cette cité contrôlée aujourd'hui par le gouvernement central.

Face à ce durcissement kurde sur la question de Kirkouk, les 145 députés ont souligné la nécessité d'un "accord politique" pour maintenir l'unité de l'Irak, a rapporté M. Nidjifi en citant le texte qui prend soin de ne jamais nommer le gouvernement autonome kurde.

Cette déclaration parlementaire commune, inhabituelle en Irak, intervient également après le récent refus de hisser le drapeau national irakien dans la région autonome du Kurdistan, initiative qui a eu le don d'irriter le gouvernement central de Bagdad, dominé par les chiites, mais aussi de nombreux sunnites dans le pays.

Or, depuis la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein, les Kurdes -alliés les plus fiables des Etats-Unis en Irak-ont forgé des relations étroites avec la majorité chiite du pays. En outre, les partis kurdes sont un élément clé de la coalition gouvernementale au pouvoir à Bagdad.

Les récentes initiatives kurdes risquent donc de créer de nouvelles sources de tensions entre les groupes religieux et ethniques du pays et sont perçues par certains comme une menace pour l'unité nationale.

Lors de la conférence de presse à Bagdad, le député Saleh al-Moutlak, chef d'un groupe parlementaire sunnite, a expliqué que la déclaration des 145 députés ne signifiait pas la création d'une alliance arabe -sunnite et chiite-contre la minorité kurde. "Nous travaillons pour l'unité du pays et cela est plus important que tout le reste", a-t-il souligné.



14 janvier 2008

LE KURDISTAN AUTONOME FAIT L'UNITE CONTRE LUI

par Monique Mas

Le gouvernement al-Maliki s'est **Lu**vu promettre lundi le renfort du Front de la concorde, le principal parti parlementaire sunnite. Ses ministres avaient démissionné en août 2007 pour protester contre le retard du vote de la loi «de réconciliation» concernant les anciens membres du parti Baas, finalement adoptée samedi, et contre la perspective du rattachement de la ville de Kirkouk au Kurdistan autonome. Dimanche avait déjà vu l'annonce inédite d'une plate-forme politique entérinée par des députés laïcs de la Liste commune irakienne de l'ex-Premier ministre Iyad Allaoui, des sunnites du Front national du dialogue de Salah al-Motlak mais aussi des chiites radicaux de l'imam Moqtada Sadr. Avec pour objectif affiché «*l'intérêt national et l'unité de l'Irak*», tous s'opposent aux revendications territoriales et pétrolières kurdes.

«*Le Front est prêt à retourner au gouvernement*», annonçait ce 14 janvier le chef du Front de la Concorde, le sunnite Tarek al-Hachémi, qui est aussi le vice-président de l'Irak présidé par le Kurde Jalal Talabani. Avec cette déclaration, les sunnites pourraient redonner figure pluriconfessionnelle au gouvernement vidé de cette composante après leur démission l'année dernière. Un nouveau cabinet «d'unité nationale» semble se profiler à l'horizon immédiat. La déclaration d'al-Hachémi succède à l'annonce de la plate-forme commune sunnites-chiites-laïcs.

Renfort sunnite pour al-Maliki

Lundi, le puissant chef sunnite Tarek al-Hachémi avait convoqué une conférence de presse commune avec un *alter ego* chiite d'importance, Abdelaziz Hakim, le chef du Conseil suprême islamique d'Irak qui soutient al-Maliki. Al-Hachémi se plaignant d'une «*stagnation politique sans précédent*», Hakim a prophétisé «*des progrès dans les jours et les mois qui viennent*». Rien ne garantit qu'ils ne s'accompagneront pas d'une crise politique mettant en scène des alliances concurrentes.

Le renfort sunnite d'al-Hachémi est bienvenu

pour le pouvoir chiite, fort à Bagdad, de l'aile du parti Dawa emmenée par Nouri el-Maliki et du Conseil suprême islamique d'Irak. Cela ne suffisait pas en effet à asseoir l'empire du Premier ministre, débordé par les ambitions des Kurdes, ses alliés jusqu'ici, avec notamment le président kurde, Jalal Talabani, en position d'équilibriste. Fin 2007, la question kurde menaçait d'ailleurs de refaire violemment surface avec la perspective du référendum sur le rattachement de la ville pétrolière de Kirkouk au Kurdistan autonome. L'Onu a jugé plus sage de repousser la consultation au premier semestre 2008. Mais désormais, en Irak, la levée de boucliers est générale.

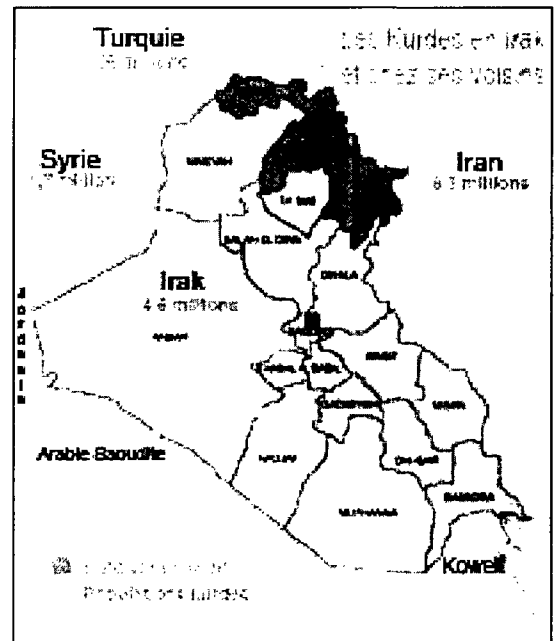
Le président du Kurdistan autonome, Massoud Barzani, revendique la souveraineté sur Kirkouk et multiplie en outre les contrats pétroliers avec des compagnies étrangères contre l'avis du gouvernement central. Il est même en train de négocier la construction d'une raffinerie et l'achèvement d'une autre avec des firmes canadiennes. En agitant le spectre d'un dépeçage de l'Irak, ces manifestations d'indépendance économique expliquent très largement les alliances contre-nature qui sont en train de se nouer.

Les signataires de la plate-forme Allaoui-Motlak-Sadr, assurant qu'ils entendent «*répartir les richesses de façon équitable et recouvrer la souveraineté et l'indépendance*» d'un Irak unitaire. Ils veulent «*faire un exemple d'unité nationale en trouvant un accord politique national pour Kirkouk*». Mais ils souhaitent aussi que «*les forces de sécurité soient reconstruites sur la base de la compétence, de façon à ce qu'elles fassent appliquer la loi et protègent la patrie, pour aboutir à la fin de l'occupation de la terre irakienne*».

Pour sa part, en annonçant son retour dans la sainte alliance du giron gouvernemental, Tarek al-Hachémi a indiqué qu'il allait rencontrer le Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki pour évoquer avec lui «*certaines exigences et pour écouter ce qui a été réalisé concernant ces demandes*». C'est en tout cas déjà comme un gage aux sunnites concédé par le chiite al-Maliki que les observateurs lisent le vote, samedi, de la loi assouplissant les mesures d'exclusion de la fonction publique des anciens membres du parti Baas de Saddam Hussein.

Certes, Washington a pesé sur l'adoption tardive de cette «*Loi sur la justice et la transparence*» qui annule partiellement la purge voulue par l'administrateur américain Paul Bremer. Accompagnant la dissolution de l'armée de

Saddam Hussein, la décision de Bremer avait jeté des centaines de milliers d'Irakiens à la rue et dans les bras de l'insurrection sunnite. Au nom de la réconciliation, la nouvelle loi donne aujourd'hui «*à des membres du cercle de décision du Baas n'ayant pas commis de crimes le droit à une pension de retraite et aux autres la possibilité de réintégrer*» certains secteurs de l'administration irakienne, à



l'exclusion des postes de direction et des domaines sensibles comme la justice, la défense ou le pétrole.

Les ex-baasistes sceptiques

La chasse à l'idéologie du Baas (un nationalisme arabe socialisant et laïc) reste ouverte avec la mise sur pied d'un Conseil sur la justice et la transparence. Et finalement, les bénéficiaires de la loi sont sceptiques sur ses effets et inquiets de savoir que «*les victimes du parti Baas pourront saisir des tribunaux spéciaux pour obtenir des compensations*», comme l'avaient demandé différents dignitaires chiites. Mais l'heure ne paraît pas aux règlements de compte entre chiites et sunnites. «*Nous sommes souples*», assure al-Hachémi.

C'est plutôt pour les Kurdes que le vent tourne dans le mauvais sens. Appuyé par Washington pour la relative sécurisation de son territoire, le Kurdistan autonome de Massoud Barzani a sans doute surestimé sa marge de manœuvre, oubliant les retournements cruels du passé.

L'Irak adopte une loi de réhabilitation des ex-baasistes

Le Monde
Mardi 15 janvier 2008

La législation adoptée par le Parlement irakien doit permettre à certains anciens membres du parti Baas de l'ex-dictateur Saddam Hussein de réintégrer la vie publique

Après des mois de palabres et de controverses, le Parlement irakien a adopté, samedi 12 janvier, la loi dite de « débaasification ». Déclinée en une trentaine d'articles, celle-ci doit permettre aux ex-membres du parti Baas (au pouvoir sous Saddam Hussein) de toucher une pension et, sous certaines conditions, de réintégrer la vie publique. Elle établit également la création de « tribunaux spéciaux » censés juger les criminels de l'ancien régime et indemniser leurs victimes.

Plus crucialement pour l'avenir de ce pays miné par les fractures communautaires, c'est toute la question de la réintégration dans la vie politique de la communauté sunnite, jusque-là marginalisée, et de la « réconciliation nationale » qui est en jeu. A ce titre, ce projet de loi avait été placé au cœur des priorités de la « nouvelle stratégie » en Irak, définie en janvier 2007 par George Bush. Le président américain, actuellement en tournée au Moyen-Orient, a aussitôt applaudi « un pas important vers la réconciliation ».

Il s'agit aussi de remédier à la faillite de la précédente « débaasification », première mesure ordonnée à la chute de Bagdad par les Etats-Unis qui voulaient extirper du « nouvel Irak » l'idéologie totalitaire incarnée par Saddam Hussein. Menée abruptement par l'administrateur américain de l'époque, Paul Bremer, l'initiative avait contribué à grossir les rangs de l'insurrection de milliers de policiers et soldats irakiens qui n'avaient pas été désarmés. Elle avait en outre été ressentie com-

me une injustice par des centaines de milliers d'autres, en grande majorité sunnites – le Baas comptait alors entre 1 million et 1,5 million de membres –, ayant adhéré au parti pour pouvoir intégrer des milieux professionnels tels que l'éducation, et qui se retrouvaient désormais sur le pavé.

« Le mot "débaasification" en français ne rend pas la violence de l'équivalent arabe, "Ijtithath", signifiant "déraciner", utilisé dans la loi irakienne », analyse Hosham Dawod, chercheur au CNRS. *Opérée sur une société qui n'était plus encadrée par la loi, la débaasification a viré en une démarche de revanche extrajudiciaire, dans la rue, avec l'élimination physique de gens proches ou membres du Baas* ». Par ailleurs, poursuit-il, « la complicité de ceux qui contrôlaient les rouages politiques, économiques ou les services de l'Etat ne s'improvise pas. L'une des explications du chaos actuel réside dans l'absence d'individus capables de gérer l'appareil étatique ».

La nouvelle législation vient donc mettre un terme à la précédente, en permettant aux anciens baasistes, à condition qu'ils n'appartiennent pas aux rangs intermédiaires ou supérieurs du parti et qu'ils ne soient pas coupables de crimes, d'intégrer l'administration ou l'armée. Les plus gradés seront mis à la retraite. Si la loi bannit le parti Baas et toute référence au baasisme, elle n'interdit pas aux individus de retourner à une activité politique. « Certains d'entre eux essaieront sans doute de s'intégrer au corps politique avec un autre nom, tout en conservant une part d'idéologie nationaliste, à laquelle s'est depuis ajoutée une teinte islamiste. Quelle place prendront-ils alors sur l'échiquier politique ? s'interroge M. Dawod. Le pouvoir actuel, chiite ou kurde, ne l'acceptera pas. Les choses risquent de se compliquer. »

En attendant, la réhabilitation politique

de la communauté sunnite est, formellement, en marche. Le contexte qui a précédé au vote de la loi renforce cette impression. Ces derniers mois ont en effet vu l'essor des milices sunnites Al-Sahwa (Réveil), alliées aux troupes américaines pour combattre Al-Qaida. En partie composées d'ex-baasistes, parfois membres de l'ancienne armée, voire de la garde républicaine de Saddam Hussein, elles se sont imposées comme une force incontournable dans les régions à majorité sunnite, s'emparant parfois localement des prérogatives réservées au pouvoir central de Bagdad. Le recul d'Al-Qaida dans des zones où elles opèrent leur a valu une légitimité auprès de Washington et de la population irakienne.

Ces derniers mois ont vu l'essor des milices sunnites Al-Sahwa, alliées aux troupes américaines

Le premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki, longtemps critique envers la prolifération de ces groupes armés sunnites, a lui-même fini par affirmer, lors d'un entretien publié le 6 décembre dans *Al-Charq*

le soutien de son gouvernement aux combattants d'Al-Sahwa, promettant d'intégrer « un grand nombre d'entre eux dans la police et dans l'armée ».

Reste le volet « justice » de la loi et la question de savoir si la société irakienne sera capable de l'appliquer. « Dans cette société où rien n'est encore réglementé, il paraît peu probable que la justice soit celle qui fera le premier tri entre les coupables et les innocents ou que la loi formulera la sentence finale, estime le chercheur. Pour l'instant, les Irakiens passent par les armes avant de passer devant les juges. Les milices s'en chargent avant que la justice ne soit saisie. C'est cependant un premier pas qu'il ne faut pas sous-estimer vers une démarche souhaitée par tous : relancer le processus politique de réconciliation, même imparfait, entre deux communautés qui s'opposent. » ■

CÉCILE HENNON

LE FIGARO samedi 19 - dimanche 20 janvier 2008

Affrontements meurtriers à l'occasion de l'Achoura chiite dans le sud de l'Irak

Des « dizaines » de membres d'une secte messianique chiite ont été tués hier, à Bassora, dans des affrontements avec les forces de sécurité irakiennes, selon un responsable de la police locale. Les assaillants obéissent à un « chef spirituel », Ahmed al-Hasani al-Yamani, qui se prétend l'ambassadeur du Mahdi, l'imam caché dont les chiites espèrent le

retour. Ils ont attaqué à l'arme légère trois quartiers du centre-ville, alors que des avions de chasse de la coalition survolaient à basse altitude la cité portuaire. À Nassiriya, des miliciens messianiques s'en sont pris également à un bâtiment de la police dans cette ville située à 350 km au sud de Bagdad.

Ces affrontements interviennent

en pleine commémoration de l'Achoura, l'une des principales célébrations du chiisme (religion majoritaire en Irak), dont le point d'orgue est prévu aujourd'hui. Des centaines de milliers de pèlerins sont attendus dans les villes saintes de Nadjaf et Karbala, où des mesures de sécurité exceptionnelles ont été prises. Depuis son autorisation après la chute

du régime de Saddam Hussein en 2003, l'Achoura a souvent donné lieu à de violents attentats. Elle commémore la fin tragique de l'imam Hussein, petit-fils du prophète Mahomet, fils d'Ali, fondateur du chiisme, tué en 680 par les troupes du califat sunnite des Omeyyades lors d'une bataille dans le désert de Karbala.

(AFP)

IRAK UN « PROJET NATIONAL » SIGNÉ PAR 150 DÉPUTÉS À BAGDAD

Le Monde
16 janvier 2008

Une alliance politique entre chiïtes et sunnites irakiens contrarie les ambitions territoriales et pétrolières kurdes

LE « PROJET NATIONAL » signé, dimanche 13 janvier, à Bagdad, par une alliance de 150 députés irakiens issus de douze partis de tous bords n'est pas « officiellement » dirigé contre le gouvernement autonome du Kurdistan. Mais personne ne s'y est trompé. En réclamant le règlement du statut de la ville stratégique de Kirkouk sur la base d'un consensus politique au sein du Parlement, et que la signature des accords pétroliers soit réservée au seul gouvernement de Bagdad, ce document vise les intérêts des Kurdes d'Irak.

La question, potentiellement explosive, du rattachement de Kirkouk à la région du Kurdistan devait faire, selon la Constitution, l'objet d'un référendum avant fin 2007. Revendication essentielle des dirigeants kurdes, le référendum, reporté au mois de juin, paraît compromis. Après quinze accords pétroliers passés avec vingt compagnies étrangères depuis le mois d'août, le Kurdistan est, une fois de plus, rappelé à l'ordre.

La demande des 150 députés, confortée par la menace du ministre du pétrole, Hussein Al-Chahristani, d'exclure toutes les sociétés pétrolières présentes au Kurdistan de futurs contrats, augure égale-

ment d'autres complications. Au Kurdistan, le président de la région, Massoud Barzani, a aussitôt prévenu que « les tentatives visant à empêcher [le référendum sur Kirkouk] seront vouées à l'échec ». Les journaux ont dénoncé une « alliance des ennemis des Kurdes ». « On voit ressurgir de la mémoire collective kurde, la grande machine à se fabriquer un ennemi éternel : les Arabes », note Adel Bakawan, spécialiste de la question kurde.

Sur le plan politique, le revers est rude. Non seulement le « Projet national » est soutenu par un grand nombre de formations (sunnites, chiïtes, mais aussi turcman et yazidi), mais parmi les signataires figure le Daawa, parti du premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki, auprès duquel les Kurdes faisaient figures d'alliés privilégiés. Avec la nouvelle alliance se profile une reconfiguration de l'échiquier politique irakien, où la coalition kurde paraît être mise en sérieuse difficulté.

« 2007 a été l'année de l'échec politique des Kurdes d'Irak », analyse M. Bakawan. Sur le plan régional, les relations avec la Turquie, l'Iran et la Syrie se sont dégradées. Sur le plan national, le Kurdistan a échoué sur les questions de Kirkouk et de la loi pétrolière.

Premiers alliés de Washington en Irak, les Kurdes ont là encore essuyé un revers, avec le soutien américain aux frappes aériennes turques contre les positions du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) retranchées dans leur région.

Enfin, une nouvelle inquiétude est apparue, avec la volonté américaine de former des milices sunnites, dites « Al-Sahwa » (Réveil), chargées de la lutte contre Al-Qaïda à Mossoul et à Kirkouk, en lisière du Kurdistan. M. Barzani a fait savoir, dimanche, que les Kurdes « n'accepteront pas » la présence de ces milices.

« Les zones concernées représentent l'espace de domination militaire kurde », explique M. Bakawan. Les peshmergas y constituent la deuxième force armée après les troupes américaines. Les milices sunnites pourraient représenter une alternative à celle des peshmergas kurdes et une situation de compétition dangereuse. Par ailleurs, les régions de Mossoul et de Kirkouk contiennent des « territoires disputés » que les Kurdes veulent intégrer au Kurdistan [et qui doivent également faire l'objet d'un référendum]. La présence de ces milices rendra impossible cette intégration. ■

CÉCILE HENNON

TURQUIE Notre culture fabrique des criminels

Le chanteur et écrivain turc Zülfü Livaneli s'insurge contre le climat de violence qui ronge son pays. Et dont les femmes sont trop souvent les victimes.

VATAN
Istanbul

Ces derniers temps, je reçois de nombreux coups de téléphone d'amis révoltés par l'ambiance de violence extrême qui règne en Turquie et dont ils lisent le récit dans les journaux. Certains expriment leur « envie de partir », d'autres disent ne plus reconnaître le pays dans lequel ils vivent. En ce qui me concerne, ces réactions me paraissent justifiées. En effet, nous vivons – ou tout au moins nous essayons de vivre – dans un environnement qui est désormais dominé par la terreur. Nos responsables politiques ne parlent que de terrorisme politique, mais ce qui s'est passé pendant la nuit du nouvel an à Istanbul ne constitue-t-il pas aussi une forme de terreur ? Faisons le compte, il y en a tant qu'on veut : des agressions en pleine place Taksim [centre d'Istanbul] contre de jeunes étrangères terrorisées, le meurtre d'un homme pendant une soirée dansante

par son ami qui lui a ensuite tranché le pénis, l'assassinat de jeunes filles qui respiraient la joie de vivre par un chauffeur de minibus complètement ivre...

La presse, lorsqu'elle évoque ce genre de faits, parle de « rustres ». L'emploi de ce terme est une façon d'atténuer l'importance réelle de ce qui est en train de se passer, comme si nous vivions dans une société où tout allait bien et où ces cas malheureux ne seraient le fait que de quelques-uns de ces « rustres ». Il est plus que temps de regarder les choses en face. Le nombre de psychopathes pervers présentés comme de simples « rustres », qui dans ce pays peuvent à tout moment se transformer en violeurs et en assassins, a incroyablement augmenté. Ils détruisent de nombreuses vies.

Cette jeune institutrice enlevée et emmenée dans un bois avec sa mère, où cette dernière a assisté au viol et à l'assassinat de sa fille : rappelez-vous, ses assassins bénéficiaient d'une amnistie et avaient été libérés. Et cette jeune

flûtiste étranglée avec des câbles ; ou encore ces gens assassinés en pleine rue, poignardés dans les stades, écrasés par des enfants gâtés fous du volant. Ces enfants de 13 ans victimes de tournantes, ces décapitations, et j'en passe.

Notre société est au bord du gouffre. La culture au sein de laquelle nous évoluons ne fait plus que fabriquer des criminels. Ne me dites pas que cela ne vous concerne pas : ce genre de chose peut vous arriver à tout moment, à vous ou à l'un de vos proches. Nous sommes vraiment en train de devenir dingues. Ce n'est ni la police ni tout l'arsenal législatif et répressif qui pourra stopper ce phénomène, qui a pris des proportions trop importantes. La seule solution et le seul remède pour s'en sortir, c'est la culture ! Rien d'autre ! Lorsque nous aurons réussi à remplacer cette culture de la violence par une culture humaniste, nous serons sauvés. Sinon, nul ne sait comment se terminera cette folie.

Zülfü Livaneli

DU 17 AU 23 JANVIER 2008

Courrier
INTERNATIONAL

LE FIGARO samedi 19 - dimanche 20 janvier 2008

Irak : comment les sunnites négocient leur collaboration

GOLFE

Pour prix de leur alliance avec les Américains dans la lutte contre al-Qaïda, les ex-insurgés exigent des maroquins et une intégration dans les forces de sécurité.

De notre envoyé spécial à Amman

ANCIEN COLONEL dans l'armée de Saddam Hussein, Abou Abed est le nouveau chef de la sécurité dans le quartier d'Adhamya, à Bagdad, cet ancien bastion de la guérilla antiméricaine passé en novembre sous le contrôle du « Réveil des tribus » sunnites. « Patriote et bien connu de la population » se félicite Mohammed Ali,

un porte-parole de ce regroupement d'anciens insurgés, financés et armés par les Américains pour lutter contre al-Qaïda. Désormais sur la défensive en Irak, la mouvance terroriste n'a pas pour autant dit son dernier mot. Dans la foulée d'un appel d'Oussama Ben Laden, ses sicaires se sont vengés de cette « collaboration honteuse », en assassinant, il y a quelques jours, le prédécesseur d'Abou Abed, le colonel Riyad al-Samarraï.

Mais depuis que les « révolutionnaires d'Adhamya » tiennent le secteur, le calme est revenu. « Les gens en avaient assez des meurtres et des kidnappings perpétrés par al-Qaïda », ajoute Mohammed Ali. Grâce à la mobilisation de 70 000 hommes sur l'ensemble du « pays » sunnite, ses

habitants ont enfin retrouvé une certaine sécurité. Fut-ce au prix d'une multiplication des milices, comme l'explique Ahmad, un habitant d'Améria à Bagdad, replié à Amman. « Chaque quartier sunnite est entouré d'un mur derrière lequel les ex-insurgés maintiennent l'ordre. Mais ils n'ont pas le droit de sortir de leur secteur. Derrière le mur, l'armée irakienne, qui contrôle les accès, prétend que c'est elle qui assure le calme. Et puis, en second rideau, l'armée américaine arbitre les différends. »

Le risque d'un retour à la guérilla

La coordination fonctionne plutôt bien entre les Américains et leurs anciens ennemis – y compris des Irakiens qui avaient rejoint al-Qaïda, parce qu'ils voyaient en la mouvance terroriste un rempart face aux milices chiïtes et à l'Iran. « Au fur et à mesure qu'al-Qaïda multipliait les crimes contre nos civils, les Américains nous ont assuré qu'ils seraient les garants de la sécurité de l'Irak », explique Cheikh Abdellatif Omais, « le problème, ajoute cet ancien proche de Saddam Hussein, c'est qu'ils tiennent le même discours aux chiïtes ». Conséquence : les relations sont mauvaises entre le Réveil des tribus et le gouvernement irakien, dominé par les chiïtes et les Kurdes, qui veut garder le monopole des armes. « Lorsque j'ai voulu me rendre à Améria pour interroger le Réveil

des tribus, raconte un journaliste irakien joint par téléphone, l'armée refusa, ce sont les soldats américains qui ont forcé les militaires irakiens à nous laisser entrer. »

Les ex-guérilleros sunnites ont des demandes politiques. Ils réclament des postes dans un gouvernement remanié, notamment celui de la Défense. Ils exigent d'être intégrés dans la police ou

l'armée. « Mais le gouvernement n'est prêt à en absorber que 20 % », regrette Jalal al-Gaoud, un puissant homme d'affaires de la province sunnite d'al-Anbar. Et de mettre en garde : « Si on ne donne pas du travail aux autres insurgés, tôt ou tard, ils reprendront les armes et certains rejoindront al-Qaïda. » Déjà, les craintes d'infiltration du « Réveil » par al-Qaïda sont omniprésentes. Le temps

presse : « On ne peut attendre éternellement », renchérit Cheikh Omais, qui place la balle dans le camp américain. « Ils doivent absolument répartir équitablement le pouvoir et les richesses de l'Irak entre ses régions. Ils ont une chance à saisir, sinon la guérilla repartira de zéro », insiste-t-il.

Les enjeux politiques dissimulent les préoccupations sociales. « Al-Anbar a été détruite, elle est maintenant sécurisée, nous réclamons des investissements », martèle Cheikh Tareq al-Abdallah, un entrepreneur de Faloudja. « Pour la première fois, dit-il, les Américains viennent d'inviter à Dubaï les hommes d'affaires sunnites pour leur demander d'investir dans leur province. » Peut-être un signe qu'une page va bientôt se tourner en Irak.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT



De plus en plus nombreux à intégrer les forces de sécurité, les ex-insurgés sunnites ont également des revendications politiques. Samad/AFP

SERGE TRUFFAUT

Les parlementaires chiites et sunnites ont convenu de faire un front commun contre les Kurdes. Quand on sait que les premiers dépensent leur énergie à alimenter la culture du ressentiment les uns envers les autres, ce fait mérite d'être souligné trois fois plutôt qu'une. Il est en tout cas révélateur d'une profonde inquiétude: que les Kurdes fassent tout simplement sécession et signent de ce fait l'implosion de l'Irak.

Il est vrai que, depuis l'été dernier, les dirigeants de la province kurde multiplient les gestes propres à angoisser les responsables chiites et surtout sunnites. Exemple spectaculaire entre tous, en août dernier les responsables du gouvernement régional ont décidé de composer leur propre loi d'exploitation du pétrole plutôt que d'attendre celle promise par le gouvernement central depuis des lunes.

Dans la foulée de l'adoption de ce texte qui implique une dénationalisation de facto, même si elle est régionale, de la

production de l'or noir, les Kurdes ont conclu une série d'accords avec des compagnies étrangères pour l'extraction et le raffinage dans une région où sont concentrées les plus importantes réserves. Juste avant Noël, c'est à noter, la société norvégienne DNO indiquait que le volume d'hydrocarbures d'un des sites était en fait le double de celui estimé jusqu'à présent.

Du premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki au simple député, tout ce que la capitale compte de notables politiques s'emploie donc à contrer les Kurdes en clamant que l'or noir appartient à tous. Comme par hasard, voilà que le gouvernement central promet la présentation prochaine d'une loi sur le sujet après avoir tergiversé au cours des trois dernières années.

Comme par hasard (bis), ce même gouvernement vient d'adopter une loi autorisant la réintégration d'ex-baasistes dans la fonction publique et un certain nombre de corps de métiers. À ce propos, on se souviendra que la décision de renvoyer les ex-baasistes qui étaient ingénieurs ou

policiers, enseignants ou médecins a eu pour effet pervers de nourrir les rangs des milices vouées à la défense des sunnites.

Cela étant, la loi corrigeant ce qui a été fait hier a été reçue avec des grincements de dents au sein de la communauté kurde. On s'en doute, les ravages provoqués sur ordre de Saddam Hussein demeurent très vifs dans la mémoire collective d'un peuple à qui l'on avait promis l'indépendance au lendemain de la... Première Guerre mondiale.

À cette série de faits vient de se greffer une nouvelle susceptible de renforcer le sentiment national des Kurdes. De quoi s'agit-il? On a appris récemment que les militaires américains avaient communiqué à l'état-major turc des informations relatives aux mouvements des militants du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak pour faciliter le bombardement de leurs bases. Bref, la table est mise pour une déclaration unilatérale d'indépendance.

AFP

L'aviation turque a frappé mardi 58 cibles du PKK en Irak (armée turque)

ANKARA, 18 jan 2008 (AFP) - L'armée turque a affirmé vendredi avoir frappé une soixantaine d'objectifs appartenant aux rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) lors de son dernier raid aérien mardi dans le nord de l'Irak.

"Cinq postes de commandement, deux postes de communication, 15 camps d'entraînement et 12 camps de soutien logistique, 18 refuges, deux batteries de défense anti-aérienne avec leurs servants et quatre dépôts de vivres et munitions ont été détruits", affirme l'état-major dans un communiqué.

"Tous les objectifs visés lors de cette action aérienne menée avec les systèmes de désignation des cibles et de contrôle des tirs les plus développés ont été frappés de plein fouet", poursuit le document, diffusé sur le site internet de l'état-major.

L'armée turque précise que ces objectifs se répartissent en huit groupes, quatre dans la zone de Zap-Sivi, deux dans celle de Avasin-Basyan et deux dans celle de Hakurk.

"Les travaux se poursuivent pour évaluer les pertes des terroristes" du PKK,

ajoute-t-elle.

Le raid aérien conduit mardi par l'aviation turque contre les positions du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak est le quatrième officiellement confirmé depuis la mi-décembre 2007 par l'état-major, qui a également fait état d'une opération terrestre d'ampleur limitée en territoire irakien.

Le PKK utilise le nord de l'Irak comme une base arrière pour ses opérations dans le sud-est anatolien, à la population en majorité kurde.

Selon l'état-major turc, entre 150 et 175 rebelles ont été tués le 16 décembre lors d'un premier raid qui a détruit quelque 200 cibles.

Confrontée à une intensification des violences des séparatistes du PKK, Ankara a obtenu en octobre l'autorisation du Parlement turc pour intervenir militairement dans le nord de l'Irak.

Le conflit avec le PKK, qui figure sur la liste d'organisations terroristes des Etats-Unis et de l'Union européenne et dont les débuts remontent à 1984, a coûté la vie à plus de 37.000 personnes.

21 janv. 2008



TURQUIE • Les véritables assassins de Hrant Dink ne sont pas inquiétés

Une cérémonie a eu lieu le 19 janvier à Istanbul pour rendre hommage à Hrant Dink, journaliste turco-arménien assassiné il y a un an. L'écrivain et journaliste Ahmet Altan dénonce, dans le quotidien Taraf, les zones d'ombre qui entourent l'enquête sur ce meurtre et, plus généralement, l'absence de justice dont souffre le pays.

A l'occasion du premier anniversaire de la mort de Hrant Dink [assassiné le 19 janvier 2007 à Istanbul], son épouse Rakel a déploré que l'on n'ait pas investigué davantage sur les collusions en haut lieu qui sont à l'origine de l'assassinat de son mari. Et elle a réclamé "du courage pour que justice soit faite" [19 suspects passent en procès, la prochaine audience

est fixée au 11 février]. En tenant ces propos très justes, elle n'a fait que souligner une réalité qui nous fait honte à tous. En effet, s'il faut faire preuve de courage lorsqu'on traite de justice, cela signifie que l'appareil d'Etat ne fonctionne pas correctement dans ce pays. De toute façon, chez nous, il n'y a ni Etat, ni justice, ni courage. Notre gouvernement ne

s'intéresse d'ailleurs pas aux questions juridiques - sauf bien sûr lorsqu'il s'agit du voile. Nos dirigeants politiques sont de grands timides. Ecouter, voir et ensuite parler, ce n'est pas leur truc. Mais, lorsque le pouvoir politique se tait, d'autres se parlent à sa place. C'est ainsi que le chef d'état-major [le général Büyükanit] a cherché à "expliquer" l'affaire de Daglica

[du nom de l'endroit où, le 21 octobre dernier, douze soldats turcs ont été tués et huit autres enlevés dans des combats contre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, PKK]. Plutôt que d'explications, il s'agit en réalité de menaces et d'intimidations. Il accuse ainsi "certains milieux de vouloir faire de l'opposition systématique à l'armée une rente de situation économique et politique".

Taraf est en effet le seul quotidien turc qui ait enquêté sérieusement sur cet épisode particulier des combats contre le PKK. Mis à part quelques courageux journalistes, personne n'a évoqué ce sujet et surtout pas la classe politique. Posons donc la question : pourquoi ces douze jeunes soldats ont-ils été tués à Daglica ? A t-on vraiment tout fait sur le plan militaire pour que cela ne se produise pas ? Si c'est le cas, que l'état-major nous fournisse des explications ! Après ces combats, seuls les huit soldats qui avaient été enlevés par le PKK [et libérés le 4 novembre 2007] ont



été emprisonnés. Ils seraient donc les responsables de cette tragédie ? Pourquoi les officiers étaient-ils alors en permission ? Pourquoi, malgré des informations faisant état de l'arrivée de militants du PKK dans la zone, a-t-on abandonné des positions sensibles ? Peut-on vraiment

mettre tout cela sur le dos de ces pauvres soldats emprisonnés ?

En posant ces questions, nous ne faisons que notre travail de journaliste. Dans ces conditions, tous les généraux doivent bien comprendre qu'en adoptant un ton menaçant ils ne réussiront pas à nous faire peur. Qu'ils abandonnent donc ce genre de méthodes. Nous savons parfaitement que nous vivons dans un pays où des journalistes sont assassinés d'une balle dans la nuque. Mais, lorsque des jeunes sont emprisonnés injustement et lorsque ceux qui font assassiner des journalistes ne sont pas inquiétés [allusion au meurtre de Hrant Dink], alors nous avons honte. Pour certains, vivre sans protester dans un pays où l'on commet ce genre d'actes honteux est encore pire que la mort.

Ahmet Altan

Taraf

Des nationalistes turcs voulaient tuer Pamuk, Nobel de littérature en 2006

cyberpresse.ca

23 janvier 2008

ISTANBUL - (AFP) - La police turque a découvert un réseau ultra-nationaliste qui voulait assassiner Orhan Pamuk, lauréat du prix Nobel 2006 de littérature, et des personnalités politiques kurdes, arrêtant 33 personnes, rapporte mercredi la presse.

Parmi les suspects arrêtés à Istanbul figurent des officiers à la retraite, des avocats connus pour leur positions nationaliste et des mafiosi, a indiqué un procureur de la métropole turque dans une déclaration écrite adressée à la presse.

Leur interpellation s'inscrit dans le cadre d'une investigation concernant la découverte l'an dernier de grenades et d'engins explosifs dans une maison de cette ville,

ajoute le document, sans autres précisions.

La police croit savoir que les suspects complotaient dans le but de tuer Pamuk, le journaliste pro-islamiste Fehmi Kuru et des politiques kurdes comme Leyla Zana, Osman Baydemir et Ahmet Türk, selon le journal Milliyet.

La police enquête en outre pour savoir si les personnes appréhendées mardi lors d'une opération d'envergure sont impliquées dans plusieurs attaques à caractère politique, comme celle du meurtre en



2007 du journaliste d'origine arménienne Hrant Dink, écrit le quotidien Sabah.

Kemal Keriçsiz, avocat d'extrême-droite qui est à l'origine des poursuites pénales à l'encontre de Pamuk et de plusieurs intellectuels pour avoir nié la version officielle des massacres d'Arméniens pendant l'empire ottoman -qui ne constituent pas un génocide pour Ankara-, est également interrogé par la police.

Autre suspect de marque: le général à la retraite Veli Küçük, figure très connue des milieux ultra-nationalistes.

Sabah notamment s'est félicité d'une rafle au sein de l'«État profond», terme employé pour désigner certaines mouvances des forces de sécurité qui agiraient en dehors des lois pour préserver, selon eux, les intérêts de l'État turc.

LaTribune 21 janvier 2008

Les Kurdes irakiens veulent sauver la citadelle d'Erbil

Associated Press (AP) Elena Becatoros
Surplombant les quartiers modernes d'Erbil, les allées étroites et les cours poussiéreuses de la citadelle sont presque désertes. Considéré comme l'une des zones urbaines les plus anciennes sur Terre, avec plus de 8 000 ans d'histoire, ce vestige de l'Antiquité est menacé de ruine, mais les autorités du Kurdistan irakien espèrent le sauver en le convertissant en attraction touristique.

Ce projet est porteur d'espoir pour le riche

patrimoine culturel irakien et met en lumière le contraste entre la tranquillité relative de la région du Kurdistan, dans le nord de l'Irak, et la violence qui sévit dans d'autres parties du pays.

Les autorités du Kurdistan irakien veulent transformer la citadelle et les richesses archéologiques que recèle son sous-sol en un site touristique international doté d'hôtels, de cafés, de galeries d'art et d'une vraie population résidant sur place. Ac-



tuellement, les bâtiments de la cité antique, en état de délabrement avancé, menacent de s'effondrer.

L'opération de sauvetage s'annonce ardue. Sur les quelque 800 logements que compte la citadelle, «pas plus de 20 se trouvent dans un état acceptable», note Mohamed Djelid, représentant de l'Unesco (Organisation des Nations unies pour l'éducation, la science et la culture) en Irak.

«Ce monument très important au coeur d'Erbil est aujourd'hui mort», souligne de son côté Shireen Sherzad, qui dirige une commission en charge des efforts de restauration et est également conseillère du Premier ministre de la région kurde, Netchirvan Barzani. Elle estime à 35 millions de dollars (24 millions d'euros) le coût du projet pour les trois premières années, mais pour le moment il n'y a «aucune ressource de financement».

Reste que personne ne conteste que la citadelle, avec ses trois mosquées, son hammam vieux de 650 ans et ses maisons aux intérieurs peints et aux arches élégantes, a besoin d'une grande attention.

La situation est «très critique», souligne Ihsan al-Totinji, représentant de la société tchèque Gema Art Group qui a recours à l'imagerie numérique pour cartographier le site. «Les maisons ne sont pas droites»

et risquent de s'écrouler quand il pleut, ajoute-t-il. L'entreprise tchèque travaille à l'élaboration d'un plan virtuel en trois dimensions, qui devrait être achevé en février et permettre de cibler les besoins de rénovation.

Dans l'ensemble de l'Irak, des trésors architecturaux sont en danger, victime de la négligence ou d'actes de pillage et de destruction. Le Conseil international des monuments et des sites, une organisation non gouvernementale basée à Paris, présente la citadelle dans son rapport 2004-2005 sur les monuments irakiens menacés comme un des cinq cas «où les dégâts sont si graves que l'on peut parler de génocide culturel».

La citadelle possède «un riche dépôt historique contenant des preuves de plusieurs millénaires de peuplement, plus de 8 000 ans, ce qui en fait le site habité sans interruption sur la durée la plus longue dans le monde», selon M. Djelid. Elle repose au sommet d'un monticule de 30 mètres de haut formé par des couches successives de peuplements assyrien, akkadien, babylonien, perse ou encore grec.

Le site n'a jamais fait l'objet de fouilles exhaustives, et de récents examens géo-

physiques ont révélé ce qui pourrait être un temple antique enfoui, précise Kanan Mufti, responsable du ministère de la Culture du gouvernement régional. Le projet de restauration prévoit de cartographier certaines zones en vue de futures excavations archéologiques.

En novembre 2006, la citadelle, qui abritait les habitants les plus pauvres d'Erbil, a été vidée de sa population afin de préserver le site menacé par l'érosion provoquée par l'infiltration des eaux usées dans le sol en l'absence de tout système d'évacuation.

Ses 840 familles déplacées ont reçu une parcelle de terre hors de la ville avec accès à l'électricité, l'eau courante et à un système d'évacuation des eaux usées et 4 000 dollars (2 700 euros) pour construire une nouvelle maison, selon le gouverneur d'Erbil Naouzet Haidi. Tous ont accepté.

Une famille a toutefois consenti, moyennant compensation, à rester dans la citadelle pour que le site puisse continuer à être habité et pour y gérer des pompes commandant l'acheminement de l'eau.



January 21st, 2008

Kurdish lawmaker expresses resentment toward U.S.

By LEILA FADEL ; McClatchy Newspapers BAGHDAD -

Mahmoud Othman, a Kurdish lawmaker, has an ax to grind with the United States. He's sick of watching American officials make statements on television every time the Iraqi parliament makes a move.

He was angry when President Bush last week said he hoped a law that was supposed to soften restrictions on former Baathists; he was angry that when the law did pass with a slim majority in the parliament, many linked the passage with Bush's statement. An hour later in Bahrain, President Bush congratulated Iraq on the law's passage, Othman said.

The law itself in some ways is more stringent than the one it was supposed to soften, and former Baathists, thousands of which can now claim pensions, do not trust the government enough to return and admit their positions in Saddam Hussein's government.

"They talk about it as if we are children and they are directing us," he said, exasperated. "When we passed the accountability and justice law, after one hour Bush said publicly we congratulate you so that everybody will say 'we told you this is an American law.'"

But there are other things that bother him about what he called a black and white American foreign policy.

He remember in 1989, he went to the United States for a month, the last 19 days of Ronald Reagan's presidency and the first 11 days of the elder George

Bush's presidency. He begged to see someone in the State Department about what had happened to the Kurds, he wanted to talk to them about the gassing of Kurds in Halabja and the Anfal campaign a campaign against the Kurds in the 1980's that was estimated to have killed between 100,000 and 200,000 Kurds in bombings and chemical bombardments of Kurdish villages. Officials in the State Department agreed but said they didn't want to hear anything about overturning Saddam Hussein's government. At this time, Saddam was a friend of the U.S.

They called the next day and said they would see him but they wanted to hear nothing about secession of the Kurds. Othman agreed, he would just tell them the story of what had happened.

The next day they called and said they could not meet with them. How would this look to their ally, Saddam Hussein?

He called powerful friends and journalists to intervene on his behalf. Finally the State Department agreed to let someone meet with him from the Human Rights section. But Othman could not come to the State Department. He must act as if he bumped into the official in the lobby of a D.C. hotel, he was told. Othman refused.

During the invasion of Iraq in 2003 the Kurds were the American's most steadfast allies. Still in the north, Americans are welcomed, he said.

"You talk to a communist, an Islamist, anyone, they all love America," he said.

But he is angry at the U.S. policy on the Kurdistan Worker's Party, the PKK, a militant Kurdish nationalist group that wants an independent Kurdistan in parts of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria.

The conflict between Turkey and the PKK has been fought for decades and in recent months Turkey's shelling of villages and incursions into Iraqi Kurdistan has angered the Kurds in the north. But in this conflict the U.S. did not play a role as a broker, he said.

Where they could have begun negotiations between the PKK and Turkey, instead they took Turkey's side and called the PKK the enemy of America, the enemy of Turkey and the enemy of Iraq.

"The PKK has been trying to talk to America," he said. "If you push them and always say they are terrorists, their policies will become more militant and they will turn somewhere else."

Othman believes the United States could have brokered a deal for amnesty for PKK fighters in Turkey and a concession on Kurdish rights and changes in the Turkish constitution.

"They support Turkey wrong or right," he said "Why are their relations with Turkey at the expense of our relationship with them."

PKK is a listed terrorist organization in the United States.

"Did they (Turkey) help America during the war? They didn't let one soldier on their land," he said. "Faith hasn't grown between America and Iraq."

BARZANI REJECTS UNDERSTANDING PACT

Kurds insist on impelementing Article 140 of Iraqi constitution.

alsumaria.tv

Kurdistan leader Mr. Massoud Barzani refused the understanding memorandum saying Kurds insist on implementing Article 140 that has been adjourned for six months according to a proposal by the United Nations. Barazani noted that attempts against the Constitution article will not work as those who seek to form an alliance against the Article against Iraq's Constitution, still, they won't reach their aim, he added.

Barazani who has met Italian Deputy Foreign Minister and Vice President of the ruling Giovanni Vernetti, praised the role of the United Nations in implementing Article 140 and firmed that as long that the United Nations are involved, opposing attempts will not work.

For his part, Iraqi Bloc MP Iyyad Jamal Din affirmed to Alsumaria that the alliance announced recently is not targeted against any party especially Kurds, while stressing that Iraq's wealth should be in government's hand.



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An Iraqi "National Project," without Kurds!

Any such "project" will only be detrimental to Kurdish demands.

By By Qassim Khidhir

The Kurdish Globe

A new agreement, called the National Project, includes 140 members of Iraqi Parliament who don't seem to have Kurds' best interests at heart.

Various Shiite and Sunni groups declared a new political project, or agreement, called the National Project, which aims to confront the sectarian system and support Iraqi national reconciliation. Apparently, however, not only is there no room for Kurds in this National Project, but it also firmly opposes any solution that would result in linking Kirkuk to Kurdistan Region.

After the Kurdistan Coalition (KC), the only ally that guarantees the stability and support of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's government, became skeptical of al-Maliki's intentions, al-Maliki's government began backing several Shiite and Sunni parties in an effort to survive. The KC says al-Maliki failed to fulfill his promises made to Kurdistan Region last summer and also failed to bring national reconciliation.

The new project embraces the National Dialogue Council; the (Sunni) National Dialogue Front (NDF) of Saleh al-Mutlak; the Iraqi National List (INL) of former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, the (Shiite) Fadhila (Virtue) Party, and the Islamic Dawa Party, to which incum-

bent Prime Minister al-Maliki belongs. The new project will also encompass the Sadrist bloc of Shiite leader Muqtada al-Sadr, the Iraqi People's Congress of Adnan al-Dulaimi, as well as a number of independent members of Iraqi Parliament. In total, there are about 140 Parliament members involved in the project ; this number of votes empowers these groups to recall many law projects in Parliament.

The participants expressed that by becoming a part of the National Project, there were no intentions of forming a new bloc in Parliament; instead, they would rather call it an agreement on several issues, including enhancing Iraqi forces so as to take charge of the country's security, a timetable of withdrawal for multinational forces, oil, and Kirkuk issues. The parties say the new agreement came as a response to a trilateral agreement between the Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party, led by Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, and the two main Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party, led by Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, led by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani.

Meanwhile, Kurds say the new agreement will only work

against Kurdish demands, since the parties involved are against the regional signing of oil contracts with foreign companies, similar to those signed

Barzani at a news conference in Erbil.

"These are the same people who were against the Iraqi Constitution before, and they



The Iraqi Prime minister Nuri Al Maliki meets with Zafir Al Ani, head of the Iraqi National Dialogue Council group, on Saturday, January 12. PRESS PHOTO

by the Kurdistan Regional Government. Project members also came out in support of a political agreement over the future of the northern oil-rich city of Kirkuk, rather than a promised referendum that had been due to be held last year.

Kurdistan Region President Barzani reacted angrily to Prime Minister al-Maliki's being involved in the new project.

"These actions against Article 140 [of the Constitution, intended to normalize Kirkuk city and other disputed areas] will not succeed," said President

couldn't do anything at that time," he said, adding that Article 140 will remain as long as the Iraqi Constitution exists.

Observers say U.S. officials advise against removing al-Maliki from office, and agree that the prime minister must govern more effectively and inclusively in the coming months or suffer a "breakdown." Said one senior U.S. official, "Clearly there is a sense among the Kurds, Sunnis, and Shiites that the government isn't doing what it's supposed to do. It needs to get

better quick." Ryan Crocker, the U.S. ambassador to Baghdad, met after Christmas in Kurdistan with Barzani and Talabani. Crocker's message to the Kurds was that "we think everyone should be placing emphasis on making the government more effective, not on changing the government."

The anti-Maliki forces would like to replace him with Adel Abdul Mahdi, who is also from the Shiite bloc and one of Iraq's vice presidents. He is a leader of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council, headed by

Abdul Aziz al-Hakim. The biggest obstacle in removing al-Maliki is Shiite religious leader Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, who is said to be frustrated with al-Maliki's poor performance but wary of dividing the Shiite alliance. "Najaf [Sistani's headquarters] is unhappy," said a top Iraqi leader. But the senior U.S. official said he was "certain" that Sistani had not yet blessed any change of government.

Though Bush administration officials share Iraqi frustration with al-Maliki, they fear that a change of regime would add delay and distrust to the already chaotic political scene in Baghdad. "How long would such a transition take? How long before they would form a new government?" worried a second senior U.S. official.

Rather than dumping al-Maliki, the administration hopes to work around him by operating through a coalition known as the "three plus one."

In addition to al-Maliki, that group includes Talabani and vice presidents Mahdi and al-Hashimi. "Our message to al-Maliki is that you can't govern solo. You have to govern as part of a group," said the second senior U.S. official.

The question is in what measure al-Maliki's government will become more effective in 2008 and confront the sectarian system while he is backing the formation of a coalition without Kurds?



January 15, 2008

Iraq: Will Passage Of New Law Appease Sunnis?

By Sumedha Senanayake Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty

In what is being trumpeted as a major political accomplishment for the Iraqi government, the Council of Representatives on January 12 unanimously passed the Accountability and Justice Law, which revises the de-Ba'athification order passed under the Coalition Provisional Authority in 2003.

Under the de-Ba'athification law, thousands of Ba'athists were dismissed from their government jobs. The new legislation, once ratified by the three-member Presidential Council, would allow many of the former Ba'ath Party members to apply for reinstatement to their government posts.

Many Sunnis complained that the de-Ba'athification law was overly broad and amounted to collective punishment. The new legislation is believed to go a long way in easing the fears of Sunni Arabs, who once dominated the Hussein regime, of being completely sidelined.

The initial de-Ba'athification law was also seen as one of the main sources of anger fueling the Sunni-led insurgency against the Shi'ite-dominated government and the U.S. occupation. It is hoped that the Accountability and Justice Law mollifies much of the Sunni anger and persuades many Ba'athists to surrender their weapons and join the political process.

Mahmud Uthman, an independent Kurdish lawmaker, told the Xinhua news agency on January 12 that the new law would close the sectarian gap between Shi'a and Sunnis. "If this law is implemented correctly on the ground, it will allow many Ba'athists to return to the public life and will curb the violence," he said. "I think it is a right step toward the national reconciliation in Iraq."

Passing the legislation was also a victory for Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. Almost a year after the U.S. "surge" policy was initiated to allow breathing space for al-Maliki's government to move the political process forward, the government passed one of its most important pieces of legislation. Passing the law showed that al-Maliki's government, though slow, could indeed deliver results.

Punishing The Guilty

The new law is meant to punish those Ba'athists that committed crimes during the regime of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, but allow those who did not a chance to return to their jobs. The law distinguishes between two categories of Ba'athist: senior officials, and mid-level and lower-ranking officials.

Senior-level Ba'athists, who were in the top five of the party's 10 levels and responsible for implementing the former regime's policies, would still be banned from returning to their positions. However, if they were not convicted of any crimes, they would

be retired with full pension.

Mid-level and lower-ranking Ba'athists who also did not have a criminal record would be allowed reinstatement to their positions. A seven-member panel will determine which mid and lower-level officials can be reinstated and which senior-level Ba'athists are eligible for their pensions.

However, no former Ba'athists can return to their positions in the judicial, ministerial, or security bureaucracies, or in the Foreign or Finance ministries. And members of Hussein's Fidayin security force won't receive pensions or be able to return to their jobs.

The new legislation also includes an article allowing victims of the Hussein regime to apply to special tribunals for monetary compensation.

New Law Still Divisive

While on the surface the decision by the Council of Representatives to pass the Accountability and Justice Law seemed to have been an extraordinary step toward national reconciliation, there were indications that the law could also prove to be divisive.

Soon after word spread that the law was passed, the Iraqi Ba'ath Party condemned it. Party spokesman Dr. Abu Muhammad issued a statement posted on the website al-basrah.net on January 12 describing the law as essentially the de-Ba'athification law with a different name.

"Changing the name of the first law issued by the American occupation governor of Iraq [Paul Bremer] is a meager attempt to beautify the fascistic and brutal nature of the law, which brought shame on scandal on the occupation and its agents.... This will not change the objective of the Ba'ath Party, its members and supporters in continuing the resistance hand in hand with other resistance factions," the statement said.

Underscoring the divisiveness of the issue, the vote took place while the parliament barely had a quorum. Although the law was passed unanimously, only 143 lawmakers in the 275-member Council of Representatives were in attendance.

Following the law's passage, several Sunni political parties issued a joint statement rejecting the law, "Al-Sharq al-Awsat" reported on January 13. The Iraqi National List, the Iraqi National Dialogue Front, the Independent Arab Bloc, the Iraqi National Dialogue Council, and independent members of the Iraqi Accordance Front said they had refused to vote on the law, calling it "difficult to apply."

The opponents said application of the law was "unrealistic" because it forbids the return of the Ba'ath Party, whether politi-

cally, ideologically, in practice, and under any other party name. Furthermore, they described the law as being "vague" and therefore easy to be misused by those looking to settle scores with former Ba'athists.

Salah al-Mutlaq, leader of the Sunni-led Front for National Dialogue, told McClatchy Newspapers on January 12 that all criminals, including Ba'athists, should be tried fairly by the Iraqi justice system, regardless of party affiliation. "Justice should be for everybody, accountability should be for everybody. You can not make the accountability only for Ba'athists," al-Mutlaq said.

Ba'athists May Be Wary Of New Law

Undoubtedly, reversing the de-Ba'athification process has been one of the thorniest issues in Iraqi politics. Many Shi'ite groups, particularly Muqtada al-Sadr's political bloc, have been strongly opposed to allowing any Ba'athists to enter the mainstream, for fear they may one day take power. Indeed, after 35 years of repressive policies by the former regime, Shi'a and Kurds have reason to be wary of the Ba'ath Party.

Ba'athists, too, may feel unease at the new legislation after

more than four years of being sidelined in the new post-Hussein political landscape. Many may feel unwilling to confess their former affiliation or complicity in crimes in exchange for their government jobs or pension. Since there was no guarantee of amnesty, the price of incarceration may be too high for some Ba'athists to enter the mainstream.

Furthermore, some Ba'athists may also be wary of revealing themselves for fear of retribution. Former Ba'athists coming in from the shadows may face the ire of those who want to settle old scores. In this instance, it may be difficult for Ba'athists, who have been marginalized to believe that the Shi'a-dominated government would be able to protect them.

Finally, to temper Shi'ite and Kurdish fears, the new law bars former Ba'athists from certain positions in government, essentially making them second-class citizens. Many Ba'athists joined the party out of necessity, not out of party loyalty and punishment via association may further inflame the ire of the Ba'athists and the Sunni Arab community in general. For many, it may reaffirm their fears that the current government intends to sideline them as much as possible

BBC NEWS

15 January 2008

TURKISH JETS BOMB REBELS IN IRAQ

Turkish warplanes have bombed Kurdish rebel positions in northern Iraq, the Turkish military has said.

The jets struck targets in the Zap-Sivi, Avasin-Basyan and Kakurk areas, it said.

There were no immediate reports of casualties or serious damage, in what was the fourth Turkish air raid in northern Iraq since 16 December.

Turkey blames rebels from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) for launching attacks on Turkey from bases in Iraq.

The Turkish military said that Tuesday's air raid had targeted only confirmed PKK positions, describing the strikes as "intensive".

It said in a statement: "Our planes returned to their bases safely after successfully completing their duties." It gave no details on how many jets had been involved in the operation.

The military said that efforts had been

made to avoid any civilian casualties.

A spokesman for the Kurdish Peshmerga security forces in northern Iraq said the



shelling began just before midday (0900 GMT) near the town of Amadiya in the Dahuk province, Reuters reported.

US caution

Ankara approved cross-border raids on PKK bases in October, saying the Iraqi

government and its US backers were not doing enough to halt rebel attacks.

Turkey launched its first cross-border raid on 16 December. Three air raids and an incursion by ground forces followed shortly afterwards.

The US backs Turkish operations against the PKK and has agreed to share intelligence with Ankara.

However, Washington has cautioned Ankara against a large offensive in northern Iraq, fearing it could further destabilise the region.

The PKK - which is designated a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the US and the EU - is thought to have about 3,000 rebels based in Iraq.

For decades, it has been fighting for a Kurdish homeland separate from Turkey.

REUTERS

January 18, 2008

Turkish warplanes destroyed some 60 Kurdish PKK Targets inside Iraqi Kurdistan.

Turkish warplanes destroyed some 60 Turkey's Kurdish PKK guerrilla targets in Kurdistan region in 'northern Iraq' during an operation this week, Turkey's General Staff said on Friday.

Tuesday's strikes on Turkey's Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) positions in the Kurdistan mountainous region near Turkey's border followed a series of cross-border attacks by aircraft in December aimed at crushing the Turkish rebel group. There have so far been no reports of casualties or damage caused by the latest raid on targets in the regions of Zap-Sivi, Avasin-Basyan and Hakurk.

"During the operation ... some 60 targets, confirmed as being used solely by the terror organization, came under fire from our warplanes," the General Staff said in a statement. It said targets hit included command posts, shelters and training and logistics sites used by the guerrillas. The General Staff said it

was trying to assess the number of PKK casualties and would continue its operations.

In October, the Turkish parliament authorized the military to strike at the rebels across the border.

Ankara says 3,000 PKK rebels are based in Kurdistan 'northern Iraq'

mountains, from where they launch raids on Turkey. Some 100,000 Turkish troops are massed along the border with Iraqi Kurdistan but Ankara is not expected to launch a major cross-border land incursion.



Iraqi Kurdistan politician says, Turkey is using Turkey's Kurdish separatist PKK rebel group as an excuse to invade Kurdistan region 'Iraq' to prevent the establishment of Kurdistan state in the Kurdish autonomous region in 'northern Iraq', Turkey fears this could fan separatism among its own large Kurdish population in southeast Turkey. In a separate statement on Friday, the General Staff said 21 PKK rebels had surrendered to Turkish forces in the past month.

Turkish forces shelled two areas in Duhok on January 11, without causing significant damage or injury. That shelling followed a January 3 bomb attack in the southeast Turkish city of Diyarbakir blamed on the PKK. The death toll in that bombing rose to seven on Friday after one of the casualties died in hospital from his injuries.

Since 1984 the PKK took up arms for self-rule in the country's mainly Kurdish southeast of Turkey. A large Turkey's Kurdish community openly sympathise with the Kurdish PKK for a Kurdish homeland in the country's mainly Kurdish southeast of Turkey.

The PKK demanded Turkey's recognition of the Kurds' identity in its constitution and of their language as a native language along with Turkish in the country's Kurdish areas, the party also demanded an end to ethnic discrimination in Turkish laws and constitution against Kurds, granting them full political freedoms.

The group is listed as a "terrorist" organisation by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

Los Angeles Times

January 15, 2008

Kirkuk referendum needed, Kurdish leader says

If Baghdad doesn't arrange for a vote in the next 6 months, then the provincial government should be allowed to sponsor the balloting, he argues.

By Ned Parker Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

BAGHDAD — The president of Iraq's Kurdish region warned Monday that Kurdish leaders would resist efforts to scrap plans for a referendum on the fate of the multiethnic city of Kirkuk. His tough comments came a day after nearly a dozen political parties in Baghdad challenged Kurdish designs by calling for the central government to impose a solution.

Iraqi Kurdistan leader Massoud Barzani fired back at his Arab opponents who argued that Kirkuk -- a home to Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens -- is no longer subject to an article in the Iraqi Constitution calling for a general referendum on disputed territories to be held by the end of 2007.

"There is no turning back," Barzani said in Irbil. "The referendum must be conducted in the next six months."

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who was traveling with President Bush in Saudi Arabia, traveled to Iraq early today to press for political reconciliation, officials said.

Meanwhile, a large fire erupted at an oil refinery in Shuaiba, west of Basra, early today. The cause of the fire, which sent large clouds of smoke into the air, was not immediately determined.

Some witnesses said the refinery, which produces oil for southern Iraq but not for export, was sabotaged. Other sources said a technical problem had caused the fire.

Barzani, the Kurdish leader, spoke at the reburial of 365 victims of the bloody 1988 campaign known as the Anfal, which the Iraqi government waged against its Kurdish population. The bodies were recovered from graves across northern and southern Iraq and returned to families in a reminder of how Kurds had suffered at the hands of Saddam Hussein's regime.



"This is our past and we have the right to ask for guarantees in the new Iraq in order to avoid any genocide against the Kurdish people," Barzani told mourners.

If the referendum is not held in the next six months, he said, the Kirkuk provincial government should be able to sponsor its own referendum. The Kurds, who dominate the provincial government, have long dreamed of making oil-rich Kirkuk part of their northern region and believe the area belongs to them historically.

The Kurds also insist that they have been robbed of areas in the northern provinces of Diyala and Nineveh through Hussein's policy of "ethnic cleansing." A referendum would settle the fate of all contested locations.

Barzani appeared to be reacting to the Arab political groups who read their communique Sunday opposing a referendum on Kirkuk's fate.

The Arab statement also challenged the Kurds' rights to sign oil-exploration contracts with foreign companies independent of Baghdad. The statement brought together Shiite and Sunni Arab parties from opposite ends of the political spectrum.

In Baghdad, Iraqi Vice President Tariq Hashimi said the 44-seat Sunni Arab bloc known as the Iraqi Accordance Front, or Tawafiq, might return to the government. Hashimi made his comments at a news conference after a visit from Shiite leader Abdelaziz Hakim. Tawafiq, which left the government in August, has previously hinted its ministers might return but they haven't yet.

In west Baghdad, a high-ranking judge was assassinated by gunmen, police and hospital sources said. Judge Amer Jawdat Naib, who sat on the national appeals court, and his driver were killed by machine-gun fire after seven gunmen in two cars blocked their vehicle, police said. The shooting took place near two Iraqi army checkpoints.

Many Iraqi judges and lawyers have been assassinated since 2003 as armed groups have sought to destroy the country's professional classes.

Seven Iraqi policemen were killed and four others wounded Monday when they entered a booby-trapped house in Abarat Behroz in Diyala province, police said. Last week, six American soldiers were killed when a booby-trapped house exploded in the Diyala town of Sinsil Tharia.

The U.S. Army announced Monday that it had killed 60 fighters and detained 193 militants during the hunt for Sunni militants in four northern Iraqi provinces. The military said it confiscated more than 4,000 pounds of explosives during the operation.

Sunni militants have flowed into northern Iraq since coming under pressure last year in Baghdad and the western province of Anbar. The northern region now accounts for about 50% of violence nationwide, according to U.S. figures.

IRAQ KURDS REBURY ANFAL VICTIMS

Mourners gather at a hilltop cemetery as 365 coffins arrive bearing remains of those killed in Hussein's genocidal 1988 campaign.

By Kimi Yoshino

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

DOKAN, IRAQ — The army of griever climbed to the hilltop at dawn, waiting for the 365 flag-draped coffins to arrive. Some sat weeping in the stony dirt amid row after row of empty graves; others lined the streets for blocks. They clutched framed pictures of husbands and wives, sisters and brothers, sons and daughters -- all victims of Saddam Hussein's 1988 genocidal campaign against the Kurds.

When the coffins came, carried up the hill on the backs of soldiers, the lamentation could wait no longer. This Anfal burial was 20 years in the making.

Fatima Omar pushed through the crowd of thousands, past the caution tape and past the soldiers. The mother who had lost three sons and a daughter collapsed on an unmarked coffin, her arms hugging the wooden box. She wailed plaintively; her body shook.

"All of them are like my children," she said. "My children and all these people go into death together. And now, they come back together."

It was a scene of almost unimaginable grief. Grown men sobbed into their scarves; one woman became so inconsolable she had to be carried out; and a photographer, after snapping dozens of pictures, put down his camera and cried into his hands.

As many as 180,000 Kurds were killed in 1988, during Hussein's deadly Anfal, or "spoils of war," operation in which firing squads, chemical warfare and concentration camps were used by the then-ruling Baath Party to root out Kurds in northern Iraq. Thousands of victims remain missing and thousands have yet to be identified.

The remains in the burial ceremony -- found in mass graves in Mosul, Dahuk, Sulaymaniya and Samawah -- were recently turned over to the semiautonomous Kurdish regional government after being used as evidence in trials against Hussein; his cousin Ali Hassan Majid, known as "Chemical Ali"; and others, said Fuad Hussein, chief of staff for Iraqi Kurdistan leader Massoud Barzani.

Although the government considered creating a national burial ground, Hussein said the survivors wanted these remains buried closer to home -- a request officials

were willing to accommodate.

"It's an important piece of our history," Hussein said. "It also signals to the outside world that genocide happened to the Kurds and it must not happen anywhere else."

At the burial site Thursday, dozens of black banners dotted the hillside. Each had its own message. "Anfal is a hurt in the body of the Kurd. We don't forget. Ever," declared one. Another called on the government to execute three former top officials who have been convicted and sentenced to death for Anfal-related crimes.

Kurds, though, are split on whether Majid; Hussein Rashid Mohammed, the former deputy head of army operations; and Sultan Hashim Ahmad Jabburi Tai, a onetime defense minister, should be executed. President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, has argued that Tai should be spared.

But this was not a day about politics. It was a day, finally, to say goodbye. And for some, to relive old wounds.

"I tried to forget because it was a long process," said Ismat Abdul Rahman, whose son Aziz, 4, was killed, along with

five other family members.

"Now I am hurt, my head and my body. Today I feel like they are killing my son."

Fatima Salah crouched over an empty grave, her body rocking side to side. "All of the time I cry," she said. "All of my life, I cry about you. I don't forget you."

She held up nine plastic floral bouquets, each bearing the name of one of her nieces or nephews: Hiwa, 11; Cameran, 15; Runak, 13; Sangar, 2; Peri, 4; Bestun, 1. . . .

"Some were not even old enough to go to school," she said, sobbing. Her list continued: Hawri, 3; Akhtar, 19; Delkhwaz, 5.

When the procession of coffins approached, hours after many mourners had arrived, the crowd moved to the edge and peered down at the row of trucks carrying the caskets.

Muneri Mahmoud watched, as one coffin after another passed by. Tears flowed, and she spoke a flood of Kurdish. She stood quietly for several minutes.

Then she dabbed her eyes and smiled. She said one word, in English: "Home."



Female relatives of those killed in a genocidal 1988 campaign against Iraqi Kurds by the government of Saddam Hussein are among those mourning at burial rites in Dokan, in the north.

January 18, 2008

The Washington Post

Federalism, Not Partition: A System Devolving Power to the Regions Is the Route...

By Mowaffak al-Rubaie

BAGHDAD -- Iraq's government is at a stalemate. As in the United States, there is much discussion here of the need for political reconciliation. What does that mean? That the majority Shiites and the minority Sunnis and Kurds must find a way to govern collectively at the national level. As national security adviser to the head of Iraq's governments since March 2004, I have participated in the development of democracy in my country. I strongly support the government and applaud its achievements. But I understand that the political objectives of Iraq's three main communities are unrealizable within the framework of a unitary, centralized state.

It has been impossible to maintain a political consensus on many important issues. For one thing, the U.S.-dominated coalition, which has its own objectives, must be accommodated. The regional "superpowers" (Iran and Saudi Arabia) meddle in Iraq's affairs, and their own sectarian tensions are reflected in the violence here. The absence of truly national political parties and leadership that reach the Iraqi people exacerbates the problem.

Overall, Shiites see their future based on two fundamental "rights": Power must be exercised by the political majority through control of governmental institutions, and institutional sectarian discrimination must be eliminated. Kurds see their future bound to their "rights" of linguistic, cultural, financial and resource control within Kurdistan. Sunni Arabs are driven by resistance to their loss of power, as well as fear of revenge for past wrongs and the potential for reverse discrimination.

The current political framework is based on a pluralistic democratic vision that, while admirable, is entirely unsuited to

resolving this three-way divide. It ignores underlying issues and expects that a consensus will emerge simply by enacting a liberal constitutional legal order.

Pluralistic democracy will not take root unless the national political compact recognizes and accommodates the fears and aspirations of Iraq's communities. Resolution can be achieved only through a system that incorporates regional federalism, with clear, mutually acceptable distributions of power between the regions and the central government. Such a system is in the interest of all Iraqis and is necessary if Iraq is to avoid partition or further civil strife.

Only through a new political compact among Iraq's main communities will a viable state emerge. A key condition for success is that the balance of power should tip decisively to the regions on all matters that do not compromise the integrity of the state. The central institutions must earn their legitimacy from the power that the three main ethnic groups are prepared to give them. Iraq needs a period during which the Shiites and the Kurds achieve political control over their destinies while the Sunni Arab community is secure from the feared tyranny of the majority.

The shape of a reconstructed, federal Iraq could vary, but it should permit the assignment of nearly all domestic powers to the regions, to be funded out of a percentage of oil revenue distributed on the basis of population. The federal government should be responsible only for essential central functions such as foreign policy (including interregional affairs), defense, fiscal and monetary policy, and banking. Regional parliaments and executives would govern their areas. A federal parliament with a new upper house could manage governance at the national level. A regional political structure would allow

for the development of religious, cultural and educational policies more suited to areas' populations than a central government could create. A regional framework for economic policy would also fit better with traditional trade patterns and markets.

Iraq's political geography suggests five likely federal units: A "Kurdistan province," including the current Kurdistan and surrounding areas; a "Western province," including Mosul and the upper Tigris and Euphrates valleys; a "Kufa province," built around the Middle Euphrates governorates; a "Basra province," including the lower Tigris and Euphrates valleys; and a "Baghdad province," built around Greater Baghdad, which may include parts of Diyala and Salah ad Din Governorates. The Kurdish region would be given a special constitutional status as a recognized society and culture with a unique identity (similar to the Canadian province of Quebec).

The new, national Iraqi identity will be forged over time as a result of peaceful, respectful participation in governance and growth, not by fear and terror as in our past. Iraq's constitution was ratified before its communities reached agreement on many vital issues, such as provincial powers. Without a process aimed at reaching a broad political consensus on the makeup of the Iraqi state, order and democracy are unlikely. This consensus would form the backdrop to a referendum on a reformed constitution. Each of Iraq's communities has leaders up to the task of creating a new political consensus. It is time for them to begin work. *The writer is Iraq's national security adviser. The views expressed here are his own and do not constitute an official position of the government of Iraq.*

January 23, 2008

TURKISH DAILY NEWS

Secret Kurdish plan unveiled in Ecevit archives

ANKARA - Milliyet

In an attempt at solving the Kurdish problem in eastern Turkey a commission formed by the 1960 coup leaders proposed a policy of transmigration between Kurds in southeastern Anatolia with people from the Black Sea area, according to the archives of former Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, a report by daily Milliyet said.

Coup leaders wanted to bring the people in the eastern and southeastern parts of the country closer to the state and asked the State Planning Agency (DPT) to propose a solution by collecting information from the National Intelligence Agency (MİT), the military and the police, according to the report.

The report prepared by the commission was submitted and approved by the gov-

ernment formed by the coup leaders. However, in the elections held in October 1961, a new Justice Party (AP) and Republican People's Party (CHP) coalition came to power and the new government was told to implement the recommendations in the report. Ecevit was the labor minister in the new government.

The report, titled, The Principles of the Development Program to be implemented

by the State in the East and the South-east, noted that the region had been ignored and clan leaders dominated the scene, thus eroding the people's attachment to the state.

While economic measures to boost income in the region was suggested, the report also proposed steps to assimilate and transfer the region's Kurds, referred to as those who believed they were Kurds. The relocation of Kurds to other regions

was intended to ensure that the population in the region would become majority Turkish.

Kurds were to be replaced by the excess population in the Black Sea and Turks arriving from overseas.

Milliyet also said the project also aimed to separate Kurds in the region from those in Iraq and Iran.

Among other measures considered were the appointment of Kurdish governors, administrators, judges and military officers to eastern and southeastern Anatolia, broadcasting cultural propaganda on the radio, and efforts to scientifically prove that Kurds are not of Iranian but Turkish stock.

The report is one of the many documents included in the book, Ecevit and his Secret Achieve that will be published this week.

KURDISHGL
The %11 and only English paper in Kurdistan

BE

23 January 2008,

Kurds, Baghdad object to Sahwa forces in Mosul Sahwa forces, successful in other provinces, are unwelcome in Mosul.

The Globe

As Awakening Councils expand throughout Iraq, Kurdish leaders oppose to their formation in areas subject to Article 140. Deputy Governor of Mosul, Khosro Goran, said that Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Iraqi government officials in Baghdad strongly reject to the formation of Sahwa (Awakening) Councils in the area. He also dispelled rumors that 20,000 Kurds have joined the armed groups.

The Sahwa forces were first established by Sunni Arab tribes in Iraq's western province of Anbar, and were backed by American forces to fight insurgents. Later, after the forces prove successful, the formation of similar groups expanded in other Iraqi provinces, especially those inhabited by Sunni Arabs.

Goran, who is a Kurd, said that security conditions in Mosul are different compared with Anbar and other Iraqi provinces. "We as Kurds reject the presence of al-Sahwa in those provinces that are included within Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution," said Goran. "The Kurds will not allow the formation of Awakening Councils in Kurdistan cities such as Akre,

Shekhan, and other safe areas," he confirmed.

Last November, a group from around Mosul, the second largest province of Iraq, tried to form Sahwa forces to fight insurgent groups and al-Qaeda in the ethnically disputed areas. That same group recently declared that up to 20,000 Kurds joined them.

"There is no truth about Kurdish fighters joining Sahwa forces in our areas, and anyone who associates with them will be captured," Goran said. He added that those who join Sahwa councils do so only for money. If they really want to cleanse the city of Mosul of insurgents, he said, they can better do so by joining the Iraqi armed forces.

Goran stated that the existence of Sahwa forces in the ethnically mixed province of Mosul may not have the most positive outcome for the people there.

Kurdish leaders and Mosul officials are against the formation of Awakening Councils in other areas and admit that the councils have played a vital role in cutting violence and improving security conditions in other provinces.



Sunni Sheikhs, tribal leaders and military officials attend a summit September 6, 2007, in Anbar.

Asked whether or not President Jalal Talabani backs the councils, Goran said that President Talabani, Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani, and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and all Iraqi political parties would like the public to show support for Iraq's national forces to increase the security situation throughout the country, but up until now, Kurdish parties haven't shown dissatisfaction concerning the formation of Sahwa forces.

Mosul is the largest province and Sahwa forces can't maintain order there easily. Kurdish officials announced they would

prefer the existence of a national, formal military base instead of Sahwa forces in the area.

"PM al-Maliki has met with the leaders of this party," said Goran. "We, as Mosul Governorate, have met with the PM and a number of ministers, all of whom stand firm against al-Sahwa." According to authorities, there has been no formal order from Baghdad to the Mosul Governorate to allow al-Sahwa councils to operate in the province.



Press Conference

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

PRESS CONFERENCE BY SECRETARY-GENERAL'S SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR IRAQ

With heightened security in the "red zone" of Baghdad and on its streets, a drastic drop in violence, good economic growth prospects and a warming of political relations between the majority Shiite and minority Sunni religious groups, the chances for a stable and unified Iraq were encouraging, Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for that country, said at a Headquarters press conference today.

Violent acts had decreased 60 per cent from July and August to September and October, he said, noting that the Shiite ritual of Ashura had ended peacefully in Kerbala over the past weekend, thanks to tightened security put in place to protect around 2.5 million pilgrims. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expected Iraq's economy to grow 7 per cent this year and daily oil production to increase by 200,000 barrels.

He said the new de-baathification law was awaiting ratification and serious discussions were under way concerning the reintegration of Sunnis into public office in order to ensure a Government of National Unity. Moreover, the United Nations had a strong presence in Iraq and was now involved in resolving internal border disputes in the north. The Organization would also be engaged in future elections. "All of this is good news but it needs to be sustained by political activities and dialogue among the Iraqis." Other legislation needed to be approved, included laws on oil-resource sharing, provincial elections and amnesty. Economic sustainability was vital and must trickle down to all Iraqis, many of whom lacked basic social services, electricity, water and sanitation.

Mr. De Mistura said he was encouraged by the efforts of Iraqi and Kurdish officials to work together in the past month and those of other stakeholders to resolve the territorial dispute over Kirkuk. The 31 December timetable for a referendum on that city's status in accordance with article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution had not been met due to technical and logistical reasons, but the parties involved had asked the United Nations to provide technical support during the next six months on Kirkuk and other disputed areas in the north, and possibly the south as well.

"To allow the UN to be the technical supporter to ensure there would be progress on that through dialogue -- not through violence, not through brinkmanship -- for us was a demonstration of the maturity which the Iraqi and Kurdish authorities and other stakeholders have reached when confronted with a situation of that kind, and an indication that perhaps we can do that elsewhere as well," the Special Representative added.

He went on to say that the Iraqi people were tired of violence and that the increased support of the United Nations and coalition forces on the ground to assist internally displaced persons were encouraging, as were the efforts of the 73,000 civilians who had formed the so-called "Awakening Councils" to help fight Al-Qaida, the ceasefire declared by Moqtada al-Sadr and the advisory role Iranian officials were playing to ease tensions and encourage dialogue.

Asked whether trust would be restored this year between Iraq's Shiite and Sunni populations, he said both sides must develop that trust, pointing out that dialogue between them was growing, particularly in recent days. There were strong rumours of very strong discussions between Sunnis and the Shiite-led Government over reintegrating Sunnis into a Government of National Unity. "There is no alternative. They have to find a way and we will try to help them to do so."

He added that, while Iraqis had largely identified themselves with a particular religious group or party during the recent two elections and referendum -- the first held in many years -- they were increasingly voicing their commitment to a unified nation. "When you talk to them about sovereignty, they are all Iraqis."

Asked about the importance of the new United Nations headquarters in Iraq, he said the General Assembly would consider in March a proposal for a larger, more integrated and well-protected headquarters in Baghdad, which was needed to better assist the Iraqis to adjust to the changing reality on the ground. The United Nations was taking many precautions to protect its staff in Iraq, among them the Secretary-General's son-in-law. The Organization had learned from the tragedy of the August 2003 bombing of its Baghdad offices.

As for the role of Fijian peacekeepers in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), he said Fiji had a long tradition of participating in United Nations peacekeeping and its soldiers were doing an outstanding job. A source of pride for the Organization, the Fijian contingent was helping to protect the three United Nations locations in Iraq, including the Special Representative's residence

* * * * *

Iraq Parliament Purges Hussein Vestiges on Flag

By ABEER MOHAMMED and SOLOMON MOORE

BAGHDAD — Iraqi lawmakers adopted a modified version of the national flag on Tuesday, removing three stars that symbolized the Baathist ideals of unity, freedom and socialism, and Saddam Hussein's handwritten calligraphy of the Koranic incantation "Allahu akbar."

The incantation, which means God is great, will remain on the flag, though it will now be written in a different calligraphic style.

Members of Parliament voted 110 to 50 for the flag, which was introduced in 2004 and bears the red, white and black stripes of Iraq's original banner. The design preserves a sense of continuous national identity, while purging the flag of Baathist allusions, supporters say.

Kurdish politicians, many of whom survived the genocidal gas bombings by Hussein forces in the Anfal, or spoils of war, campaign of the 1980s, were among the fiercest critics of the old flag. In 2006, Massoud Barzani, president of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government, refused to fly the flag from government offices, prompting fear of Kurdish separatism.

On Tuesday, however, Kurdish lawmakers pushed for a compromise, dropping their insistence on yellow lettering for the Arabic inscription, for a design without Baathist references.

Zuhair Humadi, a senior adviser to the Shiite-led Iraqi government, said the Kurds sought the deal before an international conference of members of Arab Parliaments in weeks.

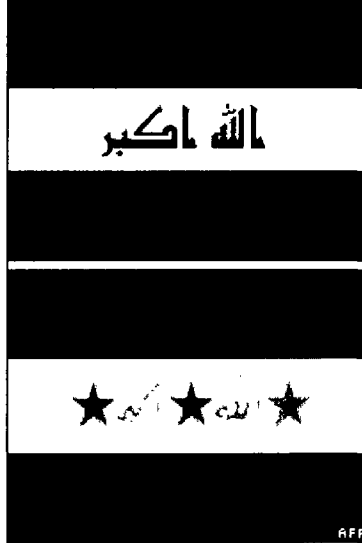
"They won't come if only the Kurdish flag is flying," Mr. Humadi said of the Arab leaders. "And Barzani wanted that meeting to be in Kurdistan, and he will not allow Saddam Hussein's flag to be flown. So they agreed to this."

The new flag continues to generate disagreements and conflicting national narratives among Iraqis.

One supporter was Hameed Meala, a member of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, which for years had waged an armed struggle with Mr. Hussein's forces.

Regarding the three stars, Mr. Meala said, "It is obvious that they refer to unity, freedom and socialism — the goals of the Baath Party, as announced during Saddam's regime."

However, two other Shiite factions,



Fadhila Party and the Sadr movement; the Sunni-led Tawafiq Party; and the nationalist Iraqia List favored keeping the stars.

"We wanted the verse to be written in Kufic script and to keep the three stars," said Ahmed al-Masody, a Sadrist lawmaker. "We would have announced that they don't symbolize the Baath Party, but other principles, like justice."

Several lawmakers said that because the flag had been changed out of Kurdish expediency, they expected it to be changed again.

The flag is the second design to be introduced in Iraq since the American-led invasion in 2003. In 2004, the American-appointed Iraqi Governing Council announced a white, blue and yellow flag with a prominent Islamic crescent. That design was scrapped after Iraqis criticized it for being too radical a change from the original, and too similar to the blue and white flag of Israel.

Iraqi politicians then kept the old design, including the three stars, but replaced Mr. Hussein's writing with an angular pre-Islamic script that originated in Kufa, a city in southern Iraq.

During Mr. Hussein's 24-year dictatorship, his name and face adorned state buildings, national monuments and public squares. Since the American-orchestrated toppling of Mr. Hussein's statue in Firdous Square in Baghdad, Iraqis have aggressively removed Baathist references from

the national landscape.

Last year, politicians decided to dismantle one of Iraq's most recognizable landmarks, two gigantic arms holding aloft crossed swords and a collection of helmets to symbolize Mr. Hussein's proclaimed victory over Iran during a 1980-1988 war. Mr. Hussein is believed to have provided the original cast for the arms.

Iraqis expressed varying opinions about the new flag.

"We refuse this change, because this flag does not favor any political group, but represents the unity of Iraq," said Sheik Mohammad Saleh al-Butchery, a spokesman for the Falluja Tribal Council in Sunni-dominated Anbar Province.

Kareem Jameel, a 45-year-old journalist in Basra, a predominantly Shiite, called the change necessary. "If we want to build a new Iraq, then we have to change Saddam's flag," he said.

But many Iraqis, burdened by uncertain security, frequent electricity failures, poverty and disenchantment with their leadership, complained that Parliament had more important things to worry about than flag designs.

"The government's priorities should be to make people happy by getting rid of terrorism, providing security and purging the country from gangs and militiamen," said Idress Yunis, 35, a Baghdad shop owner.

News of the adoption of the flag was released amid reports of sporadic violence throughout Iraq.

In Diyala Province, north of Baghdad, Iraqi police officers said they had found the bodies of a family, a father, his three sons and three nephews. They had been shot to death and discovered in Buhruz, the police said.

In Baquba, the provincial capital, a water boiler packed with explosives exploded near a high school and a checkpoint for an American-allied tribal security force, killing three people and wounding 12 students, the Iraqi police said, and, separately, a gunman killed a civilian near a medical clinic.

The bodies of two more Iraqis, a woman and a policeman, were discovered about 30 miles outside Hilla in the south, the Iraqi police said.

And in Basra, gunmen killed an Iraqi policeman, witnesses said.

United Press International

Jan. 23, 2008

Kurds in Baghdad for new oil talks

BAGHDAD, Jan. 23 (UPI) -- Iraq's Kurdish oil leaders are in Baghdad to clear an impasse over oil control, though the national oil minister is reportedly not in town.

That could be the point, since some Kurdish leaders have called for Oil Minister Hussain al-Shahristani to be removed from office.

Shahristani has confirmed attendance at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, which began Wednesday. A U.S. State Department official is reportedly mediating.

The Kurdistan Regional Government and the national government have been at an evolving stalemate over oil issues for more than a year. The two sides have yet to reach agreement on a new national oil law, called for in the constitution but stalled over its interpretation.

The KRG favors decentralized oil control, allowing the producing regions and provinces more say in the pace and method for developing the respective oil sector. Others want the oil strategy to be a central one.

The KRG has been developing its oil sector for three years. It has little of Iraq's proven oil reserves -- the third largest in the world -- but experts say there could be a bonanza when it's fully explored. The KRG had signed a small handful of deals with international oil firms prior to February 2007 when a deal was

supposedly reached over the oil law.

But disagreements over control arose, and a wedge between the two sides grew. In August the KRG passed its own regional oil law and since then has signed dozens of new deals.

Shahristani initially called them illegal, then null and void, and has since made good on the threat to blacklist any oil firm with a KRG deal from receiving any contracts in upcoming national tenders.

"The oil companies operating in the Kurdistan Region insist on working in the region and don't pay any attention to Shahristani's threats," said Falah Mustafa Bakir, The Kurdish Globe reports. Bakir won't meet with Shahristani, The Globe reports, and Mahmoud Othman, a Kurd and parliamentarian, said the current meetings on the oil issue will be final.

Weekly Petroleum Argus reports the Kurds are asking Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to delegate his energy adviser, Thamir Ghadhban, instead of Oil Minister Hussain al-Shahristani in new oil law talks in Parliament's Energy Committee.

KRG Minister of National Resources Ashti Hawrami led a delegation last month as well. The Globe reports Reuben Jeffrey, a top U.S. State Department official tasked with moving the oil law along, will facilitate.

THE
INDEPENDENT

25 January 2008

US troops will be gone within 10 years, says Iraqi minister

By Patrick Cockburn in Baghdad

The Republican presidential candidate, Senator John McCain, caused anger among Iraqis this month by saying during the New Hampshire primary that US military forces might stay in Iraq "for 100 years". Mr Zebari, asked by The Independent in Baghdad if the American army would be in Iraq in 10 years, said: "Really, I wouldn't say so."

Mr Zebari is much more confident than he was a year ago that "al-Qa'ida has been crushed, its network has been shattered" though it has not been completely eliminated. He says he thinks it dangerous if the Shia-Kurdish government, of which he is one of the most powerful members, does not pay and absorb into its own security forces the 70,000-strong Sunni Awakening movement which is fighting al-Qa'ida.

"That is the danger," said Mr Zebari. "The Awakening movement is not that well organised and it could be easily manipulated by al-Qa'ida." He added that it was an illusion that the Sunni political parties and their leaders "represent the Sunni community".

Mr Zebari originally made his name as the energetic spokesman and foreign repre-

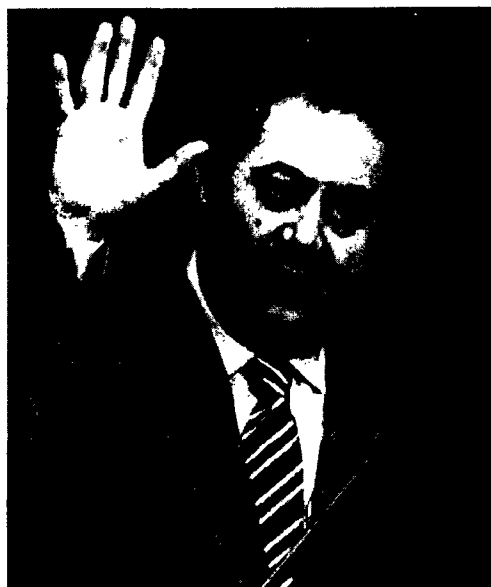
sentative of the Kurdistan Democratic Party during its long years of resistance to Saddam Hussein. He has been the most successful of Iraqi ministers since he was appointed in 2004, cultivating good relations with the US and Iran. Three years ago, insurgents tried to assassinate him using a vehicle packed with a tonne of explosives, including a naval torpedo, which was detected near his home before it was detonated.

For all Mr Zebari's optimism, Iraq remains an extraordinary violent country. Yesterday, a suicide bomber in a police uniform killed Brigadier-General Salih Mohammed Hasan, the chief of police of Mosul, northern Iraq's largest city. He had been inspecting the ruins of a building in which 20 civilians had been killed and 150 wounded in an explosion the previous day.

The Iraqi leaders are eager to sign by July a bilateral treaty with the US which would in effect determine who rules Iraq. It would settle issues such as Iraqi sovereignty, command and control of Iraqi security forces, and the immunity of foreign troops and private security companies. The Iraqi intelligence service, at present controlled and financed by the

CIA, will be brought under Iraqi government control.

Above all, said Mr Zebari, "the duration of



the American presence here will be negotiated ... so their presence will not be open-ended". Although sovereignty was theoretically returned to Iraq in June

2004, the US remains very much in charge of security.

Mr Zebari says that he has no doubt that the new agreement would be denounced as a sell-out in Iraq, but it was necessary for Americans and Iraqis to end uncertainty about their future relations.

The Foreign Minister sees US support for the Iraqi government as being essential to prevent foreign invasion. "If we did not have the Americans here we would have seen many interventions by our neighbours, the latest of which was the massing of the Turkish troops [on Iraq's northern border]."

Syria has also made it more difficult for al-Qa'ida members to cross into Iraq and Iran has restrained the Shia militias and

cut back on sending sophisticated Iranian-made roadside bombs into Iraq. "We convinced many countries that you are playing with fire, you have a snake by the tail" in supporting the insurgency in Iraq, says Mr Zebari.

Paradoxically, Iran is a strong supporter of the present government in Baghdad, which is dominated by religious parties from the majority Shia community. But Iran is a rival of the US for influence over the Iraqi government and does not want to see a threatening American army permanently encamped in Iraq and on its borders. Mr Zebari has tried to foster dialogue between Tehran and Washington, though with mixed success. But he is convinced that Iran has played a crucial role in restraining the Mehdi Army, the

powerful Shia militia at present observing a ceasefire. Baghdad has invited the Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to visit Iraq.

Mr Zebari would not confirm reports that Iran has recently taken a tougher line, postponing talks with US representatives several times in recent weeks because Tehran is increasingly confident that the US is going to attack it. This follows a US National Intelligence Estimate saying that Iran is not developing a nuclear bomb.

The Iranians may also be worried that the Awakening movement is a US-run Sunni militia that will never give its loyalty to a Shia government.

Guardian

January 25, 2008

Mosul police chief killed by suicide bomber at blast site

- **Assassin hid TNT vest under Iraqi police uniform**
- **At least 36 died in huge explosion hours earlier**

The Guardian **Michael Howard in Baghdad**

A suicide bomber wearing a police uniform assassinated a top police officer in the northern city of Mosul yesterday, as rescue operations continued at the site of a huge blast that hours earlier had killed at least 36 and wounded more than 150.

The two explosions appeared to cement the reputation of Mosul, Iraq's third largest city, as one of the last remaining urban redoubts of al-Qaida in Iraq. US commanders in Baghdad were last night asked by officials in the city to send reinforcements.

Khasro Goran, the deputy governor of Mosul, said that brigadier-general Salih Mohammed Hasan Atiya al-Jubouri, the acting police chief of Nineveh province, had been killed along with two police officers as they inspected the site of an earlier explosion in the Shingeli area. As local residents and security officials dug through mountains of rubble in search of survivors, a man in a police uniform approached the police chief from behind and detonated a vest packed with TNT, Goran said.

Some reports said the attack occurred after a group of angry residents had forced al-

Jubouri and his entourage to retreat to their cars. Al-Jubouri died on his way to hospital. An Iraqi journalist and a US soldier were said to be among six injured.

Goran said the commander of the Iraqi army's second division had also been present, but that he "remained safe". He said yesterday's attack was "a big blow" against Iraqi security forces' efforts to secure Mosul, but they remained determined to rid the city of jihadists, whose operations have been disrupted elsewhere in Iraq by a combination of "awakening" groups and the US troop surge. "The last battle will be here [in Mosul]," he said.

The first explosion occurred on Wednesday after Iraqi security forces surrounded an apartment block, acting on a tip that it was being used as a weapons cache by insurgents. Major-General Mark Hertling, commander of US forces in northern Iraq, said that an estimated 115 tonnes of ordinance had been hidden there. He said it appeared Iraqi soldiers had triggered the huge explosion when they detonated a roadside bomb found nearby.

Women and children were among the victims.

Located along major transport routes west to Syria and south to the Sunni triangle, Mosul is a logistical and financial hub for



Iraqi fire fighters and residents of Mosul inspect the site Thursday, Jan. 24, 2008.

insurgents. Its 1.7 million population is dominated by Sunni Arabs, but there is a significant Kurdish community. Thousands of Kurds have been forced out by violence from Islamic extremist groups based in the city, Kurdish leaders say.

Turkey struggles to define itself

By Sabrina Tavernise

IZMIR, Turkey: When Atilla Yayla, a maverick political science professor, offered a mild criticism of Turkey's first years as a country, his remarks unleashed a torrent of abuse.

"Traitor!" a newspaper headline shouted. His college dismissed him. And state prosecutors in this western city where he had spoken opened a criminal case against him. His crime? Violating an obscure law against insulting the legacy of the country's founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

"I need thoughts to counter my ideas," Yayla said. "Instead, they attacked me."

Turkey's government is expected as early as Friday to announce that it has changed a law against insulting Turkishness. Amending that law is considered a crucial measure of the democratic maturity of this Muslim country as it tries to gain acceptance to the European Union.

But while the article, called 301, is known to many in the West — Orhan Pamuk, the Nobel Prize-winning Turkish novelist, was prosecuted under it — it is just one in a bigger universe of laws that limit freedom of expression for intellectuals in Turkey. The law under which Yayla was prosecuted, for example, dates to 1951 and is not even part of the country's penal code.

While the change in 301 is likely to stop the wanton application of that law — the single most common law used against critics of Turkey's official version of history — the government was ultimately unable to remove it from the books completely, as liberals wanted.

The reason goes to the heart of the state of Turkey today: Despite its booming economy, gay pride parades and ambitious European aspirations, a large portion of Turkish society is still deeply conservative and many Turks support the prosecutions.

As nationalism has been rising in Turkey, in response to the broad changes sweeping society, so have the number of court cases against writers, publishers and academics. The European Union, in a report on Turkey in November, said the number of people prosecuted almost doubled in 2006 from the year before, and rose further in 2007.

In all, about 39 articles lead to limits on free expression in Turkey, though only 13 of them are commonly used, said Zafer Gokdemir, a rights lawyer who has defended freedom of expression cases since 1995.

The laws are deeply damaging for the country, liberals argue, because they postpone the work required for Turks to process their painful past by blocking society's thinkers from asking difficult questions.

Turkey was born fighting for its life against European powers that were carving it up at the end of World War I. It was left defensive, with low self-esteem and weak institutions, and a deep-seated insecurity still lingers.

And unlike Russians who were deeply cynical about the motives of the Soviet state, most Turks strongly believe in their system. Nationalist taboos on questioning any part of official history are held in place as much by society as by Turkey's controlling state.

The cases, for that reason, emerge from the most insecure part of society: a nationalist, sometimes violent fringe, whose backers are the secular old guard. With vast power, but small public accountability, they are not unlike senior Soviet apparatchiks. The heart of this class works in the military, an elite institution in Turkey, and in its judiciary.

In Turkey's court system, private citizens can file complaints, which require prosecutors to investigate, and the vast majority of the freedom-of-expression cases begins that way. Kemal Kerinsiz, an ultra-nationalist lawyer who started the case against Pamuk, said in an interview that he had successfully gotten about 50 cases opened since 2005.

Yayla's speech, in 2006 at a youth conference here, drew eight complaints, one of them from the Izmir Bar Association. His argument — that the early years of the Turkish republic were less democratic than the period after Turkey became a multi-party system, and that Ataturk's monopoly on public images would be perplexing to Europeans — "had no basis in science," said Huseyin Durdu, a Turkish patriot lawyer and a complainant.

Asked what would happen if the law was taken off the books, Durdu looked stricken.

"People would be insulting each other," he said, in an immaculate office in downtown Izmir, a small bust of Ataturk on the wall behind him. "It would be conflict and chaos."

Yayla, for his part, said he was simply trying to provoke a thoughtful discussion on the monopoly of political symbols.

"Of course we need to have Ataturk statues, but there are other people in Turkish history and they deserve statues, too," he said.

In a surprising twist, it is Turkey's Islamic class — deeply despised by the secular old guard primarily because it is now, as the top political party in Turkey, a serious threat to their power — that has pushed to reduce the power of the laws. President Abdullah Gul has said that article 301 is as damaging to Turkey's reputation as "Midnight Express," a 1978 film about an American drug smuggler brutalized in a Turkish prison.

But the old guard, which professes to stand for Western values but in fact is deeply suspicious of the freedoms they would bring, deftly place obstacles in the path of the observant class by drawing the specter of religious extremism.

Yayla, who effortlessly cites John Stuart Mill and John Locke, is harder to attack.

"My ideas are coming from the West, not from the Koran or the Prophet Muhammad," Yayla said. "This is infuriating for them."

Indeed, Yayla's speech was so scholarly that the only thing the authorities found to charge him with on paper was for referring to Ataturk as "this man." For reference, in Turkey's Constitution, Ataturk is described as the "immortal leader and unrivaled hero."

The prosecutions result in suspended sentences, fines, closures of publishing houses, but rarely in actual jail time. Even so, they have had a chilling effect on speech. Public trials drag on for months, and draw leering ultra-nationalists. Last year, one turned lethal when a nationalist teenager shot and killed Hrant Dink, a Turkish-Armenian journalist.

Yayla is now in self-imposed exile in England, after months of moving around with a government-imposed bodyguard in Turkey.

The cases that can get jail time are those against Kurds. An arsenal of laws relating to the charge of terrorism is aimed at Kurdish writers, publishers and artists.

"When you use the word Kurd or Kurdistan, you are conducting terrorist propaganda, no matter what you are saying," said Ahmet Onal, a Kurdish publisher who has published 270 books, for which he has stood trial 27 times and served jail terms twice.

The issue is sensitive because Turkey has fought a bloody war with a militant fringe of its Kurdish population since the 1980s, and the lines between expression and revolt are blurry. For years the old guard refused to acknowledge its own Kurdish population.

"I'm trying to show Turks the pure facts," Onal said over tea after one of his court hearings last month, "so they can wash off the ugliness of the past and move toward the future."

Another law, against "praising crime and criminals," has been used as a weapon against mayors in Turkey's largely Kurdish southeast, with at least 54 charged with it last year, according to the Bar Association of Diyarbakir, the capital of the region.

Many Turks say that Europe should be more understanding of Turkey, a far younger state with bigger problems. European democracy is a "thornless garden," said Umit Kocacakal, a lawyer who supports article 301 but advocates a more judicial application of it.

Besides, he says, Europeans have similar laws. Articles 90A and 90B in Germany prohibit disparaging the state, its symbols and its constitutional institutions, and article 290 of the Italian penal code prohibits vilifying the Republic and its armed forces.

But application in Europe is rare. Germany has prosecuted some neo-Nazis, and in Italy a ranting separatist politician was once convicted but a fine was the only punishment. The European countries do not punish insulting Italianness or Frenchness, although, as part of the government's amendment, that phrase will be changed to "Turkish nation."

Herald Tribune January 28, 2008

Turkey arrests 13 nationalists

Group said to be tied to political killings

By Sabrina Tavernise

ISTANBUL: In one of the biggest operations against ultranationalists in decades, the authorities said, 13 people have been arrested who were part of a criminal group that had carried out political killings and had shadowy ties to the Turkish state.

Among those arrested Saturday night was Kemal Kerincsiz, the neonationalist lawyer who had filed dozens of legal cases against Turkish intellectuals, including Orhan Pamuk, the Turkish novelist who has won the Nobel Prize, and three retired military officers, according to the state-run Anatolian News Agency. The men were first detained Tuesday.

One of the officers, Veli Kucuk, a former major general, was believed to have been plotting Pamuk's assassination, Turkish newspapers reported, citing documents from the investigation. Kucuk is suspected of having run a secret unit within the police forces that carried out bombings and killings, for which other groups were blamed.

The arrests have riveted Turks, who have long suspected links between political violence, including the killings of members of ethnic and religious minorities, and legal state institutions like the military, the judiciary, and political parties. But the connections were sketchy and it was unclear whether the group had been working with the blessing of the state or whether it was operating on its own.

"Everyone suspected something fishy was happening," said Ilter Turan, a professor of political science at Bilgi University in Istanbul. "But the evidence was imperfect."

"Then suddenly this thing got uncovered."

The arrests strike a blow at Turkey's old guard, a staunchly secular elite that controls the military, the judiciary and a large portion of the bureaucracy. That elite is locked in a power struggle with a new class of religiously observant politicians from the heartland, which is led by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

While the group arrested Saturday did not appear to work directly for that elite, the two groups share similar chauvinistic visions for Turkey of a pure Turkic-Muslim nation without religious or ethnic minorities, like Armenians, Christians or Kurds.

A number of those arrested had links with protests against the Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink, who was killed by an ultranationalist teenager a year ago.

Herald Tribune January 30, 2008

In Turkey, majority confronts old guard

Move to end a ban on head scarves is political milestone

By Sabrina Tavernise

ISTANBUL: When the Turkish government agreed Monday to loosen restrictions on religion by lifting a ban on women wearing head scarves in universities, it might have looked troubling at first glance. Will Islam start to erode Turkey's secular democracy?

But in Turkey, looks are often deceiving. In a surprising twist, it is the country's most observant citizens who have been its most active democrats, while its staunchly secular old guard — the military and the judiciary — has run things by court order and coup.

The paradox goes to the heart of modern Turkey, a vibrant Muslim democracy of 70 million between Europe and the Middle East. Its elected governments have never fully run

News Analysis the country. They are watched — and blocked — by an immensely powerful

coterie of generals and judges who inherited power from Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, a brilliant, autocratic former general, who created Turkey in 1923 from Ottoman remains.

The system he set up was secular, but deeply divided by class, with the elite, urban, "white Turks" intervening when political leaders elected by the poorer observant heartland veered off course.

"The citizen is perceived as a small, incapable child that can constantly damage something," said Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat, a member of the governing party, Justice and Development. The state "builds a garden fence around this child and doesn't let him out."

Now, for the first time in Turkish history, that underclass, led by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is challenging the old order and at least for now, is getting away with it.

Turkey is like a restless expatriate, who spent most of the last century in the West, trying to escape its previous six centuries as the capital of the Muslim east, and the challenge to the old guard over an item like the head scarf is, in many ways, Turkey returning to itself.

While many in educated Turkish society bristle when the country is seen as part of the Muslim Middle East, instead of Europe, its population remains

fairly observant.

A 2006 study conducted by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation, a respected Istanbul-based research organization, found that 59 percent of Turks described themselves as "very religious," or "extremely religious," and about two-thirds of the women in the study — 1,500 interviews across Turkey — said they covered their heads in some way when they leave the house.

In that sense, Erdogan's proposal, which was submitted to Parliament on Tuesday, is likely to have broad support among the Turkish population.

"It should be known that we are not working for anything else other than to stop the unjust treatment against our girls at university entrances," he said.

Turkish liberals, like Ergun Ozbudun, a law professor who has been tasked by the government to rewrite the Turkish Constitution, tend to agree.

"It's an issue of human rights, not secularism," said Ozbudun, who has taught in the United States. "In the U.S., I had Jewish students wearing yarmulkes and nobody cared."

The leader of the secular opposition party, a 69-year-old politician born while Ataturk was still living, and who has run the party for almost 20 years, played on familiar fears. "Moves to end the head scarf ban are aimed at the very foundations of Ataturk's secular republic," said the leader, Deniz Baykal.

The proposal "has paved the way for the intrusion of the 'turban,' as it is called," he said, referring to the hijab, a scarf that covers the hair and neck. It is, he said, "something that is not part of our nation, history, traditions or culture, an exported article of clothing that has been imposed on Turkey from outside."

For Hilal Kaplan, a graduate student who wears one, the talk sounds woefully outdated. "It's like the ground cracked open and people from the 1930s crawled out," she said.

More hard-line secular opposition invoked analogies to fascism. On a popular talk show debate this week, a professor, Emre Kongar, pointed out that the swastika "is prohibited in Germany," and that if symbols pose a threat "they can be prohibited."

Erdogan has argued, so far convincingly, that there is no reason why the smoothly running machine of secular Turkish democracy cannot be operated by observant Muslims. But with a firmer grip on power — his party now controls the presidency, government and Parliament — many liberals fear it will begin to stamp its image on Turkey, through its rank-and-file who, like the secular elite, are a closed group of their own.

"They might talk rights, but they believe that those rights come from being a good member of the community," said Jenny White, an American scholar who has studied Turkey since the 1970s.

"Democracy is not just a technology," she said. "It involves tolerance of people you don't agree with."

IRAQI ALLIANCES: SHIFTING SANDS

By Ma'ad Fayad — London, Asharq Al-Awsat-

The political process in Iraq has lacked any real mobility for nearly a year now; the government operates on one side and the parliament on the other. Political coalitions and blocs hold discussions in which agreements are rare and disputes more frequent.

However, from time to time, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani with his wisdom, political expertise and enduring patience proposes a political initiative or reconciles between various parties or engages in dialogue with all Iraqi parties for a better Iraq. The famous adage that says that Iraqi politicians always agree to disagree is the most accurate reflection of the present Iraqi political arena.

Several Iraqi politicians who spoke with Asharq Al-Awsat agreed that the Iraqi political process has been immobile for a considerable period of time and that political mobility was necessary to save the entire political process from its steady deterioration.

Perhaps President Talabani's proposed initiative, which Asharq Al-Awsat reported on following an interview with former speaker of the Iraqi interim parliament at the end of last year, Fouad Masum, is the first step forward towards salvation. Masum, from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the head of the Kurdish bloc in the Iraqi parliament is working with President Talabani to implement this initiative. Despite the fact that the details of the initiative have yet to be announced however, it is one that is based on realistic and efficient mechanisms that are far removed from political theorizing.

However, recently, approximately 12 political blocs and various Arab Sunni and Shia figures were in attendance at the Iraqi parliament and they signed a memorandum of understanding that was described as "aimed at resolving the state's most controversial issue, which is Article 140 of the [Iraqi] constitution which is related to the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk [an important and mixed city of Kurds, Turkmen, Christians and Arabs]," demanding that a solution be reached through political consensus.

Also discussed was the subject of oil contracts that were signed by the Iraqi Kurdistan regional government, which is matter that has caused most international public opinion, and particularly Kurdish public opinion to believe that this initiative [aforementioned memorandum] is directed against the Iraqi Kurds, who in turn call for "restoring and annexing Kirkuk to the Kurdistan region and legitimizing the use of their natural resources, such as oil and gas since the Iraqi constitution recognizes the principle of oil as the property of the Iraqi people."

However, no one, signatories and non-signatories alike [of the memorandum], has voiced concern that this latest development could become a new alliance or political bloc that will dismantle other alliances and political blocs and unite them under one alliance.

Adnan al Dulaimi, the head of the Iraqi Accord Front, which incorporates the Iraqi National Dialogue Council led by Khalaf al Ulayyan (the former, who is also one of the signatories) described it as "simply the signing of a document and it does not signify the formation of a parliamentary bloc or a new political alliance."

Meanwhile, Masum stated that "this document cannot be described as a political coalition since the

inherent differences between signatories exceed the points of agreement. There are some calling for the participation of the Baathists in the political process while others cannot stand to hear the word Baath."

"There is no clarity in this document; if the intention was to form a political bloc that could help propel the political process forward then it would be understandable. However, we do not believe that what has been issued will assist the political process and resolve its problems, especially since all the blocs that have signed, led by the Iraqi blocs, are part of the political process through their participation in parliament," he added.

In a recent telephone interview with Asharq Al-Awsat, Masum said, "the political blocs have expressed their rejection of some of the names that are affiliated to them in this document, such as the Islamic Virtue party (Al Fadhila party) and the Sadrist bloc." Moreover, he questioned whether Osama al Najafi (Iraqi MP and member of the Iraqi National List headed by Dr. Iyad Allawi), "represents the whole Iraqi National List, or whether he signed as an independent, especially since there is an Iraqi group that claims that it is not represented in the document."

In a telephone interview, Bassim Sharif, parliamentarian and member of the Fadhila party politburo from Baghdad said that his party "is not with those who have signed the document."

"The Fadhila party entered into dialogue with all the political parties and blocs, whether part of the government or outside of it and we have decided to not participate unless it is politically mature," describing the dialogue in general as a "positive thing."

Not long ago, MP al Najafi made a controversial statement in which he said, "The complex situation in Kirkuk and the desire to preserve the interests of all its social components including Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen in accordance with the constitution and in a manner that reflects national political consensus to make this city an example of national unity, coexistence and social integration between the people of one nation is the fundamental goal that the political forces, which signed this document, strive towards." The document moreover stressed that Kurdistan's central federal government is to retain its authority over the management of the state's natural resources and wealth.

However, al Najafi continued, "oil, natural gas and other natural resources are the primary source of wealth for the Iraqi people but the management of these resources is exclusive to the federal government authority in cooperation with the regional authority, in accordance with the constitution. We are deeply concerned about any unilateral measures within this field [that may be taken] without consulting the central government."

In terms of these measures, al Najafi mentioned "forging contracts with foreign bodies regardless of the justifications behind the action," in a reference to the contracts that the Iraqi Kurdistan government had concluded without prior consultation with the central government.

The most prominent blocs who signed the document are the Sadrist bloc (30 seats), the Iraqi National List headed by Dr. Iyad Allawi and the Islamic Dawa party (15 seats), the Iraqi Accord Front, which incorporates the Iraqi National Dialogue Front led by Saleh al Mutlaq (11 seats) and the Iraqi National Dialogue Council, which is part of

the Iraqi Accord Front (8 seats), in addition to the independent blocs in parliament.

Parliamentarian and member of the Iraqi National List, Iyad Jamal told Asharq Al-Awsat, "What has taken place is not a coalition or a new political bloc but rather an agreement with common points amongst the blocs and a declaration of common denominators between them. In return, there also exist differences between our bloc and others, however we have been keen to reach a joint understanding and that does not equate to the formation of a new political bloc."

For their part, the Kurdish people view the tackling of the issue of oil contracts and the issue of Kirkuk as interference in the Kurdistan region's affairs and believe the document to be a violation of the Iraqi constitution. There are even some who believe that it marks the beginning of an Arab alliance against the Kurds.

Al Dulaimi was the first to mention this when he said, "the Kurdish people will consider this document to be [directed] against them," which prompted Maysoun al Damluji who is a member of Iraqi National List, to tell Asharq Al-Awsat in a telephone interview that the Iraqi National List considers itself to be "strongly allied with the Kurds."

She also added that "the Kurdish people will resolve the situation," and in reference to Kirkuk stated, "they must allow the issue its time." This contrasts with Al Fadhila party's Bassim Sharif who stated that, "the Kurds will have to relinquish some things."

The pertinent question is: Will new political alliances be governed by common interests, and will these alliances shift from political to national conflict: Arabs against Kurds?

Sharif confirms, "The new alliances are based on partial interests whilst we are experiencing a large political problem. Perhaps these alliances will be based on gathering the largest number of votes for the forthcoming elections, if the aim is to amend the electoral laws or hold early elections."

He also believes that if indeed the alliances shift from political conflict to a national one that it would "portend serious indicators for the political process," and added that "we must make serious efforts to ensure that the matter does not reach this state and there must be dialogue with the Kurds who believe that they cannot give up some of the profits or achievements that they have accomplished. They will never move backwards but I am saying that the democratic situation can best guarantee them and their achievements."

Furthermore, Sharif believes that, "the current situation does not allow for Al Fadhila party to forge any alliance," and added that "the situation has reached the crossroads."

He also stated that his movement had "withdrawn from the United Iraqi Alliance due to the dismantling that was taking place among the present alliances on a sectarian or national basis, with the exception of the Kurdistan Alliance (KA) which has its own special circumstances."

Meanwhile, Masum doubts that there will ever be an Arab alliance against the Kurds, expecting that there would be further alliances formed on a national basis with the intention of advancing the political process forward.

Head of the office of Kurdish President Masoud

Barzani, Dr. Fouad Hussein said that, "Any alliance against the Kurds is destined to fail since it would be against the Iraqi national project which the Kurdish people believe in and work towards."

Kurdish political writer and Deputy Editor of 'Kurdistan' newspaper Adalat Abdallah said, "Any Iraqi

political party reserves the right to establish alliances and blocs so long as it is in the Iraqi national interest."

He told Asharq Al-Awsat from his office in Sulaymaniyah, "If the nature of these alliances is sectarian or nationalistic against another nationality then it

means that it is working against the national Iraqi project. Any alliance against the Kurds is doomed to fail," he concluded.



January 26, 2008

Iraq: Kurdish Ambitions Generate Backlash

By **Sumedha Senanayake**

Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty

On January 13, a coalition of 10 Shi'ite and Sunni political blocs announced the formation of a new broad-based alliance called the National Understanding Project that intends to do away with the sectarian quota system and support national reconciliation.

Among the blocs included were the Sunni-led Iraqi National Dialogue Council, the Iraqi Front for National Dialogue, and independent members of the Iraqi Accordance Front (Al-Tawafuq); the Shi'a-led Islamic Al-Da'wah Party, Islamic Al-Da'wah Party-Iraq Organization, and followers of radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr; and the secular-leaning Iraqi National List.

The formation of the alliance was announced as an attempt to work for the benefit of Iraq, but more importantly to check Kurdish motives, which the group believes are dividing the country.

The alliance is the latest move in a growing chorus of voices from both Sunni and Shi'ite parties warning against growing Kurdish assurance and moves toward autonomy. Their attempts to set their own oil policy, as well as their increasing boldness in pursuing their interests inside a federal Iraq, have ruffled feathers among other Iraqi interest groups, as well as in neighboring Turkey.

In a January 14 interview with the Iraq News Agency, Muhammad Uthman, a parliament deputy and member of the Kurdish Alliance, condemned the new coalition, describing it as a direct threat to Kurdish aspirations. "Surely, the Kurdish Alliance will adopt a position toward this new alliance, because it basically targets the achievements made by the Kurdish people," he said. "This bloc seeks to push the Kurdish issue many steps back."

Kurds' Oil Deals Raise Hackles

Soon after the formation of the new alliance, the pan-Arab daily "Al-Hayat" reported on January 15 that approximately 150 Iraqi lawmakers from both Sunni and Shi'ite parties signed a statement criticizing moves by Iraq's Kurds as overreaching and overly ambitious.

Among the moves that have particularly disturbed the signatories were the Kurdistan regional government's (KRG) continued insistence on signing oil deals with foreign firms without the consent of the Baghdad government. Since the Kurds passed their own oil law in August 2007, they have signed 15 production-sharing contracts with some 20 foreign firms.

Iraqi Oil Minister Husayn al-Shahristani has repeatedly said that only the ministry had the legal authority to sign contracts, and described the Kurds' deals as "illegal." In November, he took the unprecedented step of warning foreign firms that signed deals with the KRG that they would be barred from seeking future contracts with the federal government.

The Kurds see the vast oil reserves in their semi-autonomous region as rightfully theirs, and while they believe the oil contracts are legitimate and within their rights, some non-Kurdish lawmakers see the deals as a direct threat to Iraq's unity. Complicating the situation further are similar aspirations by the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC) to form a semi-autonomous Shi'ite region comprising eight governorates in the south. This scenario, the signatories fear, would essentially lead to the disintegration of Iraq.

At a news conference after the statement was signed, Usama al-Nujayfi of the secular-leaning Iraqi National List claimed that the Kurds' oil deals were setting a dangerous precedent. "There must be a formula for maintaining the unity of Iraq and the distribution of its wealth," he said. "Oil and gas are a national wealth and we are concerned about those who want to

go it alone when it comes to signing deals."

Kurdish Demands Stall Budget

The passing of the Accountability and Justice Law on January 12, which paved the way for some former Ba'athists to return to their government and military positions, was seen as a rare display of unity within the Council of Ministers. However, that unity was short-lived as a new row erupted on January 22 when several political blocs refused to ratify Iraq's \$48 billion budget for 2008, citing excessive demands by the Kurds.

According to several lawmakers, the dispute centered on a demand by the Kurds that 17 percent of the national budget be allocated to their region, a figure based on population estimates. In addition, the Kurds also wanted funds from the national defense budget to be used to pay for their regional security force, the peshmerga.

Many non-Kurdish lawmakers balked at the request. Al-Nujayfi of the Iraqi National List described the Kurds' demands as unacceptable, AFP reported. "Kurdistan's share of 17 percent is not fair and the peshmerga allocations should rather be taken from Kurdistan's allocations, not from the Defense Ministry," he said.

Hasan al-Shimmari, a member of the Shi'a-led Al-Fadhila (Virtue) Party, said his party rejected the "unjustifiable allocations" of the budget, which did "not meet the needs of the Iraqi people."

Parliament speaker Mahmud al-Mashhadani postponed voting on the budget until at least January 24 and it remains unclear whether a resolution can be reached.

Kirkuk Issue Still Contentious

The status of Kirkuk was to be resolved under Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution. The resolution calls for a three-step process of "normalization," which seeks to reverse the Arabization policies of the former Ba'athist regime when thousands of Kurds and non-Arabs were forcibly evicted from Kirkuk and replaced with Arabs from central and southern Iraq. Normalization is then to be followed by a census, and finally a referendum to determine whether the governorate will be annexed into the Kurdish region.

However, there has been fierce opposition to Article 140 on multiple fronts. The sizable Arab and Turkoman populations in the governorate adamantly oppose it, fearing that if the Kurds end up controlling Kirkuk, they may be forced out. Turkey also rejects the plan, voicing concern that if Iraqi Kurds control Kirkuk and its oil resources, their increased wealth and power could in turn fuel Kurdish separatism in Turkey.

The referendum was scheduled to take place by the end of 2007, but logistical issues prevented it and the Kurds reluctantly agreed to a UN-sponsored deal that postponed the vote by six months. Now, the National Understanding Project has said that since the constitutional deadline has passed, Article 140 should be annulled and instead the future of Kirkuk determined through a negotiated settlement.

Kurds say this is out of the question, stressing that the Iraqi Constitution mandates that Article 140 be fully implemented. In the past, some Kurds indicated that Kirkuk was "the red line" and any attempt to derail Article 140 could lead to violence.

However, as recent events point out, the Kurds are under increasing pressure to reach a compromise on some of their ambitions. If the 150 signatories to the statement are any indication, continued intransigence by the Kurds could lead them to be increasingly isolated in a region that has been historically hostile toward Kurdish ambitions.

KURDISH FRUSTRATION WITH MALIKI GROWS

Rifts over key issues threaten alliance between Kurdish authorities and Baghdad.

IWPR(Institute for War & Peace Reporting)

Tensions are building between Kurdish leaders and Arab prime minister Nouri al-Maliki's government in Baghdad, threatening to divide two of Iraq's strongest political allies.

Kurdish leaders accuse Maliki's government of not acting on issues most important to the Kurds, such as resolving a dispute over ownership of Kirkuk province and the funding of Kurdish forces known as the Peshmerga.

At the same time, the Iraqi Kurdish government has forged ahead with signing private oil contracts without the approval of the central government, irking Baghdad and reigniting debates about how much power Iraq's regional governments should hold.

The Kurdish Alliance, the second-largest political bloc in the country, holds 53 of Baghdad parliament's 275 seats and are members of Maliki's Shia-led government. The recent tensions have damaged one of the strongest alliances in Iraq's severely fractured political landscape. The political disputes have simmered since last summer, escalating over the past few weeks. While Kurdish leaders insist they won't pull out of Maliki's government, they are growing increasingly vocal with their demands.

"I wouldn't call it a crisis, but there are ups and downs and mistrust between the two sides," said Qassim Dawd, an Iraqi parliament MP from the Maliki's United Iraqi Alliance list. Kurdish leaders "have been negligent and made a lot of mistakes", said Mahmood Osman, an independent Kurdish member of the Baghdad assembly and one of the most



vocal Kurdish critics of Maliki's government.

"Federalism is new to Iraq, so undoubtedly problems like these would arise," said Osman.

"[The Kurds] took for granted that Baghdad would follow through on its promises," he said. "One should not depend on promises, but actions."

Iraqi Kurdistan's decision to sign independently about 15 oil contracts with international firms is one of the most contentious issues. The region approved an oil law last year that paved the way for the agreements. The politically paralysed central government has yet to vote on a national oil law.

The Iraqi constitution states that central government controls oil revenues, however it does not stipulate who should manage issues like oil contracts and production. The Kurdistan Regional Government's natural resources minister Ashti Hawrami is in Baghdad this week to try to resolve the oil contracts dispute with the oil ministry, according to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's news service. Nechirvan

Barzani, the KRG's prime minister, was not able to resolve any of the issues during a visit to Baghdad earlier this month.

Iraqi oil minister Hussein al-Shahristani deems the KRG's contracts illegal and has threatened to bar oil firms working for the Iraqi Kurdistan authorities from doing business with Baghdad.

Dawd blamed the Iraqi government for dragging its feet on regulating oil. He said that "our Kurdish brothers" started signing contracts months after the KRG requested that the central government ratify the agreements.

Dawd is more sympathetic than many politicians. Last week, in a challenge to the Kurds, 145 MPs from a dozen political lists - including Sunni and Shia Arabs, Turkoman and Yezidis - signed a declaration supporting the central government's control over all of Iraq's natural resources.

The MPs also said that Iraq's political factions should resolve the future status of Kirkuk without a referendum. Although Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution called for a plebiscite to be held on Kirkuk by

the end of 2007, the vote has been postponed in part because of rising violence in the province.

The delays over Kirkuk, an oil-rich city which is home to Kurds, Turkoman and Arabs, has frustrated Kurdish leaders who want it to be administered by the KRG. Kurdish leaders are under heavy public pressure to bring Kirkuk under KRG control, as many Kurds believe that Kirkuk is a historically Kurdish area. The late Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein carried out several ethnic cleansing operations in Kirkuk to change the demography of the province. Thousands of Kurds and Turkoman were displaced from the city and Arabs replaced them.

Meanwhile, the KRG is waiting for Maliki to approve funds for 80,000 Peshmarga fighters, and there is an ongoing debate over how much revenue Iraqi Kurdistan should receive from central government: The Kurds maintained that they are 17 per cent of the population and, as such, are entitled to 17 per cent of oil revenues, while non-Kurds have argued that Kurds are only 13 per cent of the population. Iraq has not had an accurate census in decades.

Early last month, Kurdish leaders sent a "very strong" memorandum to Maliki demanding that the government quickly clarify its position on Kurdish-related issues, said Mohammad Mala Qadir, a politburo member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party. Mala Qadir said Maliki had not responded.

"We'll keep negotiating with [the Iraqi government]," he said. "That way, they can't ignore us."

The New York Times

January 28, 2008

8 Decades, 7 Iraqi Flags

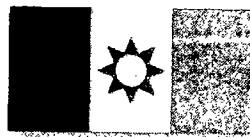
In World War I, Britain enticed Hussein, the sherif, or protector, of Mecca, to head a revolt against Ottoman rule across the Arabian Peninsula, in hopes that he would become the new caliph of all Islam. The British diplomat Mark Sykes designed a red, black, green and white banner for Hussein's son Faisal to fight under. After victory, Britain and France carved the region into separate new nations, and those colors, in varying patterns, came to fly over many Arab capitals. In Iraq, the colors have endured through the decades, but the design has changed again and again — most recently last week — like chapter headings in a tempestuous history.

JOHN KIFNER



Britain's Kingdom 1924-1958

After France evicted Hussein's son Faisal from Syria, Britain set him up as king in Iraq. He ruled until 1958, flying a variant of the flag of the Arab Revolt; it closely resembled the one flown next door by his brother Abdullah, who became king of Jordan, and also the one later adopted by the Palestinian national movement. In Iraq's version, two white stars in a foreshortened red triangle stood for Arabs and Kurds.



The Generals' Republic 1959-1963

British sway over Iraq ended when the monarchy was overthrown in a bloody military coup in 1958; the generals adopted an entirely new flag, keeping the Arab nationalist colors but turning the horizontal lines vertical and placing a yellow sun in the middle to represent Iraq's Kurds.



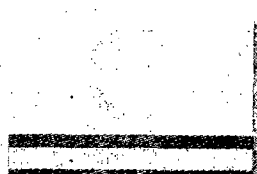
The Arabs' Dream 1963-1991

By 1963, Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser had made pan-Arab socialism the dream of the day. Iraq adopted the red-white-black template in use in Egypt and Syria, and put three stars in the center to signify a dream of eventual union with them. Later, the stars were interpreted as three ideals of the Baath Party under Saddam Hussein — unity, freedom and socialism, none of which were fully realized.



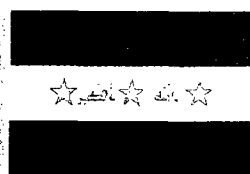
The Dictator's Prayer 1991-2004

In January 1991, with American-led coalition forces on his border about to drive his invasion forces out of Kuwait, the hitherto secular Saddam Hussein decided to write a reference to Islam on the flag, so he added a one-line incantation — "Allahu akbar" ("God is great") — between the stars, and Iraqis took it to be his handwriting. He lost the war, but kept the flag.



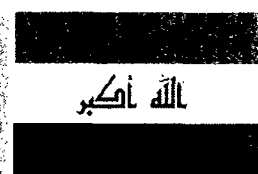
The Flag That Never Flew 2004

After American invasion forces ousted Mr. Hussein five years ago, the Iraqi Governing Council sought designs for a flag that would convey a clean break with the past. Its choice featured the Islamic crescent, but in colors reminiscent of Israel's blue-and-white flag. Iraqis rejected it before it could fly.



De-Saddamification 2004-2008

Instead of the new design, the national flag in use since 2004 became a modification of Mr. Hussein's — retaining the homage to Islam, but in a Kufic script that dates from ancient Mesopotamia. This removed the inscription a step from Mr. Hussein's banner.



De-Baathification 2008

The change of script did not satisfy Iraq's Kurds. Still associating the stars with Baathism, they banned the flag from territory they controlled and flew their own flag. And they demanded more changes if the national flag were to fly over an international conference of Arab legislators in Kurdish territory this year. Unable to agree on a permanent revision, the government decided that pan-Arab stripes with the Kufic inscription but no stars will have to do for a year.

'UNTOUCHABLES' NABBED IN RAID

A new chapter opens in the investigation into the 'Ergenekon' gang, which some claim is part of Turkey's deep state. The court decides that 13 suspects be arrested, among them Ret Gen Veli Küçük

ISTANBUL - TDN with wire dispatches

After a record amount of time in Istanbul's 13th Criminal Court, eight alleged members of the "Ergenekon" gang – including a former top military commander – were arrested at the beginning of the weekend on charges of "provoking armed rebellion against the government." With Saturday's arrests the total number of arrested has risen to 13. Among those arrested is Ret. Brig. General Veli Küçük, the alleged founder of the Gendarmerie Intelligence Anti-Terror Unit (JİTEM). Despite various allegations against him, Küçük has remained virtually untouchable for the last decade.

The crackdown follows a promise by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to eradicate clandestine hard-line nationalist groups that allegedly target people they consider to be a threat to the country's unity, The Associated Press said in a report.

Following a four-day police interrogation, the suspects were taken to court late Friday where they were interrogated by the prosecutor until 5 a.m. Saturday. They were then taken to appear in front of the judge by 5 p.m. on the same day, after which 13 of them, including Küçük, were arrested and imprisoned, according to newspaper reports yesterday.

High-profile names:

Those arrested include Ret. Col. Fikri Karadağ, president of the "Kuvayı Milliye" (National Forces) Association, lawyer Kemal Kerişsiz, the public relations representative of the Turkish Orthodox Church, Sevgi Erenerol, and alleged mafia boss Sami Hoştan.

Kerişsiz gained notoriety for leading campaigns against prominent intellectuals including novelists Orhan Pamuk, Elif Şafak and Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, who was murdered in January 2007.

Among detainees released on Friday was columnist Güler Kömürcü of daily Akşam, a lawyer, Fuat Turgut who defended an alleged instigator in the Dink murder and Ali Yasak, an alleged crime boss.

The suspects were all taken into custody after a police raid in Istanbul's Ümraniye district in June that uncovered dozens of hand grenades. The grenades were seized at the home of a retired, non-commissioned military officer.

The suspects were "preparing to assassinate a leading figure," according to press reports. Mass-circulation daily Hürriyet said Nobel literature prize laureate Orhan Pamuk was on the "hit list," while other newspapers reported that pro-Kurdish politicians Leyla Zana and Ahmet Türk were also targets of the shadowy organization.

Provoking a coup?:

The gang "hoped" that the chaos after those murders would provoke a military coup that would topple the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, according to various newspaper reports. Nationalists and ultra-nationalists accuse the government of having a hidden "Islamic agenda," and for making too many concessions to the European Union.

A court has issued a news blackout on the investigation into the gang.

With the arrests Küçük became the third former – or actual – member of the powerful Turkish military to be imprisoned. Throughout the Republic's history only two other "pashas" have been arrested: The first one was General Mustafa Muğlalı, charged with ordering the killing of 32 Kurdish peasants who were caught smuggling goods from the Iranian border and accused of stealing livestock. The peasants were executed by a shooting squad on July 30, 1943. Muğlalı was tried at a military court three years later and was sentenced to 20 years of prison, but died in prison in 1951.

The second "pasha" to be put behind bars was Admiral İlhami Erdil, who was arrested last year on charges of illegal enrichment.

The Şemdinli bombing:

Meanwhile, in an unusually harsh speech Saturday, a former lawmaker from the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) pointed to the many unresolved murder cases in the southeast.

"The real Ergenekon are those that have killed people in the [southeast] region with identity cards given by the state itself," Mesut Değer, a member of the CHP executive board, said during the party's district congress in Van, 1,250 kilometers east of Ankara.

"In the Şemdinli case, the accused were set free," Değer was quoted as saying by



the Doğan news agency, referring to another shadow case. "Now we see the start of the Ergenekon case. What is Ergenekon? They say it is defending the unity of the state. Are we aiming for something else? The real Ergenekon are those that have their signatures on many unsolved murders in this region," he said.

The Şemdinli case takes its name from Hakkari's Şemdinli town, some 1,500 kilometers southeast of Ankara. On Nov. 9, 2005, a bookstore in the town belonging to a former member of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was bombed, leaving one person dead. Minutes after the attack locals caught the alleged criminals and handed them over to the police. The identities of the suspects created controversy, as two were active sergeants on duty and the third one was a former PKK confessor. On the same day, as CHP Hakkari deputy Esat Canan and a state prosecutor were mobilized to investigate the incident, they were fired upon and a second person was killed in this attack. Claiming clandestine state forces were on a killing spree, locals at various towns in Hakkari protested in the streets, and three more people were killed during clashes between the police and protesters.

Le désarroi face au nucléaire iranien

Le Monde 22 janvier 2008

Les ministres des affaires étrangères des pays traitant le dossier nucléaire iranien (Etats-Unis, Royaume-Uni, France, Allemagne, Russie, Chine) doivent se réunir mardi 22 janvier à Berlin pour discuter de nouvelles sanctions contre l'Iran à l'ONU. L'Iran refuse toujours de suspendre l'enrichissement d'uranium. La diplomatie patine.

Si une troisième résolution de sanctions est votée – ce qui n'est pas acquis –, tout porte à croire que son contenu sera modeste. Le dernier train de sanctions remonte à mars 2007. Depuis, rien. La Russie et la Chine ne veulent pas entendre parler de mesures coercitives fortes.

L'idée de sanctions européennes supplémentaires contre l'Iran, prônée par Nicolas Sarkozy pour contourner les blocages à l'ONU, n'a pas non plus progressé. L'Europe n'a pris aucune décision concrète.

Il est possible que rien ne bouge avant le mois de mars, date des prochaines élections législatives en Iran. C'est aussi, grosso modo, le délai pour que le « plan de travail » élaboré entre Téhéran et l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA) soit mené à bien. L'objectif de ce plan est d'éclaircir des pans passés du programme iranien. La Russie et la Chine veulent lui donner une chance, gagner du temps, ne pas accabler l'Iran.

Le directeur de l'AIEA, Mohamed ElBaradei, s'est récemment rendu en Iran, où il a été reçu par l'ayatollah Khamenei, et a passé un accord. Son voyage semblait être un contre-feu au déplacement de George Bush au Proche-Orient. Le président américain a déclaré que l'Iran était une « menace pour la sécurité des nations » et le « principal parrain du terrorisme dans le monde ». La diplomatie piétine aussi parce que, ces dernières semaines, l'administration Bush, la France, le Royaume-Uni, l'Allemagne, se sont consacrés à réparer les dégâts causés par le rapport des agences de renseignement américaines, publié le 3 décembre 2007. La phrase la plus citée de ce rapport (« A l'automne 2003, l'Iran a arrêté son programme militaire nucléaire ») a eu pour effet d'atténuer la perception de la menace et le sentiment qu'il y avait urgence à agir.

Pourtant, cette même phrase contenait un constat essentiel : elle établissait la nature militaire du programme. L'Iran a toujours prétendu qu'il était pacifique. La Russie dit qu'elle n'a jamais vu de preuve du contraire. L'AIEA n'a pour sa part jamais formulé d'avis sur ce point, se disant incapable de trancher, faute d'accès suffisant aux personnes, aux documents et aux sites.

En toute logique, si on se fie à ce rapport, le « plan de travail » de l'AIEA avec l'Iran ne devrait jamais aboutir. En effet, si l'Iran fait vraiment la transparence sur l'historique de son programme nucléaire, il apparaîtra à un moment donné que le programme visait la fabrication de l'arme nucléaire. Terrible aveu, auquel Téhéran pourra difficilement se résoudre.

La France, le Royaume-Uni et l'Allemagne ont affirmé que rien dans le rapport américain ne permettait de minimiser le danger émanant de l'Iran. Tant que l'enrichissement d'uranium continue –

c'est le volet le plus difficile du programme nucléaire, à usage dual, civil ou militaire –, tous les soupçons perdureront.

Mais un autre élément contenu dans le rapport suscite de vives inquiétudes, qui ne sont guère exprimées publiquement par les responsables occidentaux. Il s'agit de la mention d'activités d'enrichissement d'uranium qui seraient restées clandestines, distinctes de celles qui ont été découvertes en 2002 à Natanz, au sud de Téhéran.

Cela avait déjà été évoqué en novembre 2007, dans le dernier rapport de M. ElBaradei. Or voilà que, selon le renseignement américain : « Pour la production d'uranium hautement enrichi destiné à une arme [nucléaire], l'Iran utilisera probablement des installations clandestines plutôt que ses sites nucléaires déclarés. »

Où sont ces installations restées secrètes à ce jour ? S'agit-il des expérimentations faites sur des centrifugeuses P2, de « deuxième génération », livrées clandestinement à l'Iran en provenance du Pakistan ? A quel point l'utilisation d'une telle technologie accélérerait-elle l'acquisition de matière fissile suffisante pour faire une bombe ou atteindre le seuil militaire nucléaire ?

L'AIEA n'est pas en mesure de répondre. Depuis deux ans, elle a été privée par le régime iranien de la possibilité d'effectuer des inspections larges et inopinées. Elle a reconnu que sa connaissance du programme est allée « en décroissant ».

Ces derniers mois, les signes d'enlisement du dossier se sont accumulés. Le processus des sanctions internationales apparaît en panne. L'administration américaine est affaiblie. Elle a donné à ses alliés, en Europe et au Proche-Orient, l'impression d'être désorientée, prise de court par le rapport de ses propres agences. Celui-ci relèverait d'un règlement de comptes entre responsables américains, après les manipulations d'informations qui ont conduit à la guerre en Irak, en 2003.

« Le danger d'une guerre existe »

C'est dans ce contexte embrouillé que deux événements militaires se sont produits. Le 6 septembre 2007, l'aviation israélienne a bombardé un site en Syrie où, selon les Américains, se construisait une centrale nucléaire de type nord-coréen. Le 6 janvier 2008, des navires américains appareillant dans le détroit d'Ormuz étaient « provoqués » par des vedettes des Gardiens de la révolution iraniens.

Le rapport du renseignement américain, par son impact, a sans doute écarté le scénario d'une action militaire américaine contre l'Iran. Mais c'est désormais la possibilité d'une initiative israélienne qui est mentionnée. « Nous n'écartons aucune option », a dit le premier ministre, Ehoud Olmert, le 14 janvier. « Le danger d'une guerre existe », a déclaré mi-décembre Nicolas Sarkozy au *Nouvel observateur*, « les Israéliens considèrent que leur sécurité est vraiment menacée ».

La France vient d'annoncer la création d'une base militaire à Abu Dhabi, face à l'Iran. George Bush a menacé l'Iran de « conséquences sérieuses » si des navires américains étaient « attaqués » dans la région. L'enjeu semble être de faire croire à l'Iran que l'usage de la force n'est pas écarté.

Le régime des mollahs, tout en étant agité de divisions, ne cède toujours rien. Il fait tourner ses centrifugeuses et attend qu'une nouvelle administration s'installe à Washington. Le temps qu'il reste avant qu'il ne franchisse la ligne rouge de la maîtrise technologique d'une capacité militaire demeure une inconnue fondamentale. ■

Analyse

Natalie Nougayrède

LE FIGARO 24 janvier 2008

Le drapeau irakien perd les étoiles du Baas

MOYEN-ORIENT

Le Parlement a choisi le nouvel étendard de l'Irak, tournant définitivement le dos à la dictature de Saddam Hussein.

EXIT les trois étoiles symboles du baasisme déchu. Le nouveau drapeau irakien ferme le chapitre noir de l'ère de Saddam Hussein. Par 110 voix contre 50, le Parlement a surmonté ses divergences, en votant hier le dessin du futur étendard de l'Irak, même s'il ne s'agit que d'une modification, avant l'adoption l'année prochaine du drapeau définitif de l'ancienne Mésopotamie. Un casse-tête depuis la chute de la dictature en 2003, reflet des fractures politico-confessionnelles qui entravent tout renouveau de l'Irak.



L'inscription *Allah akbar* (Dieu est grand) a été conservée en arabe classique sur le nouvel étendard irakien (en haut). AFP

En 2004, déjà, un premier essai avait dû être abandonné. Voulant faire table rase du passé, les dirigeants irakiens avaient imposé un emblème radicalement différent du précédent, mais sa ressemblance avec l'oriflamme israélienne avait suscité une vive polémique. Principales victimes du régime baasiste, les Kurdes et les chiïtes, qui dominent le jeu politique, sont revenus ensuite à la charge. Et l'inscription *Allah akbar* (Dieu est grand), soi-disant écrite de la main de Saddam Hussein pour flatter le sentiment religieux de ses compatriotes, fut finalement rédigée en arabe classique.

Dépasser les clivages confessionnels

« Le nouveau drapeau est le signe qu'un changement a été réalisé en Irak », se félicite Humam Hamoudi, un responsable du Conseil islamique suprême, membre de la coalition au pouvoir à Bagdad. Si les couleurs – rouge, blanc et noir –, de l'ancien drapeau demeurent, en revanche les étoiles, qui symbolisaient la devise du parti

Baas (Unité, Liberté et Socialisme), ont disparu. Après l'adoption la semaine dernière de la loi autorisant le retour d'anciens baasistes dans l'administration, cette avancée marque une certaine volonté du Parlement de dépasser ses clivages confessionnels pour parvenir à une réconciliation nationale, la priorité des États-Unis aujourd'hui en Irak. Cela étant, alors que la violence ces derniers mois a reculé, de nombreux obstacles demeurent.

Depuis bientôt un an, les députés se montrent incapables d'adopter la loi pétrolière, cruciale pour le redécoupage économique et le retour des « majors » américaines ou européennes entre le Tigre et l'Euphrate. Par ailleurs, les parlementaires ne sont toujours pas parvenus à voter le budget 2008, entraînant ainsi l'ajournement de projets de développement, attendus depuis longtemps par la population. Avant-hier, la dernière session de l'Assemblée a une nouvelle fois échoué sur la répartition des fonds publics entre les principales régions du pays.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT
(avec AFP)

Le Monde

26 janvier 2008

TURQUIE SOCIÉTÉ SECRÈTE POLITICO-MAFIEUSE

Vague d'arrestations au sein de l'extrême droite turque

ISTANBUL

CORRESPONDANCE

Trente-cinq personnes liées à une organisation d'extrême droite ont été interpellées lors d'une vaste opération de police menée, mardi 22 et mercredi 23 janvier, dans toute la Turquie. Elles ont été placées en garde à vue. Cette société secrète politico-mafieuse proche de l'extrême droite ultranationaliste, qui s'était baptisée « Ergenekon » – du nom d'une vallée d'Asie centrale, berceau du peuple turc, selon la légende –, est soupçonnée d'être impliquée dans plusieurs attaques à caractère politique.

Parmi les interpellés, figurent une éditeur nationaliste, la porte-parole du patriarcat turc orthodoxe ou encore l'avocat Kemal Kerinçsiz, responsable d'une série de procès contre des intellectuels turcs pour « insultes à l'identité turque ».

Surtout, on y trouve le général à la retraite Veli Küçük, une figure de la lutte contre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). Fondateur des « Jitem », l'unité antiterroriste de la gendarmerie, cet officier supérieur avait aussi menacé

de mort à plusieurs reprises le journaliste d'origine arménienne Hrant Dink, assassiné il y a un an. Le général, symbole de ce que l'on nomme en Turquie « l'Etat profond », avait autour de lui une organisation militaire camouflée sous diverses fondations ou associations nationalistes.

Ergenekon pourrait être impliquée dans l'assassinat de Hrant Dink, en janvier 2006, celui du prêtre Santoro ou encore l'attaque contre le Conseil d'Etat perpétuée la même année. Des actes destinés à sauver la République contre ses « ennemis de l'intérieur ».

« Une partie de l'Etat profond »

Les noms des principaux protagonistes se recourent et apparaissent déjà dans l'affaire de Susurluk en 1996. Dans ce village de l'ouest du pays, on avait retrouvé, dans une voiture accidentée, les corps d'un chef de la police d'Istanbul, d'un député et d'une figure de l'extrême droite recherchée pour trafic de drogue.

Selon la presse turque, ce groupe projetait une série d'assassinats, contre le Prix Nobel de littérature Orhan Pamuk, contre

plusieurs politiciens kurdes ou contre l'éditorialiste Fehmi Koru, ami d'enfance du président de la République, Abdullah Gül. Le groupe envisageait également de « créer les conditions d'un coup d'Etat », selon le quotidien libéral *Radikal*.

« Ce sont les restes des réseaux datant de la guerre froide », analyse M. Koru, faisant référence aux cellules organisées par l'OTAN et chargées de la lutte anti-communiste. « C'est une partie de l'Etat profond. Maintenant, si les autorités ont décidé d'aller le plus loin possible, il y aura d'autres arrestations et d'autres mises en garde à vue », juge-t-il.

Si certains observateurs enthousiastes parlaient mercredi d'une attaque inédite de « l'Etat contre l'Etat profond », d'autres se montraient plus prudents sur la portée réelle de ce coup de filet. Ergin Cilmen, l'un des avocats de Hrant Dink, estime que, « pour la première fois, l'enquête semble sérieuse... Nous devenons plus optimistes ». « L'Etat fait son travail », a sobrement commenté le premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

IRAK TERRORISME

Une liste
de « 606 djihadistes »
d'Al-Qaida en Irak
publiée sur Internet

UN DOCUMENT surprenant vient d'être mis en ligne sur Internet par le Combating Terrorism Center (CTC), un organisme de recherche de l'académie militaire américaine de West Point. Il s'agit d'une liste répertoriant 606 personnes, majoritairement saoudiennes, identifiées comme des djihadistes au service de la branche d'Al-Qaida en Irak. Ces documents auraient été retrouvés dans des ordinateurs portables découverts en octobre 2007, lors d'un raid de l'armée américaine dans la zone désertique bordant la ville irakienne de Sinjar, non loin de la frontière syrienne. Ce raid visait, selon des sources militaires citées par le *New York Times* du 22 novembre, une cellule soupçonnée d'accueillir les combattants étrangers transitant par la Syrie.

Présentées sous leur forme originale (en arabe) et traduites en anglais par le CTC, ces listes se présentent sous forme de formulaires quasiment administratifs, estampillés « Etat islamique en Irak », nom de l'alliance sunnite de la guérilla irakienne ayant officiellement fait allégeance à Al-Qaida. Ces formulaires comprennent les identités, « noms de guerre », pays et villes d'origine, numéros de téléphone, voire photos, des recrues (classées comme « combattants » ou « martyrs »), enregistrées à leur arrivée sur le sol irakien par le réseau islamiste. Dans certains cas figurent également les réponses à un questionnaire : où ont été effectués les entraînements ?, quels ont été les pays de transit ?, quelle est la contribution financière apportée par la recrue ?, etc.

IRAK
Au moins dix-sept morts
dans un attentat-suicide

TIKRIT. Au moins 17 personnes ont été tuées, lundi 21 janvier, dans un attentat-suicide visant un responsable de la sécurité de la province de Salaheddine, dans le centre-nord de l'Irak. Un kamikaze a déclenché la veste d'explosifs qu'il portait sur lui au milieu d'une cérémonie de condoléances dans le village d'Al-Hajaj, à 200 km au nord de Bagdad. Cette province est un ancien bastion de l'insurrection sunnite. Les attaques contre les forces gouvernementales et les milices sunnites travaillant avec l'armée américaine y sont devenues quasi quotidiennes.

— (AFP.)

La Turquie dans l'UE ?
C'est toujours non !

Un groupe de parlementaires de la majorité réaffirme son refus d'intégrer Ankara à l'Europe

Le 21 février 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy déclarait avec justesse : « *La Turquie, qui n'est pas un pays européen, n'a pas sa place à l'intérieur de l'Union européenne.* » Nous ne pouvons qu'approuver cette réalité.

Pour que l'Europe existe politiquement, pour qu'elle soit une réalité pour nos concitoyens, il est nécessaire qu'elle ait des frontières, et celles-ci existent. C'est pourquoi nous sommes opposés à l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union européenne comme 71 % des Français et 66 % des Allemands, selon un sondage Louis-Harris de juin 2007. La Turquie est un Etat d'Asie mineure dont les frontières touchent la Syrie, l'Irak et l'Azerbaïdjan. Faire entrer la Turquie dans l'Europe signifie déplacer nos frontières sur les hauteurs du Kurdistan comme dans le désert irakien. L'Europe sans frontières, c'est la mort de l'idée de l'Europe politique, l'Europe sans frontières, c'est la condamner.

Nous sommes convaincus qu'intégrer la Turquie serait une erreur, car cela créerait un choc budgétaire qui mettrait en péril cette nouvelle Europe. En effet, selon une étude de la Commission européenne, le coût de l'intégration turque équivaldrait au quart du budget annuel de l'Union. L'entrée de la Turquie, dont la richesse par habitant est quatre fois plus faible que celle de l'Union élargie, ferait perdre « leurs droits à subsides » à une douzaine de régions devenues statistiquement « trop riches ». Elle coûterait, rien qu'en matière agricole, 11,3 milliards d'euros par an, soit bien plus que le total des dépenses agricoles pour dix membres de l'UE.

Par ailleurs, il est impossible d'intégrer un Etat qui ne reconnaît toujours pas le génocide arménien, qui a coûté la vie à plus de 1,5 million d'Arméniens et qui n'a toujours pas effectué non plus d'avancées sur la question kurde ou encore sur la question chypriote. C'est la première fois dans l'histoire de l'Europe qu'un candidat à l'adhésion refuse de reconnaître un Etat membre de l'Union européenne et refuse d'accepter ses bateaux et ses avions sur son territoire !

Faut-il rappeler que la liberté d'expression, la liberté de la presse et la liberté d'as-

sociation ne sont toujours pas respectées : l'article 301 du code pénal a été invoqué pour poursuivre des journalistes et des écrivains, notamment le Prix Nobel de littérature 2006, Orhan Pamuk.

En 2007, Arat Dink, le fils du journaliste d'origine arménienne assassiné, a été condamné à un an de prison avec sursis pour avoir publié des propos de son père sur le génocide arménien. Le 17 janvier, un tribunal turc a bloqué l'accès au site de vidéos YouTube. L'origine de ce blocage serait la présence de vidéos qui « insultent » Mustafa Kenal, fondateur et premier président de la République turque. Pour ces différentes raisons, et comme l'a souligné le président de la République, les négociations engagées pour l'adhésion de la Turquie doivent déboucher sur un partenariat privilégié, car il est nécessaire d'avoir des accords commerciaux avec ses voisins immédiats.

C'est à la France de prendre l'initiative avec ses partenaires du sud de l'Europe d'une Union méditerranéenne, comme elle prit jadis l'initiative de construire l'Union européenne. Ce n'est pas aux Etats-Unis de décider de la construction européenne et des élargissements possibles. Nous avons fait l'Europe pour exprimer une volonté commune, pas pour organiser notre renoncement collectif. La Turquie ne peut prétendre entrer dans l'Europe puisqu'elle ne fait pas partie de l'Europe, c'est une évidence qu'il nous faut continuer à défendre.

Sachant que l'article 88.5 de la Constitution prévoit que toute nouvelle « *adhésion d'un Etat à l'Union européenne (...) est soumise au référendum par le président de la République* », et connaissant l'opinion des Français, nous restons fidèles à notre optimisme sur ce sujet. ■

Alain Lamassoure, député européen (PPE) ; Thierry Mariani, député (UMP) ; Bernard Carayon (UMP) ; Jean-Pierre Decool (UMP) ; Lionel Luca (UMP) ; Christian Ménard (UMP) ; Jean-Frédéric Poisson (UMP) ; Philippe Vitel (UMP) ; Richard Mallié (UMP) ; Hervé de Charette (UMP), Georges Fenech (UMP).

TURQUIE RÉFORME DE LA CONSTITUTION

La polémique turque sur le voile rebondit

ISTANBUL
CORRESPONDANCE

Le projet de réforme de la Constitution, déposé au Parlement d'Ankara, mardi 29 janvier, doit être entériné la semaine prochaine. Mais il a d'ores et déjà ravivé la rivalité entre les ex-islamistes au pouvoir et le camp kémaliste qui prépare une nouvelle mobilisation antifoulard. La réécriture de deux articles de la loi fondamentale, soutenue par le gouvernement de Recep Tayyip Erdogan, devrait aboutir, en cas de vote favorable, à la levée de l'interdiction du voile islamique dans les universités turques.

Techniquement, ce devrait être une simple formalité. Les députés de la majorité (AKP, Parti de la justice et du développement) et les ultranationalistes du MHP (Parti d'action nationaliste), qui soutiennent le projet, occupent plus des deux tiers des sièges requis pour modifier la Constitution. Devant ses députés et une assistance largement composée de femmes voilées, le premier ministre Erdogan a dénoncé les « préjugés rigides » et justifié le bien-fondé de cette réforme, soutenue par une majori-

té des Turcs : « Nous franchissons un pas important. Notre seul but est de mettre fin au traitement injuste dont sont victimes des jeunes filles aux portes des universités. » Le nouveau texte stipule que « personne ne peut être privé de son droit à l'éducation ».

Islamisation

En vertu d'une règle, instaurée après le coup d'Etat militaire de 1980 et largement contestée aujourd'hui, toute forme de voile est strictement interdite sur les campus universitaires. Pour parvenir au pouvoir, en 2002, M. Erdogan avait fait de la fin de cette interdiction l'une de ses promesses phares, pour le plus grand plaisir de la frange conservatrice de son électorat, sans toutefois la mettre en application au cours de son premier mandat.

Mais sitôt après sa réélection, en juillet 2007, la question du voile est réapparue au premier rang des priorités, devant les réformes réclamées par l'Union européenne. De quoi irriter les défenseurs intransigeants de la laïcité qui voient dans cette réforme un premier pas vers

une islamisation de la société.

Le leader du MHP, Devlet Bahçeli, a toutefois précisé que seul le foulard traditionnel noué sous le menton – *basörtüsü* – serait autorisé sur les bancs des universités. Le voile islamique qui enserre le cou, le turban, symbolique de la réislamisation des années 1980, reste théoriquement interdit. Tout comme le voile noir qui recouvre le corps ou la burka, considérés comme des attributs plus politiques que religieux. Mais les déclarations ambiguës de plusieurs membres de la majorité ont semé le trouble.

Le député AKP de Konya, Hüsnü Tuna, a estimé que les fonctionnaires devaient également être autorisés à porter le voile, ce qui a obligé son propre parti à ouvrir une enquête. Les « laïcs » craignent effet que l'université ne soit qu'une première étape. Le constitutionnaliste Ergün Özbudun, pourtant nommé par l'AKP à la tête de la commission chargée de rédiger une nouvelle Constitution, a estimé le projet « dangereux ». ■

GUILLAUME FERRIER

IRAK OFFENSIVE AMÉRICAINE

Combats contre Al-Qaida en Irak à Mossoul

LA VIOLENCE en Irak s'est déplacée selon un principe comparable à celui des « vases communicants ». Traqués à Bagdad, où les effectifs de l'armée américaine ont été renforcés depuis le printemps 2007, l'insurrection antiaméricaine et les groupes affiliés à Al-Qaida en Irak ont peu à peu déserté la capitale pour se reconstituer à sa périphérie, dans les provinces du nord et de l'est : Salaheddine, Diyala et Ninive. Durement frappée ces dernières semaines, la ville de Mossoul, capitale provinciale de Ninive, à 370 km de Bagdad, apparaît comme le nouveau sanctuaire urbain des forces djihadistes.

Le 23 janvier, un immeuble de Mossoul abritant une cache d'armes avait explosé, faisant

60 morts et plus de 280 blessés. Le lendemain, le chef de la police de la province et deux de ses adjoints avaient été tués par un kamikaze alors qu'ils inspectaient le lieu de l'explosion. Lundi 28 janvier, cinq soldats américains ont péri dans une embuscade, dans les rues de la ville. Le jour suivant, une attaque kamikaze contre une autre patrouille américaine, en plein centre de Mossoul, a tué un civil irakien et blessé une quinzaine de passants.

« Phantom Phoenix », nom de l'opération lancée début janvier par l'armée américaine, devrait donc avoir Mossoul comme principal champ de bataille. Les combats s'y annoncent rudes. Le commandant des forces américaines

dans le nord de l'Irak, le général Mark Hertling, a prédit un « long processus », dont la stratégie, similaire à celle qui avait été employée à Bagdad, visera à sécuriser un par un, chaque quartier de la ville. D'importants renforts sont déjà arrivés sur place.

Avec près de 2 millions d'habitants, Mossoul est la troisième ville d'Irak. Composée d'une population mixte d'Arabes sunnites, de Kurdes, d'Assyriens chrétiens, de Turcomans et de Yazidis, elle a longtemps été une place forte de l'idéologie baasiste. C'est dans cette ville que les deux fils de Saddam Hussein, Oudaï et Qoussaï, avaient trouvé refuge avant d'être abattus par l'armée américaine en juillet 2003. ■

CÉCILE HENNON

United Press International

Outside View: Turks, Kurds won't fight

Jan. 29, 2008 - By GEORGY MIRSKY - UPI Outside View Commentator

MOSCOW, Jan. 29 (UPI) -- Turkey has invaded northern Iraq, the domain of the Kurdistan Workers Party, several times. Five years ago I was in the area where fighting is now taking place. At that time small Turkish groups used to cross the border to deliver strikes on Kurdish positions.

What has changed since then?

Kurdish separatists are now fighting in the Kurdish areas of Turkey bordering on Iraq. When the Turkish army retaliates, separatists escape into Iraq, where they hide in the mountains, regrouping and rearming for new forays into Turkey. Iraqi Kurdistan is the natural hiding place for Kurdish separatists, and Turkey can do nothing about it.

However, they have killed Turkish soldiers this time, provoking a wave of public indignation in Turkey, and the authorities had to act more resolutely in order not to look like weaklings to their own people.

The Turkish Parliament has decided that the army must take measures to settle the situation and prevent new Kurdish attacks.

The government must now decide if it will sanction a large-scale military operation. So far, Turkey has only been delivering limited strikes, mostly from the air, which is ineffective in the mountains. The Kurds suffered some losses, but only minor ones. Turkey cannot launch a major military operation with the use of tanks at this time of the year -- it would be ineffective.

In fact, such operations are designed for the domestic population. The government just wants to show the people that it is not sitting on its hands, which seems to be enough for them.

The political aspect of the problem is much more important. A potential Turkish invasion of northern Iraq would have major political complications.

Northern Iraq, also called Iraqi Kurdistan, is actually an independent state where young Kurds do not speak Arabic and where there are very few Arab officials and soldiers. But it is formally part of Iraq, and so a large-scale Turkish invasion would be seen as an attack against a sovereign state that is a member of the United Nations.

One of Turkey's aspirations is to join the European Union, but there are numerous obstacles in its way. The opponents of the idea, including French President Nicolas Sarkozy, will use the situation as a pretext for denying access to the EU for such an aggressive state.

Relations with the United States are another crucial aspect. Turkey is a NATO member and Washington's main ally in the region. But Iraqi Kurds are one of the few U.S. allies in Iraq, especially after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Even when the Americans leave Iraq, which is bound to happen sooner or later, Iraqi Kurdistan will remain an American bridgehead in the country. Therefore, Washington would not do anything that might incite the wrath of Iraqi Kurds.

This has placed the United States between a rock and a hard place, with two of its regional allies ready to start a war against each other. Turkey seems to be more important to the United States, but the Iraqi Kurds would appeal to Washington for help in the case of a war with Turkey.

Kurds are courageous and selfless warriors who resisted Saddam Hussein for decades. They would rally to repel Turkey, but they will nevertheless need outside assistance. In this case, they will appeal not to the Iraqi government, which seems unable to deal with its own rebels, but to the United States.

It is impossible to imagine Washington sending its troops to fight its ally, Turkey, in Kurdistan. Therefore, the United States must prevent a serious conflict in the region, and Turkey will most likely listen to its recommendation.

Suppose 100,000 Turkish servicemen invaded and occupied northern Iraq. What next? How long would Turkey be able to occupy part of a foreign state? It will be unable to eliminate all guerrillas in the mountains. Moreover, Iraqi Kurds might join the guerrillas in case of a large-scale Turkish operation.

True, they do not like Turkish Kurds, saying that they stage provocations that might eventually lead to a war with Turkey. Iraqi Kurds do not want this war, because they earn a lot from trade with Turkey. But the idea of a united Kurdish nation is still alive in their hearts.

A Greater Kurdistan incorporating the Kurdish regions of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria is a utopia. The immediate goal of the Iraqi Kurds is to keep the status quo. Their leaders have said more than once that they would not secede from Iraq but only need broad autonomy. They actually have it, and if they decide to set up their own state, they would be isolated internationally. No country would recognize such a Kurdish state, and economic ties with Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran would be severed, pushing Kurds into an economic abyss.

In short, a war against Turkey is the last thing Iraqi Kurds want. Turkey does not need a war either, but it cannot sit on its hands and so is delivering pinpoint strikes in Iraqi Kurdistan. And this is all it will do in the next few months. -----

(Georgy Mirsky, Ph.D., is a senior research fellow at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, part of the Russian Academy of Sciences. This article was originally published by RIA Novosti, but the opinions in it are the author's own.) -----

(United Press International's "Outside View" commentaries are written by outside contributors who specialize in a variety of important issues. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of United Press International. In the interests of creating an open forum, original submissions are invited.)

KURDISHGL **BE** 30 January 2008

Kurds and Syria

The Syrian government has never really accepted its Kurdish community as equals to the Arab majority.

Martin Slann , Macon State College
The Globe

There are recent reports that suggest the situation of Kurds in northern Syria is, according to increasingly depressing reports, becoming more desperate. One journalist, Joseph Puder, a writer for

Frontpagemag.com, has indicated that the Kurds have long been marked for ethnic cleansing. The process began nearly half a century ago when Egyptian dictator Gamal Abdul Nasser, during the brief existence

of the Egypt/Syria United Arab Republic tried to settle Egyptians in Syrian Kurdistan. The Syrian regime is worried. It is nervous about Syria's Kurds being geographically contiguous to Iraqi Kurdistan and is

endeavoring to separate them by creating a buffer zone and then filling it with Arabs.

It is difficult to be sure just how many Kurds live in Syria or what proportion they are of the population in the northern

part of the country. The government certainly isn't interested in conducting an accurate census. However, some estimates give the Kurdish community as about 10 percent of Syria's total population, others are as much as 20 percent. It is probably higher than both those numbers near the border area with Iraq. The government (and the Syrian military) is trying to figure out a way to make sure Kurds in Syria don't think about an autonomous existence if only because the government knows that most of the country's oil reserves are to be found where

the Kurds currently reside. The Syrian Kurds are in a more precarious situation than their Iraqi counterparts across the border if only because less attention is being paid to them. There is no American presence in Syrian Kurdistan to protect the population and the central government, like the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, is violently opposed to its existence. The logic of paranoia in Damascus can only conclude that the Syrian Kurds identify with the Iraqi Kurds who are allied with the United States. Therefore, the Kurds in Syria are automatically suspect as sup-

porters of the American enemy.

There is no chance that the Assad regime is going to change its mind about Kurds in Syria. On the other hand, there is every likelihood that it will do all that it can to deprive Kurds of their language and culture and, eventually, of their ancestral lands. We've been here before. The reality hasn't changed. An independent and sovereign Kurdistan is more needed than ever before. Consider the scenario if the United States does leave Iraq: Kurdistan will be at the mercy of surrounding governments that

are well armed and determined end any Kurdish national existence before it begins. We do not require any additional evidence of Syrian or, for that matter, Turkish intentions. It may very well be that we are reaching the last opportunity when Kurdistan will have a chance to join the family of nations. It is time for the United States to unequivocally endorse an independent Kurdistan. The alternative is quickly becoming too horrific to contemplate

January 30, 2008

Guardian

Turkish military shuns head-scarf debate

By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA Associated Press Writer

ISTANBUL, Turkey — Turkey's military has a tradition of interfering in politics, even staging several coups in past decades. But on Wednesday, the chief of the secular armed forces refrained from direct comment on one of his country's most explosive debates: the Islamic head scarf.

Parliament is considering a bill that would lift a ban on female students wearing head scarves at universities, reflecting a conflict between the Islamic-oriented government and military-backed opponents who view the religious attire as a threat to Turkey's secular traditions.

As the debate among lawmakers has intensified in recent days, many Turks wondered whether the military would get involved in a replay of a political crisis last year that derailed the first presidential candidacy of Abdullah Gul, an observant Muslim.

For now, however, Turkey's top general is staying out of the fray even though the military has periodically spoken up against what it views as official moves to undermine secular principles introduced by the national founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

"I know why you are here. You want to know what the military thinks on the headscarf issue," Gen. Yasar Buyukanit said to a crush of live broadcast crews that turned up at military headquarters in Ankara, the capital, for his meeting with the Macedonian defense minister.

"There's no one in all levels of the Turkish society who doesn't know what the military's views are," Buyukanit said. "To say anything would be nothing more than stating the obvious. That is why I don't want to say anything."

The Turkish military rarely elaborates on its decision-making process, and analysts were left to speculate whether Buyukanit's comments signaled a preference to sit out the head scarf debate, or argued a robust intervention, with either public statements or behind-the-scenes lobbying.

"He appears as if he is not stressing the issue, but it means that the military is still resolutely against the head scarf issue," said Rusen Cakir, a political analyst with NTV television. "I believe the military will make its opinion more clear in communications with state institutions in the coming days."

The military showed no such restraint last year, when it jumped into an acrimonious dispute over Gul's candidacy, issuing a dire warning that secularism was at stake. But the tactic backfired when the government won a landslide in general elections and Gul, whose wife wears a head scarf, became president on a re-try.

The tumultuous year appeared to signal the diminishing political influence of the military in a country with an emboldened class of devout Muslims and aspirations to join the European Union, which says Turkey must do more to keep army generals out of politics.

Since then, tension between the military and the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has eased, and the two have cooperated in the fight against Kurdish rebels based in Iraq. But the military still resembles a parallel institution as much as an apolitical instrument of its civilian leaders.

"The chief of staff's views are his own views," Burhan Kuzu, a ruling party legislator and head of the parliamentary con-



stitutional committee, said after Buyukanit's news conference.

The committee is scheduled to discuss the head scarf bill on Friday, and constitutional amendments that would include the lifting of the ban will be debated in parliament next week.

Under the new proposal, female students would be allowed to wear head scarves at universities as long as they tie them under the chin, leaving their faces more exposed.

The attire, which is accepted in barracks and military guest houses and is not necessarily associated with Islam, appears to be aimed at appeasing secularists who view another, tightly-wound version of the head scarf as a direct challenge to the secular state. However, the nuance was unlikely to win over many government opponents.

The government, which characterizes the debate as a freedom of expression issue and says it will uphold secular ideals, has enough support from lawmakers to get the ban lifted. But an opposition party has vowed to challenge the measure in the pro-secular constitutional court if it is passed.

THE STATE OF THE (IRAQI) UNION

By Pepe Escobar

*I say this to the evil Bush - leave my country.
We do not need you and your army of darkness.
We don't need your planes and tanks.
We don't need your policy and your interference.
We don't want your democracy and fake freedom.
Get out of our land.*

- **Muqtada al-Sadr**, Iraqi Shi'ite leader

The George W Bush-sponsored Iraqi "surge" is now one year old. The US\$11 billion-a-month (and counting) Iraqi/Afghan joint quagmire keeps adding to the US government's staggering over \$9 trillion debt (it was "only" \$5.6 trillion when Bush took power in early 2001).

On the ground in Iraq, the state of the union - Bush's legacy - translates into a completely shattered nation with up to 70% unemployment, a 70% inflation rate, less than six hours of electricity a day and virtually no reconstruction, although White House-connected multinationals have bagged more than \$50 billion in competition-free contracts so far. The gleaming reconstruction success stories of course are the Vatican-sized US Embassy in Baghdad - the largest in the world - and the scores of US military bases.

Facts on the ground also attest the "surge" achieved no "political reconciliation" whatsoever in Iraq - regardless of a relentless US corporate media propaganda drive, fed by the Pentagon, to proclaim it a success. The new law to reverse de-Ba'athification - approved by a half-empty Parliament and immediately condemned by Sunni and secular parties as well as former Ba'athists themselves - will only exacerbate sectarian hatred.

What the "surge" has facilitated instead is the total balkanization of Baghdad - as well as the whole of Iraq. There are now at least 5 million Iraqis among refugees and the internally displaced - apart from competing statistics numbering what certainly amounts to hundreds of thousands of dead civilians. So of course there is less violence: there's hardly any people left to be ethnically cleansed.

Everywhere in Iraq there are myriad signs of balkanization - not only in blast wall/partitioned Baghdad. In the Shi'ite south, the big prize is Basra, disputed by at least three militias. The Sadrists - the voice of the streets - are against regional autonomy; the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC) - which controls security - wants Basra as the key node of a southern Shi'iteistan; and the Fadhila party - which control the governorate - wants an autonomous Basra.

In the north, the big prize is oil-rich Kirkuk province, disputed by Kurds, Sunni Arabs and Turkmen; the referendum on Kirkuk has been postponed indefinitely, as everyone knows it will unleash a blood-bath. In al-Anbar province, Sunni Arab tribes bide their time collaborating with the US and controlling the exits to Syria and Jordan while preparing for the inevitable settling of scores with Shi'ites in Baghdad.

Obama and Hillary vs Iraqis

Meanwhile, in the Democratic party presidential race, Hillary Clinton, who voted for the war on Iraq, viciously battles Kennedy clan-supported Barack Obama, who opposed the war, followed at a distance by John "can a white man be president"

Edwards, who apologized for his initial support for the war. Obama, Edwards and Clinton basically agree, with some nuance, the "surge" was a fluke.

They have all pledged to end the war if elected. But Edwards is the only pre-candidate who has explicitly called for an immediate US troop withdrawal - up to 50,000, with nearly all of the remaining out within a maximum of 10 months. Edwards insisted Iraqi troops would be trained "outside of Iraq" and no troops would be left to "guard US bases".

For their part, both Clinton and Obama believe substantial numbers of troops must remain in Iraq to "protect US bases" and "to fight al-Qaeda in Iraq". This essentially means the occupation grinding on. Both never said exactly how many troops would be needed: they could be as many as 75,000. Both have steadfastly refused to end the "mission" before 2013.

It's hard to envision an "occupation out" Obama when among his chief advisers one finds former president Jimmy Carter's national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski - the "grand chessboard" ideologue who always preached American domination of Eurasia - and former Middle East negotiator Dennis Ross, who always fought for Israel's dominance of the "mini-chessboard", the Middle East.

So far Obama has not given any signs he would try to counter the logic of global US military hegemony conditioned by control of oil; that's why the US is in Iraq and Africa, that's the reason for so much hostility towards Venezuela, Iran and Russia. As for Clinton - with the constant references to "vital national security interests" - there's no evidence this twin-headed presidency would differ from Bush in wanting to install a puppet, pliable, perennial, anti-Iranian, peppered-with-US-military-bases regime in Iraq.

But more than US presidential candidates stumbling on how to position themselves about Iraq, what really matters is what Iraqis themselves think. According to Asia Times Online sources in Baghdad, apart from the three provinces in Iraqi Kurdistan, more than 75% of Sunnis and Shi'ites alike are certain Washington wants to set up permanent military bases; this roughly equals the bulk of the population in favor of continued attacks against US troops.

Furthermore, Sunni Arabs as a whole as well as the Sadrists are united in infinite suspicion of the key Bush-mandated "benchmark": the eventual approval by the Iraqi Parliament of a new oil law which would in fact de-nationalize the Iraqi oil industry and open it to Big Oil. Iraqi public opinion as a whole is also suspicious of what the Bush administration wants to extract from the cornered, battered Nuri al-Maliki government: full immunity from Iraqi law not only for US troops but for US civilian contractors as well. The empire seems to be oblivious to history: that was exactly one of ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's most popular reasons to dethrone the Shah of Iran in 1979.

Too many fish in the sea

It's impossible to overestimate the widespread anger in Baghdad, among Sunnis and Shi'ites alike, for what has essentially been the balkanization of the city as negotiated by US commanders with a rash of militias; the occupiers after all are only one more militia among many, although better equipped. Now there are insistent rumors - again - in Baghdad that the occupation, allied with the government-sanctioned Badr Organization - is preparing an anti-Sadrist blitzkrieg in oil-rich Basra.

The daily horror in Iraq has all but been erased

from US corporate media narrative. But in Baghdad, now virtually a Shi'ite city like Shiraz, Salafi-jihadi suicide bombers continue to attack Shi'ite markets or funerals - especially in mixed neighborhoods, even those only across the Tigris from the Green Zone. Sectarian militias - although theoretical allies of the occupation, paid in US dollars in cash - continue to pursue their own ethnic cleansing agenda. And the "surge" continues to privilege air strikes which inevitably produce scores of civilian "collateral damage".

The Sunni Arab resistance continues to be the "fish" offered protection by the "sea" of the civilian population. All during the "surge", the Sunni Arab guerrillas always kept moving - from west Baghdad to Diyala, Salahuddin, Nineveh and Kirkuk provinces and even to the northern part of Babil province. After the collapse of fuel imports from Turkey used to drive the Iraqi power grid, Baghdad and other Iraqi major cities are most of the time mired in darkness. Fuel shortages are the norm. In addition, the Sunni Arab resistance makes sure sabotage of electricity towers and stations remains endemic.

Contrary to Iraqi government propaganda, only very few among the at least 1 million Iraqis exiled in Syria since the beginning of the "surge" - mostly white-collar middle class - have come back. They are Sunni and Shi'ite alike. People - mostly Sunni - are still fleeing the country. The Shi'ite urban middle class fears there will inevitably be a push by the Sunni Arab resistance - supported and financed by the ultra-wealthy Sunni Gulf monarchies - to "re-capture" Baghdad. This includes of course the hundreds of thousands of Baghdad Sunnis forced to abandon their city because of the "surge".

As for the Sadrists, they are convinced the 80,000-strong Sunni Arab "Awakening Councils" - *al-Sahwah*, in Arabic - gathered in Anbar province are de facto militias biding their time and practicing for the big push. It's fair to assume thousands still keep tight connections with the Salafi-jihadis (including most of all al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers) they are now supposedly fighting.

Considering the sectarian record of the US-backed Maliki government - which, as well as the Sadrists, considers the Awakening Councils as US-financed Sunni militias - there's no chance they will be incorporated into the Iraqi army or police.

One of the Awakening Council leaders, Abu Marouf, a Saddam Hussein "security officer" before the 2003 invasion and then a commander of the influential Sunni Arab guerrilla group the 1920 Revolutionary Brigades, all but admitted to The Independent's Patrick Cockburn the consequences will be dire if they are not seen to be part of the so-called "reconciliation" process. All this amounts to a certainty: a new battle of Baghdad is all but inevitable, and could happen in 2008.

Occupied of the world, unite

As the occupation/quagmire slouches towards its fifth year, it's obvious the US cannot possibly "win" the Iraqi war - either on a military or political level - as Republican presidential pre-candidate John McCain insists. Sources in Baghdad tell Asia Times Online if not in 2008, by 2009 the post-"surge" Sunni Arab resistance is set to unleash a new national, anti-sectarian, anti-religion-linked-to-politics offensive bound to seal what an overwhelming majority of Iraqis consider the "ideological and cultural" US defeat.

Already now a crucial Sunni-Shi'ite nationalist 12-party coalition is emerging - oblivious to US designs and divorced from the US-backed parties in power (the Shi'ite SIIC and Da'wa and the two main Kurdish parties - the Kurdish Patriotic Union of

Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party). They have already established a consensus in three key themes: no privatization of the Iraqi oil industry, either via the new oil law or via dodgy deals signed by the Kurds; no breakup of Iraq via a Kurdish state (which implies no Kurdish takeover of Kirkuk); and an end to the civil war.

The 12-party coalition includes almost all Sunni parties, the Sadrists, the Fadhila party, a dissidence of Da'awa and the independents in the Iraqi Parliament. And they want as many factions as possible of the Sunni Arab resistance on board - including the crucial tribal leaders of Awakening.

The ultimate success of this coalition in great

measure should be attributed to negotiations led by Muqtada al-Sadr. The Sadrists are betting on parliamentary elections in 2009, when they sense they may reach a non-sectarian, nationalist-based majority to form a government. This would definitely bury Iraq's Defense Minister Abdul Qader Mohammed Jassim's recent estimate that a "significant" number of US troops would have to remain in Iraq at least for another 10 years, until 2018.

Even barring a possible Dr Strangelove-like attack on Iran, Bush is set to leave to Obama or Clinton, apart from a nearly \$10 trillion black hole, a lost war in Afghanistan, total chaos in Pakistan, an open wound in Gaza, a virtual civil war in Lebanon and

the heart of darkness of Iraq.

Both Obama - still unwilling to defend progressive ideas on progressive grounds - and drowning-in-platitudes Clinton owe it to US and world public opinion to start detailing, in "the fierce urgency of now", how they realistically plan to confront such a state of (dis)union.

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GENOCIDE; IS IT A QUESTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY?

Last Saturday, the International Conference on Genocide against the Kurdish people commenced in Martyr Saad Abdullah's conference center here in Erbil.

By The Globe- Etbil

By Eleni Fergadi

The conference, which lasted for three days, began two weeks after the burial ceremony of the remains of the Anfal victims with the somewhat sober aim of "academic" remembrance of sorts; in a way to present the research that has been undertaken on this very black page of Kurdish history and at the same time "internationalize" these events with the hope that similarly to the national recognition it has received by the Federal High Court as genocide, the same would follow on an international level.

Scholars, writers, politicians and artists were invited to this conference to present their own perspectives and research on the Kurdish genocide from the Ba'athist government - simply put and in the words of the organizers - to present "a record" of the atrocities that began with the deportation of around 40,000 Kurds from areas surrounding Kirkuk on July 10, 1963, and the destruction of more than 800 Kurdish villages during that time. Much followed throughout Kurdistan, such as the bombardment of the cities of Qaladze (April 24, 1974) and Halabja (April 26, 1974), the chemical attacks during 1987-88, the infamous Anfal Campaign (1988), as well as the destruction of villages that were burned to the ground, the indiscriminate

killing of civilians and the bombardment of refugee camps.

The daughter of the late Saad Abdullah, in whose memory the conference center was

Kurds (99%) and Muslims (98%). In gender terms, 66.61% of victims were male and 33.39% female. The minister, while stressing the abhorrence of the Anfal Cam-

At the Conference, the Chief of Staff of the presidential office, Fuad Hussein, reiterated that the aim of such a conference is "not only to deal with questions, but also to discuss the genocide...from different angles," expressing his hope that the workshops and panel discussions "will lead us to the answer of the question why this genocide...happened." Mr. Hussein also stressed that "just as our language, geography, history...form part of our national identity, so the genocide against the Kurds is the most important aspect in the formation of the Kurdish Nation." He added, "This tragedy must not only form part of our history, but it must also become a guideline for us to build a society far removed from hatred and violence....In this way we hope that one day we can feel so sure of ourselves that we can tell our children...and all the future generations...that the killings...will never happen again."

Within the framework of the conference, a documentary film on the genocide against the Kurds (Kurdistan TV) was shown on the first day (visitors could then watch it in a special amphitheatre that was held for this purpose); a series of photographs and artwork were exhibited and singers Diyari Qaradaghi and Melek performed Kurdish songs about Anfal. More than 60 papers were received by the ministries organizing the event; however,



The Kurdish orchestra is presenting music on the opening ceremony of the International Conference of Genocide against the Kurdish People in Erbil, January 26. GLOBE PHOTO/Safin Hamed

built, and current Minister of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs, Mrs. Chinar Saad Abdullah, presented a detailed account of crimes perpetrated against the Kurds, providing startling statistics: The province most affected by the atrocities was Dohuk (70.33%), with Suleimanya (42%), Kirkuk (22%) and Erbil (17%) following; in terms of nationalities and religious affiliations, those who suffered the most were

paigned, stated that in its duration "all human rights and ethics were violated."

The minister also provided figures relating to the preferred targets of the attacks (see Table above) and stated that 17% of those who survived the attacks suffer from mental and physical illnesses, pointing out that many families, having lost all possessions, still have to live under dire conditions.

the time limit only allowed 37 to be presented. The papers will be published in a book on the subject and another conference will take place in Europe in the near future. On Monday, Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani visited the conference.

An interview on trauma and national identity

The Globe spoke with Dr. Zafer Yörük, a lecturer at the University of Kurdistan-Hawler and a specialist in identity politics, about the Kurdish genocide and the process of Kurdish nation-building, and it was discovered that in a nation-building process, such as the one Kurdistan is currently undergoing, there is more than meets the eye.

Dr. Yörük, what do you think of the International Conference on the Genocide against the Kurds?

"A few weeks ago, we witnessed the burial ceremony of the remains of victims, and this conference that followed shows both that the genocide and particularly the memories of Anfal are still fresh... this makes me fairly confident that the genocide can be called what in psychoanalysis is a trauma and in this case a collective one."

What is collective trauma?

"Trauma is a medical word used widely in the field of orthopedics to refer to the moment to define the cause of a broken leg or arm. When used as a psychiatric term, trauma refers to the same moment or experience, with the only difference being that what is traumatized is the soul and therefore healing the wound requires much more than a mere cast for a couple of weeks. In the case of collective trauma, we are talking about a different kind of scar, more so, because it was experienced collectively." Dr. Yörük explained: "Traumas determine our behavior usually in the form of a personality disorder. People repress their trauma; that is, they try to forget them and think that they never happened, but in reality the scars of the past traumas survive in our unconscious and come to

the surface without us realizing it. For example, people who cannot cope with boundaries and authority in their adult lives definitely carry serious scars inflicted upon their souls by their fathers. Now, families and communities can share a collective trauma even though they have never experienced it themselves."

Can you be more specific?

"Older generations, who have experienced a trauma collectively, like the Kurds did, cannot repress; that is, they cannot simply ignore it, try to forget it and thus they 'speak it' to the younger generation in order to cope with it. This collective transmission is similar to what we call repression in the case of the individual. Vamik Volkan, an American psychiatrist, provides us with an interesting example when he discusses the Long March of the Red Indians. When a reporter interviewed a Navajo Red Indian on the subject, it was as if the interviewee was referring to an event that had taken place yesterday, but the journalist soon realized that the Long March had actually occurred 125 years before. Volkan argued that, for the Red Indians, the Long March is as real as the rising sun in the morning, even though they might not have experienced it themselves, even if it was an event that took place more than a century ago...the older generations projected their experiences to the younger ones and thus shaped the latter. So much so that the trauma itself has become the major collective bond that united the Red Indian community together; it has become the major plaster of a social identity. The problem with this style of building collective/national identity lies in what I said above. The scars of trauma have many negative effects on human behavior; they result in serious personality disorders. Therefore, if the genocide ends up as the most important factor of the Kurdish national identity, then there are dangers ahead...."

Are you implying that the Kurds should forget? And

what do you mean by dangers? What are they?

"No, no, on the contrary...Kurds should be invited not to forget; that is, to remember what happened. But they should also be invited to forgive. From the beginning of the history of the 'person' and of the 'word' we have learned that the best way of coping with trauma is remembering it; that is, not repressing it, but at the same time trying to find ways to forgive those responsible. The beloved Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, for example, who was murdered last year outside his office in Istanbul, was well aware of this problem. In every public interview he gave, Dink systematically called on his people not to rely on the Armenian genocide for the existence of the Armenian nation and that is because he knew very well the potential disorders of such a practice. What are those disorders, you may ask? If you look at the emerging Turkish nationalist discourse preceding 1915, then you can see that the sole element that it relied on was some trauma that the Turkic-Islamic peoples of Central Asia, the Balkans and Caucasus had experienced during the 19th century. When these elements arrived in Anatolia from Russia and the Balkans, they not only brought with them a shared traumatic scar but also the feeling of revenge and compensation for what they had been through. It is precisely the reliance on a trauma in the Turkish nation-building that resulted in the Armenian genocide. The hatred and the consequent search for revenge and compensation were all projected onto the Christian peoples of Anatolia, particularly the Armenians, even though the only thing the Armenian population shared with the perpetrators of the past was that of religion; they were Christians. It is exactly this vicious circle, this chain of events that I am talking about. What I have said so far can be summarized as follows: In the process of nation-building, a collective trauma may be 'selected' to play a positive bonding role, but such selection also means the emergence of 'col-

lective personality disorders.' Simply put, if the Kurdish nation insists on building itself by relying on the trauma of the genocide, then the potential danger of seeking compensation is very real. The Kurds should definitely remember, but they should also forgive."

What would you propose then?

When we are talking of building a community, a nation, then peoples' minds usually go back to the beginning of the 19th century, when nation-states and nationalism were mushrooming. When nationalism emerged, there were particular circumstances, such as modernity, new technologies and alienation. Almost 30 years have passed since Benedict Anderson showed that the nation is not natural, something that existed and exists 'just like that'; rather, it is what he called 'an imagined community.' Hobsbawm defined nation as 'an invented community' and I would rather call it 'a fabricated community.' Now, nationalism draws on both positive and negative aspects: The positive are usually a glorious past that is being reclaimed for today; for instance, Kurdish nationalist discourse refers to the glorious Med Empire, and the Kawa rebellion against the tyrant Dohak, and relates all these events to the Kurdish New Year (Newroz). It is these aspects that are imagined to be somehow shaping and determining the Kurdish identity of today. The Anfal and the genocide in general adds the traumatic dimension in play....No one should be allowed to deny that the genocide is as real as the rising sun, borrowing from Volkan's abovementioned example, but building an identity by emphasizing the genocide is a recipe full with traps. I think that in the 21st century the best way of creating a polity isn't by relying on methods left over by the 19th century, but to seriously activate and promote the norms of citizenship, solidarity and trust, as the primary bonds to cement a community together as one, the precondition of which are participation, accountability and transparency."

Turkey, the Kurds and Islam A RELIGIOUS REVIVAL

The AK government uses Islam to win over Kurdish support

ANKARA AND DIYARBAKIR

A SIGN adorned with Ataturk's favourite adage, "Happy is he who calls himself a Turk", hangs in Diyarbakir, south-east Turkey, as a reminder of Turkey's decades-old policy of forcibly assimilating the region's Kurds. The ruling Justice and Development (AK) party might prefer "Happy is he who calls himself a Muslim".

"Uniting around our common Islamic identity is the only way to solve the Kurdish problem," argues one AK leader. "Islam bound us in Ottoman times and during the war of independence, why not today?" Religion has become the mildly Islamist AK's most potent weapon as it seeks to snatch control of Diyarbakir, the unofficial capital of Turkey's estimated 14m Kurds, from the pro-Kurdish Democratic People's Party (DTP) in next year's local election.

In the slums of Diyarbakir sympathy for AK is growing. "They give us free coal, free school textbooks, my vote is for AK," croaks Fatma Demirci, a shrivelled mother of nine. Generous welfare spending, plus modest reforms to satisfy the Kurds' demands for greater freedom, helped the party to take over 50% of the vote in the mainly Kurdish provinces of Turkey in last July's general election.

Now Turkey's richest Islamic fraternity is helping the AK to win more Kurdish votes. Named after Fetullah Gulen, a liberal Muslim cleric who lives in self-imposed exile in America, the Gulenists distributed meat to

some 60,000 families during the Muslim Feast of Sacrifice in December. Scores of Gulenist doctors are offering free check-ups and treatment in Kurdish areas. Their message is that Turks and Kurds are brothers in Islam and that nationalism, whether Turkish or Kurdish, is bad. Such Islamic fraternities (*tari-kats*) have strong roots in the region.

Other AK actions are also burnishing the party's image. A new government proposal to scrap restrictions on wearing the Islamic headscarf in universities has elated pious Kurds as much as it has horrified Turkish secularists. Kurds of all leanings cheered the arrest of 14 members of an ultra-nationalist gang whose leader, a retired army general called Veli Kucuk, is said by some to have plotted the extra-judicial murders of Kurdish dissidents at the height of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) insurgency in the early 1990s.

The government's popularity seems to be surviving even the airstrikes launched in December against PKK targets in northern Iraq. A retaliatory bombing claimed by the PKK killed seven people in Diyarbakir last month, but provoked outrage and rebounded against the DTP. One reason, some say, is that it is in practice run by the captive PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, making it hard for elected DTP politicians to disavow PKK terrorism. Polls suggest that the party's support has slipped.

With much of their time spent in court or in jail, few DTP mayors are able to govern effectively. Diyarbakir's mayor, Osman Baydemir, is facing 23 court cases and other investigations for such crimes as printing new-year greeting cards in Kurdish. Some mayors have been pursued for offences such as building an artificial pool "shaped like the map of Kurdistan".

Hasim Hasimi, a moderate Kurdish politician, argues that this sort of pressure on the DTP may cause voters to return to it. Even business leaders are disquieted by the government's attempts to dilute Kurdish nationalism. "It is foolish to imagine that the Kurds' demands to develop their language and culture will go away," says Mehmet Kaya, president of the Diyarbakir chamber of commerce.

On a recent visit, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the AK prime minister, dismissed calls for more Kurdish-language education and broadcasting. He argued that other minorities would agitate for similar rights. His message has reached the state-run maternity clinic. Cetin Bakir, the chief doctor, rejects suggestions that his staff might communicate better with patients if they used Kurdish. "Absolutely not," he sniffs. Leyla Dincer, a midwife, disagrees. "What use are these?" she asks, pointing to a rack full of pamphlets on birth control. "It's all in Turkish, nobody understands a word."

DÉMOCRATIE, LAÏCITÉ, DROITS DE LA PERSONNE

La société turque entre l'armée et les islamistes

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Après sa spectaculaire victoire aux élections législatives de juillet dernier, le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) s'est lancé dans une profonde réforme de la Constitution. Celle-ci se heurte à la volonté de l'armée de maintenir son hégémonie et aux divisions de la société concernant la définition du nationalisme et de la laïcité. L'aggravation de la crise kurde fin 2007 fournit aux militaires l'occasion de réaffirmer leur pouvoir face au nouveau président Abdullah Gül



cérémonies officielles auxquelles participe son mari.

Le conflit entre le gouvernement de M. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, dont le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) ne renie pas ses racines musulmanes, et l'armée, qui se veut le fer de lance du camp kémaliste, résolument laïque, a connu nombre de rebondissements

depuis l'automne 2007. La victoire électorale de l'AKP et l'élection à la présidence de l'ex-ministre des affaires étrangères de M. Erdogan, que les kémalistes voulaient à tout prix éviter, ont changé le rapport de forces entre les deux camps. L'AKP contrôle pour la première fois les deux branches de l'exécutif, et donc la présidence, considérée comme une instance de défense de l'héritage de Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Le prédecesseur kémaliste de M. Gül, M. Ahmet Necdet Sezer, un juriste pointilleux, avait mis son veto à nombre de projets de lois et de nominations du gouvernement. Il n'est guère étonnant que les militaires aient voulu empêcher M. Gül de lui succéder.

Le 27 avril, peu avant le vote de désignation au Parlement, l'état-major publia un communiqué sur Internet proclamant que, « *garantes infailibles de la laïcité* », les forces armées étaient décidées « *à protéger les valeurs irréductibles de la République* ». Cette « intervention militaire électronique » obtint l'effet escompté : la Cour constitutionnelle annula l'élection de M. Gül par une décision en laquelle la plupart des juristes virent une simple obéissance aux ordres (1).

Mais le tir de barrage de l'état-major fut un coup d'épée dans l'eau : M. Erdo-

gan réagit en convoquant pour le 22 juillet des élections législatives anticipées, qu'il remporta haut la main. Avec 46,6 % des voix, l'AKP augmentait de 12,2 % son score de 2002. Ce résultat obtenu, il remit son candidat en lice : M. Gül fut élu président de la République le 28 août, au troisième tour de scrutin.

Rôle déterminant de l'économie

MAIS l'état-major boycotta la cérémonie d'investiture du nouveau président. Il fallut une aggravation de la crise kurde pour que la situation évolue (*lire l'article d'Olivier Piot pages 12 et 13*). Avec ses incursions transfrontalières, le PKK fournit aux militaires l'occasion de mettre sous pression le gouvernement et l'AKP. L'émotion populaire fut telle qu'elle ne laissait aucune latitude à M. Erdogan pour s'opposer aux plans de mobilisation de l'armée et de son chef Büyükanit. Afin d'empêcher un cavalier seul de l'état-major, l'AKP fit voter au Parlement une loi autorisant les militaires à mener des actions dans le nord de l'Irak. La question-clé du pouvoir de décision en temps de crise – le gouvernement contrôle-t-il ou non la direction de l'armée ? – n'est donc toujours pas tranchée.

Il n'en reste pas moins que l'équilibre des pouvoirs entre responsables politiques et militaires a nettement évolué depuis l'été 2007. Mais les analystes et

PAR NOTRE ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL
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VINGT-NEUF OCTOBRE, jour de la fête nationale. Tout semble aller pour le mieux en Turquie. Debout, côte à côte, le président de la République Abdullah Gül et le chef d'état-major Yasar Büyükanit passent les troupes en revue. Le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) et la crise qu'il a déclenchée à la frontière turco-irakienne ont ramené dans le même bateau les deux têtes, civile et militaire, de l'exécutif. Toutefois, leur antagonisme n'est que mis en veilleuse. Une photographie qui, un mois plus tôt, faisait la « une » de tous les quotidiens l'illustre à merveille : elle montre l'accueil réservé au président Gül, de retour de son premier voyage officiel à l'étranger en compagnie de son épouse. Dans le comité d'accueil, à l'aéroport, un général tourne le dos aux civils ; M^{me} Gül porte un foulard – objet du contentieux. Pour ne pas « provoquer », elle se tient souvent à l'écart des

les commentateurs politiques divergent sur le point de savoir dans quelle mesure le mémorandum Internet de l'état-major le 27 avril a précipité la victoire de l'AKP. L'historien Ayhan Aktar estime que ce sont les « voix frustrées » qui ont emporté la décision : « En Anatolie, les gens ont ressenti comme une insulte les menaces contre Gül, qui est originaire de Kayseri. »

Le plus connu des analystes électoraux, Tarhan Erdem, est d'un avis différent. Dans toutes les enquêtes effectuées par son institut de sondages, l'AKP atteignait depuis février 2007 les 45-50 %. Si le 27 avril a bien amené un sursaut de sympathie en sa faveur, il juge néanmoins que sa victoire électorale du 22 juillet est due avant tout à la bonne situation économique de la Turquie.

Le facteur économique a été également déterminant dans l'est du pays, estime Metin Münir, l'éditorialiste économique du quotidien *Milliyet*, qui a suivi la campagne électorale à Gaziantep. Peuplée d'un million de personnes, cette ville située près de la frontière syrienne a connu un essor que ses habitants attribuent au gouvernement. Mais l'AKP a aussi enregistré une importante progression dans la partie sous-développée de l'Anatolie : Münir raconte que, pour la première fois, les habitants y ont reçu des manuels scolaires pour leurs enfants, et bénéficient de soins médicaux gratuits (2). Tout cela a fait de l'AKP le premier parti dans les régions kurdes. Mais Münir pense que l'armée a également contribué à la victoire de M. Erdogan : ses menaces du 27 avril auraient été préjudiciables au Parti républicain du peuple (CHP), kémaliste, qui se serait un peu trop présenté comme le « bras civil de l'armée ».

Pour Erdem, les résultats obtenus indiquent un déplacement significatif au sein des couches moyennes et supérieures dont l'AKP a complètement absorbé le potentiel conservateur. S'il parvient à maintenir ce vivier de voix, il restera longtemps au pouvoir, prophétise-t-il. C'est aussi l'avis de Münir, qui nuance : « Seulement si l'AKP agit intelligemment. » Sa victoire électorale l'a inscrit définitivement parmi les partis bourgeois, avec pour conséquence automatique un affaiblissement de ses liens avec l'électorat religieux. Pour Münir, le premier ministre serait fou d'effrayer sa nouvelle base électorale par des initiatives à coloration « islamiste ».

Mais le leader de l'AKP se comportera-t-il de façon rationnelle ? Ne suivra-t-il pas plutôt un « agenda caché », comme le prétendent ses adversaires ? Les kémalistes orthodoxes font courir le bruit que le but ultime de MM. Erdogan et Gül serait d'instaurer un système à l'iranienne. Cette méfiance explique pourquoi la « question du foulard » domine le débat politique, depuis que le gouvernement a annoncé le projet d'une nouvelle Constitution. Il ne s'agit pas tel-

lement ici de la coiffe de l'épouse du président ni du sacro-saint principe de l'Etat kémaliste, la laïcité. Le cœur de l'affaire, c'est le pouvoir du bloc kémaliste. Un bloc qui ne comprend pas seulement l'appareil militaire stricto sensu, mais englobe tout le complexe dit de l'« Etat profond » (*derin devlet*), et donc inclut aussi les services secrets et l'appareil policier ainsi que les bastions du kémalisme dans la justice, l'université et la bureaucratie.

Ce « bloc de pouvoir » très complexe représente les intérêts d'une élite qui a longtemps dominé le pays. Aktar parle des « Turcs blancs » qui se sentent menacés par des « nègres anatoliens », lesquels auraient toujours été traités comme les « parents pauvres dans la maison des riches ». L'élite kémaliste, plaisante-t-il, n'accepte M. Erdogan qu'à partir du moment où « il se rase la moustache, envoie sa femme au diable et se fait photographe au bras d'un mannequin ». Mais, derrière les divergences d'ordre culturel et sociétal, l'historien décèle de purs conflits d'intérêts : la vieille classe bourgeoise voit ses privilèges menacés par l'ascension de l'AKP et de la « jeune » bourgeoisie anatolienne.

C'est pourquoi les kémalistes, militaires comme civils, font de la réforme constitutionnelle un véritable test. D'autant que les islamistes ont annoncé vouloir supprimer l'interdiction du *turban* (3) dans les universités d'Etat. Fin septembre, le chef de l'armée de terre, le général Ilker Basbug, mettait en garde contre une « anarchie des idées » et avertissait : « La laïcité est la pierre angulaire de tous les principes et de toutes les valeurs de la Turquie et ne peut faire l'objet d'aucune discussion (4). »

La question posée est : de quelle marge de manœuvre dispose l'armée ? La plupart des observateurs sont perplexes. D'un côté, ils estiment que quel qu'un d'extérieur ne peut connaître les desseins cachés de l'état-major et que les forces armées n'abandonneront pas le pouvoir sans combattre. De l'autre, beaucoup jugent quand même que l'« intervention du peuple », c'est-à-dire son vote, pourrait bien avoir considérablement réduit la force des militaires, qui, de toute façon, n'ont jamais voulu exercer directement le pouvoir. Ils conçoivent idéalement leur rôle comme celui d'une instance de tutelle qui n'intervient que lorsque le peuple, immature, n'agit pas selon ses vœux.

Aktar, un fan de basket-ball, estime que « l'état-major a dû se rabattre sur une défense de zone », un choix tactique censé pousser l'adversaire à la faute, à une attaque ouverte contre le sécularisme (*laiklik*). Et, comme MM. Erdogan et Gül protestent quotidiennement de leur attachement à la laïcité, les militaires déclarent que la simple suppression de l'interdiction du port du foulard représente une attaque contre les valeurs fondatrices de l'Etat kémaliste.

Or, en Turquie, l'interdiction du port du foulard dans les universités n'est ni légale ni constitutionnelle. Le tournant date d'un simple arrêt de 1989 de la Cour constitutionnelle faisant de la laïcité le « principe suprême de la vie sociale et culturelle ». Ce principe étant dès lors supérieur à tous les autres, personne ne peut « se prévaloir de quelque liberté que ce soit si elle n'est pas compatible avec le principe de laïcité ».

Un second point est tout aussi important : ce que les kémalistes entendent par laïcité n'a rien à voir avec ce que l'on entend par là en France, en Allemagne ou au Royaume-Uni. *Laiklik* n'équivaut pas à la séparation des Eglises et de l'Etat, mais au contrôle de la religion par l'Etat. C'est la raison d'être de la présidence des affaires religieuses (Diyaret Isleri Baskanligi, DIB), une administration qui organise et surveille l'islam sunnite hanafite. Elle se veut en phase avec l'idéal d'une nation homogène au sens de la « synthèse turco-islamique » devenue idéologie d'Etat après le putsch militaire de 1980, et propagée jusqu'à ce jour dans tous les manuels scolaires. C'est dans cet esprit que la DIB nomme les imams et dispense aussi les cours de religion obligatoires dans les écoles publiques.

Un modèle autoritaire

POLITOLOGUE, Sahin Alpay décrit la DIB comme l'instrument étatique de la politique identitaire sunnite. Comme cette administration est financée par l'impôt, tous les Turcs non sunnites, y compris les citoyens juifs et chrétiens, paient pour être discriminés : ils sont considérés comme des sortes d'« étrangers » et exclus de la fonction publique. Même les alévis, principale minorité musulmane, ne sont pas reconnus comme un groupe religieux autonome.

La séparation des Eglises et de l'Etat est donc un principe tout aussi étranger à l'Etat kémaliste que l'est l'égalité de droit entre les religions. La laïcité n'est qu'un trompe-l'œil et ne sert qu'à protéger une autre foi : dans quasiment toutes les salles de ces mêmes universités sont accrochés de pieux portraits d'Atatürk. Dans la Turquie laïque, la « religion kémaliste » est omniprésente. Un buste

(Lire la suite page suivante.)

(1) Lire Ignacio Ramonet, « Une élection décisive », *Le Monde diplomatique*, mai 2007.

(2) L'AKP a obtenu plus de 50 % des voix en Anatolie et dans la région de la mer Noire, et est même arrivé à 56 % dans l'est de l'Anatolie.

(3) Le mot turc *turban* désigne le foulard porté serré autour de la tête et recouvrant l'intégralité de la chevelure.

(4) *Turkish Daily News*, Ankara, 25 septembre 2007.

(5) Cet article punit l'« offense à l'identité turque » ; mais, pour les procureurs kémalistes, l'« identité turque » et Atatürk sont une seule et même chose.

du fondateur de la Turquie moderne se trouve dans chaque village, son effigie orne chaque billet de banque. A l'école, la vie d'Atatürk est enseignée comme celle d'un saint. Quiconque met cette légende en question risque une plainte pour blasphème en vertu de l'article 301 du code pénal turc (5). Et, bien sûr, le « saint d'Etat » a aussi son lieu de pèlerinage : le mausolée d'Atatürk dans la capitale, Ankara.

Dans la Constitution, la première phrase du préambule en appelle au « chef immortel et héros incomparable » Atatürk, dont les idées seraient aussi essentielles pour l'Etat et la nation que ses « réformes et principes ». Manière de figer l'histoire pour en faire un principe constitutionnel...

Aucun historien ne niera les mérites d'Atatürk, quand, sur les ruines de l'Empire ottoman et au cours de la lutte contre l'envahisseur grec, il créa, après la première guerre mondiale, d'abord une armée de libération, puis un Etat, et pour finir les bases d'une nouvelle nation. Mais ses méthodes portent les marques d'une époque où se développaient en Europe les idées nationalistes et autoritaires. C'est pourquoi, comme l'a écrit Mustafa Akyol, le nouveau nationalisme turc comportait aussi des « caractéristiques fascistes », comme par exemple des « affabulations sur la supériorité de la race turque (6) ».

Dès le départ, le pilier institutionnel de cette tradition autoritaire a été l'armée. Elle se considère non seulement comme le sauveur historique du pays, mais aussi comme le maître d'œuvre d'une mutation sociale qui, selon les mots de l'ancien chef d'état-major Hilmi Özkök, « fut aussi importante pour la Turquie que le fut la Renaissance pour l'Occident (7) ». Les militaires pensent que seule l'armée peut assurer la cohésion d'une société profondément divisée. C'est pourquoi le corps des officiers est censé, de par sa formation dans les académies militaires, être immunisé contre les « idéologies extérieures » qui peuvent constituer une menace pour l'homogénéité de l'armée.

Un modèle aussi autoritaire peut-être perpétué *ad vitam aeternam*. L'astuce des kémalistes consiste à dénoncer toute contestation comme réactionnaire, comme si elle allait renvoyer la Turquie au Moyen Age.

Mais les choses sont plus complexes. L'actuel débat constitutionnel rend nerveuses beaucoup de femmes, même lorsqu'elles sont opposées à l'interdiction du port du foulard. Elles craignent une « returbanisation » rampante, comme la voit aussi venir le sociologue Sherif Mardin : la « pression sociale » risque d'être si forte, dans un environnement musulman traditionnel, que même des étudiantes non religieuses s'y plieront.

Comme par exemple à Fener, un quartier misérable d'Istanbul, un fief de musulmans rigoristes sur la rive sud de

la Corne d'or. Ici, une femme sur deux porte le *carsaf*, un foulard noir intégral qui ne laisse apparent que le visage, tandis que les autres ont leurs cheveux dissimulés sous le *turban*. La plupart des hommes portent la calotte de tricot et les barbes strictes des musulmans pieux. Devant la mosquée Ismail Aga, on vend des cassettes et des cd de prédicateurs saoudiens et de combattants d'Afghanistan. L'imam de la mosquée a été assassiné, il y a un an, dans des circonstances qui n'ont toujours pas été élucidées. La police turque n'a pas la moindre chance de percer à jour tous les mystères de ce quartier. S'il existe à Istanbul un « Islamistan » autonome, c'est bien là. Mais on trouve ici aussi des endroits où non seulement des étrangers non musulmans, mais aussi des hommes turcs, peuvent déjeuner pendant le ramadan. Fener donne l'impression d'un quartier autiste, mais non hostile.

De tels endroits montrent clairement deux choses : d'une part, que la force d'inertie de l'« islam anatolien » ne pourra pas être brisée par la contrainte

étatique ; d'autre part, que la question religieuse a une dimension sociale. Le changement des modes de comportement et de pensée traditionnels constitue une évolution de la société qu'aucune répression ne pourra interrompre. Pourtant, avec leurs craintes, des post-kémalistes de gauche en viennent aussi à partager inconsciemment les fantasmes autoritaires des kémalistes quant au possible succès d'une accélération du « processus de modernisation ».

Ces craintes distordent la perception de la réalité. C'est ce que montre une étude concernant l'ensemble de la Turquie, financée par la fondation Tesev : en mai 2006, 65 % des personnes sondées étaient convaincues qu'il y avait de plus en plus de femmes portant le foulard (8). La même étude a établi que, de 1999 à 2006, le nombre de femmes « voilées » avait reculé de 9 %. En 1999, seules 27,3 % des femmes s'affichaient en public sans foulard ou *turban* ; en 2007, elles étaient 36,5 %.

Le foulard a beau s'être raréfié, celles qui le portent sont de plus en plus visibles aux yeux de l'élite citadine. Les raisons en sont l'exode rural de l'Anatolie vers les grandes villes, l'ascension sociale de nombre de chefs d'entreprise anatoliens, la présence médiatique de politiciens de l'AKP qui ne cachent pas leurs épouses. Il ne fait pas de doute que la gauche a raison dans certaines de ses craintes : dans un premier temps, la suppression de l'interdiction fera croître le nombre d'étudiantes portant le foulard, parce que les familles traditionnelles accentueront la pression sur leurs filles faisant des études. Mais, si la gauche et les féministes craignent à ce point la « pression sociale », n'est-ce pas une forme de démission ?

Trois questions pour une Constitution

SI LE DÉBAT constitutionnel actuel est tellement monopolisé par la question du foulard et la question de la laïcité, la faute n'en revient pas seulement aux kémalistes purs et durs, mais aussi au gouvernement. L'AKP a omis de poser publiquement l'enjeu historique de ce débat. La société doit se prononcer sur les grandes lignes d'une Constitution qui dépasse enfin le kémalisme figé et prédémocratique, et répondre à trois grandes questions : comment l'armée peut-elle être soumise au contrôle civil ? ; comment le rapport autoritaire de l'Etat et de l'individu peut-il être dépassé ? ; et, troisièmement, comment une Constitution peut-elle prendre en compte les différences ethniques, culturelles, religieuses existant dans la population ?

La Constitution de 1982 proclame comme but suprême de l'Etat « l'existence perpétuelle, la prospérité et le bien-être matériel et spirituel de la République

de Turquie ». Elle prône la « suprématie absolue de la volonté de la nation », laquelle suppose son caractère homogène. Les droits fondamentaux des citoyens sont dès lors une simple fonction de l'Etat, émanant de celui-ci, un Etat dont la souveraineté sur le peuple est garantie en dernier ressort par le rôle tutélaire de l'armée.

La différence avec une Constitution démocratique est évidente. Selon M. Mehmet Firat, vice-président de l'AKP, « alors que la Constitution actuelle a été proclamée pour protéger l'Etat du peuple, la nouvelle Constitution a pour but de protéger l'individu de l'Etat ». Ce n'est pas un hasard si M. Firat formule cette profession de foi devant les ambassadeurs des pays de l'Union européenne (9). L'AKP peut-il et veut-il traduire cet objectif dans les faits ? Les observateurs sont sceptiques, pour deux raisons : le gouvernement, placé sous le regard suspicieux des kémalistes,

ne se sentirait pas assez fort pour démilitariser et libéraliser le système ; l'AKP lui-même ne serait pas immunisé contre la « culture politique nationaliste et autoritaire qui l'a vu grandir (10) ».

Ce que sont les projets du gouvernement, nul ne peut mieux l'évaluer qu'Ergen Özbudun. Ce professeur de

(6) *Turkish Daily News*, 7 octobre 2007.

(7) Cf. Ersel Atidini, Nihat Ali Özcan et Dogan Akyaz, « The Turkish military's march toward Europe », *Foreign Affairs*, Londres, janvier-février 2006.

(8) Ali Carkoglu et Binnaz Toprak, *Religion, Society and Politics in a Changing Turkey*, Tesev Publications, Istanbul, 2007, p. 63.

(9) *Today's Zaman*, Istanbul, 20 septembre 2007.

(10) Dogu Ergil, *Today's Zaman*, 23 septembre 2007.



poings de l'Etat » servant d'abord à tenir les citoyens.

M. Kardas ne voit guère l'AKP reprendre telles quelles des idées aussi radicales. Il se demande même si l'attitude défensive de ce parti ne relève pas d'une tactique de précaution envers le bloc kémaliste, voire de penchants autoritaires que M. Erdogan a déjà laissé entrevoir à plusieurs reprises. Par exemple lorsqu'il porta plainte pour diffamation contre des caricaturistes qui, en prenant pour cible les faiblesses du premier ministre, n'avaient pourtant fait qu'exercer leur métier.

Si l'on demande à des démocrates sincères comme M. Kardas quelles sont les forces politiques qui peuvent faire passer une Constitution postkémaliste, on s'attire des haussements d'épaule résignés. Oui, bien sûr, une gauche indépendante, postkémaliste, est nécessaire, mais nulle par on ne la voit apparaître. Lors des élections de l'été 2007, on avait pu espérer que certains sièges seraient conquis par des candidats se présentant sous l'étiquette « indépendants ». Mais le candidat indépendant n'est même pas parvenu à s'imposer dans la libérale Istanbul.

Les problèmes sociaux et les conflits politiques qui devraient normalement permettre à un parti de gauche d'avoir le vent en poupe sont plus exacerbés que jamais. L'AKP mène avec constance une politique économique néolibérale. Le fossé entre pauvres et riches se creuse. Les avancées d'une politique sociale digne de ce nom sont sporadiques. Les petites gens sont souvent lourdement endettés. Et la stabilité économique à laquelle M. Erdogan doit sa victoire électorale repose sur un afflux constant de capitaux étrangers. Pourtant, personne à gauche ne se risquerait à appeler de ses vœux une crise économique : avec une population chauffée à blanc par la « crise kurde », seul le Parti d'action nationaliste (MHP) d'extrême droite en sortirait à son avantage.

NIELS KADRITZKE.

(11) Turkish Daily News, 26 septembre 2007.

droit constitutionnel a été appelé à présider la commission chargée de l'élaboration du nouveau projet de Constitution. Özbudun n'est pas suspect de penchants islamistes : en 2001, il représentait le gouvernement devant la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme pour défendre l'interdiction du parti islamiste Refah, où MM. Erdogan et Gül ont fait leurs premières armes. Mais le professeur Özbudun reconnaît que tous deux ont changé, et considère que l'AKP est un parti conservateur ayant opté de façon crédible pour l'Union européenne et un système démocratique. Le fameux « agenda caché » islamiste n'est, pour lui, qu'une pure chimère des kémalistes.

Dans la lettre et dans l'esprit, le projet de Constitution prend appui sur la Convention européenne des droits de l'homme et les arrêts de la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme. Cela vaut notamment pour la définition de la liberté de pensée et de la liberté d'expression comme pour la priorité du droit humanitaire international sur la Constitution turque. Il est également important pour M. Özbudun que les jugements des tribunaux militaires puissent être contrôlés en dernière instance par des tribunaux civils. On pourrait enfin, selon lui, avancer vers une solution du problème kurde en définissant la langue turque comme « langue administrative », et en ouvrant ainsi un espace pour d'autres langues « non officielles » comme le kurde dans les médias audiovisuels et dans les écoles.

Quant aux cours de religion, que les militaires avaient introduits en 1982 comme matière obligatoire, ils ne seraient plus qu'optionnels, et la Constitution affirmerait le droit de tout citoyen à changer de religion. Pour le juriste, l'interdiction du foulard relève d'une « conception déformée de la laïcité » qui serait une atteinte aux droits de la personne. La commission propose une solution élégante : déclarer inadmissible toute « discrimination en raison du vêtement (...) tant que cela ne contrevient pas aux principes et aux réformes d'Atatürk ».

Cette tactique montre avec quel luxe de précautions la commission se meut dans le magasin de porcelaine de la république kémaliste. Quant à savoir quelles idées de la commission Özbudun seront reprises dans le texte de la Constitution que le gouvernement de l'AKP présentera cet hiver au Parlement, la question demeure ouverte. La version définitive doit être votée au printemps 2008 par le Parlement, puis approuvée par référendum.

Vers le postkémalisme

IL EST PEU vraisemblable qu'au final la Constitution réponde intégralement aux idéaux laïques du professeur Özbudun. Le professeur Ali Bardakoglu, le grand

patron de la présidence des affaires religieuses, a d'ores et déjà exigé le maintien des cours de religion obligatoires. La raison invoquée est révélatrice : des cours facultatifs ne feraient que « renforcer les différences entre les élèves (11) » – que tombe le monopole de la doctrine majoritaire sunnite, et c'est toute l'homogénéité qui est menacée. Une troisième position, à égale distance des kémalistes et de l'AKP, s'exprime également, fût-ce avec prudence. Des juristes de gauche, des représentants des minorités religieuses et des tenants d'une « laïcité démocratique » exigent que soit formulé un cadre juridique pour le pluralisme religieux. Il s'agit en somme de mettre un terme aux discriminations à l'égard des musulmans non sunnites et des croyants d'autres religions.

Dans ce contexte, des intellectuels qui ont défendu M. Erdogan et l'AKP contre la vieille garde kémaliste se montrent critiques envers le gouvernement. Le politologue Sahin Alpay, éditorialiste respecté du journal *Today's Zaman*, proche du gouvernement, critique la façon dont l'AKP se comporte avec les alévis, qui avaient aussi en juillet voté majoritairement pour le CHP kémaliste parce qu'ils voyaient en M. Erdogan le chef d'un parti sunnite. Pour Alpay, une « laïcité démocratique » ne peut être garantie que si la nouvelle Constitution prévoit l'égalité des droits pour les alévis.

Le procureur militaire Ümit Kardas prône, lui, le démantèlement complet de la Constitution de 1982. Ce texte est pour lui un « instrument qui n'est pas réparable », son préambule renvoyant à une époque révolue où l'armée définissait la nation à sa convenance. Sa position se fonde sur son expérience : en tant que juge militaire, il a, après le putsch de 1980, vécu au plus près la répression contre la population kurde, et a démissionné de ses fonctions. M. Kardas soutient le principe d'une laïcité sur le modèle de certains pays européens. Il veut supprimer complètement l'administration des affaires religieuses, la DIB, et par là même le contrôle de l'Etat sur les religions. Celles-ci ne seraient plus finan-

cées par l'impôt, mais uniquement par les dons et par des fondations qui devraient pouvoir exercer leurs activités hors du contrôle de l'Etat.

Les idéaux constitutionnalistes de M. Kardas donnent une sorte d'empreinte « en creux » d'une Loi fondamentale que l'on pourrait nommer « postkémaliste ». Une Constitution où les libertés individuelles et les droits civiques ne seraient plus limités par référence à une définition autoritaire de l'Etat. Il veut aussi affaiblir l'influence disciplinaire de l'armée sur la société civile, par le droit à l'objection de conscience et par la création d'un service civil de remplacement. Il va jusqu'à rêver d'une armée et d'une police qui repenseraient leur formation selon des principes démocratiques et citoyens, et n'auraient plus à fonctionner comme « les deux

Comment Ankara étouffe l'opposition kurde

Le 18 décembre 2007, l'armée turque a effectué une incursion en territoire irakien contre des positions du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). Mais le vrai défi lancé à Ankara vient des revendications identitaires de la population kurde de Turquie, qui se heurtent à la vieille conception de l'Etat kémaliste homogène. Soupçonnés de liens avec le PKK, les opposant subissent discriminations et répression politique.

PAR NOTRE ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL
OLIVIER PIOT *

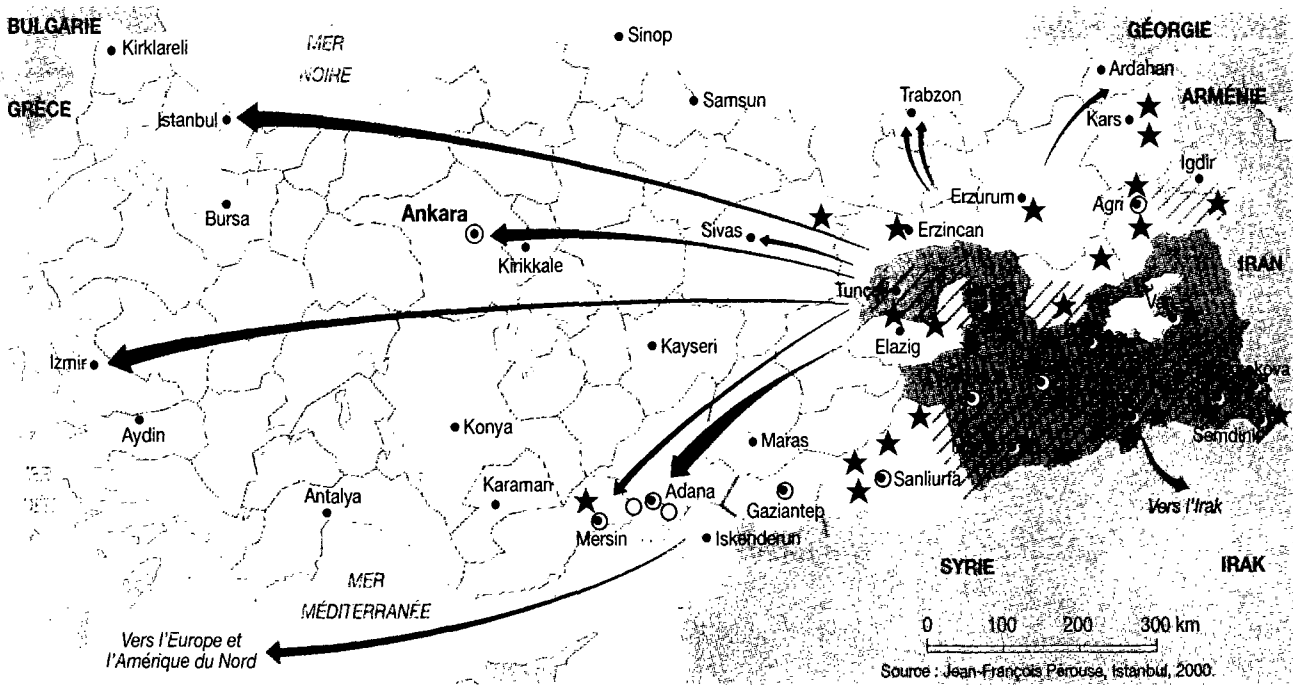
* Journaliste.

Traits tirés, chevelure blanchie par presque trente années d'isolement dans les prisons turques. M. Awat H***, la cinquantaine, reçoit dans sa petite boutique de Diyarbakir. Aux murs de sa modeste échoppe, aucun portrait d'Atatürk, pas un seul drapeau turc. Libéré en 2006, M. H*** est revenu vivre dans la capitale historique de ce Kurdistan pour lequel il a commencé la lutte à l'université, à la fin des années 1970 (1). En apprenant que nous avons visité des camps clandestins du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak (2), sa méfiance s'estompe. Mais comme tous ceux qui acceptent de parler, il exige

l'anonymat. « Nous vivons ici comme les Palestiniens de Gaza et de Cisjordanie, au contact permanent d'une armée et d'une police d'occupation qui surveillent chacun de nos gestes. Allez jusqu'à la frontière irakienne, traversez nos villes et villages, et vous verrez si la Turquie est un pays démocratique. »

« Garnizon », « Jandarma Komando », « Polis » : les frontons des forces turques jalonnent la route qui nous conduit vers Van, dans le nord des régions kurdes. A la suite des tensions avec des combattants du PKK réfugiés en Irak, l'effectif des soldats turcs installés dans le sud-est du pays a été porté à plusieurs centaines de milliers, et plus de cent mille campent le long de la frontière. Engagée en février 2007, cette logique sécuritaire a

servi la surenchère nationaliste voulue par l'état-major avant les élections législatives de juillet 2007. Juste après leur victoire, les dirigeants du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, au pouvoir à Ankara) ont dû emboîter le pas. Alors qu'il était délibérément resté flou, voire « ouvert » sur la question kurde, le



Le conflit kurde au début des années 1990

- Principales actions de la guérilla
- Destinations de l'émigration kurde
- ★ Affrontements armés
- Villes refuges
- Départements placés sous état d'exception
- ▨ Zones dans lesquelles de nombreux villages ont été « vidés » ou détruits

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premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan s'est empressé de signer, en août 2007, un accord avec Bagdad. Objectif : démontrer sa volonté d'intensifier la lutte contre les « terroristes » du PKK.

Vatan Bolunmez ! (« La patrie indivisible ! ») : tracée à flanc de colline, en énormes lettres de terre blanchie à la peinture, la devise signée Jandarma Komando est visible à des kilomètres à la ronde. Pour tous ceux qui vivent ici, près de Van, la principale ville kurde d'Anatolie orientale, ce rappel idéologique de l'armée claque comme un avertissement. Traduisez : « Il n'y aura jamais de Kurdistan en Turquie ! » A Van, pourtant, dans les locaux du Parti pour une société démocratique (DTP), une formation politique prokurde légale, M. Kubar D*** veut toujours y croire : « En 2004, nous avons gagné de nombreuses mairies dans la région. Aujourd'hui, en dépit de fraudes évidentes, vingt de nos députés siègent au Parlement turc. J'espère que les dirigeants de l'AKP respecteront ce verdict de la démocratie. » Mais M. D*** omet de dire une chose : avec vingt parlementaires, le DTP a réalisé en juillet 2007 un score électoral très inférieur à celui qu'espéraient ses dirigeants.

Certes, pour se faire élire, les candidats indépendants (3) ont rencontré de nombreux obstacles. Comme cette longue liste nominative de tous les candidats qu'une nouvelle loi a imposée dans chaque bureau de vote. « Nous avons dû distribuer des milliers de règles, en papier ou en bois, pour aider les électeurs kurdes, dont beaucoup ne savent pas lire, à situer matériellement sur la liste l'endroit précis où figuraient les noms des candidats indépendants prokurdes », raconte M. D***. Mais la défaite relative du DTP a une autre explication. « Beaucoup de gens sont lassés des deux décennies de guérilla, de misère et de harcèlement policier qu'ils viennent de traverser, explique un professeur de Van. Résultat, les électeurs kurdes sont donc nombreux à s'être laissés séduire par la politique sociale [soins de santé, distributions de nourriture, promesses de subventions aux villes conquises par l'AKP] menée localement par les islamistes. »

En poursuivant vers Yüksekova, plus au sud, le long de la frontière iranienne, les forces militaires deviennent omniprésentes. Casernes, voitures blindées, contrôles d'identité : le centre-ville de la

préfecture kurde a des allures de cité en état de siège. Visite au bureau central du DTP. En bas de l'immeuble, deux militaires patrouillent. A l'étage, dans une salle aux murs couverts des drapeaux jaune et rouge du parti, une trentaine de personnes attendent. La veille, Perihan, une jeune Kurde de 18 ans, membre du PKK, est tombée sous les balles turques. Un convoi d'une quinzaine de véhicules s'apprête à partir pour présenter les condoléances à la famille de la « martyre ». Le maire (DTP) de Yüksekova, M. Salih Yildiz, nous propose de nous joindre au groupe.

Situé à une dizaine de kilomètres de la ville, le village est saturé de voitures venues de tout le district. Par vagues successives, des hommes, jeunes et vieux, entrent et sortent d'un jardin dédié à l'accueil des visiteurs. Sur une table, le portrait de Perihan noyé dans des gerbes de fleurs. Derrière, les hommes de la famille proche de la défunte sont alignés le long du mur de la mosquée. Face à eux, une centaine de chaises, toutes occupées. De temps à autre, l'imam du village lance un appel à la prière. Puis M. Yildiz se lève : « Chaque militant du peuple kurde fait ses choix, lance-t-il, tourné vers l'assemblée. Perihan avait fait le sien. » Sans jamais prononcer le nom du PKK, il reproche ouvertement à l'AKP de mener la répression contre le peuple kurde, au mépris de la démocratie : « Poursuivre les combats pendant le ramadan n'est pas à l'honneur de ce parti qui se dit grand défenseur des valeurs de l'islam ! », conclut le maire.

La mort de Perihan témoigne des accrochages qui perdurent dans la région entre soldats turcs et combattants du PKK, en dépit du cessez-le-feu décrété en octobre 2006. Accord qui, selon le PKK, n'a jamais été remis en cause depuis par les dirigeants kurdes. « Contrairement à ce que disent les médias kémalistes, télévision et journaux, c'est l'armée qui cherche l'affrontement, fulmine un jeune de Yüksekova. Pourchassés, contraints à la clandestinité, les combattants du PKK ne font que riposter aux attaques dirigées contre eux. »

Une chose est sûre : les positions de plus en plus belliqueuses de l'armée et des médias sont sans commune mesure avec le danger que représente le PKK. Militairement, d'abord, ses forces combattantes n'ont plus rien à voir avec celles des années de forte guérilla (1984-1992). Le PKK compte moins de trois mille militants en terre turque – en plus des trois mille cinq cents retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak –, contre près de vingt mille en 1992. Politiquement, ensuite, les dirigeants du PKK n'ont cessé depuis une quinzaine d'années de revoir à la baisse leurs exigences.

En 1992, l'Etat a lancé une vaste opération de destruction des villages kurdes. En quelques années, cette politique de terreur a entraîné l'exil forcé

des populations rurales vers les grandes métropoles ainsi qu'une forte immigration kurde (étudiante, notamment) en Europe (4). Cette stratégie visait à affaiblir le PKK en le coupant de ses bases militantes au « Kurdistan nord ». Objectif atteint puisque c'est précisément à cette époque que certains dirigeants commencent à délaisser l'intransigeance séparatiste au profit d'une perspective plus réaliste d'autonomie négociée. En février 1999, l'arrestation du président de leur parti, M. Abdullah

Öcalan, a été l'occasion d'une nouvelle mise au point. De sa prison turque, le leader kurde demanda l'« arrêt de la lutte armée » et appela à une « transition démocratique » vers la reconnaissance des droits du peuple kurde. Trois ans plus tard, le PKK changeait de nom (5).

Dans la ville de Semdinli, petite sous-préfecture située à quelques kilomètres de la frontière irakienne, cette mutation est loin de faire l'unanimité. Car, si la mairie a été conquise par le Parti de la démocratie du peuple (Hadep) en 1999, puis par le DTP, cinq ans plus tard, les partis prokurdes n'ont guère convaincu (6). Il faut dire qu'avec quinze mille soldats stationnés dans une zone de quarante-cinq mille habitants la

présence militaire atteint ici son paroxysme. « C'est presque impossible de gérer une ville avec une aussi forte pression, concède le maire Hursit Tekin. Mon prédécesseur a été démis de ses fonctions pendant seize mois, et moi j'ai une trentaine de procès sur le dos. Sans parler de la façon dont l'Etat turc nous traite : contrairement aux communes dirigées par l'AKP, Semdinli ne touche presque rien des subventions publiques... »

Même ambiance martiale à Hakkari, une préfecture régionale située au sud-ouest de Yüksekova. A l'entrée de la commune, deux policiers en civil contrôlent les identités. Au centre-ville, un contact nous conduit discrètement dans l'arrière-salle d'un café où sont

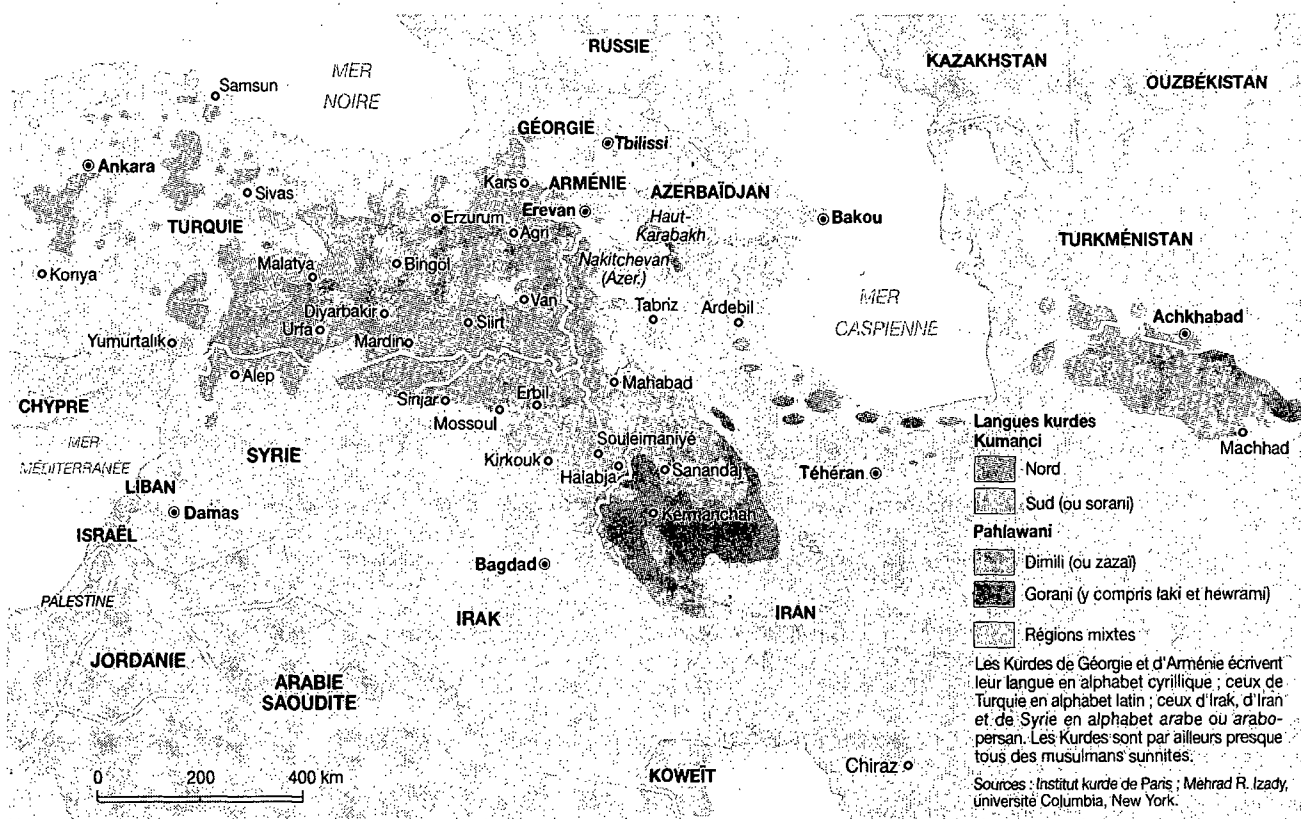
réunis une dizaine de jeunes âgés de 20 à 30 ans. Aucun d'entre eux n'est militant du PKK, mais ils se réclament tous du DTP. « Je n'ai pas envie de vivre dans la clandestinité, explique Afran, un étudiant. Et je crois que le choix de la légalité fait par le DTP est le bon. Les élections représentent une façon efficace de faire entendre la voix des Kurdes. » Sur sa droite, Metin, 25 ans, trépigne en l'écoutant : « D'accord, le DTP fait un travail important. Mais le problème, c'est qu'il peut être interdit à tout moment. Regarde ce qui est arrivé aux anciens partis prokurdes... L'existence d'une structure clandestine et armée comme le PKK reste la seule garantie pour contraindre l'Etat turc et le monde entier à tenir compte des revendications du peuple kurde. »

La ville de Sanliurfa, à près de quatre cents kilomètres, se situe à l'extrême

(1) Fondé officiellement en 1978, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) est né du mouvement de contestation étudiant qui a agité la Turquie dès le milieu des années 1970.

(2) Lire « Dans les maquis du Kurdistan », *Le Monde diplomatique*, novembre 2007.

(3) Pour se présenter sous l'étiquette d'un parti politique, la loi turque exige que ce dernier représente au moins 10 % des voix à l'échelle nationale. Les candidats du DTP sont donc obligés de se présenter comme « indépendants ».



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ouest des régions kurdes. A plusieurs reprises, entre Hakkari et Sirnak, nous croisons des groupes de « protecteurs de villages », ces quelque cinquante mille Kurdes payés par l'Etat pour servir de forces d'appoint aux missions de son armée. Sur la route, les contrôles militaires sont de plus en plus nombreux. A chaque fois, notre voiture est minutieusement inspectée, nos sacs sont fouillés. Jusqu'à ce qu'un officier exige

de consulter les photographies et notes de notre reportage. Un refus provoque une heure d'attente. Après consultation de ses supérieurs, le commandant nous laisse partir. Un quart d'heure plus tard, même scénario. Il faudra plus de treize heures et une quinzaine de contrôles pour atteindre Sanliurfa.

OLIVIER PIOT.

(4) Cf. Bernard Dorin. *Les Kurdes, Destin héroïque, destin iraque*, Lignes de repères, Paris, 2005.

(5) En 2002, le PKK devient le Congrès pour la liberté et la démocratie du Kurdistan (Kadek). Lire Michel Verrier, « Paysages kurdes avant la bataille », *Le Monde diplomatique*, octobre 2002.

(6) Créé en 1994, le parti prokurde Hadepe fut interdit en 2003 par les autorités turques.

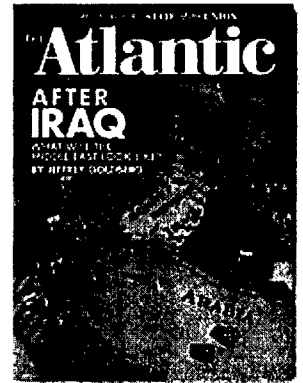
THE Atlantic

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After Iraq

A report from the new Middle East—and a glimpse of its possible future

BY JEFFREY GOLDBERG

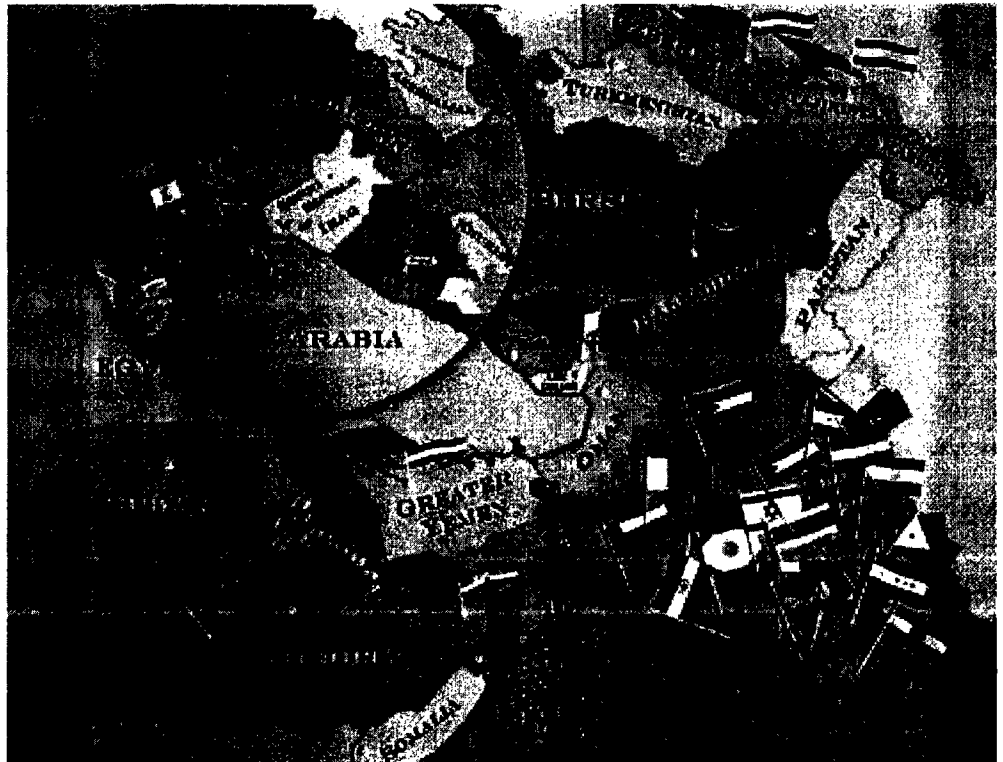


Not long ago, in a decrepit prison in Iraqi Kurdistan, a senior interrogator with the Kurdish intelligence service decided, for my entertainment and edification, to introduce me to an al-Qaeda terrorist named Omar. “This one is crazy,” the interrogator said. “Don’t get close, or he’ll bite you.”

Omar was a Sunni Arab from a village outside Mosul; he was a short and weedy man, roughly 30 years old, who radiated a pure animal anger. He was also a relentless jabberer; he did not shut up from the moment we were introduced. I met him in an unventilated interrogation room that smelled of bleach and paint. He was handcuffed, and he cursed steadily, making appalling accusations about the sexual practices of the interrogator’s mother. He cursed the Kurds, in general, as pig-eaters, blasphemers, and American lackeys. As Omar ranted, the interrogator smiled. “I told you the Arabs don’t like the Kurds,” he said. I’ve known the interrogator for a while, and this is his perpetual theme: close proximity to Arabs has sabotaged Kurdish happiness.

Omar, the Kurds claim, was once an inconsequential deputy to the now-deceased terrorist chieftain Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Omar disputed this characterization. By his own telling, he accomplished prodigies of terror against the pro-American Kurdish forces in the northern provinces of Iraq. “You are worse than the Americans,” he told his Kurdish interrogator. “You are the enemy of the Muslim nation. You are enemies of God.” The interrogator—I will not name him here, for reasons that will become apparent in a moment—sat sturdily opposite Omar, absorbing his invective for several minutes, absentmindedly paging through a copy of the Koran.

During a break in the tirade, the interrogator asked Omar, for my benefit, to rehearse his biography. Omar’s life was undistinguished. His father was a one-donkey farmer; Omar was educated in Saddam’s school system, which is to say he was hardly educated; he joined the army, and then Ansar al-Islam, the al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist group that operates along the Iranian frontier. And then, on the blackest of days, as he described it, he



fell prisoner to the Kurds.

The interrogator asked me if I had any questions for Omar. Yes, I said: Have you been tortured in this prison?

“No,” he said.

“What would you do if you were to be released from prison right now?”

“I would get a knife and cut your head off,” he said.

At this, the interrogator smacked Omar across the face with the Koran.

Omar yelped in shock. The interrogator said: “Don’t talk that way to a guest!”

Now, Omar rounded the bend. A bolus of spit flew from his mouth as he screamed. The interrogator taunted Omar further. “This book of yours,” he said, waving the Koran. “Cut off their heads! Cut off their heads! That’s the answer for everything!” Omar cursed the interrogator’s mother once again; the interrogator trumped him by cursing the Prophet Muhammad’s mother.

The meeting was then adjourned.

In the hallway, I asked the interrogator, “Aren’t you Muslim?”

“Of course,” he said.

“But you’re not a big believer in the Koran?”

“The Koran’s OK,” he said. “I don’t have any criticism of Muhammad’s mother. I just say that to get him mad.”

He went on, “The Koran wasn’t written by God, you know. It was written by Arabs. The Arabs were imperialists, and they forced it on us.” This is a common belief among negligibly religious Kurds, of whom there are many millions.

“That’s your problem, then,” I said. “Arabs.”

“Of course,” he replied. “The Arabs are responsible for all our misfortunes.”

“What about the Turks?” I asked. It is the Turks, after all, who are incessantly threatening to invade Iraqi Kurdistan, which they decline to call “Iraqi Kurdis-

tan," in more or less the same obstreperous manner that they refuse to call the Armenian genocide a genocide.

"The Turks, too," he said. "Everyone who denies us our right to be free is responsible for our misfortunes."

We stepped out into the sun. "The Kurds never had friends. Now we have the most important friend, America. We're closer to freeing ourselves from the Arabs than ever," he said.

To the Kurds, the Arabs are bearers of great misfortune. The decades-long oppression of Iraq's Kurds culminated during the rule of Saddam Hussein, whose Sunni Arab-dominated army committed genocide against them in the late 1980s. Yet their unfaltering faith that they will one day be free may soon be rewarded: the Kurds are finally edging close to independence. Much blood may be spilled as Kurdistan unhitches itself from Iraq—Turkey is famously sour on the idea of Kurdish independence, fearing a riptide of nationalist feeling among its own unhappy Kurds—but independence for Iraq's Kurds seems, if not immediate, then in due course inevitable.

In many ways, the Kurds are functionally independent already. The Kurdish regional government has its own army, collects its own taxes, and negotiates its own oil deals. For the moment, Kurdish officials say they would be satisfied with membership in a loose-jointed federation with the Shiite and Sunni Arabs to their south. But in Erbil and Sulaymani, the two main cities of the Kurdish region, the Iraqi flag is banned from flying; Arabic is scarcely heard on the streets (and is never spoken by young people, who are happily ignorant of it), and Baghdad is referred to as a foreign capital. In October, when I was last in the region, I called the office of a high official of the *peshmerga*, the Kurdish guerrilla army, but was told that he had "gone to Iraq" for the week.

The Bush administration gave many reasons for the invasion of Iraq, but the satisfaction of Kurdish national desire was not one of them. Quite the opposite: the goal was, and remains, a unified, democratic Iraq. In fact, key officials of the administration have a history of indifference to, and ignorance of, the subject of Kurdish nationalism. At a conference in 2004, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice stated, "What has been impressive to me so far is that Iraqis—whether Kurds or Shia or Sunni or the many other ethnic groups in Iraq—have demonstrated that they really want to live as one in a unified Iraq." As Peter Galbraith, a former American diplomat and an advocate for Kurdish independence, has observed, Rice's statement was disconnected from observable reality—shortly before she spoke, 80 percent of all Iraqi Kurdish adults had signed a petition calling for a vote on independence.

Nor were neoconservative ideologues—who had the most-elaborate visions of a liberal, democratic Iraq—interested in the Kurdish cause, or even particularly knowledgeable about its history. Just before the "Mission Accomplished" phase of the war, I spoke about Kurdistan to an audience that included Norman Podhoretz, the vicariously martial neoconservative who is now a Middle East adviser to Rudolph Giuliani. After the event, Podhoretz seemed authentically bewildered. "What's a Kurd, anyway?" he asked me.

As America approaches the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, the list of the war's unintended consequences is without end (as opposed to the list of intended consequences, which is, so far, vanishingly brief). The list includes, notably, the likelihood that the Kurds will achieve their independence and that Iraq will go the way of Gaul and be divided into three parts—but it also includes much more than that. Across the Middle East, and into south-central Asia, the intrinsically artificial qualities of several states have been brought into focus by the omnivorous American response to the attacks of 9/11; it is not just Iraq and Afghanistan that appear to be incoherent amalgamations of disparate tribes and territories. The precariousness of such states as Lebanon and Pakistan, of course, predates the invasion of Iraq. But the wars against al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and especially Saddam Hussein have made the durability of the modern Middle East state system an open question in ways that it wasn't a mere seven years ago.

It used to be that the most far-reaching and inventive question one could ask about the Middle East was this: How many states, one or two—Israel or a Palestinian state, or both—will one day exist on the slip of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River?

Today, that question seems trivial when compared with this one: How many states will there one day be between the Mediterranean and the Euphrates River? Three? Four? Five? Six? And why stop at the western bank of the Euphrates? Why not go all the way to the Indus River? Between the Mediterranean and the Indus today lie Israel and the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Long-term instability could lead to the breakup of many of these states.

All states are man-made. But some are more man-made than others. It was Winston Churchill (a bust of whom Bush keeps in the Oval Office) who, in the aftermath of World War I, roped together three provinces of the defeated and dissolved Ottoman Empire, adopted the name Iraq, and bequeathed it to a luckless branch of the Hashemite tribe of west Arabia. Churchill would eventually call the forced inclusion of the Kurds in Iraq one

of his worst mistakes—but by then, there was nothing he could do about it.

The British, together with the French, gave the world the modern Middle East. In addition to manufacturing the country now called Iraq, the grand Middle East settlement shrank Turkey by the middle of the 1920s to the size of the Anatolian peninsula; granted what are now Syria and Lebanon to the French; and kept Egypt under British control. The British also broke Palestine in two, calling its eastern portion Trans-Jordan and installing a Hashemite prince, Abdullah, as its ruler, and at the same time promising Western Palestine to the Jews, while implying to the Arabs there that it was their land, too. As the historian David Fromkin puts it in *A Peace to End All Peace*, his definitive account of the machinations among the Great Powers that resulted in the modern map of the Middle East, the region

became what it is today both because the European powers undertook to re-shape it and because Britain and France failed to ensure that the dynasties, the states, and the political system that they established would permanently endure.

Of course, the current turbulence in the Middle East is attributable also to factors beyond the miscalculations of both the hubristic, seat-of-the-pants Bush administration and the hubristic, seat-of-the-pants French and British empires. Among other things, there is the crisis within Islam, a religion whose doctrinal triumphalism—Muslims believe the Koran to be the final, authoritative word of God—is undermined daily by the global balance of power, with predictable and terrible consequences (see: the life of Mohammed Atta et al.); and there is the related and continuing crisis of globalization, which drives people who have not yet received the message that the world is now flat to find solace and meaning in their fundamental ethnic and religious identities.

But since 9/11, America's interventions in the region—and especially in Iraq—have exacerbated the tensions there, and have laid bare how artificial, and how tenuously constructed, the current map of the Middle East really is. By invading Iraq, the Bush administration sought not only to deprive the country of its putative weapons of mass destruction, but also to shake things up in Iraq's chaotic neighborhood; toppling Saddam and planting the seeds of democracy in Iraq would, it was hoped, make possible the transformation of the region. The region is being transformed; that transformation is just turning out to be a different, and possibly far broader, one than imagined. As Dennis Ross, who was a Middle East envoy for both Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush, and is now with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, puts it, the Iraq War has begun to produce "wholesale change"—but

“it won’t be the one envisioned by the administration.” An independent Kurdistan would be just the start.

Envisioning what the Middle East might look like five or 10 or 50 years from now is by definition a speculative exercise. But precisely because of the scope of the transformation that’s under way, imagining the future of the region, and figuring out a smart approach to it, should be at the top of America’s post-Iraq priorities. At the moment, however, neither the Bush administration nor the candidates for the presidency seem to be thinking about the future of the Middle East (beyond the immediate situation in Iraq and the specific question of what to do about Iran’s nuclear intentions) in any particularly creative way. At the State Department and on the National Security Council, there is a poverty of imagination (to borrow a phrase from the debate about the causes of chronic intelligence failure) about the shifting map of the region.

It’s not just the fragility of the post-1922 borders that has been exposed by recent history; it’s also the limitations of the leading foreign-policy philosophies—realism and neoconservatism. Formulating a foreign policy after Iraq will require coming to terms with a reshaped Middle East, and thinking about it in new ways.

Unintended Consequences

In an effort to understand the shape of things to come in the Middle East, I spent several weeks speaking with more than 25 experts and traveling to Iraq, Jordan, the West Bank, and Israel. Many of the conversations were colored, naturally, by the ideological predispositions of those I talked with. The realists quake at instability, which threatens (as they see it) the only real American interest in the Middle East, the uninterrupted flow of Arab oil. Iranophobes see that country’s empowerment, and the threat of regional Shiite-Sunni warfare, as the greatest cause for worry. Pro-Palestinian academics blame Israel, and its friends in Washington, for trying to force the collapse of the Arab state system. The liberal interventionists lament the poor execution of the Iraq War, and wish that the Bush administration had gone about exporting democracy to the Middle East with more subtlety and less hypocrisy. The neoconservatives, who cite the American Revolution as an example of what might be called “constructive volatility,” see no reason to regret instability (even as they concede that it’s hard to imagine a happy end to the Iraq War anytime soon).

Some experts didn’t want to play at all. When I called David Fromkin and asked him to speculate about the future of the Middle East, he said morosely, “The Middle East has no future.” And when I spoke

to Edward Luttwak, the iconoclastic military historian at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, he said there was no reason to engage the subject: the West is unable to shape the future of the Middle East, so why bother? “The United States could abandon Israel altogether, or embrace the general Arab cause 100 percent,” he said, but “the Arabs will find a new reason to be anti-American.”

Many experts I spoke to ventured that it would be foolish to predict what will happen in the Middle East next Tuesday, let alone in 2018, or in 2028—but that it would also be foolish not to be actively thinking about, and preparing for, what might come next.

So what might, in fact, come next? The most important first-order consequence of the Iraq invasion, envisioned by many of those I spoke to, is the possibility of a regional conflict between Sunnis and Shiites for theological and political supremacy in the Middle East. This is a war that could be fought by proxies of Saudi Arabia, the Sunni flag-bearer, against Iran—or perhaps by Iran and Saudi Arabia themselves—on battlefields across Iraq, in Lebanon and Syria, and in Saudi Arabia’s largely Shiite Eastern Province, under which most of the kingdom’s oil lies. In 2004, King Abdullah II of Jordan, a Sunni, spoke of the creation of a Shiite “crescent,” running from Iran, through Iraq, and into Syria and Lebanon, that would destabilize the Arab world. Jordan, which is an indispensably important American ally, is a Sunni country, but its population is also majority-Palestinian, and many of those Palestinians support the Islamist Hamas movement, one of whose main sponsors is Shiite Iran.

There are likely second-order consequences, as well. Rampant Kurdish nationalism, unleashed by the invasion, may spill over into the Kurdish areas of Turkey and Iran. America’s reliance on anti-democratic regimes, such as Egypt’s, for help in its campaign against Islamist terrorism could strengthen the Islamist opposition in those countries. An American decision to confront Iran could have an enduring impact on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process—a tenuous undertaking to begin with—because the chief enemies of compromise are the Iranian-backed terror groups Hamas and Hezbollah.

Then there are third-order consequences: in the next 20 years, new states could emerge as old ones shrink, fracture, or disappear. Khuzestan, a mostly Arab province of majority-Persian Iran, could become independent. Lebanon, whose existence is perpetually inexplicable, could become partly absorbed by Syria, whose future is also uncertain. The Alawites who rule Syria are members of a Shiite splinter sect, and they are a tiny minority in their own, mostly Sunni country (the Ala-wites

briefly ruled an independent state in the mountains above the Mediterranean). Syria, out of a population of 20 million, has roughly 2 million Kurds, who are mostly indifferent, and sometimes hostile, to the government in Damascus.

Kuwait is another state whose future looks unstable; after all, it has already been subsumed once, and could be again—though, under another scenario, it could gain territory and population, if Iraq’s Sunnis seek an alliance with it as a way of protecting themselves from their country’s newly powerful Shiites. Bahrain, a majority-Shiite country ruled by Sunnis, could well be annexed by Iran (which already claims it), and Yemen could expand its territory at Saudi Arabia’s expense. And the next decades might see the birth of one or two Palestinian states—and, perhaps, the end of Israel as a Jewish state, a fervent dream of much of the Muslim world.

And let’s not forget Pakistan, whose artificiality I was reminded of by Pervez Musharraf, the Pakistani dictator, during an interview in the garrison city of Rawalpindi some years ago. At one point, he took exception to the idea that the Baluch, the quasi-nomadic people who inhabit the large deserts of Pakistan’s west (and Iran’s southeast), might feel unattached to the government in Islamabad. In so doing, he undermined the idea of Pakistan as a naturally unitary state. “I know many residents of Baluchistan who are appreciative of Pakistan and the many programs and the like that Pakistan has for Baluchistan,” he said, referring to one of his states as if it were another country. He continued: “Why [is Pakistan] thought of as artificial and not others? Didn’t your country almost come to an end in a civil war? You faced larger problems than we ever have.”

Musharraf also made passing reference to the Afghan-Pakistan border, the so-called Durand Line. It was named after the English official who in 1893 forced the Afghans to accept it as their border with British India, even though it sliced through the territory of a large ethnic group, the truculent Pashtuns, who dominate Afghan politics and warmaking and who have always disliked and, accordingly, disrespected the line. Musharraf warned about the hazards of even thinking about the line. “Why would there be such a desire to change existing situations?” he said. “There would be instability to come out of this situation, should this question be put on the table. It is best to leave borders alone. If you start asking about this and that border or this and that arrangement ...” He didn’t finish the sentence.

All of this is very confusing, of course. Many Americans (including, until not so long ago, President Bush) do not know the difference between a Shiite and a Sunni, let alone between a Sindhi and a Punjabi. Just try to imagine, say, Secretary of State Podhoretz briefing President Giuliani on

his first meeting with the leaders of the Baluchi-stan Liberation Army, and it becomes obvious that we may be entering a new and hazardous era.

Mapping the New Middle East

"Nobody is thinking about whether or not the map is still viable," Ralph Peters told me. Peters is a retired Army lieutenant colonel and intelligence expert who writes frequent critiques of U.S. strategy in the Middle East. "It's not a question about how America wants the map to look; it's a question of how the map is going to look, whether we like it or not."

In the June 2006 issue of *Armed Forces Journal*, Peters published a map of what he thought a more logical Middle East might look like. Rather than following the European-drawn borders, he made his map by tracing the region's "blood borders," invisible lines that would separate battling ethnic and sectarian groups. He wrote of his map,

While the Middle East has far more problems than dysfunctional borders alone—from cultural stagnation through scandalous inequality to deadly religious extremism—the greatest taboo in striving to understand the region's comprehensive failure isn't Islam but the awful-but-sacrosanct international boundaries worshipped by our own diplomats.

Peters drew onto his map an independent Kurdistan and an abridged Turkey; he shrank Iran (handing over Khuzestan to an as-yet-imaginary Arab-Shiite state he carved out of what is now southern Iraq); he placed Jordan and Yemen on a steroid regimen; and he dismembered Saudi Arabia because he sees it as a primary enemy of Muslim modernization.

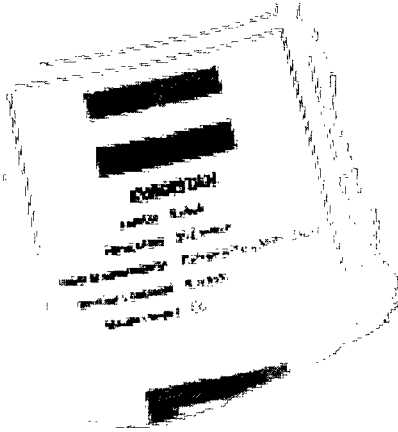
It was an act of knowing whimsy, he said. But it was seen by the Middle East's more fevered minds as a window onto the American imperial planning process. "The reaction was pure paranoia, just hysterics," Peters told me. "The Turks in particular got very upset." Peters explained how he made the map. "The art department gave me a blank map, and I took a crayon and drew on it. After it came out, people started arguing on the Internet that this border should, in fact, be 50 miles this way, and that border 50 miles that way, but the width of the crayon itself was 200 miles."

Given the preexisting sensitivities in the Middle East to white men wielding crayons, it's not surprising that his map would be met with such anxiety. There is a belief, prevalent in the Middle East and among pro-Palestinian American academics, that the Bush administration's actual goal—or

the goal, at least, of its favored theoreticians—is to rip up the existing map of the Arab Middle East in order to help Israel.

"One of the most evil things that is happening is that a bunch of people who are fundamentally opposed to the existence of these nation-states have gotten into the control room," Rashid Khalidi, who is the Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies at Columbia University, told me. "They are irresponsible and highly ideological neo-conservatives, generally, and they have been trying to smash the Arab state system. Their basic philosophy is, the smaller the Arab state, the better."

Neoconservatives inside the administration deny this. "We never had the creation



of new states as a goal," Douglas Feith, the former undersecretary of defense for policy, told me, and indeed, there is no proof that the administration sought the breakup of Iraq. On the contrary: shortly after the invasion, I saw Paul Wolfowitz, then the deputy secretary of defense, at the White House Correspondents' Association dinner, and I told him I had just returned from Kurdistan. Maybe he was just feeling snappish (a few minutes earlier he had had a confrontation with Al Franken that ended with Wolfowitz saying "Fuck you" to the comedian), but Wolfowitz looked at me and, as though he were channeling the Turkish foreign minister, said, "We call it northern Iraq. Northern Iraq."

Peters said he noticed early on as well that the administration was committed to a unified Iraq, and to the preexisting, European-drawn map of the Middle East. "This is how strange things are—the greatest force for democracy in the world has signed up for the maintenance of the European model of the world," he said. "Even the neocons, who look like revolutionaries, just want to substitute Bourbons for Hapsburgs," he continued, and added, "Not just in Iraq." (Peters acknowledged that neoconservatives outside the administration were more radical than those on the inside, like Feith and Wolfowitz.)

So just what did the neoconservatives, the most influential foreign-policy school of the Bush years, have in mind? Feith,

whose (inevitable) book on the invasion and its aftermath will be published in March, told me that the neoconservatives—at least those inside the administration—did not hope to create new borders, but did see a value in "instability," especially since, in his view, the Middle East was already destabilized by the presence of Saddam Hussein. "There is something I once heard attributed to Goethe," he said, "that 'Disorder is worse than injustice.' We have an interest in stability, of course, but we should not overemphasize the value of stability when there is an opportunity to make the world a better or safer place for us. For example, during the Nixon presidency, and the George H. W. Bush presidency, the emphasis was on stabilizing relations with the Soviet Union. During the Reagan administration, the goal was to put the Communists on the ash heap of history. Those Americans who argued for stability tried to preserve the Soviet Union. But it was Reagan who was right." Feith had hoped that the demise of Iraq's Baath regime would allow a new sort of governance to take hold in an Arab country. "We understood that if you did something as big as replacing Saddam, then there are going to be all kinds of consequences, many of which you can't possibly anticipate. Something good may come, something negative might come out."

So far, it's been mainly negative. The neo-conservatives' big idea was that American-style democracy would quickly take hold in Iraq, spread through the Arab Middle East, and then be followed by the collapse of al-Qaeda, who would no longer have American-backed authoritarian Arab regimes to rally against. But democracy has turned out to be a habit not easily cultivated, and the idea that Arab political culture is capable of absorbing democratic notions of governance has fallen into disfavor.

In December of 2006, I went to the Israeli Embassy in Washington for a ceremony honoring Natan Sharansky, who had just received the Medal of Freedom from President Bush. Sharansky, the former Soviet dissident, had become the president's tutor on the importance of democratic reform in the Arab world, and during the ceremony, he praised the president for pursuing unpopular policies. As he talked, the man next to me, a senior Israeli security official, whispered, "What a child."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"It's not smart ... He wants Jordan to be more democratic. Do you know what that would mean for Israel and America? If you were me, would you rather have a stable monarch who is secular and who has a good intelligence service on your eastern border, or would you rather have a state run by Hamas? That's what he would get if there were no more monarchy in Jordan."

After the ceremony, I spoke with Sharansky about this critique. He acknowledged that he is virtually the lone neoconserva-

tive thinker in Israel, and one of the few who still believes that democracy is exportable to the Arab world, by force or otherwise.

"After I came back from Washington once," he said, "I saw [Prime Minister Ariel] Sharon in the Knesset, and he said, 'Mazel tov, Natan. You've convinced President Bush of something that doesn't exist.'"

A War about Nothing?

It is true that the neoconservatives' dream of Middle East democracy has proved to be a mirage. But it's not as though the neocons' principal foils, the foreign-policy realists, who view stability as a paramount virtue, have covered themselves in glory in the post-9/11 era. Brent Scowcroft, President George H. W. Bush's national security adviser and Washington's senior advocate of foreign-policy realism, told me not long ago of a conversation he had had with his onetime protégée Condoleezza Rice. "She says, 'We're going to democratize Iraq,' and I said, 'Condi, you're not going to democratize Iraq,' and she said, 'You know, you're just stuck in the old days,' and she comes back to this thing, that we've tolerated an autocratic Middle East for 50 years, and so on and so forth. But we've had 50 years of peace." Of course, what Scowcroft fails to note here is that al-Qaeda attacked us in part because America is the prime backer of its enemies, the autocratic rulers of Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

It is conceivable, if paradoxical, that the actual outcome of the recent turmoil in the Middle East could be a new era of stability, fostered by realists in this country and in the region itself. This might be the most unlikely potential outcome of the Iraq invasion—that it turns out to be the Seinfeld War, a war about nothing (except, of course, the loss of a great many lives and vast sums of money). Everything changes if America attacks Iranian nuclear sites, of course—but the latest National Intelligence Estimate, which came out in early December and reported that Iran had shut down its covert nuclear-weapons program in 2003, makes it unlikely that the Bush administration will pursue this option. And the next one or two U.S. presidents, who will be inheriting both the Iraq and Afghanistan portfolios, will probably be hesitant to attack any more Muslim countries. It's not impossible to imagine that, in 20 years, the map of the Middle East will look exactly like it does today.

"We tend to underestimate the power of states," Robert Satloff, the director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, told me. "The PC way of looking at the 21st century is that non-state actors—al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, general chaos—have replaced states as the key players in the Middle East. But states are more resilient than

that." He added that a newfound fear of instability might even buttress existing states.

Jordan is an interesting example of this phenomenon. While it would seem eminently vulnerable to the chaos—Iraq is to its east, the Palestinians and Israel to its west, and Syria to the north—Jordan is, in fact, almost tranquil, in part because it is led by a savvy king (scion of a family, the Hashemites, who are quite used to living on the balls of their feet) and in part because most of its people, having viewed from orchestra seats the bedlam in Iraq, want quiet, even if that means forgoing all the features of Western democracy.

Jordan might be an exception, however. Even a passing look at a country like Saudi Arabia suggests that internally driven regime changes are real possibilities. In Egypt the aging Hosni Mubarak is trying to engineer his unproven younger son, Gamal, into the presidency. It does not seem likely, at the moment, that Gamal would succeed in the job. Egypt was once a country that could project its power into Syria; now its leaders are having trouble controlling the Sinai Peninsula, home to a couple hundred thousand Bedouin, who are Pashtun-like in their stiff-neckedness and who seem more and more unwilling to accept Cairo's rule. America, of course, continues to embrace Mubarak, seeing no alternative except the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood. This pattern is familiar in American diplomacy; President Bush's long embrace of Musharraf comes to mind, and there are various, bipartisan antecedents—such as, most notably, Jimmy Carter's support for the Shah of Iran.

Beyond Realism and Neoconservatism

In the years since his Iraq project fell into disrepair, President Bush has acted like a realist while speaking like a utopian neo-conservative. He has touted the virtues of democracy to the very people subjugated by pro-American dictators. This is probably not a good long-term policy for managing chaos in the Middle East.

The problem is that Iraq has already proven—and Iran continues to prove—that Americans cannot make Middle Easterners do what is in America's best interest. "Whether the Middle East is unimportant or terrifically important, when it comes to doing anything about it, the actions undertaken are all ineffectual or counterproductive," Edward Luttwak told me. "In the Middle East, it doesn't help to be nice to them, or to bomb them."

A first step in restoring America's influence in the Middle East is to accept with humility the notion that America—like Britain before it—cannot organize the

region according to its own interests. (Ideologues of varying positions tend to quote for their own benefit the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr on the proper use of American power—but perhaps what the debate needs is a version of Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer: "God grant me the courage to change the regimes I can, the grace to accept the regimes I can't ...") What's called for is a foreign policy in which the neoconservative's belief in the liberating power of democracy is yoked to the realist's understanding of unintended consequences.

Of course, winning in Iraq—or at least not losing—would help fortify America's deterrent power, and check Iran's involvement in Lebanon, Gaza, and elsewhere. America's situation in Iraq is not quite so dire as it was a year ago; the troop surge has worked to suppress much violence, and there have been tentative steps by both Shiite and Sunni leaders to prevent all-out sectarian war. To be sure, very few experts predict with any assurance an optimistic future for Iraq. "Ten years is a reasonable time period to think that the sectarian conflict will need to play out," Martin Indyk, the director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, told me. "The parties will eventually exhaust themselves. Perhaps they have already, although I fear that the surge has just provided a break for Sunnis and Shias to better position themselves for further conflict when American forces are drawn down. There's no indication yet that the Shias are prepared to share power or that the Sunnis are prepared to live as a minority under Shia majoritarian rule."

Erstwhile optimists about the prospects for democracy in the Middle East, myself included, have been chastened by recent events. But the U.S. would do well not to abandon the long-term hope that democracy, exported carefully, and slowly, can change reality. This would be not a five-year project, but a 50-year one. It would focus on aiding Middle Eastern journalists and democracy activists, on building strong universities and independent judiciaries—and on being discerning enough *not* to aid Muslim democracy activists when American help would undermine their credibility. If Arab moderates and democrats "begin this work now, in 10 or 15 years we will have a horse in this race," said Omran Salman, the head of an Arab reform organization called Aafaq. "We've sacrificed democracy for stability, but it's a fabricated stability. When someone's sitting on your head, it's not stable." Salman, a Shiite from Bahrain, said he opposes Western military intervention in certain cases, preferring American "moral intervention." The Americans "have to keep pressure on regimes to force them to make reforms and open their societies. Now what the regimes do is oppress liberals."

One problem is that American moral capital has been depleted, which only under-

scores the practical importance to national security of, among other things, banning torture, and considering carefully the impact an American strike on Iran would have on the typical Iranian. After 30 years of oppressive fundamentalist Muslim rule, many of Iran's people are pro-American; that could change, however, if American bombs begin to fall on their country.

The Next Phase

There is a way to go beyond merely managing the current instability, and to capitalize on it. I'm aware that this is not the most opportune moment in American history to disinter Wilsonian idealism, but America does now have the chance to help right some historic wrongs—for one thing, wrongs committed against the Kurds. (There are other peoples, of course, in the Middle East that the U.S. could stand up for, if it weren't quite so committed to the preservation of the existing map; the blacks in the south of Sudan—one of the most disastrous countries created by Europe—would surely like to be free from the Arab government that rules them from Khartoum.)

Iraq has been unstable since its creation because its Kurds and Shiites did not want to be ruled from Baghdad by a Sunni minority. So why not remove one source of instability—the perennially oppressed Kurds—from the formula? Kurdish independence was—literally—one of Wilson's famous Fourteen Points (No. 12, to be precise), and it is quite obviously a moral cause (and no less moral than the cause that preoccupies the West—that of Palestinian independence). There is danger here, of course: Kurdish freedom might spark secessionist impulses among other Middle Eastern ethnic groups. But these impulses already exist, and one lesson from the British and French management of the Middle East is that people cannot be suppressed forever.

For the moment, the Kurds of Iraq are playing the American game, officially

supporting the U.S. and its flawed vision of Iraqi federalism, in part because the Turks fear Kurdish independence. Turkey has been an important American ally except for the one time when Turkey's friendship would have truly mattered—at the outset of the Iraq War, when Turkey refused to let the American 4th Infantry Division invade northern Iraq from its territory. The U.S. does not owe Turkey quite as much as its advocates think. The Kurds, on the other hand, are the most stalwart U.S. allies in Iraq, and their leaders are certainly the most responsible, working for the country's unity even while hoping for something better for their own people. "If Iraq fails, no one will be able to blame the Kurds," said Barham Salih, a Kurd who is Iraq's deputy prime minister.

The next phase of Middle East history could start 160 miles north of Baghdad, in Kirkuk, which the Kurds consider their Jerusalem. One day, in the home of Abdal Rahman Mustafa, the Kurdish-Iraqi governor there, I learned about the mature position the Kurds are adopting. Over the course of its 20 years, Saddam's regime expelled Kurds from Kirkuk and gave their homes to Arabs from the south. The government now is slowly—too slowly for many Kurds—reversing the expulsions. A group of dignitaries had come to see the governor on Eid al-Fitr, the holiday that marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan. To reach the governor's office, you must navigate an endless series of barricades manned by tense-seeming Kurdish soldiers. The house itself is surrounded by blast walls. Kirkuk has a vigorous Sunni terrorist underground, and an enormous car bomb had killed seven people the day before.

I asked the governor, who is an unexcitable lawyer of about 60, if "his people"—I phrased it this way—were seeking independence from Iraq. "My people," he said, "are all the people of Kirkuk." The men seated about his living room nodded in agreement. "My job is to help all the people of Kirkuk have better lives." More nodding. "My friends here all know that we will have justice for those who were hurt in the regime of Saddam, but we will

not hurt others in order to get justice." Even more nodding, and mumblings of approval.

Four men eventually got up to leave. They kissed the governor and then left the house. The governor turned to me and said, "One of those men is Arab. Everyone is welcome here."

I told him I would like to ask my question again. "Do your people want independence from Iraq?"

"Yes, of course my people, most of them, want a new, different situation," he said. "I think—I will be careful now—I think that we will have what we need soon. Please don't ask me any more specific questions about what we need and want."

I asked, instead, for his analysis of the situation—did he think the Sunni-Shiite struggle would become worse, or would it burn out? He laughed. "I cannot predict anything about this country. I would never have predicted that I would be governor of Kirkuk. This is a city that expelled Kurds like me until the Americans came. So I couldn't predict my own future. I only know that we won't go back to the way it was before."

He went on, "I listen to television about the future, but I don't believe anything I hear."

Later that evening, as I was looking over my notes of the conversation, I recalled another comment, made by a man who thought he understood the Middle East. A little over a year ago, I ran into Paul Bremer, the ex-grand vizier of the Coalition Provisional Authority, the man who disbanded the Iraqi army, among other achievements. We were at Reagan National Airport; it was the day after the Iraq Study Group report was released, and I asked Bremer what he thought of it. He said he had not yet read it. I told him that from what I could tell, the experts were already divided on its recommendations. Bremer laughed, and said, with what I'm fairly sure was a complete lack of self-awareness, "Who really is an Iraq expert, anyway?"