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TURKEY: A HISTORIC VISIT TO DIYARBEKIR BY MASSUD BARZANI

On 16 November 2013, Massud Barzani, President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, visited the city of Diyarbekir (the political capital of Turkish Kurdistan at the invitation of the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan — an invitation that the head of the Turkish government himself described as *"historic"*.

While the peace process with the PKK, initiated in March 2013, is marking time and that the PKK has announced a freeze in the withdrawal of its troops from Turkey and Ankara's promised reforms have proved very disappointing, Recep Tayyip Erdogan's determination was, perhaps, to *"prove his determination to put an end to Kurdish conflict at a time when things were not going well"* as an anonymous

source (allegedly *"close to the government"*) told the AFP. He added that the choice of Diyarbekir, this *"cradle of the Kurds"* was evidently intentional and *"symbolic"*.

Moreover, the meeting came a few days after the unilateral declaration of autonomy by the Syrian Kurdish Party of Democratic Unity (PYD), a branch of the PKK, which had incurred the common disapproval of Turkey and the Kurdish government in Erbil. Several political observers assumed that the situation in Syrian Kurdistan would have been one of the major subjects tackled during this meeting, as well as the recurrent tension between Erbil and Baghdad, the oil agreements with Ankara and terrorist attacks by the Jihadist organisation the Islamic State of

Iraq and the East (ISIE) which is fighting at once against the Baghdad government, the Kurds of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and the PYD forces in Syria.

Cengiz Candar, a columnist of the Turkish daily *Radikal*, considers, for his part, that while Erdogan, on the one side, needs *"Barzani's help for settling his own Kurdish problem"*, Massud Barzani also needs Turkey's support against the Iran-Baghdad-Syria Axis.

The Party for Peace and Democracy (BDP), the main Kurdish force in Turkey, was pretty divided, for its part on the event. Some, like the president of the Diyarbekir BDP branch, Mehmet Emin Yilmaz, who led a counter-demonstration outside the local offices of his party, saw it as providing support for R. T.

Erdogan for the coming elections. Others, like the Member of Parliament Leyla Zana or the Mayor of Diyarbakir, Osman Baydemir, preferred to see it as a "sign of hope" and took part in the ceremony. Following this meeting, Osman Baydemir, gave a press conference jointly with Massud Barzani and declared that this meeting "was contributing to a peace based on a law of fraternity needed by all".

However, Hugh Pope, Manager of the International Crisis Group (ICG) Turkish Project, saw the visit as a "challenge" to the PKK more than as Erdogan's electoral manoeuvre:

"This visit aligns, in a spectacular manner, the new initiative of two major progressive lines within the Justice and Development Party (AKP): the normalisation of relations with the RGK and the efforts to find a more inclusive national discourse in Turkey, especially with regard to the Kurds. This is a challenge to the PKK to the extent that Massud Barzani (who made his speech in his own language wearing traditional Kurdish costume) represents a very different "Kurdish" ideology to that of the PKK. It is, nevertheless, interesting to note that holding such a meeting at Diyarbakir dedicates this city as the principal Kurdish city in Turkey".

According to Hugh Pope, this visit had the aim of keeping the Kurds within Turkey while wishing to give a new impulse to the peace process:

"It is clear that the AKP hope that this will help it in the future electoral cycle. However, to really win a majority of Turkey's Kurds, Erdogan will have to go forward with a structured policy having as objective the full right of educating the Kurds in their mother tongue, an open debate and action for decen-

tralisation, the abrogation of all discrimination in the Constitution, making the anti-terrorist law conform with European standards and lower the electoral threshold from 10 to 5%, this letting the principal Kurdish party have equitable access to political life".

In his speech, the Turkish Prime Minister affirmed: "the peace process will go forward" with the support of "his brothers of Diyarbakir" and called for their "support":

"How have the Turks and Kurds come to tear one another apart? Turks and Kurds must never again tear one another apart".

As for Massud Barzani, his speech also called for continuing the peace process:

"I am glad to be amongst you in this dear city of Diyarbakir. I would like to thank Prime Minister Erdogan for this invitation. This is a historic visit for me. I bring with me the warmest greetings of Kurdistan to Turkey and I also bring the warmest greetings of Erbil to Diyarbakir, which is so dear to us

Ladies and gentlemen, today is a historic day — it is a day on which we are beginning to found a co-existence and both to accept one another.

One of the stages was when Mr. Erdogan came to Diyarbakir saying that the time for denying the existence of the Kurds was over. For me, as a Kurd, I am glad that a leader has arisen in Turkey to put is on the right road — the road of brotherhood.

Ladies and gentlemen, the peoples of the Middle East must coexist and live in peace together and accept one another reciprocally. Through co-existence we can make our countries more prosperous. We have tried war,

and none of us has benefitted from it. The blood of a young Kurd must never again be shed by a young Turk and the blood of a young Turk must never again be shed by a young Kurd.

The bases of the peace process have been laid. Thank you Mr. Erdogan for having initiated it and I call on all my Kurdish and Turkish brothers to support this peace process. The struggle for peace is hard and this struggle can only be pursued by brave men.

I announce here that we, Kurds and Turks, are party to this peace process and support it. I have wanted for the last two decades to visit Diyarbakir and that is why I'm speaking to you this way. This day is clearly the result of peace and fraternity.

To conclude, I want to reaffirm that I am very glad to be here among you today. I wish you every success and prosperity.

And I would now like to say something in Turkish, although I don't really know Turkish:

"Long live the fraternity of Kurds and Turks. Long live freedom. Long live peace!"

The speeches of the two political leaders were preceded by a joint performance of two very popular singers Şivan Perwer and Ibrahim Tatlis. Sivan Perwer's return to his native land after 37 years of exile in Europe was a moment of intense emotion of that day. The ceremony ended with a collective wedding of several hundreds of young couples at which Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his wife, Massud Barzani and the Member of Parliament Leyla Zana all presided.

SYRIA: THE PYD UNILATERALLY PROCLAIMS AN AUTONOMOUS PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

While at the beginning of November the Syrian land and Air forces pursued their attacks on the quarters of Damascus held by the Free Syrian Army, the Kurdish PYD/YPG forces continued to repulse the Jihadist militia of the Islamic State of Iraq and the East (ISIE) in North-East Syria, in the mainly Kurdish province of Hassaké. Several villages round Serê Kaniyê (Ras Al Ayn, in Arabic) were taken back from the Jihadists by the PYD, which now controls (according to the Syrian Observer for Human Rights) a 25 Km band along the Turkish border.

In all, according to this London-based independent organisation, this makes 19 Arab and Kurdish villages that were regained from the Jihadists at the beginning of November as well as a petrol station at Sefrani and a grain silo at Al-Safih. With the final recapture of the Manajir zone, that makes the whole region round Serê Kaniyê that is now in Kurdish hands, the Islamic state of Iraq and the East falling back on Raqqa and the South-West of the Euphrates valley.

The YPG announced, for its part that it had inflicted many casualties on the Jihadists and well as captured ammunition and anti-aircraft weapons.

In the political field, the second Geneva conference has been the main pre-occupation. On 8 November, 9 Kurdish parties met at Hassaké to decide the conditions for their participation and the content of their demands. The nine parties present were the Party of Democratic Unity (PYD), the

Syrian Kurd Democratic Union Party, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria, the Syrian Kurdish Freedom Party, the Syrian Democratic Party for Equality, the Syrian Kurdish Unity Party, the Syrian Democratic Union and the Progressive Democratic party of Syrian Kurds.

The Kurdish parties that are members of the Kurdish National Council indicated, at this meeting, their intention of going to Geneva with the Syrian National Coalition while the PYD representative, Şêxmûs Ehmed, maintained that the Kurds should be present at Geneva as a third party. Consequently no common position could be found.

Almost immediately after, the PYG and its affiliated organisations and allies announced unilaterally at Qamishlo the formation of an "autonomous Kurdish transition government" by passing the Kurdish National Council (KNC).

A "Constituent Assembly" composed of 82 Kurds, Arabs, Christians and Chechens was formed and "Western Kurdistan" was divided into three administrative regions: Afrin, Kobanê and Jezireh. This follows their geographic layout, and each will have its own cantonal assembly whose representatives will sit in the General Assembly and will have representatives in the executive.

This declaration did not have the support of the 15 Kurdish parties of the KNC, who were dismissed from this initiative and not even, they said, informed of it. Consequently its leaders had

no hesitation about criticising it. One of them, Nuri Brimo, described this step as "*hasty and unilateral*" and judged that the PYG was "*going in the wrong direction*".

The opposition National Syrian Council accused the PYD and its allies of being "*a group hostile to the Syrian Revolution*" and, through this action "*separatist*" and harming the struggle of the Syrian people.

Evidently Turkey attacked the autonomous government. "*It is impossible to accept any such de facto declaration of an autonomous entity in Syria and this can only lead to a new crisis*" declared the Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, on 19 November.

The Turkish President, Abdullah Gul, also disapproved this "*fait accompli*": "*We cannot allow Syria, that is facing chaos, to disintegrate*".

The principal support of the Kurdish National Council, Masud Barzani, the President of the Regional Government of Iraqi Kurdistan, also immediately condemned the PYD's bid, accusing it of being "*autocratic*" and of "*marginalising the other Kurdish parties in the Rojava* (Syrian Kurdistan called "Western")".

"With these events in Syria, we think that there was a good opportunity for the Kurds of Western Kurdistan, after decades of denial of their rights, including the right to citizenship. We could envisage an end to the oppression of the Kurdish people and a final guarantee of their rights. I am worried about the future of Western Kurdistan and

there is a danger that this opportunity may be missed for these Kurds.

In the last few days the PYD unilaterally proclaimed its own administration for Western Kurdistan. We reiterate out stand that is that we will only support efforts coming from both sides. We will not negotiate with any unilateral decision. If the PYD continues to ignore the others, it is certain that it will be unable to face the coming challenges and dangers, on its own, which will, as a result, endanger the fate of the Kurds. If all the parties do not return to the Erbil agreements... the PYD will bear the responsibility for the loss of this historic opportunity.

The Syrian regime has provided the Kurds with any right for supporting the PYD. The time is coming when the Syrian opposition considers the Kurds as being also allies of the regime and this will bring our people major problems in the future. The fact that the PYD had joined the fighting has had the consequence that ten thousand Kurds have become refugees”.

On 15 November, in reply to these attacks the PYD made a new statement, in which it mainly replied to the accusations of the Syrian National Coalition, whose “hostile” attitude it criti-

cised in turn. It recalled the recent remarks by Abdullah Ocalan on the Syrian question. For whom “the fraternity of the Kurdish and Arab peoples cannot be achieved under the influence of the present regime” and stressed that several groups within the Syrian National Council were politically influenced by the AKP. The PYD also reproached the SNC for its silence about the recent attacks on the Kurds by the al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and the East.

No doubt to show the popular base for this decision, the PYD also rallied thousands of its supporters on 20 November, in the town of Afrin, where they demonstrated against Masud Barzani’s statements.

Behçet Berekat, Vice-President of the Afrin People’s Assembly, the new autonomous local authority, attacked the attitude of Iraqi Kurdistan, affirming that they “denied the blood-stained revolution of hundreds of our young people. This denial is to deny the blood shed by these young people and to deny the work of our people”.

Behçet Berekat also considered that this message was “one of support for organisations acting in

concert with gangs like Al Parti and Azadi (two Syrian Kurdish parties that are in the KNC and hostile to the PYD) and a promise to pursue the attacks against Syrian Kurdistan”.

On 25 November, the General Secretary of UNO, Ban Ki-Moon, finally set a date for the second Geneva Conference that, he said, would take place on 25 January 2014.

At the same time, despite their differences and both their acid statements, Masud Barzani’s KDP and the PYD nevertheless held discussions on 30 November. On the agenda of these discussions, in addition to the situation in Syrian Kurdistan, the peace process in Turkey and the holding of a National Kurdish Conference in Erbil were discussed.

In contrast to the sharpness of the remarks made all through the month, the PYD representative in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Jafar Hanan, considered that these tensions were not sufficient to hinder the negotiations taking place and to finally bury the Kurdish National Conference, nevertheless has been postponed *sine die* for the third consecutive time.

IRAN: AN INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN LAUNCHED AGAINST THE EXECUTIONS OF PRISONERS

During the 3 months presidency of Hassan Rouhani, 200 detainees, including two Kurdish political prisoners, have been executed and 7 others sentenced to death.

Since the Iranian President took office last August, there has been a spectacular increase in executions (200 since August 2014 and 278 since his election in June

2013). Already last October, the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran and the Iran Documentation Centre had jointly issued an appeal on the subject of the dramatic increase in the carrying out of death sentences: “It is paradoxical that, at this time when relations between Iran and the international community are improving, the number of executions is increasing in Iran. Many of these prisoners in death

row have been subjected to torture, forced confessions and irregular trials. Requiring a stop to these executions and respect for the law should be at the top of the agenda in the dialogue between the international community and Iran”. (Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, spokesman of the Iran Human Rights Centre). On 8 November the World Coalition for the abolition of the death sentence published a statement condemning these

“arbitrary” executions and also calling on the international community to include the issue of the death sentences in Iran on their agenda.

Apart from detainees sentenced for “drug trafficking” (most of them being, co-incidentally, members of persecuted ethnic minorities, like the Baluchis or the Arabs of Ahwaz) the majority is composed of Kurdish activists and political prisoners. Thus, in the last ten days of October, 40 people were hanged in several towns throughout the country and only on the 3 and 4 November 12 prisoners were executed.

Amongst these, Shirko Moarefi, a 34-year-old Kurdish political prisoner, was hanged in Saghez Prison. He had been convicted of being an “enemy of God” on 1 November 2007 and, following international pressure, had hitherto escaped having the sentence carried out though confirmed on 14 November 2009 and on 1 May 2011. Also in Saghez prison, another political prisoner, Mutelib Ehmedi, is said to have been placed in the pre-execution cell. Five detainees accused of murder were similarly executed at Kermanshah.

The Iranian High Court recently approved the death sentence on another Kurd, Mansur Arwend, detained in Urmia Prison. He had

been arrested two years earlier at Mahabad and accused of membership of a Kurdish organisation. His brother, Ismail Arwend, confirmed that the sentence could take place at any time, while also saying that his lawyer was suddenly unavailable, having changed the number of his mobile phone and so no longer had any contact with the detainee’s family.

Regarding the simultaneous hanging of several Baluchis on 26 October last, Florence Bellivier, the president of the World Coalition against the death sentence, considered that *“the death sentence in Iran is often passed in violation of international laws. In this case (the execution of the Baluchis) none of the guarantees had been observed — neither those provided by international law or those of local law”*. Fur Arabs from Ahwaz Province were also taken to a secret destination, which is usually an indication of imminent execution. Reports from local NGOs suggest that 12 Kurdish political prisoners are, at this time in danger of imminent execution.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned about the fate of two Kurds, Zanyar and Loghman Moradi, whose death sentence had been passed on the basis of confessions extorted by torture to force the two prisoners to confess to the murder of an imam of Marwan in

2009 and to taking part on some alleged armed actions with a Kurdish organisation. These executions have aroused the indignation of Kurdish public opinion and demonstrations have taken place in several towns of Iranian Kurdistan and repressed violently. Thus in Marwan on 5 November, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) attacked several people who were demonstrating in the Sheirengewe district and carried out several arrests. The demonstrators carried placards written in Persian, English and Kurdish saying “Do not execute Kurdistan!”. According to witnesses the army was then deployed in the main streets of the town to prevent gatherings.

Demonstrations also took place outside Iran, at first in Van (Turkish Kurdistan) then, on 9 November, in Iraqi Kurdistan, where the Iranian consulate was attacked by stone throwing by a group of people who had gathered in front of the building to protest at the hangings. The Erbil police rapidly intervened.

“The demonstrations were supposed to take place in a park, but several of the protesters changed the marches route and went on to attack the consulate”, explained the Erbil chief of police, Abdul Khaliq Tala’at, to the daily paper Basnews. “We arrested a number of the demonstrators who attacked the consulate”.

PARIS:

A SYMPOSIUM ON “THE NEW KURDISH DYNAMISM”

On 13 and 14 November, a symposium jointly organised by the French Institute for International Relations (IFRI) and the Arab World Institute (IMA) took place in Paris — on the 13th at the IFRI premises then on the 14th at the IMA building. Entitled “The new Kurdish Dynamism” the

symposium’s subject was presented in these terms: *“The ‘Kurdish Question’ is once more in the forefront in the Near and Middle East. The consolidation of the Iraqi Kurdish entity gives a fresh impetus to demands that so far have been limited to the area of social, cultural and political rights. In Syria the a worsening of the war that has been raging since March*

2011 has given rise to forecasts and scenarios that a short time ago could hardly be envisaged. Similarly in Turkey, divisions taking place in the old national equation are lifting the historic taboo on ethnic, and cultural diversity, opening the perspective of a reform of Turkish citizenship. The Kurds, as a people, a political entity or an economic actor are now taking their destiny in their own

hands — they carry weight in any reconfiguration of the Middle East Region”.

Thomas Gomart and Dorothee Schmidt (IFRI) and François Zabbal (IMA) welcomed the participants and the public on the morning of 13 November for the first session: “the Kurds: dreams and Projects”. Former Foreign Minister, Bernard Kouchner, opened the first day’s discussion with a speech entitled “The strength of the new Kurdish dynamic”.

The first Round Table, “The Kurds faced with the States: between oppression and strategies of autonomy” was moderated by Jean-Christophe Ploquin, chief editor of the daily *La Croix* and led by Michiel Leezenberg, of Leyden University, whose contribution dealt with “The Iraqi Federation in unstable equilibrium”. He was followed by Kadri Gürsel, a journalist from the Turkish daily *Milliyet*, on “The ups and downs of the Turco-Kurdish peace process”. Then Abbas Vali, of Boğaziçi University examined “The Kurds and the Syrian Crisis”, while Clément Therme, of Geneva University tackled the case of the “Iranian Kurds: between integration and ethnic demands”.

The second Round Table was opened in the afternoon of the 13th with Marc Semo, a journalist from *Libération* as moderator. The theme was “the regional and internation-

al effects of Kurdish dynamism”. Those taking part were Arthur Quesnay, of Paris I University on “The integration of the Kurdish guerrillas into the Middle Eastern conflicts”, Denise Natali, of the National Defence University, on the subject of “The Kurds in American national strategy”, Gareth Winrow, of Oxford University on “The Kurds and the Energy situation” and finally Ofra Bengio, of Tel Aviv University whose contribution was on “Israel and the Kurds”.

This first day was closed by Falah Mustafa, Foreign Minister of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) who set out “The objectives of the Kurdistan Regional Government’s diplomacy”.

The second session, “The new Kurds” took place at the *Institut du monde Arabe*. It was opened by Jack Lang, former Minister of Culture and president of the *Institut du monde arabe*, and Denis Bauchard, of IFRI.

The third Round Table, “Kurdishness, Arabness and Turkishness: murderous identities and how nationalisms are fed by opposition” was moderated by Dorothee Schmidt (IFRI). Those taking part were Djene Bajalan (Oxford University) reviewed “The building of Kurdishness and the Kurdish question: from fragmented society to nation”, Jordi Tejel (Geneva Graduate Institute)

who described “The formation of Kurdish political identity in Baathist Syria (1964-2013): between national integration and opposition by proxy”, while Olivier Grosjean (*Institut français du Proche-Orient* in Amman) on “The building of identities and policies of hostility between Kurds and Turks” and finally Cyril Roussel (*Institut français du Proche-Orient* in Amman) dealt with “The regional integration of Iraqi Kurdistan with its neighbours: Syria, Turkey and Iran”.

The fourth Round Table was entitled “The difficult unification of the Kurds by history, language and culture” and was presided by François Zabbal, of the *Institut du monde arabe*, chief editor of the cultural review *Qantara*. Boris James, of the *Institut français du Proche-Orient* dealt with “Building Kurdish historic memory” and Joyce Blau of the Paris Kurdish Institute covered the Kurdish question as a “linguistic issue”. The contribution by Salih Akin, of Rouen University was entitled “Fragmented culture and unitary aspiration” and the poet Seyhmus Dagtekin concluded this Round Table with “This ‘Other’ — the very condition for my own existence”.

This second day was closed by Kendal Nezan, president of the Paris Kurdish Institute whose speech dealt with “the Diaspora in Europe and Kurdish dynamism”.

CULTURE:

THE MUSIC ALBUM “NISHTIMAN” HAS BEEN RELEASED

On 5 November the group of Kurdish musicians Nishtiman (Country) produced an album under the Accords Croisés - Harmonia Mundi label while starting a series of concerts in France. This album has been favourably noticed by music critics. The journalist and musicologist

Bertrand Dicale reviewed the album and its eponymous group in these terms:

“Nishtiman is a pioneer and daring musical adventure that celebrates the unity and diversity of Iranian, Iraqi and Turkish Kurdistan. Nishtiman simply means “country”. The music of Turkish Kurdistan, the music of the Kurds

of Iraq, of the Iranian Kurds and of the Syrian Kurds are all known — as well as all the variations of syntax inspired by the geography of the Kurdish people, split up between four countries.

Nishtiman is thus a unique adventure that united musicians of several nationalities round the music,

the language and the culture of the Kurdish people. A pioneer and audacious musical adventure although the political laws, the habits imposed by history and the routine of cultural circuits have always separated the Kurds, including on festival stages and on shelves of disk shops. Yet, for all that, Kurdistan really does exist musically speaking. Nishtiman suddenly makes this people and culture loom up in the world's vast musical arena with a vision both contemporary and deeply rooted".

In the periodical *Telerama*, Anne Berthod points out "certainly Syria is missing. However, three parts of Kurdistan reunited on a single disk is already a great deal in view of the rarity of projects celebrating Kurdish music. Over and above the symbol — "nishtiman" in the Kurdish language means the natal land, the country — it is the quality of this encounter that is so attractive. That of artists of different nationalities and dialects wanting to share a common heritage the better to display its diversity.

Amongst them the Iranian Sohrab Pournazeri a singer and a prodigy on the tanbur lute and the

hurdy-gurdy, his compatriot Maryam Ebrahimpour whose magnificent voice so well expresses classical songs, Goran Kamil, the Iraqi oudh player or the Turkish Ertan Tekin, a master oboe player (zorna, balaban, duduk). The Iraqi artistic director, percussionist Hussein Zahawy, has succeeded, by choosing these virtuosi of the new generation (but also including two French payers, Leila Renault on the double bass and Robin Vassy with African drums) has immediately escaped from simple folklore. The original repertory is based on compositions by Pournazeri, who reinterprets Kurdish traditions to make them accessible to everyone.

Swirling dances carried away by a wild elation, heartrending laments and ecstatic Sufi rhythms, virile scanning and broken hearts... this anthology of styles also enables alternating, with perfect balance, between collective items and solos. The uncluttered sound is enhanced by a meticulous production".

Interviewed by Allan Kaval in the daily paper *Rudaw*, Hussein Zahawy explained that the

group's aim was to make the Kurdish music tradition known to a foreign public "in a musical journey through Great Kurdistan" with musicians coming from different countries and areas.

"We want to promote this culture, to show a cultural region by transcending the idea of State. We take no account of the political borders".

As for the absence of musicians from Syrian Kurdistan, it is just due to the war. The five Kurdish musicians have been joined by two French musicians: Robin Vassy, who plays African percussion instruments and Leila Renault, a double bass player.

The repertory includes Kurdish mystical music like that of the Yarsans, popular tunes love songs and traditional dances.

Finally, the better to raise Kurdish music to an international as well as academic level, Hussein Zahawy wishes to see a high quality teaching of classical and traditional Kurdish music begin to be adopted by the music academies — in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, for example.



November 1, 2013

Has energy-hungry Turkey finally solved 'the Kurdish problem'?



Gönül Tol, special for CNN

(CNN) -- The latest round of peace talks with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) remains the Turkish government's best bet not just to solve the country's 29-year old "Kurdish problem" but also to feed its energy-hungry population and wean it off costly and politically risky Russian and Iranian energy imports.

To cope with a fast-growing economy and an increasing demand for energy, Turkey must ensure an adequate energy supply. So far, its power generation has largely relied on Russian and Iranian imports.

The Syria crisis, however, has created a rift between Turkey and these energy suppliers, leaving the Turkish economy vulnerable to regional dynamics and price shocks. To fuel its growing economy and reduce its account deficit driven by high prices of oil and gas, Turkey has been scrambling to find alternative energy resources.

To that end, the Turkish government has quietly been building up its energy presence in the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) oil and gas industry. On March 25, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani negotiated a framework deal that included Turkish stakes in exploration blocks and terms for the direct pipeline export of oil and gas from the KRG.

The pipeline will allow Kurdish crude oil to be transported from the KRG directly into Turkey, bypassing Baghdad and setting up the KRG as a competitive supplier of oil to Turkey.

In an effort to stave off political tension with Baghdad and Washington, the parties did not sign a government-to-government deal; instead, they turned the KRG energy portfolio over to public and private energy companies.

In the spring of this year, Turkey established a state-backed firm to explore for oil and gas in northern Iraq. In January, Genel Energy, an Anglo-Turkish exploration and production company, was awarded the right to ship oil directly from the area. Since then, the company has been exporting crude oil from the KRG's Taq Taq fields to Turkey's Ceyhan port by truck. The amount of oil exported from Taq Taq will grow significantly when the construction of the pipeline is completed by the end of this year.

The KRG's gas resources are even more appealing to Turkey. In 2012, Turkey's daily gas demand was 125 million cubic meters; this figure is likely to double this winter. As such, Turkey is expected to be one of Europe's biggest gas consumers in a decade. Kurdish gas is attractive to Turkey because the framework agreement between Turkey and the KRG includes specific terms on the price of gas. Turkey thus has leverage over pricing. Some

experts have said the KRG's supplies could be three times cheaper than Russian and Iranian sources due to this leverage.

This energy cooperation between the KRG and Turkey has been expanding rapidly. About a dozen Turkish companies have applied to Turkey's energy watchdog to obtain licenses to import gas from and construct oil pipelines in the KRG, and the KRG recently granted six Turkish companies permission to explore for oil.

Last month, news leaked that a Turkish company was issued a license to import natural gas directly from the KRG. The Turkish state company Botas has also started construction of a gas pipeline from the KRG to Turkey's southeastern city of Mardin. Through this energy partnership, Turkey can secure an alternative low-cost supplier and realize Erdogan's goal of promoting Turkey as an energy hub, and the KRG can ensure its economic independence from Baghdad.

But the success of the Turkey-KRG energy partnership hinges on the peaceful resolution of Turkey's Kurdish problem. The PKK has used pipeline attacks as a means of targeting Turkey's strategic assets. Until very recently, PKK attacks on pipelines knocked out oil and gas flows, forcing Turkey to buy Russian and Azeri gas at higher prices and keeping the Iraq-Turkey route mostly idle.

In order to assure pipeline security and investment confidence, Turkey must finish what it started a year ago. In an effort to end three decades of fighting between Turkey and the PKK, Turkish intelligence started negotiations with the imprisoned PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, in 2012. As part of settlement talks, the PKK declared a ceasefire in March 2013 and started its withdrawal from Turkey toward its camps in northern Iraq in May. No serious fighting has been reported since, but that could change. Last month, the PKK announced that it halted its pull-out as both sides accused each other of failing to respect their part of the deal.

Late last month, the Turkish government unveiled a reform package that allows the use of Kurdish language in election campaigns, lifts restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language in private schools, abolishes the requirement to recite the pledge of allegiance that forced schoolchildren to declare that "I am a Turk," and allows Kurdish towns to use their Kurdish names.

For the Kurds, however, the reform package seems to only move forward halfway. Kurds have long asked for the right to public education in Kurdish, and the package only applies to private schools. The democratization package also does not offer concrete steps to address the Kurdish demand to lower the 10 per cent electoral threshold, which has mainly been



Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has struck new energy deals with Kurdish firms.

used to keep pro-Kurdish parties out of parliament.

After the announcement, the PKK warned that it may end the unilateral ceasefire. After a visit by Kurdish politicians to the prison island of Imrali where Ocalan has been held since 1999, the Kurdish leader also relayed a message asking the government to lay the legal groundwork to address all Kurdish demands or risk a breakdown in talks.

But for the Turkish government, there is no easy way forward. With the 2014 local and presidential elections looming and no end in sight for the Syrian civil war, political uncertainty seems guaranteed. In the highly charged pre-election atmosphere, the Turkish government has to operate such that it does not alienate nationalists while at the same time keeps the peace process moving.

Yet the bigger challenge facing Turkish decision-makers is the regional fallout from the war in Syria. Turkish media is reporting that in retaliation to Turkey's stance in Syria, Iranian intelligence has been talking to the PKK leadership in northern Iraq's Qandil Mountains to convince it to abandon the peace process, promising support for Kurdish demands for autonomy in northern Syria in return.

For Turkey, the stakes are higher than ever.

Finding a peaceful resolution to its Kurdish problem will not only remove a strategic vulnerability; it will also ensure a less costly and politically less risky energy alternative to Russia and Iran and will realize Erdogan's dream of making Turkey one of the world's ten largest economies by 2023—the hundredth anniversary of the Turkish Republic. ♦

Editor's note: Gönül Tol is the founding director of The Middle East Institute's Center for Turkish Studies and an adjunct professor at George Washington University's Institute for Middle East Studies.

Iranian Kurd leader says West shouldn't be fooled by Rouhani

By Alexandra Hudson / (Reuters)

BERLIN - The leader of an armed Iranian Kurdish group says new President Hassan Rouhani is taking advantage of the West's wary optimism towards him to step up pressure on citizens at home, particularly Kurds, and has markedly increased executions.

The election in June of Rouhani, a relative moderate and a former chief nuclear negotiator, has created a diplomatic opening between Iran and a group of six world powers which are trying to persuade it to curb its nuclear program

Rouhani even spoke by phone to U.S. President Barack Obama in late September, in the highest-level contact between the two countries in three decades.

Abdul Rahman Haji-Ahmadi, the Germany-based leader of the Party for Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK), told Reuters in a written interview that Rouhani "belongs completely to the core system" of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and bringing him to the fore was Tehran's attempt to get out of political deadlock.

"Obviously he has played very well so far, managing to escape from some crises as well as deceiving some of the Iranian peoples," Haji-Ahmadi said, but this would end if he fell short of election pledges in a country hungry for change.

PJAK, an Iranian offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a Kurdish militant group in Turkey, has sought greater autonomy for Kurdish areas of Iran.

Iran considers it a terrorist group and in 2010 sought Haji-Ahmadi's extradition, but Berlin rejected this as he holds German citizenship. Since 2011 a ceasefire has lar-



File - Hassan Rouhani in Mashhad, Iran.



Abdul Rahman Haji-Ahmadi

gely held between PJAK and the Islamic Republic, but Haji-Ahmadi said he believed Iran was "gearing up for another offensive against PJAK to retest its military might."

"The Americans and the Europeans are being optimistic, but no internal changes have been made... Pressure on the people and the rate of executions have markedly increased."

DISSIDENTS KILLED

Rouhani had released political prisoners, but none were of non-Persian ethnicity, he said.

He highlighted the killings of 52 Iranian dissidents in a camp in eastern Iraq in September, which he said was neglected abroad. The dissidents belonged to the Mujahadin-e-Khalq (MEK), which wants Iran's clerical leaders overthrown. They are no longer welcome in Iraq under the Tehran-aligned, Shi'ite Muslim-led government.

Haji-Ahmadi also pointed to Iran's execution of 16 people in a day last month, most of them Baluchi, Sunni Muslims who

lived near the Pakistan border, as well as two PJAK members. Iran said those executed were elements of terrorist groups, and they were killed in response to the killing of 14 Iranian border guards.

Kurds are estimated to number about 8 million in Iran. The country's minorities - Azeris, Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis and Turkmen - make up nearly half the population of 76 million, have cross-border ethnic kin and are at times seen warily by the Persian majority.

A U.N. envoy to Iran said last month Iran's human rights record should not be overlooked amid Tehran's overtures to the West. Rights groups say Iran has executed more than 400 so far this year, including at least 125 since Rouhani's election.

Haji-Ahmadi said all Iran's ethnicities aspired to the same rights Persians have.

"We envisage a free border confederation for Iran," he said, with the potential to avoid possible future civil war between different national groups." ●

REUTERS

Residents and Kurdish fighters celebrate what they said was the liberation of their village from Islamist rebels near the city of Ras al-Ain

Reuters - November 5, 2013

Residents and Kurdish fighters celebrate what they said was the liberation of their village from Islamist rebels near the city of Ras al-Ain November 5, 2013. The picture depicts a member of the Kurdish Youth Movement who died during the fighting. Redur Xelil, spokesman for the armed wing of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), said Kurdish militias had seized the city of Ras al-Ain and all its surrounding villages. Syrian Kurdish fighters have captured more territory from Islamist rebels in northeastern Syria, a Kurdish militant group said on Monday, tightening their grip on an area where they have been setting up autonomous rule. REUTERS/Stringer (SYRIA - Tags: POLITICS CIVIL UNREST CONFLICT) ○



REUTERS

Iraqi leader blames regional unrest for revival of al Qaeda in Iraq

November 1, 2013 - By David Alexander - (Reuters)

WASHINGTON - Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki said on Thursday he was seeking U.S. help to counter a resurgent al Qaeda in his country and blamed the revival of the extremist group on power vacuums in the region rather than divisive Iraqi policies.

On his first visit to Washington in two years, Maliki met with U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Army General Martin Dempsey before speaking at the U.S. Institute of Peace. He is due to meet President Barack Obama on Friday.

Speaking to an audience of about 200, Maliki highlighted the extremist violence in his country while stressing U.S.-Iraqi relations and the suffering as a result of violence following the 2003 war to topple Saddam Hussein.

"We were partners and we shed blood together fighting terrorism," Maliki said through a translator, adding "this allowed us to win over terrorism in Iraq." The problem has now returned, he said.

Many U.S. officials disagree with Maliki's view on the causes of the violence in Iraq and have watched in dismay as he and his government have moved closer to Iran, while ignoring Washington's call to give Sunni and Kurdish minorities a greater role in the Shi'ite-led government.

Fielding questions, Maliki said that everything he had done in office had followed the Iraqi constitution and that the Iraqi leadership shared a common view of the future, regardless of whether they were Sunni, Shi'ite or Kurds.

"We have a common ground, we have a common vision based on the constitution that we built," Maliki said. "But if you want to ask me why do we have problems, I would say, 'Of course, democracy ... needs lots of time, needs solutions.'"

Lawmakers in the U.S. Congress sent a letter to Obama, on Thursday taking a hard line against Maliki and blaming his

government's actions for the violence.

Maliki blamed the resurgence of al Qaeda in Iraq on the Arab Spring revolutions that toppled longstanding dictatorships, but, he said, "were not able to fill the void in the right way."

"A vacuum was created and al Qaeda and other groups were able to exploit it and to gain ground," he said. "They benefited from the fall of the state structure, so now we are seeing the new reality ... that allowed terrorism to be back."

Maliki is urgently seeking Apache attack helicopters and other U.S. military equipment to fight al Qaeda militants as sectarian violence spills over the border from Syria.

"We are talking with the Americans and we are telling them that we need to benefit from their experience, from the intelligence information and from training," Maliki said.

White House spokesman Jay Carney told reporters he expected Obama to discuss Iraq's military needs with Maliki at their meeting on Friday. He said there was "no question" Obama would raise his concerns about the violence in Iraq and "the need to take steps, peaceful steps, to reduce that violence."

Asked whether Obama would push to overcome congressional resistance to military aid for Iraq, Carney said, "We believe that continued assistance (to Iraq) is necessary, and denying that assistance would be contrary to our interests." ○



AFP

Turquie: 20 ans après, des ex-soldats jugés pour le meurtre de six kurdes

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 05 novembre 2013 (AFP)

UN TRIBUNAL DE SIRNAK, dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a ouvert mardi le procès de six anciens militaires turcs, dont un général, accusés d'avoir torturé puis assassiné six villageois kurdes en 1993, avant de faire disparaître leurs corps.

Ces six habitants du village de Görümlü, dans la province de Sirnak, étaient soupçonnés d'aider les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), au plus fort des combats qui les opposaient alors à l'armée turque.

Aucun des accusés, qui risquent tous la prison à vie, n'a assisté mardi à la première audience du procès, que les juges de Sirnak ont immédiatement décidé de délocaliser à Ankara pour des raisons de sécurité.

La date de la prochaine audience dans la capitale n'a pas été fixée.

L'ouverture du procès de l'ex-général Mete Sayar, qui commandait les forces

turques dans la région, et des cinq soldats sous ses ordres a été salué par les victimes et les ONG de défense des droits de l'Homme comme la fin de l'impunité des responsables militaires de l'époque, accusés d'être à l'origine de nombreuses disparitions.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) a ainsi souligné que "les familles (des victimes) ont attendu deux décennies".

"Le procès de Mete Sayar et des autres pour le meurtre et la disparition des villageois de Görümlü est un pas significatif pour que justice soit rendue à leur familles", a estimé Emma Sinclair Webb, responsable de HRW pour la Turquie, dans un communiqué publié lundi.

Le PKK a engagé en 1984 contre l'Etat turc une guérilla qui a fait à ce jour plus de 40.000 victimes.

Le gouvernement islamo-conservateur d'Ankara a renoué le dialogue il y a un an avec le chef emprisonné du PKK Abdullah Öcalan mais ces pourparlers sont au point mort.

Le PKK, qui a décrété en mars un cessez-le-feu unilatéral, a suspendu début septembre le retrait de ses combattants de Turquie, jugeant que les gestes de l'Etat turc insuffisants. ●

En proie à la guerre civile, l'Irak se tourne vers l'Amérique

Par Maurin Picard

Dépassé par les violences, le premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki quémande des armes auprès des États-Unis et appelle une «troisième guerre mondiale» contre al-Qaïda.

Que faire lorsqu'un allié encombrant vous réclame plus d'armes et de moyens, tandis que son pays se désagrège sous sa botte autoritaire? Jadis le Sud-Vietnam, ces jours-ci l'Égypte: la diplomatie américaine connaît sur le bout des doigts cet écueil classique de politique étrangère. Mais le président Barack Obama ne semblait toutefois pas en maîtriser l'équation irakienne, en accueillant vendredi le premier ministre chiïte irakien Nouri al-Maliki à la Maison-Blanche, pour des entretiens axés sur la lutte anti-al-Qaïda et sur la résurgence de la guerre civile.

Les chiffres témoignent de la descente aux enfers de l'Irak post-Saddam Hussein, deux ans après le retrait des troupes américaines. En octobre, le nombre de victimes de violences interconfessionnelles entre sunnites, kurdes et chiïtes a atteint les pics de 2008, la pire année depuis l'invasion du pays par les États-Unis en 2003: 964 tués, dont 855 civils, 65 policiers et 44 soldats, plus 1600 blessés, selon Bagdad, résultant pour l'essentiel de trente-huit attaques suicide meurtrières.



Le premier ministre chiïte irakien, Nouri al-Maliki, et Barack Obama, à la Maison-Blanche. Crédits photo : Pablo Martinez Monsivais/AP

L'ONU recense, pour sa part, 979 morts et 1902 blessés. Plus de 6000 personnes au total auraient été tuées en 2013, venant s'ajouter au chiffre effarant d'un demi-million de morts, directs et indirectes, en une décennie de combats et d'attentats, selon une étude récente publiée aux États-Unis.

«UNE TROISIÈME GUERRE MONDIALE» CONTRE AL-QAÏDA

Pour endiguer le phénomène, al-Maliki vient quémander à Washington plus d'armes et de moyens: des hélicoptères de combat Apache, des armes sophistiquées, et une coopération accrue en matière de renseignement. Avec un brin de mauvaise conscience, peut-être: la recrudescence des violences interconfessionnelles date du retrait, fin 2011, des troupes américaines, pour lesquelles al-Maliki, au pou-

voir depuis 2006, avait refusé d'autoriser un séjour prolongé. Washington, qui s'était vu refuser l'immunité de ses troupes, avait saisi l'occasion de cette querelle juridique avec Bagdad pour compléter son retrait définitif du théâtre mésopotamien.

Jeudi, lors d'une conférence à l'Institute of Peace, à Washington, le chef du gouvernement irakien a rappelé la responsabilité de la communauté internationale face à la menace du terrorisme, dont les auteurs bénéficieraient d'une «seconde chance» en Irak, aidés par la propagation de la guerre civile en Syrie. Il a appelé de ses vœux une «troisième guerre mondiale» contre al-Qaïda. «Si la situation en Irak n'est pas prise au sérieux, ce sera désastreux pour le monde entier, a-t-il déclaré. Le terrorisme ne connaît pas de frontières. Al-Qaïda est un vent mauvais qui

souffle sur l'ensemble du globe.»

La supplique du premier ministre irakien peine à se faire entendre. Depuis le départ précipité des derniers GI en 2011, la relation Bagdad-Washington s'est sensiblement distendue, le rapprochement opéré par al-Maliki avec Téhéran ne faisant qu'aggraver les choses. Des sénateurs, mardi, le fustigeaient dans une lettre ouverte à Barack Obama, sommant leur président d'exercer la pression nécessaire sur son interlocuteur, jugé «sectaire» et «autoritaire», pour qu'il modifie sans délai sa manière de gouverner le pays, et ouvre son régime aux minorités sunnites et kurdes.

«Le moins que l'on puisse dire est qu'il n'a pas fait du bon boulot en essayant d'unifier le pays», note le démocrate Carl Levin, président de la commission sénatoriale des forces armées, soutenu, une fois n'est pas coutume, par les républicains John McCain et Lindsay Graham. «Cet échec patent a conduit à jeter nombre de sunnites irakiens dans les bras d'al-Qaïda.» Sans compter que Bagdad a «autorisé l'usage de son espace aérien aux avions iraniens ravitaillant la Syrie» de Bachar el-Assad.

«Soyez patients avec nous», implorait le roué al-Maliki dans une tribune au New York Times, le 29 octobre dernier, tout en niant effrontément un quelconque antagonisme entre sunnites et chiïtes. L'Amérique, circonspecte, soupèse ses maigres options. ■

AFP

L'Irak veut continuer à travailler avec BP sur un champ de pétrole contesté

KIRKOUK (Irak), 06 novembre 2013 (AFP)

LES AUTORITÉS IRAKIENNES ont affirmé mercredi qu'elles allaient continuer à travailler avec le groupe pétrolier britannique BP sur un champ de pétrole situé dans une zone disputée, au risque de provoquer la colère de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien.

L'Irak veut développer le champ de Kirkouk, bien que le Kurdistan revendique la souveraineté de cette région dans le nord du pays, pour augmenter sa production pétrolière afin de financer sa reconstruction.

Le ministre irakien du pétrole, Abdel Karim al-Luaybi, le gouverneur de la province de Kirkouk, Najm al-Din Karim, et le directeur général de BP, Bob Dudley ont visité le site après une réunion de travail à Kirkouk.

"Le contrat avec la compagnie britannique sera exécuté de manière à faire face à la baisse de la production pétrolière du champ pétrolier de Kirkouk, qui a atteint 230.000 barils par jour (bpj), et la compagnie mènera les expertises dans le champ de Kirkouk

pendant la durée du contrat", a déclaré M. Luaybi à l'AFP.

La production actuelle du champ de Kirkouk est bien en-deçà de ses anciens niveaux, et les responsables irakiens espèrent la faire remonter à environ 500.000 bpj d'ici trois ans.

Cette visite était la première depuis la signature en septembre de cet accord qui prévoit que BP mène des analyses dans le champ de Kirkouk, mais laisse aussi envisager que le groupe travaille à augmenter la production de ce gisement.

Un porte-parole du ministère des Ressources naturelles du Kurdistan irakien, qui avait condamné l'accord au moment de sa signature, n'a pas immédiatement commenté la rencontre de mercredi.

Parallèlement, Bagdad reproche au Kurdistan de passer des contrats pétroliers directement avec des compagnies étrangères, sans l'aval du gouvernement central.

Des diplomates et dirigeants considèrent que les différends entre Bagdad et Erbil, notamment le différend territorial concernant Kirkouk, est une de plus sérieuses menaces à long terme pour la stabilité de l'Irak, toujours plongé dans les violences. ●

Des députées voilées, une première au Parlement turc

Encore tabou à la fin des années 1990, le port du hidjab dans les institutions publiques est de plus en plus accepté

Istanbul
Correspondance



La députée Nurcan Dalbudak (à droite) à l'Assemblée nationale, le 31 octobre.

L'un des tabous les plus tenaces de la politique turque a été brisé jeudi 31 octobre, à Ankara. Dix minutes avant le début de la session parlementaire qui se tenait dans l'hémicycle de l'Assemblée nationale, quatre députées du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), la formation islamo-conservatrice au pouvoir du premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan, se sont présentées la tête recouverte d'un voile.

« Il n'y a aucun règlement au Parlement qui interdise cela »

Recep Tayyip Erdogan
premier ministre turc

Noir et blanc, strict, pour Gülay Samanci, élue de la ville conservatrice de Konya, mauve assorti à sa tunique pour Sevede Beyazit Kacar, de couleur claire et noué comme une écharpe pour Nurcan Dalbudak, bleu électrique, enfin, pour Gönül Bekin Sahkulubey. « Nous serons des portedrapeaux », a estimé M^{me} Dalbudak. Les quatre femmes, qui avaient été élues non voilées en 2011, ont expliqué avoir fait ce choix de vie depuis leur pèlerinage à La Mecque, accompli récemment. « J'attends que tout le monde respecte ma décision. Le voile est une question entre un fidèle et son Dieu », a déclaré M^{me} Sahkulubey. La

séance s'est déroulée sans incident et les élus masculins de l'AKP ont longuement félicité les quatre femmes, certains se prenant en photo avec elles.

Cette entrée remarquée d'un symbole religieux au Parlement a été permise par la levée de l'interdiction de porter le voile qui frappait les députées, comme toutes les fonctionnaires. Le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan avait révélé fin septembre le contenu d'un « paquet de réformes démocratiques », dont la principale mesure était précisément l'autorisation du port du voile dans les institutions publiques. Il est désormais autorisé pour les agents de l'Etat, à l'exception de la justice, de la police et de l'armée.

L'ouverture avait déjà été entérinée dans les universités, où les étudiantes ont longtemps été contraintes de se découvrir pour entrer sur les campus. M. Erdogan a soutenu la démarche de ses députées : « Il n'y a aucun règlement au Parlement qui interdise cela et chacun doit respecter la décision de nos sœurs. » Pour l'AKP, il s'agit d'une « normalisation ».

La question demeure pourtant un sujet de clivage au sein de la société turque. Alors qu'environ deux tiers des femmes se couvrent la tête par conviction religieuse ou par tradition, une frange laïque dénonce une intrusion de l'islam politique

dans la république fondée par Mustafa Kemal Atatürk et une instrumentalisation de la question à des fins électoralistes.

Le député Faruk Logoglu, du parti kémaliste (CHP), principale force d'opposition, a jugé que le voile « représente une mentalité antilaïque ». La députée Dilek Akagün est arrivée en séance vêtue d'un tee-shirt à l'effigie d'Atatürk. « Qu'allons nous faire si des députées se présentent avec une burqa ? », a demandé, pour sa part, son collègue Engin Altan.

Mais, hors de ces résistances de principe, le voile n'est plus une question aussi sensible qu'autrefois et les autres partis ont réservé un accueil chaleureux aux quatre députées. En 1999, le hidjab de la députée du parti islamiste Parti de la vertu, Merve Kavakçi, avait déclenché l'hystérie et provoqué une crise politique mémorable. La jeune femme avait été expulsée du Parlement, déchu de son mandat et de sa nationalité turque, avant de s'exiler aux Etats-Unis. Jeudi, à la tribune, la députée du parti kurde BDP (Parti pour la paix et la démocratie) Pervin Buldan s'est déclarée « heureuse que le plus grand problème de la Turquie ait été résolu » et satisfaite de ne pas avoir vécu un deuxième épisode Kavakçi. Mais elle a aussi précisé que « la liberté ne devait pas concerner que le voile ».

Handicapée à la suite d'un acci-

dent de voiture, l'élue du CHP Safak Pavey, qui porte une jambe artificielle, a rappelé que le Parlement lui avait interdit de revêtir un pantalon. La députée de gauche a souligné que la liberté religieuse devait également être assurée pour les minorités chrétienne ou alévie, toujours victimes de discriminations de la part de l'Etat turc. Et que la laïcité était sa meilleure protection. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Le Hezbollah, allié décisif du régime Assad

Un combattant d'élite du parti chiite libanais raconte la bataille de Qoussair, en Syrie, au mois de juin

Récit

Beyrouth
Correspondance

Les hommes armés de fusils au checkpoint ne prennent pas la peine de contrôler les voitures. Les drapeaux du Hezbollah côtoient les portraits de son chef de file charismatique, Hassan Nasrallah, de l'ayatollah Khomeïni et du président syrien Bachar Al-Assad. Ici, chaque rue de Dahiyé, la banlieue sud de Beyrouth, est acquise au Parti de Dieu chiite, qui y a installé son quartier général.

Dans le petit salon d'une maison anonyme de deux étages, un homme d'une quarantaine d'années, cheveux courts, yeux bleus, le visage parsemé de taches de rousseur, se présente sous le nom d'Abbas. C'est le seul mot qu'il prononcera avant d'enfiler une cagoule. Le Hezbollah a formellement interdit à ses combattants de parler à la presse. Mais Abbas a fait une exception. L'entretien peut commencer. « En 1982, il n'y avait personne pour défendre [les chiïtes], personne ne ressentait notre douleur, maintenant nous sommes organisés. » A l'époque, le Liban, déchiré par la guerre civile, doit faire face à l'invasion israélienne. Abbas rejoint alors le Hezbollah pour regagner sa « dignité ». Au fil des batailles, des attentats et des violences, Abbas apprend le maniement des armes, jusqu'à devenir un soldat d'élite de la milice chiite.

En 2011, lorsque la guerre éclate en Syrie, le Hezbollah prend fait et cause pour Bachar Al-Assad. Abbas, comme d'autres volontaires, n'attend que le feu vert du Parti de Dieu pour s'engager sur le terrain. Il veut aussi protéger les lieux saints chiïtes, cibles d'attaques des djihadistes.

C'est à quelques kilomètres de la frontière libanaise, dans la ville de Qoussair, qu'Abbas et son unité vont s'illustrer. Aux mains des rebelles depuis le début 2012, la ville résiste aux tentatives de reprise de l'armée syrienne. Qoussair

représente un enjeu stratégique, car elle se situe sur l'axe routier reliant Damas au littoral méditerranéen. Cette bataille est un test : « Ce combat nous permettait de jauger de la qualité des ennemis que nous allions affronter avant de nous engager totalement en Syrie », résume Abbas.

Le Hezbollah adopte une technique classique : il reprend d'abord les villages voisins, puis la banlieue de Qoussair, pour finalement encercler les rebelles et tenter de les étouffer dans la ville. Abbas, avec son unité, combat dans les rues de Qoussair des « extrémistes, des gens barbares, qui démembrèrent et brûlent des prisonniers », des fanatiques qui sont « beaucoup plus nombreux ». Les rebelles islamistes ont fait de Qoussair un bastion imprenable. Une ville de « tranchées et de fortifications » dans un style qui rappelle à Abbas les défenses du Hezbollah contre Israël. Il affirme aussi que les « takfiristes » (surnom donné par les chiïtes aux djihadistes sunnites) sont préparés depuis plus d'un an à cette bataille : « Des soldats déterminés, organisés, avec une idéologie, et qui n'ont pas peur de mourir (...). Imaginez, plusieurs milliers d'hommes avec des armes à votre frontière, comment vous protégeriez-vous contre eux ? »

Dans cette lutte, rue par rue, mètre par mètre, le centre-ville, où se trouve l'immeuble de la municipalité, connaît les combats les plus âpres. En réalité, le Hezbollah n'a pas perdu autant d'hommes depuis sa guerre contre Israël en 2006. Les combats sont d'une rare violence, parfois même au corps à corps. « Les échanges de tirs étaient proches, à 7 ou 10 ou 15 mètres », dit Abbas. Chaque unité du Hezbollah est « assignée à un certain secteur » et fonctionne en nettoyant zone par zone. En moins de trois semaines, les troupes du Hezbollah reprennent totalement le contrôle de Qoussair et y installent leurs quartiers.

A la question : « Pourquoi l'armée syrienne n'est-elle pas parvenue à reprendre Qoussair toute seu-

le, ainsi que certaines régions de Syrie ? », on devine un sourire sous la cagoule d'Abbas. Puis, sur un ton sec : « Ce n'est pas à moi de les juger. » Même si le Hezbollah agit « indépendamment », il est en « coordination » avec l'armée régulière. Mais celle-ci, censée surveiller les arrières du Hezbollah, a plusieurs fois manqué à sa tâche. Des membres du Hezbollah le confirment lors d'entretiens informels.

Abbas cherche tout de même à dédouaner l'armée syrienne. « Les combats à Qoussair étaient très rapprochés, il est arrivé qu'on se batte à l'arme blanche. Quand vous ouvrez une porte, vous pouvez exploser, car elle est piégée. L'armée régulière [syrienne] n'est pas entraînée à ces méthodes. » Le Hezbollah, en revanche, est passé maître dans l'art de la guérilla.

Les pasdarans (gardiens de la révolution, la force d'élite de la République islamique) envoyés par Téhéran ont donné aux troupes de Bachar Al-Assad des cours accélérés de combat urbain. Mais la question de la présence iranienne en Syrie reste sensible, presque taboue. Elle met Abbas en colère : « Pourquoi toujours parler de la présence iranienne en Syrie ? Il n'y a pas que les Iraniens, parlons de tout le monde ! Pourquoi Al-Qaïda est là ? Pourquoi Al-Nosra [la branche syrienne d'Al-Qaïda] est là ? Et l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant ? Et la Turquie, et l'Arabie saoudite, elles sont aussi présentes. » Abbas déclare finalement que « l'Iran n'est pas impliqué directement dans les combats », laissant dans l'ombre son rôle de conseiller militaire et d'encadrement.

Pour le Hezbollah, combattre en Syrie dépasse la simple défense du régime Assad. Il s'agit d'éliminer un possible « Afghanistan » aux portes du Liban et de « préserver la Syrie » des « hordes » djihadistes. Abbas se veut pragmatique, il « n'attend pas qu'on vienne l'égorger », il préfère « égorger [les extrémistes sunnites] avant ». Abbas réfute l'idée d'une guerre de religion chiite-sunnite : pour lui, c'est un combat mené contre « des

« Les combats à Qoussair étaient très rapprochés, il est arrivé qu'on se batte à l'arme blanche »

Abbas
combattant du Hezbollah

extrémistes, des sectaires (...) avec qui il est impossible de cohabiter ». La communauté chiite libanaise redoute de voir à ses portes « un pays contrôlé par Jabhat Al-Nosra ».

Abbas, qui se dit « prêt à défendre le Liban, de la guerre en Syrie jusqu'en Irak », a la certitude que l'intervention du Hezbollah « a changé la face de la région » et du conflit. Par contrecoup, le Liban est profondément affecté, avec de nombreux heurts communautaires ces derniers mois et des attentats sanglants à Tripoli ou Beyrouth. « Nous ne verrons pas les fruits de cette intervention stratégique tout de suite », estime-t-il.

Son seul regret est que le Hezbollah n'est pas intervenu plus tôt en Syrie : « Nous sommes entrés dans cette bataille un peu tard, mais nous l'avons fait et c'est une bonne chose. » Aujourd'hui, le Hezbollah bat discrètement le rappel, comme si la victoire était déjà acquise à l'allié Assad. ■

Alix Foucault

OPINION

Yes, we can work with Iran

Ryan C. Crocker

There were high expectations after President Obama and Iran's president, Hassan Rouhani, talked on the phone in late September. Those hoping for a diplomatic resolution to the nuclear standoff were excited that a breakthrough was imminent; meanwhile, some American allies, like Israel and Saudi Arabia, expressed deep skepticism over a potential American rapprochement with Iran.

No breakthrough was achieved when American and Iranian officials met for negotiations last month, but few observers expected one. Later this week, another round of talks is scheduled to begin in Geneva.

The window for achieving a diplomatic solution to the nuclear crisis is not open-ended. Both Mr. Obama and Mr. Rouhani face domestic pressures — from skeptical members of Congress in Washington and anti-American hardliners in Tehran.

Nevertheless, despite three decades of frosty relations and although most Americans may be unaware of it, talks with Iran have succeeded in the past — and they can succeed again.

Immediately after 9/11, while serving in the State Department, I sat down with Iranian diplomats to discuss next steps in Afghanistan. Back then, we had a common enemy, the Taliban and its Al Qaeda associates, and both governments thought it was worth exploring whether we could cooperate.

The Iranians were constructive, pragmatic and focused, at one point they even produced an extremely valuable map showing the Taliban's order of battle just before American military action began.

They were also strong proponents of taking action in Afghanistan. We met through the remaining months of 2001 in different locations, and Iranian-American agreement at the Bonn Conference on Afghanistan was central to establishing the Afghan Interim Authority, headed by Hamid Karzai, now the president of Afghanistan.

I continued to hold talks with the Iranians in Kabul when I was sent to reopen the United States Embassy there. We forged agreements on various security issues and coordinated approaches to reconstruction. And then, suddenly, it all came to an end when President

George W. Bush gave his famous "Axis of Evil" speech in early 2002. The Iranian leadership concluded that in spite of their cooperation with the American war effort, the United States remained implacably hostile to the Islamic Republic.

Real cooperation effectively ceased after the speech and the costs were immediate. At the time, we were in the process of negotiating the transfer of the notorious Afghan warlord, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, from Iranian house arrest to Afghan custody and ultimately to American control. Instead, the Iranians facilitated his covert entry into Afghanistan where he remains at large, launching attacks on coalition and Afghan targets.

I had another set of negotiations with

Iranian diplomats when I was ambassador to Iraq in 2007. The goal was to persuade Iran to cease supporting groups like Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi army, a Shiite militia that was targeting the Iraqi government and coalition forces. Unlike the Afghan negotiations, these talks took place in the full glare of the media, rendering the give-and-take of effective diplomacy impossible. While the negotiations accomplished nothing, they may have convinced Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki

Although many people may be unaware of it, talks with Iran have succeeded in the past — and they can succeed again.

that his only option for dealing with the militias was military force. He launched a military operation against them in April 2008. In fighting that extended from Baghdad to Basra, the government eventually prevailed, with substantial coalition support.

The Afghan experience demonstrates

that diplomatic progress between the United States and Iran is possible. It is certainly not guaranteed, but a solid diplomatic solution is always better than the alternatives.

The government of the Islamic Republic is clearly an adversary, but it is also a rational actor. And, like all governments, it is capable of being pragmatic and flexible when it is in its interest to do so. There is a chance that the Obama administration can replicate past successes if it applies four lessons from the 2001 talks.

First, American negotiators must understand that serious progress is likely to come only in direct talks between the United States and Iran. The involvement of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and Germany should continue, but the heavy lifting will have to be done by the two central actors.

Second, the substance of the talks must be closely held. Revealing the details too soon will give ammunition to those who oppose the talks and limit the flexibility of the negotiators.

Third, America should be ready to introduce other issues beyond the nuclear file. Progress in one area can build confidence and facilitate progress in others. I mentioned this in a discussion with Iranian leaders in New York last month and they seemed receptive, mentioning Afghanistan and Syria as possibilities.

Finally, the United States must make clear that we do not seek to overthrow the Iranian regime. Iranian paranoia on this issue is virtually limitless and understandably so. In 1953, the American and British intelligence services ousted a democratically elected Iranian prime minister, an episode that very few Americans remember and no Iranian will ever forget.

The outlines of a deal are already clear. Iran wants sanctions lifted and an end to its isolation while the international community wants clear, continuous and unambiguous verification that Iran's nuclear energy program will never be weaponized. The Iranian leaders I met in New York argued that a nuclear weapon would actually degrade Iran's security because it would spark a destabilizing cascade of proliferation among its Arab neighbors. They insisted that Iran wants security and stability in the region, not a nuclear arms race.

That is encouraging talk, but the Iranians will have to move first. There can be no question of easing American sanctions until Iran has demonstrated its seriousness in confining any nuclear program to peaceful purposes.

RYAN C. CROCKER, a former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Kuwait and Lebanon, is dean of the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University.

Iraqi Kurdistan more vulnerable to Al-Qaeda attacks



Wladimir van Wilgenburg
www.al-monitor.com

On Nov. 3, the Kurdish security forces prevented another suicide attack on the security headquarters building in Akre, Dahuk, arresting two Syrians who were members of the al-Qaeda-affiliated Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). The security operation shows the Kurdish security forces' vigilance, and it also indicates that the Syrian war has increased security risks for the Iraqi Kurds, who have managed to keep their region safe from attacks for six years.

Reports suggest that the Iraqi Kurdish border security has been tightened and that some Iraqi Arabs who want to visit Iraqi Kurdistan are turned away. The increased security threat to Iraqi Kurdistan is linked to the empowerment of al-Qaeda as a result of the civil war in Syria. Despite this, the Kurdish security forces are well-prepared to prevent any threat to the security of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and have increased security measures to prevent any attack.

A report based on police sources from the Kurdish TV station NRT suggested that 500 ISIS fighters have come to the province of Kirkuk from Syria, which has aroused concern among the Kurdish security forces. Kirkuk is not officially part of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, but it borders the provinces of Erbil and Sulaimaniyah and is also mostly under the control of security forces linked to the Kurds.

The official ISIS media outlet, the Ministry of Information, claimed responsibility on Oct. 6 for the Sept. 29 suicide attack in Erbil that killed seven people and wounded more than 70. The group claimed that it was a response to alleged aid by Kurdish President Massoud Barzani to Baghdad against al-Qaeda and for Barzani's statement promising help to the Kurds in Syria.

The statement by the ministry, which was also tweeted (@e3tesemo), read: "In response to the threats issued by criminal apostate Massoud Barzani — the head of what is known as the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and he who issued a statement in preparation of sending members of the evil Kurdish security, known as the 'Asayish' — to stand with the Safavid [reference to the alleged Iranian-controlled Iraqi government] government and protect the Rafidites [derogatory term for Shiites] against the rising attacks of the mujahedeen, saying they failed to stop the attacks, despite their efforts."

The contents of the statement is most likely a reference to the help the Iraqi Kurds provided to Baghdad after the storming of Abu Ghraib prison on July 21, in which many al-Qaeda members escaped. Reuters reported in August that the Shiite-led Iraqi government and the Kurdish government were looking to launch a joint security operation and share intelligence to combat the al-Qaeda threat, after the latter increased its presence in the provinces that are disputed by Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). In May, a security agreement was signed by the Kurdish government and Baghdad to form a supreme security committee for security cooperation.

The al-Qaeda statement also mentioned threats by Barzani to support the Syrian Kurds, who are under threat of Islamist brigades linked to al-Qaeda. "Another threat by the mentioned criminal [Barzani] against the mujahedeen in Sham [Syria], announcing his intention to support the war criminals of the PKK [Kurdistan Workers Party] who are fighting the Islamic state and other jihadists in the border areas of Deir al-Zour-Baraqa, Hassakeh, Raqqa and



A member of the Kurdish security forces stands guard outside a polling station after its closing in Erbil, Sept. 21, 2013. (photo by REUTERS/Azad Lashkari)

Aleppo."

"There has been news recently that al-Qaeda groups have declared war against the Kurds in Syria and engage in beheadings of Kurdish women and children," Barzani said in a letter to the organizers of the important Kurdish National Conference scheduled to be held in Erbil on Nov. 25-27, after having been postponed several times before.

The letter continued, "If those reports are true, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is ready to do everything in its power to protect the lives of the Kurds in western (Syrian) Kurdistan."

However, in reality, there have been tensions between Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the PKK-linked Democratic Union Party (PYD), which resulted in the KDP refusing entry to PYD leader Saleh Muslim in October.

Fighters of the PKK-linked People's Defense Units (YPG) have been engaged in clashes with Islamist groups linked to the Free Syrian Army and al-Qaeda since July 16 in Raqqa, Aleppo and Hassakeh. They have been making progress, especially in Hassakeh, while losing out in the more mixed areas in Raqqa, where al-Qaeda is strong. On Oct. 26, they captured the Iraqi border crossing and took control of several villages in Hassakeh.

The ISIS statement mentions that the operation was prepared for more than a month and was part of a series of operations, claiming the headquarters of the Kurdish security in Erbil to be a "criminal tool of oppression and injustice" and part of the "war against Islam."

The statement further mentions how the al-Qaeda group attacked the Kurdish security forces in Erbil.

On Sept. 29, the Kurdish security authorities confirmed in a press conference that ISIS was behind the attack.

Although Kurdish media reported that Kurds were possibly involved in the Erbil attack, Masrour Barzani, the KRG's director of security and intelligence services, announced that no Kurds were involved, and that three ISIS suspects — Samer Baker Younis, Muhammad Khalil Khadosh and Hashim Salih Muhammad — from Mosul were arrested and confessed to being ISIS members.

"The investigation is still ongoing, but no Kurds were involved in any of the attack's stages. The terrorists used 150 kilograms [330 pounds] of TNT in the attack," Masrour Barzani said, as reported by the Kurdish news website Bas News.

Idrees Mosa, a lecturer in international relations at the University of Dahuk's department of political science, told Al-Monitor by email, "Maintaining stability in the region is a pillar of KRG strategy. It is a driving force behind the economic development in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq."

He continued, "It [the attack] mainly has had a psychological effect. I cannot verify the NRT report. However, the KRG is increasingly becoming more vulnerable to terrorist attacks. The KRG has been deeply worried about the terrorist threat coming from Syria even before the attack." ♦



Free Syrian Army kills 30 Kurdish fighters

www.kuna.net.kw

DAMASCUS, November 5, 2013 (KUNA) -- The opposition Free Syrian Army (FSA) killed Tuesday 30 of the Kurdistan Workers Party fighters (PKK) in northern Syria.

In a press statement, the Syrian Revolution General Commission (SRGC) said the PKK fighters were killed in heavy clashes with the FSA fighters in the town of Tal Abyad in northeastern Ar-Raqqa Governorate.

In a different front, the regime forces killed 16 FSA fighters in the town Maheen in Homs countryside, the statement added.

The intense fighting between regime and FSA forces in Maleha town in Damascus countryside left dozens injured of both sides.

The SRGC noted that heavy clashes and shelling between regime and FSA forces continues unabated in several suburbs of the strategic Aleppo Governorate as the government forces try to break in the opposition-held areas.

The Economist

November 9th 2013

Turkey and its neighbours

A reset?

A new tone in Turkey's foreign policy
ANKARA

IT WAS widely expected to spark a fresh burst of anti-Israeli vitriol from Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's increasingly paranoid prime minister. Last month an article in the Washington Post claimed that Hakan Fidan, the head of MIT, Turkey's national spy agency, had outed ten Iranians working for Israel to his colleagues in Iran. In the eyes of Mr Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development (AK) party the allegations were part of a purported Zionist conspiracy to topple their government. Yet when Israel denied involvement in the leak, Mr Erdogan declared that Turkey must accept Israel's words.

The prime minister's dovish pronouncements have been followed by surprise visits to Ankara by the foreign ministers of Iran and Iraq. Turkey now says it will not import oil from Iraq's Kurds without the Iraqi central government's consent, easing worries that Turkey is encouraging Kurdish independence. Mr Erdogan is said to be eyeing a trip to Baghdad to coincide with the 10th day of the holy fast on November 13th when Shias around the world mourn the death of the Imam Husain.

All of this is helping to feed speculation that Mr Erdogan is reviving Turkey's much-vaunted "zero problems with neighbours" policy. This would be welcome news. The tired joke on the Ankara cocktail circuit is that Turkey now has lots of problems—with all its neighbours.

Mr Erdogan's embrace of the parties linked to the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood in its former Ottoman dominions has prompted accusations of sectarianism. Turkey's

Western friends are every bit as alarmed as Shia leaders in Iran and Iraq about its coddling of jihadists fighting Syria's president, Bashar Assad, as well as Syrian Kurds. Turkey's strident calls for Muhammed Morsi to be returned to power have angered Egypt's new leaders and chilled the friendship with Saudi Arabia.

Worst of all, Mr Erdogan's honeymoon with America's president appears to be over. In March Mr Obama had talked Israel's prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, into apologising for the deaths of nine Turkish citizens during an Israeli raid in 2010 on the Mavi Marmara, a Turkish aid flotilla bound for Gaza. But Mr Erdogan's subsequent Israel-bashing, including his claim that Israel had engineered Mr Morsi's deposition, are said to have infuriated Mr Obama and dampened hopes of Turkish-Israeli reconciliation.

The rift with Washington deepened following Turkey's announcement in September that it was planning to co-produce a missile-defence system with a Chinese company that is under American sanctions for its dealings with Syria, North Korea and Iran. NATO's secretary-general, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, has warned that the Chinese equipment, which is meant to protect Turkey against a possible attack by Syria or Iran, is not compatible with those of other NATO members. Aaron Stein, a Geneva-based non-proliferation expert, reckons that the Chinese kit may be "good against drones and aircraft but not against missiles".

Turkey picked the Chinese missile because it was vastly cheaper than its European and American rivals. The Chinese also agreed to share technology that will purportedly enable Turkey to produce and export its own missiles. This fits with Mr Erdogan's dreams of leading an Islamic superpower. A senior Turkish official confided that Mr Erdogan's sycophantic advisers were "too scared" to tell him of the potential harm to Turkey's ties to NATO.

Mr Erdogan insists that he will go ahead with the Chinese deal. Many speculate that



this is merely a bargaining tactic calculated to force the Europeans and the Americans to offer better terms. Ahmet Davutoglu, the foreign minister, has noted that "no final decision" has been made.

In spite of these twists and about-turns, talk of a Turkish foreign policy "reset" looks premature. The overtures to Iraq have more to do with pressure from Turkish businessmen, who say they are paying the price for Turkey's quarrels abroad. Those to Iran were mainly prompted by Mr Obama's own overtures to the Islamic Republic. Even Mr Erdogan's pious base is worried about his obsession with overthrowing Mr Assad. The flood of Syrian refugees in Turkey has now swollen to more than 700,000. Resentment towards them is rising. Although Turkey has made a big show of arresting suspected al-Qaeda militants in recent months, not everyone is swayed. "I don't see any sign that Turkey is taking serious measures to clamp down on the inflow of foreign fighters into Syria," observes Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, an Oxford-based expert on Islamic militant groups. "The arrests are cosmetic."

The Syrian civil war Still no hint of a compromise

The big powers and the regional ones cannot even muster a quorum for peace talks
CAIRO

FOR all the recent diplomatic drum-rolls, Syrians have no illusions that an end to their misery is in sight. A plan for a second big peace conference in Geneva, floated six months ago, was boosted in September after Syria's government, caught out killing more than a thousand civilians with chemical weapons, agreed to give them up. But since then hopes for serious talks have kept sinking into quicksand. On November 5th Lakhdar Brahimi, the joint envoy of the UN and the Arab League, conceded that the Geneva conference will not be held this month as previously promised. Diplomats mutter gloomily about further delays. December or even January are vaguely mentioned. The fact is that hardliners, both inside Bashar Assad's regime and within the motley ranks of the rebels, and among foreign sponsors backing both sides, remain more determined not to budge than the moderate voices that the talks were meant to empower.

The Syrian National Coalition, the main opposition body in exile, has been flip-flopping over whether to attend talks. It wants a guarantee that Mr Assad will not take part even in a transitional government. The regime refuses to countenance this. Moreover, Mr Assad has felt stronger since America failed to carry out a threat to punish the regime with missiles for its mass-murderous sarin-gas attack on August 21st. The ensuing deal to destroy Syria's chemical weapons, now being carried out by UN experts, has bolstered Mr Assad's legitimacy and reassured him that the West's sole focus is not his overthrow.

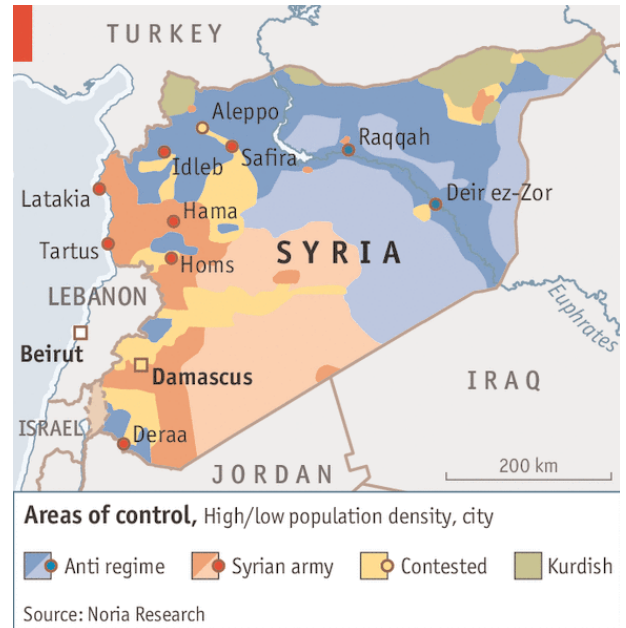
In any case, getting those two parties to the table is no recipe for success. Ever more Syrians reject the opposition coalition's authority, seeing it as a gaggle of self-aggrandising exiles who have failed to supply arms or aid to fighters on the ground. On November 4th one of the most senior pro-Western rebel commanders in northern Syria resigned in frustration, citing divisions among fighting factions and the fecklessness of the national coalition as reasons, though he was one of the few leaders still acknowledging its role. On October 15th 50 groups, most of them Islamist-leaning, announced that they no longer recognised its authority. Zahran Alloush, leader of the Army of Islam, an umbrella of rebel groups around Damascus, said that the coalition would become an enemy—"the same as Bashar Assad's regime"—if it took part in talks in Geneva; 11 days later a further 19 rebel groups said

negotiations with the regime would amount to "treason".

As big an obstacle is disagreement over whether to invite Iran, which backs the regime and has helped it build a paramilitary force to bolster the army. Whereas America and Russia, which back the opposition and regime respectively, have grown closer in wishing for a compromise to end the war, this is not true of the two sides' most determined backers, Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Saudis see an axis of Shia mischief, stretching from Tehran through Baghdad and Damascus to Hezbollah in Lebanon, as their biggest threat, and Syria as its linchpin. Iran has invested billions to prop up Mr Assad's regime and to retain a vital link to Hezbollah. It is far more willing to stomach a conflict that has left at least 110,000 dead than is the West, whose sense of urgency is sharpened by evidence of an increase in jihadist muscle among the rebels and a worsening humanitarian crisis.

Tensions over Syria have risen between America and the Saudis, leading to even more fragmentation among the opposition to Mr Assad. Saudi Arabia, infuriated by America's loss of nerve—as it saw it—over punishing the Syrian regime with missile strikes after its sarin attack, has embarked on a project to create a new national army in the south of Syria rather than working through the Supreme Military Command, the coalition's armed wing based in Turkey. For months it has reportedly been training 5,000 rebels in Jordan, with help from French and more recently Pakistani forces. The Army of Islam also appears to be getting more Saudi support.

As the number of actors in Syria's war multiplies, prospects for an early resolution grow dimmer. A year ago the conflict seemed a straightforward case of rebels fighting an embattled regime. But the rebels are now often as wary of each other as of Mr Assad's forces. Kurdish fighters, in a de facto tactical alliance with the regime, have purged swathes of the north-east from hostile Islamist groups. Salafist and jihadist factions have increased their presence not just in the



north of the country close to Turkey but also around Damascus. The Saudi effort may further undercut and fragment the opposition. But the regime, too, now relies more on factions over which it has limited control, including local-defence militias and Shia fighters brought in from Iran, Lebanon and Iraq.

Meanwhile, the misery deepens remorselessly. Polio has broken out again, some 14 years after its eradication. Severe malnutrition is reported, especially among children in areas besieged by government forces. The UN says two in five Syrians now need emergency aid. Neighbouring countries warn they can no longer cope with the scale of the refugee influx, the most dramatic—by some estimates—since the second world war. Displaced Syrians now make up nearly a quarter of Lebanon's population.

As diplomats talk shop, the war continues on the ground. Mr Assad's troops have made advances in the north, recently retaking Safira, a town south-east of Aleppo, close to a chemical-weapons facility. This has restored a key supply route from Damascus. But rebels have beaten back government advances elsewhere and made some of their own. Until more of the parties inside and outside are ready to compromise, a lethal stalemate will persist.

Turkey is alarmed by extremist militants in Syria border area

Turkey has welcomed Syrian rebels in the border area, but as the conflict drags on, the rise of Al Qaeda-linked militants becomes a concern.

<http://www.latimes.com>
By Patrick J. McDonnell

REYHANLI, Turkey — In this bustling border town, anonymous apartments serve as safe houses for Syrian rebel commanders, clinics for wounded fighters and opposition media centers equipped with banks of sophisticated laptops and video gear.

Turkey has allowed an assemblage of Syrian rebels and their associates, including secular activists, cash-wielding sheiks, arms traffickers and Islamist militants, to use its territory as a transit route, logistics hub and rest stop.

The government has been very clear that it wants to see Syrian President Bashar Assad removed from power. But after more than two years, the conflict is dragging on. Al Qaeda-linked rebel groups are strengthening rapidly in Syria and seizing territory close to the Turkish frontier, the eastern boundary of the NATO alliance.

Increasingly, officials in Ankara, the Turkish capital, as well as critics of the government's policy worry that the militants will establish a permanent presence, exporting extremist ideas and fighters from a chaotic, war-torn state. Despite concern in Washington about the militants' advance, Turkey appears to have few good options.

"Ankara's calculation has been that Assad has to go, and Turkey will allow anyone who wants to fight Assad to go into Syria," said Soner Cagaptay, an analyst with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "To Turkey it didn't matter that much if there were some bad guys, because once Assad was gone the good guys would take over and clean out the bad guys."

Now that calculus is changing. "Turkey is realizing that Assad may not go," Cagaptay said. "And the good guys may not take over."

Turkish artillery batteries opened fire last month on positions in Syria of a powerful Al Qaeda-linked rebel faction, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, after its fighters captured the Syrian town of Azaz, just three miles from the border. Turkey shut the crossing to Azaz, prompting an Internet threat by the group to extend a campaign of car bombings to Turkish soil.

Turkey could be more cautious about which Syrian opposition groups receive aid and who can operate in the border region. Officials are pushing back against charges that Turkish territory has become a launch pad for Al Qaeda-linked groups such as Al Nusra Front. News reports have cited seizures of trucks carrying what they described as suspicious chemicals and warheads for hundreds of rockets.

But sealing the frontier zone to Syrian rebel factions would choke off supply routes and could lead to the collapse of the entire anti-Assad rebellion in Syria's north.

Alarmed by the downward spiral, Turkey has launched something of a diplomatic offensive with neighbors, including Iran, a key backer of the Assad government. Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, visited Ankara early this month and the two nations vowed to work together to find a solution for Syria, despite being on opposite sides of a proxy war there.

When an armed rebellion first surfaced against the autocratic Assad in 2011, Turkish officials embraced a vigorous policy of backing the opposition on the assumption that Assad's government was on the verge of collapse. Assad's exit would have opened the way for Turkey's grateful clients to seize power in Damascus.

But it hasn't worked out that way, with Assad clinging to power as the West, and most specifically the Obama administration, opted not to provide robust military aid to the Syrian opposition.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, architect of Ankara's Syria policy, did not hide his displeasure when the recent U.S.-Russian-brokered deal to neutralize Syria's chemical weapons seemed to rule out the prospect of an American bombing campaign against Syria.

Erdogan rejects the idea that Islamic militant groups could gain a foothold in Turkey. "It is out of the question that organizations like Al Qaeda or Al Nusra could take shelter in our country," he said Thursday on a visit to Sweden.

But his policy of providing a welcome mat for Syrian rebels of all stripes is drawing the ire of many Turks who fear that long-secular Turkey is being dragged into Syria's increasingly sectarian quagmire.

"Why are we bringing in all these crazies here?" asked Suleyman Osterrek, an opposition politician in Antakya, another border-area town that has seen an influx of Syrian fighters. "These people scare us."

In an interview this month with Britain's Guardian newspaper, Turkish President Abdullah Gul voiced concern that Syria could become "something like Afghanistan on the shores of the Mediterranean."

It is unclear whether additional Western military support or even direct U.S. intervention would have pushed Assad out or just accelerated the process of militarization and radicalization in Syria. Afghanistan in the 1980s, Iraq after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion and current-day Libya all provide examples of Islamist militants gaining traction after the West-backed toppling of authoritarian

governments.

Today, fractious opposition brigades and sundry warlords hold sway over vast stretches of Syria. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and another Islamist offshoot, Al Nusra Front, both apparently bankrolled by wealthy donors in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere, now count among insurgent Syria's major power brokers, and by some accounts are the most dominant.

The Islamic State has drawn thousands of recruits from other rebel units and throngs of eager volunteers from dozens of nations. Turkey is now widely regarded as a transit route for Syria-bound Islamist militants from the Persian Gulf, North Africa, Europe and Chechnya and elsewhere. Iraqi, Jordanian and Lebanese volunteers usually enter via their nations' borders with Syria, experts say.

With extremists in the ascendance, the U.S.-backed policy of aiding "moderate" rebel groups appears to face major hurdles.

The numbers of foreign Islamist militants in Syria now exceed those who previously flocked to Iraq and Afghanistan, according to U.S. congressional estimates. There is widespread concern in the West that the Syrian conflict is incubating a new generation of extremists who could eventually wreak havoc across the globe.

"When it is over, these people will be combat trained, combat hardened, and they are going to want to go home," U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers (R-Mich.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said last month.

As Turkey grapples with the Islamist militants on its doorstep, it also faces the emergence in northern Syria of autonomy-minded Kurdish militiamen allied with the Kurdistan Workers Party. Turkey has battled the party for more than 30 years, though peace talks are now underway.

Secular Kurdish militiamen, who have long viewed the radical Islamist forces as their archenemy, have proved to be the sole Syrian faction capable of pushing back the onslaught. Late last month, Kurdish militiamen overran a crossing along the Iraqi border, expelling Al Qaeda-affiliated fighters.

The volatile border tableau has prompted speculation that Ankara could eventually seek a strategic alliance with Syrian Kurds. Though improbable on one level, it no longer seems out of the question, analysts say.

"Turkey is going to have to make some very, very difficult decisions, given the way Syria has unraveled," said Howard Eissenstat, a Turkey expert at St. Lawrence University in New York. "They are backing up, recalibrating and saying, 'OK, what is our long game going to look like?'" ♦

Le programme nucléaire iranien entre guerre et paix à Genève

La délégation iranienne s'est dite optimiste sur les chances d'un accord lors des négociations qui ont débuté jeudi avec les grandes puissances.

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ENVOYÉE SPÉCIALE À GENEVE

SI L'EXTRÊME discrétion imposée sur le contenu des négociations de Genève est une condition de réussite, comme l'affirment les diplomates, la première journée des nouveaux pourparlers sur le programme nucléaire iranien a dû être un succès. C'est d'ailleurs ce qu'a sous-entendu Abbas Araghchi, vice-ministre iranien des Affaires étrangères et chef de l'équipe de négociateurs, pour qui le groupe « 5 + 1 » (les membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité plus l'Allemagne) et l'Iran sont sur le point « de conclure un accord ». « L'autre partie a accepté le cadre proposé par l'Iran, à savoir le premier pas, le dernier pas et les pas intermédiaires », a-t-il dit. Les divergences entre les puissances internationales et l'Iran demeurent « importantes », « mais les deux parties ont la volonté de rapprocher leurs positions ».

« Nous faisons des progrès », a affirmé jeudi soir un porte-parole de la diplomate en chef de l'UE, Catherine Ashton, alors que le ministre iranien des Affaires étrangères, Mohammad Javad Zarif, évoquait un accord « possible » vendredi.

Parmi les compromis envisagés, des sources proches du dossier évoquent un

20 %
C'est le seuil critique
d'enrichissement
de l'uranium
pour fabriquer une bombe

gel des avancées du programme nucléaire iranien, notamment l'arrêt de l'enrichissement de l'uranium à 20 % - le seuil critique pour fabriquer une bombe - en échange d'une suspension provisoire et réversible des sanctions. Cette première étape permettrait aux deux parties de finaliser, au cours des mois prochains, un véritable accord qui donnerait la possibilité à la communauté internationale de vérifier que le programme nucléaire militaire a bien été interrompu et aux Iraniens d'obtenir la levée totale des sanctions. La Maison-Blanche voudrait arrêter l'horloge nucléaire pour soulager les négociateurs de la pression du temps, qui pèse si lourd sur le dossier.

Mais la recherche du point d'équilibre qui permettrait aux deux parties d'accorder des points de vue difficiles à concier-

lier - l'Iran ayant fait de l'enrichissement une « ligne rouge » et les négociateurs internationaux voulant la preuve que Téhéran a renoncé à la bombe - est toujours aussi délicate. Si délicate que la conclusion d'un accord ne garantit pas le succès du processus à long terme. Les obstacles sont nombreux sur la route diplomatique de Genève. « Nous souhaitons avancer par la négociation, mais cela n'avancera que si l'Iran accepte de faire des concessions que lui demande la communauté internationale », a résumé Laurent Fabius sur i-Télé. Paris, qui conserve depuis le début de la

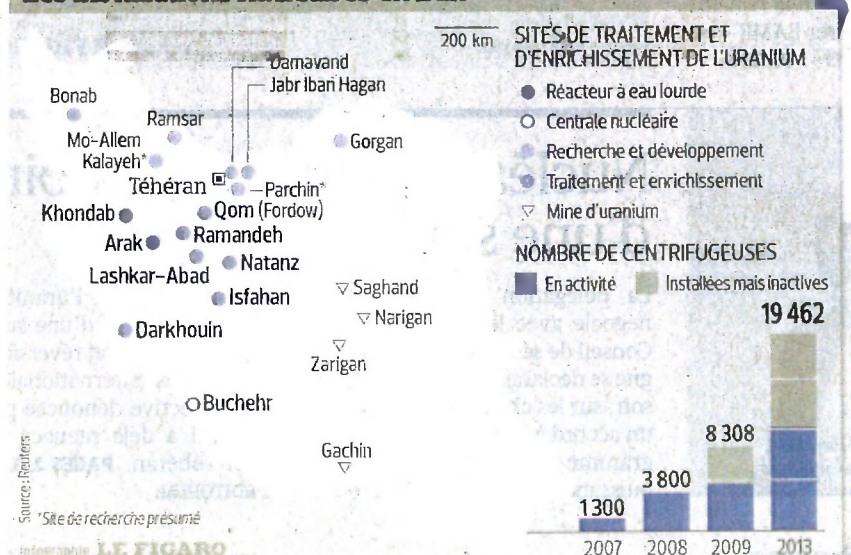
crise une ligne ferme mais cohérente vis-à-vis du nucléaire iranien, n'a pas encore pris acte des concessions de Téhéran.

Israël, qui pèse de tout son poids sur le dossier en menaçant de frapper les installations nucléaires iraniennes, a dénoncé par avance un accord qui serait « une erreur d'ampleur historique », selon Benyamin Nétanyahou, le premier ministre. La presse israélienne, qui croit savoir que Téhéran a proposé à la communauté internationale de cesser ses activités d'enrichissement à 20 % et de ralentir ses travaux sur le réacteur à eau lourde d'Arak, une usine utilisant le plutonium - l'autre filière pour accéder à l'arme nucléaire -, fustige un « mauvais accord », qui permettrait à l'Iran de conserver la capacité de fabriquer la bombe atomique. Ce scepticisme est partagé par le Congrès américain, qui détient les clés d'une éventuelle levée des sanctions.

Les limites viennent aussi de Téhéran, où les conservateurs guettent la moindre information qui pourrait leur permettre de dénoncer une « capitulation » du nouveau président face aux Américains.

Hassan Rohani a été élu pour obtenir la levée des sanctions, qui minent l'économie iranienne. Sa marge de manœuvre est à la fois étroite et limitée dans le temps. La suspension de l'embargo européen nécessitera aussi l'accord des États membres de l'UE. « Les sanctions ont des raisons d'être. Tant que ces raisons demeureront, il n'y aura pas de raison de les lever », a affirmé Michael Mann, porte-parole de Catherine Ashton. ■

Les installations nucléaires en Iran



Mobilisation des Kurdes contre le « mur de la honte »

La Turquie veut ériger un rempart de 7 km pour arrêter les Syriens qui fuient leur pays

Istanbul

Correspondance

Après neuf jours passés assise par terre ou étendue sur un matelas, dans un champ de mines à quelques mètres des rangées de barbelés qui marquent la frontière avec la Syrie, Ayse Gökkan, la maire de Nusaybin, dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a cessé sa grève de la faim. « Elle a arrêté son action jeudi. Nous pensons que la mobilisation a porté ses fruits », a déclaré un responsable local du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP), le parti kurde dont elle est membre.

M^{me} Gökkan avait décidé de lancer ce « jeûne de la mort » pour protester contre l'érection d'un « mur de la honte » le long de sa cité, à la frontière entre la Turquie et la Syrie. La construction d'un rempart de béton, long de sept kilomètres et haut d'un mètre cinquante, a été lancée, affirme l'élue, dans le

but de séparer les villes jumelles de Nusaybin et de Kamechliyé, côté syrien, deux quartiers d'une même entité autrefois réunis avant d'être divisés par le tracé de la frontière en 1921. Les Kurdes qui peuplent cette région dénoncent une stratégie d'isolement de la part d'Ankara. « Un jour, nous abattons le mur et nous abattons la frontière », a-t-elle lancé jeudi.

Slogans à la gloire du PKK

Plusieurs dizaines de milliers de personnes ont manifesté, jeudi 7 novembre, à l'appel des partis kurdes, de part et d'autre du futur mur, avant d'être dispersés par des grenades lacrymogènes. Du côté turc comme du côté syrien, les mêmes drapeaux et slogans à la gloire de la rébellion marxiste du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), les mêmes portraits sur fond jaune d'Abdullah Öcalan, leur leader emprisonné. Les autorités ont d'abord démenti, puis ont

finalement reconnu le projet de clôture. Il ne serait destiné, officiellement, qu'à protéger la population des mines antipersonnel.

Une version qui ne convainc personne. La zone est fréquemment traversée par les contrebandiers. A cet endroit, le mur arrêtera surtout les centaines de Syriens qui tentent de fuir le pays chaque nuit. Le maire de la ville voisine de Kiziltepe, Ferhat Türk, qui s'est lui aussi mis en grève de la faim, a son explication : « Ce qui dérange le gouvernement, c'est la prise de contrôle du Rojava [le Kurdistan syrien] par les Kurdes. Il impose un embargo », assure-t-il.

Depuis 2011, le Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), émanation du PKK et principal parti kurde syrien, a étendu son emprise sur le nord-est de la Syrie. Les postes-frontières tombés sous contrôle kurde ont été systématiquement bouclés par les Turcs. Le gouvernement de Recep Tayyip Erdogan

voit d'un mauvais œil cette autonomie le long de son territoire. Il irait même jusqu'à soutenir, affirme le coprésident du BDP, Selahettin Demirtas, les brigades de rebelles djihadistes telles que le Front Al-Nosra, qui luttent contre les combattants kurdes. « Ils reçoivent des armes. Sans ce soutien, ils n'auraient pas pu résister », explique M. Demirtas.

Sur ce point, la Turquie pourrait être en train de changer de stratégie. La police a révélé, jeudi, avoir intercepté une importante cargaison de munitions – près d'un millier de têtes de roquettes, dissimulées dans un camion près d'Adana. Selon la presse turque, l'arsenal était destiné à des groupes de rebelles syriens et devait traverser la frontière dans la région d'Antioche. Cette saisie tombe à point nommé pour Ankara, pressé de rassurer les diplomates occidentales sur ses intentions en Syrie. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Le Point 13 novembre 2013

Syrie : l'opposition syrienne rejette les Kurdes armés

La Coalition nationale syrienne s'en est vivement prise mercredi au principal groupe armé kurde, qu'elle a qualifié de "formation hostile à la révolution".

La Coalition de l'opposition syrienne s'en est prise vivement mercredi au principal groupe armé kurde, le Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), qu'elle a qualifié de "formation hostile à la révolution syrienne", après l'annonce d'une administration autonome dans le nord du pays. Mardi, le PYD et d'autres formations kurdes ont signé une déclaration établissant "une administration intérimaire dans les zones du Kurdistan occidental", qui désigne dans leur terminologie la région kurde de Syrie.

Pour la Coalition de l'opposition, "le PYD est une formation hostile à la révolution syrienne" et l'administration qu'elle veut mettre en place représente un "acte séparatiste brisant toute relation avec le peuple syrien qui se bat pour parvenir à un État syrien uni, indépendant, libre, non dictatorial et souverain sur son territoire". Le PYD, considéré comme proche du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, rebelles kurdes de Turquie), est "une for-

mation qui soutient le régime de (Bachar) el-Assad et agit contre les intérêts du peuple syrien et les principes de sa révolution", estime l'opposition syrienne.

Administration intérimaire

Dans un communiqué, la Coalition de l'opposition syrienne accuse aussi le PYD d'"attaquer les bataillons et les brigades de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL, rebelles syriens), de provoquer des crises (...) et de s'abstenir de combattre le régime sur plusieurs fronts". Les zones kurdes du nord de la Syrie sont administrées par des conseils locaux kurdes depuis que les forces gouvernementales syriennes s'en sont retirées, à la mi-2012. Ce retrait avait été perçu comme tactique, destiné essentiellement à encourager les Kurdes à ne pas s'allier aux rebelles qui luttent contre le régime d'Assad.

"Aujourd'hui est un jour important dans l'histoire du peuple kurde", a déclaré mardi Shirzad Izidi, porte-parole du

Conseil du peuple du Kurdistan occidental, un groupe kurde syrien, évoquant "le début de l'application d'une administration intérimaire dans les zones du Kurdistan Occidental", la région kurde de Syrie. Cette annonce, à laquelle d'autres groupes kurdes importants n'ont pas adhéré, est intervenue après des discussions dans la localité syrienne de Qamishli, à majorité kurde, et quatre mois après que des dirigeants kurdes de Syrie ont annoncé leur intention de mettre en place un gouvernement provisoire.

En vertu de cette décision, la région kurde de Syrie est divisée en trois zones, dotées chacune d'une assemblée locale ainsi que de représentants au sein d'un organe exécutif régional. Les Kurdes représentent environ 15 % de la population syrienne et se concentrent surtout dans la partie nord du pays. (AFP)



Les Kurdes, des aventuriers de la paix

Par **BERNARD KOUCHNER**

*Ancien ministre
des Affaires étrangères*

La démocratie, denrée rare dans ces pays meurtris du Proche-Orient, vient de trouver un allié : au Kurdistan d'Irak, les élections législatives de septembre se sont déroulées paisiblement et trois grands partis vont bientôt composer une alliance pour administrer le KRG (1). Seul résultat positif de la guerre américaine en Irak : dix ans après, la partie nord du pays est devenue un havre de paix et de développement. Après une tentative de génocide des Kurdes par Saddam Hussein, au milieu des secousses religieuses dont les sunnites et les chiites sont tour à tour responsables, sur fond de déplacements brutaux de populations, un territoire jouit d'une remarquable stabilité et de 10% de croissance par an : le Kurdistan d'Irak. Avec une population de plus de 4 millions d'habitants. Réfugiés chrétiens ou alaouites affluent là, venus de la Syrie proche et fracassée, ou des zones du sud Irakien.

Riches de leur pétrole et des investissements issus de tous les pays environnants, du Golfe au Liban en passant par la Turquie. Accueillants en raison de la sagesse de ses dirigeants et de la stabilité politique kurde qui contraste avec l'environnement. L'Irak s'effondre sous les attentats quotidiens et éclatera demain. La Syrie en lambeaux s'écartèle entre un dictateur alaouite - proche des chiites - et des révoltés démocrates maintenant dépassés par les extrémistes sunnites, et singulièrement par Al-Qaeda et ses affidés. Le Kurdistan d'Irak constitue un îlot de résistance, à l'excès. Les persécutés affluent dans cette zone qui suscite la colère des dictatures régionales.

Depuis l'intervention américaine, une Constitution fédérale régit l'Irak et le Kurdistan jouit d'une très large autonomie sans avoir rompu les ponts avec Bagdad. Erbil et Souleymanieh, les deux grandes villes du Nord, se plai-

gnent des tensions permanentes qui les opposent au Premier ministre de Bagdad, Maliki : des menaces de rétorsions militaires et surtout une répartition centralisée des ressources pétrolières qui ne respecte pas les termes de la Constitution.

Plus grave encore, les attentats quotidiens des sunnites contre les quartiers chiites de la capitale fédérale, que le gouvernement de Maliki semble bien

**Dans un Proche-Orient déchiré,
un territoire jouit d'une remarquable
stabilité et de 10% de croissance par an :
le Kurdistan d'Irak**

incapable de juguler. Al-Qaeda organise la tuerie des chiites des villes, alors que Maliki-le chiite semble poussé à suivre la politique de l'Iran. Il fait tacitement parti d'un axe Iran - Irak - Syrie de Bachar al-Assad et Hezbollah libanais. Pris en tenaille par sa situation géographique, le gouvernement régional du Kurdistan, depuis plusieurs années, s'est ouvert sur la Turquie. Les industriels turcs investissent paisiblement la région et construisent partout. Les Kurdes accélèrent la réalisation d'un pipeline, atteignant déjà la frontière turque. Cet afflux de pétrole permettra une plus large autonomie énergétique au régime d'Ankara. Tout pousse le Kurdistan vers une souveraineté totale. Que semble accepter la majorité des membres de l'ONU.

On sait que les Kurdes, en dépit d'une histoire millénaire, furent les oubliés du partage des dépouilles de l'Empire ottoman. La communauté internationale et divers traités leur promirent l'indépendance alors qu'ils étaient déjà près de 20 millions écartelés entre cinq nations, la Syrie, la Turquie, l'Iran, l'Irak et un petit bout de la Russie. Cette même communauté internationale feignit longtemps de s'étonner de leurs incessantes révoltes et ne les aida que superficiellement, tenant au dogme de frontières coloniales, même si elles séparent un peuple, une langue et une culture de résistance aux religions extrêmes. Ils viennent de loin, ces Kurdes, berbères

que l'islam du VIIe siècle convertit sans les convaincre des rigidités religieuses et asservit sans les dominer. Les Kurdes continuent de nommer leurs anciens conquérants «les Arabes».

Les femmes, qui jamais n'adoptèrent le niqab, travaillaient et se battaient aux côtés des hommes. Car ils se battirent beaucoup, pour affirmer leurs différences et conquérir un territoire souverain. Ils s'affrontèrent tour à tour aux armées de Turquie, d'Iran, d'Irak et moins de Syrie. Ils connurent des succès et, au lendemain de la guerre de 39-45, administrèrent «une République autonome de Mahabad».

En Iran et en Irak, les partis démocratiques kurdes (PDK) existaient depuis de nombreuses années, fondés par Mustapha Barzani, le prophète pour l'Irak, et par Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, le sage et le démocrate pour l'Iran. Aucun ne céda à l'extrémisme. Ils se battaient entre adversaires mais jamais ne furent les auteurs d'attentats aveugles - Ghassemlou disait : «Nous ne mettrons jamais de bombes dans les marchés, nous n'attaquerons jamais la population civile, et c'est pour cela que les médias ne s'intéressent pas à nous !»

Il avait raison et fut assassiné à Vienne par des agents Iraniens dont faisait - dit-on - partie Ahmadinejad.

Un gouvernement régional devrait être créé dans les semaines à venir et les tentatives d'entente poursuivies avec le gouvernement de Bagdad. Les Américains qui invitent M. Maliki à Washington à la fin du mois insistent pour maintenir en place un homme incapable de juguler la violence et de respecter la Constitution fédérale irakienne. Les Kurdes d'Irak, que le monde entier considère comme autonomes, souhaitent une véritable indépendance, mais ne veulent pas brusquer les choses. Ils ne songent nullement à un Etat qui unirait les 40 millions de Kurdes séparés par les traités. Ils tiennent avant tout à leur bonne entente avec la République turque et veulent achever le pipeline qui joindra les deux économies mieux que les accords ■■■

■■■ passés ne le firent. Ils souhaitent que les négociations entamées avec l'Iran puissent aboutir. Et connaissent d'expérience le danger que représentent leurs puissants voisins.

Ils préparent l'économie de leur région à affronter des épreuves et font preuve d'initiatives diplomatiques. Ils renforcent leurs défenses, les peshmergas - les soldats kurdes - s'entraînent aux techniques modernes de combats. Tout en soutenant l'autonomie territoriale que bâtissent leurs voisins kurdes de Syrie, ils se méfient, pour l'heure, de l'héritage du PKK (2). Ils ne prennent pas

partie dans les affrontements des sunnites et des chiites mais se montrent très résolus dans la lutte contre l'extrémisme. Conscients d'un environnement fragile, ils savent que les éclatements probables de leurs voisins peuvent submerger leur région.

Et s'ils sont prêts à accueillir les Kurdes, les chrétiens et tous ceux qui fuient massacres et dictature, ils pensent à un probable référendum de souveraineté et à une sécession sans violence dont le modèle pourrait être la séparation des Tchèques et des Slovaques.

Ces Kurdes, qui n'avaient confiance que dans leurs montagnes, pourraient construire la base d'une lointaine confédération du Moyen-Orient. L'Union européenne qui cherche en vain une politique extérieure serait bien inspirée de regarder du côté du Kurdistan d'Irak.

(1)Kurdistan Regional Government.

(2)Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan.

Gauchistes et violents ils affirment, après un discours d'apaisement de Ocalan, leur leader emprisonné, avoir renoncé à la lutte armée.

Challenge^s 13 novembre 2013

Les Kurdes de Syrie portés par leurs victoires militaires

PAR ERIKA SOLOMON

BEYROUTH (Reuters) - Les insurgés kurdes syriens ont pris dans la nuit de mardi à mercredi le contrôle de sept autres villages dans le nord-est du pays, au lendemain de l'annonce par leurs dirigeants politiques de la création d'une administration de transition, à l'image des institutions du Kurdistan irakien.

Les Kurdes, qui sont environ 30 millions, vivent en Turquie, en Iran, en Syrie et en Irak. Si les Kurdes irakiens jouissent d'une certaine autonomie depuis 1991, leurs mouvements nationalistes sont combattus dans les trois autres pays.

Depuis le début de la guerre civile en Syrie il y a deux ans et demi, les Kurdes ont pris le contrôle de la plupart des localités où ils sont majoritaires.

Ces dernières semaines, ils ont remporté de nouveaux succès, parvenant à repousser les groupes islamistes qui leur disputaient la région.

La nuit dernière, ils ont repoussé les insurgés islamistes liés à Al Qaïda dans le sud de la province de Hassaka, peuplée majoritairement de Kurdes.

Mais la communauté kurde de Syrie est divisée. Les combattants qui ont chassé les islamistes dépendent du Parti de l'Union démocratique (PYD). L'autre grande formation kurde, le PDK (Parti démocratique kurde) n'a pas signé l'accord sur l'autonomie.

L'annonce de la création d'un gouvernement provisoire kurde en Syrie gêne les autorités du Kurdistan irakien, qui veulent garder de bons rapports avec la Turquie, elle-même confrontée depuis près de trente ans à une insurrection kurde dans le sud-est de son territoire.

Ankara est engagé depuis le printemps



Après que des milices kurdes ont repris aux rebelles islamistes la ville de Ras al Ain, dans le nord de la Syrie, la semaine dernière. La guerre civile syrienne donne un nouvel élan à la cause kurde, dont les miliciens multiplient les succès militaires dans le Nord-Est et gagnent également du terrain sur le plan politique. /Photo prise le 6 novembre 2013/REUTERS

dernier dans des négociations avec les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) en vue de mettre fin au conflit. Aujourd'hui, le PKK est considéré comme très proche du PYD syrien.

Pour les dirigeants kurdes d'Irak, la proclamation par les Kurdes du Syrie d'un gouvernement local semble relever d'un accord avec les autorités de Damas.

DIVISIONS

Une thèse partagée par le ministre turc des Affaires étrangères, Ahmet Davutoglu, qui reproche au PYD d'avoir renoué des contacts avec le régime syrien.

Pour le chef de la diplomatie turque, le PYD étouffe toute opposition dans les régions qu'il contrôle, à tel point que de nombreuses plaintes ont été déposées tant auprès du gouvernement turc que des autorités du Kurdistan irakien.

Mardi, des mouvements kurdes du nord-est de la Syrie ont créé leur propre administration après une série de succès militaires face aux rebelles islamistes.

Victimes depuis des décennies de discriminations imputables aussi bien à Bachar al Assad qu'à son père Hafez, qui l'a précédé à la tête de l'Etat, les membres de cette

minorité voient dans le conflit un bon moyen d'accéder à l'autonomie de fait arrachée par leurs frères irakiens à l'issue de la première guerre du Golfe, en 1991.

Les mouvements kurdes et les djihadistes arabes qui sont farouchement hostiles à toute sécession se disputent depuis plusieurs mois les régions où l'ethnie est majoritaire, mais les premiers ont pris le dessus en novembre.

"À la lumière des circonstances que connaît actuellement la Syrie et pour combler un vide administratif (...), nous jugeons de la plus haute importance de mettre en place une administration de transition pluraliste et démocratique", a rapporté mardi un communiqué diffusé à l'issue d'un conseil des milices kurdes et d'autres mouvements à Kamichli.

Les signataires, qui se disent attachés à l'intégrité territoriale de la Syrie, invitent la communauté internationale et les pays voisins à apporter leur soutien à cette administration approuvée selon eux par différentes formations politiques et les représentants d'autres minorités. ■

Un «mur de la honte» entre Turquie et Syrie

REPORTAGE - Les autorités turques ont commencé la construction d'un mur le long de la frontière avec la Syrie, officiellement pour protéger les populations des mines antipersonnelles. Mais «le mur de la honte», comme l'ont surnommé certains, renforcera surtout la séparation entre Kurdes de part et d'autre de la frontière.

Par Laure Marchand
Envoyée spéciale à Nusaybin
(Sud-est de la Turquie)

Allongée sur son canapé, Fehime Dündar ne se lève plus guère. Au-dessus de la vieille femme kurde, trois portraits sont accrochés au mur. Celui de son mari, Yusuf, assassiné par le Hezbollah turc (groupe radical sunnite utilisé par l'État pour lutter contre la rébellion kurde) au début des années 1990. À sa droite, Kamuran, un de ses fils, chèche rouge autour du cou et armé sur l'épaule, mort dans les rangs de la guérilla du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), en guerre contre Ankara, «un peu avant son père». Et à gauche, Ferid, le petit-fils, qui a rejoint le mois dernier ce panthéon familial des martyrs de la cause kurde. «C'était le deuxième jour de la fête du sacrifice», souffle sa grand-mère. Ferid est tombé de l'autre côté de la frontière, en Syrie, tué par des djihadistes d'al-Nosra (la branche syrienne d'al-Qaïda) qui s'étaient déguisés en combattants kurdes.

Fehime Dündar habite Nusaybin, la ville qui vient buter sur la frontière le long de laquelle les autorités turques ont commencé la construction d'un mur. Pour cette grand-mère du sud-est de la Turquie, «ces barbelés sont la preuve de l'hostilité contre les Kurdes. Je ne serai pas là pour le voir, mais j'espère qu'un Kurdistan sera réuni un jour». Ce rempart, qui devrait s'étendre sur sept kilomètres, a officiellement pour objet de protéger les popu-



La police turque disperse les manifestants opposés à la construction du mur, mardi, à Nusaybin.

lations des mines antipersonnelles. Mais «le mur de la honte», comme l'ont surnommé les Kurdes, renforcera surtout un peu plus la séparation entre Nusaybin, ville kurde de Turquie, et Qamishli, sa jumelle syrienne. Il n'y a qu'un champ entre les premières maisons de Qamishli et les miradors turcs.

«Les raisons de sécurité invoquées sont un prétexte, proteste Huseyin, qui préfère taire son nom de famille. En deux ans de conflit, aucun tir n'est venu de l'autre côté. C'est normal, il n'y a que des Kurdes là-bas, le YPG (la milice armée des Kurdes syriens, NDLR) gère toute la zone.» Sans se préoccuper d'un soldat turc qui l'observe à la jumelle, ce plombier de 28 ans raconte qu'il rendait visite à ses cousins à Qamishli, avant la guerre. Depuis, la Turquie a fermé le poste-frontière. Une palissade en métal a également été érigée devant l'école primaire. À cet endroit-là, le no man's land entre les deux pays ne mesure que quelques mètres. Cette bande étroite permettait de lancer des produits de première nécessité par-dessus les barbelés. «Il faut bien reconnaître que des armes et de la drogue empruntaient aussi le même chemin», raconte, sourire en coin, un instituteur à la retraite. À Qamishli, comme en beaucoup d'autres points, la frontière turco-syrienne, qui mesure 820 km, ressemble à une passoire et fait le bonheur des contrebandiers.

Asphyxier le Kurdistan syrien

Son tracé, qui remonte à un accord conclu entre Français et Turcs en 1921, se superpose à la voie de chemin de fer Istanbul-Bagdad. Il passe comme une tranchée en plein milieu des régions kurdes. «Avec ce mur en plus, le vrai objectif du gouvernement turc est de séparer les Kurdes», martèle Demir Çelik, député du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP), parti prokurde de Turquie et vitrine politique du PKK. Ankara lutte contre les aspirations émancipatrices de sa propre minorité kurde.

Des discussions pour tenter de mettre un terme au conflit, qui a fait plus de 45.000 morts en trois décennies, sont en cours depuis un an avec Abdullah Öcalan, le leader emprisonné du PKK. Mais le processus, qui pâtit de l'absence de réformes de la part du gouvernement turc, est au point mort. Parallèlement, la prise d'indépendance des Kurdes de Syrie qui, à l'issue de discussions à Qamishli, viennent d'annoncer l'établissement d'un gouvernement autonome inquiète de plus en plus la Turquie. Environ les deux tiers des territoires majoritairement kurdes du Nord-Est syrien sont actuellement sous contrôle du PYD, le Parti de l'Union démocratique, émanation syrienne du PKK. Ses brigades ont engrangé des succès militaires contre les djihadistes ces derniers jours.

Renforcer les djihadistes

«Les Turcs veulent asphyxier

économiquement et politiquement» le Kurdistan syrien, poursuit Demir Çelik. Jeudi dernier, les forces de la police antiterroriste ont en tout cas saturé l'atmosphère de Nusaybin. Des gaz lacrymogènes rendaient l'air irrespirable, mettant fin à un rassemblement organisé pour dénoncer l'érection du mur. Pris d'un malaise, le parlementaire sera conduit aux urgences.

Un peu avant la dispersion à coups de tirs de grenades, des milliers de personnes écoutaient religieusement Selahattin Demirtas. À la tribune, le coprésident de la formation kurde accusait la Turquie de renforcer les djihadistes du Front al-Nosra «en envoyant des armes» en Syrie: «Sans ce soutien et celui de l'Arabie saoudite, les terroristes ne pourraient pas se maintenir.» Des grappes de jeunes encagoulés brandissaient des drapeaux à l'effigie d'Abdullah Öcalan. De l'autre côté de la frontière, des Syriens répondaient en écho.

Comme environ trois mille autres Kurdes de Syrie, Abdurrahman Kasim a trouvé refuge à Qamishli. Il a mis les siens à l'abri de la guerre et survient à ses besoins grâce à un emploi de soudeur. Le mois dernier, un cousin engagé dans les rangs du YPG a réchappé de justesse à un attentat à la bombe «à 30 kilomètres de Qamishli. C'est une zone que le YPG essaye de nettoyer d'al-Nosra». Blessé, il n'a pas été hospitalisé en Turquie. «C'est interdit. Par contre, l'État turc prend ceux d'al-Nosra, les guérit et les renvoie se battre contre les Kurdes», assure Abdurrahman. Avant de se battre en Syrie, son parent avait passé treize ans dans les rangs du PKK. Pour ces Kurdes, la frontière turco-syrienne est une tragique erreur de l'Histoire qui a laissé leur peuple sans État après la Première Guerre mondiale. Aujourd'hui, en Turquie ou en Syrie, «nous voulons nos droits», acquiesce en chœur la famille d'Abdurrahman. ■

Iran agrees to 'managed access' to 2 sites

PARIS

BY ALISSA J. RUBIN
AND MARK LANDLER

The International Atomic Energy Agency said Monday that Iran had agreed to resolve all outstanding issues with the agency and would permit "managed access" by international inspectors to two key nuclear facilities, in what seemed a conciliatory gesture after negotiators seeking a broader deal at talks in Geneva failed to secure a quick breakthrough.

But Monday's promise of wider scrutiny did not seem to extend to one of the more contentious locations: the Parchin military site southwest of Tehran. Inspectors from the agency, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, have been trying for months to view selected areas of the site, where they suspect that Iran may have tested triggering devices for nuclear weapons.

"This is an important step forward to start with, but much more needs to be done," Yukiya Amano, the director general of the agency, told reporters in Tehran, where he signed the accord.

The agreement, the first step in five years toward resolving nuclear issues with Iran, came after unsuccessful talks between Iran and six world powers in Geneva aimed at reaching an agreement to ease sanctions on Iran in exchange for verifiable assurances that Iran would not pursue a nuclear weapon.

Western diplomats said Iranian negotiators balked at a proposed agreement, and did not give enough concrete assurances of peaceful intentions.

Coming so soon after those talks, Monday's agreement appeared to represent an effort by Iran to show that it remained committed to reaching accommodation with the West and wanted to demonstrate a willingness to go beyond past steps. The Geneva talks are to resume at a lower level on Nov. 20.

In Abu Dhabi, Secretary of State John Kerry, who has been trying to reassure regional allies that any broader deal will protect their interests, told reporters on Monday that the Obama administration was not in a "race" to strike a deal. Trying to fend off any rush to condemn an incomplete deal, he said, "The time to oppose it is when you see what it is, not to oppose the effort to find out what is possible."

And in London, Foreign Secretary William Hague, who took part in the Geneva

talks, said Monday that if Tehran failed to reach an agreement, pressure to intensify already tough economic sanctions on Iran would grow. But if a deal could be struck, he told Parliament, Iran could receive "limited, proportionate sanctions relief," Reuters reported.

Monday's agreement was signed by Mr. Amano and Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of Iran's atomic energy organization. Among its specific provisions are "managed access" to the Gachin mine in Bandar Abbas, on the Strait of Hormuz, and the heavy-water production plant being built at Arak.

In the past, the agency has questioned whether the Gachin mine, which produces yellowcake uranium for conversion to nuclear fuel, was linked to Iran's military.

The heavy-water plant at Arak could produce weapons-grade plutonium. A main concern is that once the plant is operational it would be nearly impossible for outside powers to destroy it without running the risk of spreading deadly plutonium.

Western officials in Vienna noted that Monday's agreement gave the I.A.E.A. access to the heavy-water production plant at Arak but not to the nuclear reactor under construction there. A point of disagreement at the broader negotiations in Geneva was a French demand that Iran completely suspend construction at Arak.

The agreement with the I.A.E.A. also calls for Iran to provide fuller information about the scope and longer-term plans for additional uranium enrichment facilities, as well as answers to "all present and past issues," the

Tehran would be permitted to protect information it considers to be proprietary or secret.

agency said. The "past issues" include the question of whether Iran has previously tried to develop nuclear weapons.

The country's longstanding reluctance to answer questions from the nuclear watchdog and allow more comprehensive inspections have deepened Western suspicions about Iran's intent.

The agency, the only outside entity allowed to enter Iranian facilities and report back to the world, has had limited access up to now. But Mr. Salehi, the Iranian official, described the agreement as a "road map" for cooperation, ac-

ording to Press TV.

"The I.A.E.A.," a joint statement said, "agreed to continue to take into account Iran's security concerns, including through the use of managed access and the protection of confidential information."

"Managed access" denotes the ground rules for that agency's inspections that permit host countries to protect information they consider to be proprietary or secret, such as military technology, while allowing inspectors to garner needed data, officials said.

Iran committed itself to providing information on all new research reactors and on identifying 16 sites designated for the construction of nuclear power plants. The agreement also enjoined Iran to clarify its stance on additional enrichment facilities and on laser enrichment technology.

Mr. Kerry, speaking to reporters in Abu Dhabi, addressed news reports, including in the French press, that French reservations had delayed a deal at the talks in Geneva. He insisted that the major powers were united.

"The French signed off on it — we signed off on it," Mr. Kerry said. "There was unity but Iran couldn't take it."

A day after seeking to assure Israel that any agreement with Iran would protect its security interests, he offered reassurances on Monday to his hosts, the crown prince of the United Arab Emirates, Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, and the foreign minister, Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan.

"We have a strong strategic relationship that has been built up over many years. It is also a friendship," Mr. Kerry said. "The United States will do nothing in negotiating with Iran that will change that relationship."

Mr. Kerry was wrapping up a weeklong regional tour in which he spent considerable time mollifying American allies about the talks with Iran. In Tel Aviv, he held a tense session with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who said the agreement discussed in Geneva would be a "deal of the century" for Iran. In Saudi Arabia, Mr. Kerry relayed assurances from President Obama that the United States would defend its ally from external attack. And he said the administration would keep the Saudis updated on nuclear negotiations "so there are no surprises."

Alan Cowell contributed reporting from London.

Dans le nord, des Kurdes de Syrie annoncent une administration autonome

www.france24.com/fr

Des formations kurdes du nord-est de la Syrie ont annoncé, mardi, la formation d'une administration autonome de transition. De violents combats opposent les milices kurdes aux djihadistes dans ces régions, et les Kurdes ont repris l'avantage.

Ils avaient déjà une autonomie de fait, mais désormais c'est officiel. Des formations kurdes du nord-est de la Syrie ont annoncé, mardi 12 novembre, l'établissement d'une administration autonome de transition, après avoir progressé sur le terrain face aux groupes jihadistes.

Depuis que les forces de Bachar al-Assad s'en sont retirées à la mi-2012, les zones kurdes du nord de la Syrie sont administrées par des conseils locaux kurdes, et fonctionnent de façon quasi-autonomes. Ce retrait avait été perçu comme tactique, destiné essentiellement à encourager les Kurdes, qui représentent 15 % environ de la population syrienne, à ne pas s'allier aux rebelles. Pour autant, la stratégie des Kurdes avait globalement consisté à protéger leurs régions des violences venues, tant des rebelles que du régime.

Plus récemment, des combats ont opposé les combattants kurdes aux djihadistes, et en octobre, les forces kurdes ont pris le contrôle d'un poste frontalier très important à la frontière de l'Irak. Une victoire de plus, qui semble les avoir confortés dans une position de force.

Dans les pays voisins, les Kurdes gagnent en autonomie

Ce communiqué survient alors que les



Kurdes gagnent en autonomie, dans les pays voisins. En Turquie, une série de réformes vient ainsi d'être rendue publique, destinées à étendre les droits des minorités, dont ceux des quelque 15 millions de Kurdes y vivant. Et en Irak, la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien se démarque de plus en plus du gouvernement fédéral de Bagdad.

"Aujourd'hui est un jour important dans l'histoire du peuple kurde", a déclaré Shirzad Izidi, porte-parole du Conseil du peuple du Kurdistan occidental, un groupe kurde syrien, évoquant "le début de l'application d'une administration intérimaire dans les zones du Kurdistan occidental", la région kurde de Syrie.

Cette annonce est également intervenue,

après des discussions dans la localité de Qamishli, à majorité kurde, et quatre mois après que des dirigeants kurdes de Syrie ont annoncé leur intention de mettre en place un gouvernement provisoire.

Doute sur la viabilité de l'administration

En vertu de cette décision, la région kurde de Syrie est divisée en trois zones, dotées chacune d'une assemblée locale, ainsi que de représentants au sein d'un organe exécutif régional.

Le communiqué annonce la "formation d'une administration civile transitoire pour la région du Kurdistan occidental/Syrie." Cette administration a été chargée de préparer les élections locales et générales, outre des questions politiques, militaires, économiques et de sécurité.

Reste que d'autres groupes kurdes importants ont refusé de signer cette déclaration déjà évoquée en juillet. Et cela jette un doute sur sa viabilité.

Pour l'instant, elle est composée du puissant Parti de l'Union Démocratique (PYD) et de plusieurs autres petites formations, mais pas du Conseil national kurde (KNC), qui inclut un large éventail de partis kurdes.

"Je pense qu'une telle démarche précipitée, unilatérale sera perçue [...] comme un obstacle à l'opposition syrienne", a expliqué un membre du KNC. "J'estime que le PYD avance dans la mauvaise direction, en annonçant individuellement l'administration locale", a-t-il ajouté.

Les combats entre Kurdes et djihadistes, qui luttent également contre le régime de Bachar al-Assad, ont ajouté à la complexité d'une guerre civile, ayant fait, selon une ONG syrienne, plus de 120 000 morts depuis 2011.

AFP

Autonomie kurde en Syrie: "La Turquie ne peut permettre un fait accompli" (président)

ANKARA, 15 nov 2013 (AFP)

LA TURQUIE a affiché vendredi son hostilité à l'annonce d'une administration autonome kurde dans le nord de la Syrie, son président, Abdullah Gül, déclarant qu'elle "ne peut permettre un fait accompli".

"La Turquie ne peut permettre de fait accompli, il ne serait pas question d'accepter une telle chose en Syrie", a indiqué M. Gül dans des déclarations télévisées lors d'un déplacement à Erzincan, dans l'est de la Turquie.

Le chef de l'Etat turc a souligné les relations fraternelles unissant les peuples turcs et syriens, divisés par une longue frontière, affirmant que son pays ne favorisait aucune pression d'une communauté syrienne, arabe, kurde ou turkmène, sur une autre.

Mardi, le Parti de l'Union Démocratique (PYD), le principal groupe armé kurde, et

d'autres formations kurdes ont signé une déclaration établissant "une administration intérimaire dans les zones du Kurdistan occidental", qui désigne dans leur terminologie la région kurde de Syrie.

La Turquie avait déjà plusieurs fois mis en garde le PYD, considéré comme proche du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, rebelles kurdes de Turquie), contre toute velléité autonomiste, estimant que cela pourrait consacrer la division de la Syrie voisine, qu'elle rejette.

"Nous ne pouvons permettre un éclatement de la Syrie qui est confrontée à un grand chaos", a ajouté M. Gül.

Les zones kurdes du nord de la Syrie sont administrées par des conseils locaux kurdes depuis que les forces gouvernementales syriennes s'en sont retirées à la mi-2012.

La Turquie a rompu avec le régime de Damas et soutient les rebelles. Elle héberge sur son sol plus de 600.000 réfugiés dont le tiers dans des camps. ●

Iraq's Kurdish region pursues ties with Turkey — for energy revenue and independence

BY BEN VAN HEUVELEN

IRBIL, Iraq — As the rest of Iraq descends into a crisis of deepening violence, the autonomous enclave of Kurdistan is enlisting the help of an unlikely ally, Turkey, to reach for a long-delayed dream of independence.

In many ways, Iraqi Kurdistan already acts like a sovereign state. Kurdish authorities provide all public services, command their own army and control their own borders — including their heavily guarded southern border with Arab-majority provinces of Iraq. In Irbil, the Kurdish capital, most government buildings fly the Kurdish flag — not the flag of Iraq — and many members of the younger generation never learned Arabic and speak only Kurdish.

Until now, however, the Kurds have remained tightly tied to Baghdad because they depend on the Iraqi treasury for the vast majority of their regional budget.

THAT COULD SOON CHANGE.

Putting aside years of hostility, Turkish and Kurdish leaders are quietly implementing an energy partnership agreement, signed earlier this year, that promises to provide the Kurdistan region with an independent stream of oil revenue.

The first major step in the plan is a pipeline that runs directly to Turkey, beyond Baghdad's reach, and that will begin operating by the end of the year, according to the Kurdistan region's minister of natural resources, Ashti Hawrami.

"It is our duty as Iraqis to pursue export routes for oil and gas, to secure our future," Hawrami said.

TURKEY'S TURNABOUT

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and the Obama administration have balked at Turkey's budding alliance with the Kurds, saying that it could further destabilize Iraq. They worry that a push toward Kurdish nationalism could raise ethnic tensions with Iraq's Arab majority, especially those who live along the disputed boundary between the Kurdistan region and the rest of the country.

More than 5,500 people have been killed in attacks in 2013, Iraq's deadliest year since 2008. The Kurdistan region has remained safe, with the exception of one major attack on an intelligence headquarters in the Kurdish capital, Irbil, in September. But the war in neighboring Syria has helped reenergize al-Qaeda's Iraqi affiliates, which are waging an escalating campaign of bombings, assassinations and prison breaks.

Leaders in the Kurdistan region have

The citadel and the City Park in the northern regional capital of Irbil in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region. Turkish companies are helping transform Irbil as Turkish and Kurdish leaders work to build economic ties.
SAFIN
HAMED/AFP/Getty Images -



tried to quell the concerns of Iraqi and American officials, giving assurances that they have no plans to formally secede from Iraq, even as they lay the groundwork for increasing autonomy.

"Independence is an aspiration in the heart of every Kurd," said a senior Kurdish official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of political sensitivities. "But we need to be strategic."

IRONICALLY, TURKEY COULD BECOME A KEY ENABLER OF KURDISH DREAMS.

In the past, Turkish leaders opposed political autonomy for Iraqi Kurds, for fear that Turkey's own sizable Kurdish minority might be emboldened toward separatism.

As recently as 2008, Turkey massed tens of thousands of troops on its southern border and launched major ground attacks on Kurdish militants in Iraqi territory, prompting Kurdish regional President Massoud Barzani to threaten violent retaliation.

But Turkey's policy toward the Kurds has shifted dramatically. Relations warmed as Turkey began to see growing economic opportunities in Iraqi Kurdistan, including several unexploited natural gas fields. Turkey needs cheap and plentiful energy supplies to keep its economy growing quickly.

In March, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the Kurdish region's prime minister, Nechirvan Barzani, finalized a comprehensive energy agreement. It calls for a new state-owned entity called the Turkish Energy Co. to explore for oil in several parts of Iraqi Kurdistan and to facilitate the pipeline export of oil and natural gas.

Most details of the deal have been kept secret, but two senior Turkish government officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of political sensitivities, outlined its broad parameters and confirmed

the signing.

Beyond the oil sector, Turkish companies are helping transform Irbil, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, into an aspiring capital of commerce with a skyline full of cranes. In the past five years, Turkish companies have built an international airport, two luxury hotels, gated communities for expats and a towering office park named Empire World.

But the oil deal has raised alarms in Washington. When Erdogan visited the United States in May, President Obama emphasized his administration's opposition, according to two government officials, one American and one Turkish, who were briefed on the meeting but were not authorized to speak to the news media. The White House pushed Turkey to reformulate the agreement to address the concerns of Iraq's central government, which claims primary authority over oil development and exports.

But that proposal went nowhere with the Kurds, who keenly remember the oppressive policies of previous Arab-majority governments in Baghdad. From the Kurdish perspective, one of the primary benefits of an alliance with Turkey is the validation of an expansively federalist interpretation of Iraq's constitution, under which the Kurdistan region claims almost total autonomy.

"We have learned a lesson from history," said Falah Mustafa Bakir, head of the Kurdistan region's Department of Foreign Relations. "Our natural resources have strengthened our hand, our position, our political weight."

PIPELINE TO THE FUTURE

The regional government has signed more than 50 contracts with dozens of oil companies, including Exxon Mobil and Chevron. But the landlocked Kurds can only persuade their private-sector partners to develop billions of dollars worth of oil pro-

duction if there is a reliable way to transport all of that crude to international markets — and that means pipelines.

In the past, the Kurds have struck a series of temporary agreements with Baghdad to export through federal Iraqi infrastructure. But Baghdad, loath to condone independent oil ambitions, has accepted the Kurdistan region's crude while withholding most of the expected payments.

Turkey has guaranteed that Iraqi Kurdistan will receive revenue from its oil and gas sales directly, circumventing Baghdad.

The Turkish state company Botas has begun building a gas pipeline toward the Kurdish border, according to a senior

Turkish energy official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the political sensitivities. Under the terms of the March agreement, the Kurdistan region will ultimately export at least 10 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year — enough to meet more than one-fifth of Turkey's current consumption.

The Syrian civil war has helped push Turkish and Kurdish leaders together. Seeing growing instability in the largely Kurdish areas of northern Syria, Erdogan has been eager to enlist Massoud and Nechirvan Barzani — the uncle-nephew team that leads the Kurdistan Regional Government — to exert a moderating influence on militant Kurdish groups.

For the Kurds, deteriorating security in

the rest of Iraq has helped create political opportunity. Maliki, who is seeking reelection as prime minister next year, faces widespread public frustration and political challenges from the fractious Shiite parties that form his base and is likely to need Kurdish support to win another term.

In the Kurdistan region, the Barzanis just led their political party to a victory in regional elections through a campaign that proudly linked oil with Kurdish nationalism. In one television commercial, a young boy in the desert smiles with delight as he walks along the region's new pipeline, following the path of oil flowing toward a sunset in Turkey. □



12 NOVEMBER 2013

Syria's Kurds move towards autonomy with announcement of transitional government

Areas dominated by Kurds in the north-east of the country would be ruled by the new government

RICHARD HALL

The main Kurdish party in Syria has announced plans to create a transitional government in the areas dominated by Kurds in the north-east of the country.

The move is the clearest sign yet that Syria's Kurds are moving towards a long-held ambition of autonomy in the areas they inhabit.

The Democratic Union Party (PYD) — the largest Kurdish party in Syria — made the announcement following a meeting in the northern city of Qamishli that involved Christian and Arab groups from across the Kurdish-dominated areas of north-east Syria.

The plan calls for the creation of a parliament of 82 members elected from three cantons across the region, which will each have their own local assemblies.

"This administration will be democratically elected and we think it will be integral in the future for democratic Syria," a PYD spokesman told The Independent.

The plan is due to be implemented within six months, and has the blessing of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government across the border in Iraq.

Although the spokesman said the administration was a temporary solution to run the Kurdish regions of Syria while the war was ongoing, he added that it would continue to be managed autonomously regardless of who eventually emerges as



Members of the Kurdish People's Protection Units walk together in Al-Rmelan, Qamshli province

the victor.

"The Kurdish people will govern themselves democratically alongside other ethnic minorities in the area. It will not be affected by whoever will run Damascus. Assad cannot enter our area again. We are protecting our area. We are not attacking anyone."

The Kurds in Syria have walked a cautious line since the beginning of the country's civil war nearly three years ago. They have long sought to carve out an autonomous north-eastern region similar to one in northern Iraq, which has complicated their role in the conflict.

The PYD has publicly expressed support for the revolution against Bashar al-Assad, but the largest Kurdish fighting force — the People's Protection Units (YPG) — has yet to be involved in any major battles with government forces, most of whom

withdrew from Kurdish areas in the early stages of the conflict.

The YPG has largely played a defensive role in the war — protecting the areas in which it is dominant but not seeking to gain extra ground.

In recent months, it has fought fierce battles with various Islamist rebel groups, including the Islamic State of Iraq and as-Sham (ISIS) and Jabhat al-Nusra. After being pushed back in some areas, YPG forces last week regained the ground they had lost.

The clashes came just a week after Kurdish fighters seized the Yaarubiyeh crossing on the Iraq border from jihadists.

Syria opposition says armed Kurds 'hostile'

Syrian National Council's statement comes after groups that control parts of the country's north proclaimed self-rule.

The main Syrian opposition alliance has dubbed as "hostile" forces Kurdish groups that control large swathes of the country's north after they proclaimed provisional self-rule.

Kurdish armed groups, dominated by the Democratic Union Party (PYD), sister party of veteran Turkish rebel group the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), have held the Afrin region of northwestern Syria and big chunks of the northeast for more than a year.

On Monday, they announced that after talks in Qamishli, on the Turkish border, they had decided to declare provisional self-rule in areas under their control, modelling neighbouring Iraq, where the Kurds have had nominal autonomy from Baghdad since 1970.

Both Afrin and the whole northeast region



Kurdish fighters have captured more territory from self-described jihadists in northeast Syria [Reuters]

around Qamishli are mainly populated by Kurds, who form 10 percent of Syria's population.

The Sunni Arab-dominated main opposition

alliance, the Syrian National Coalition, has been at pains to keep the Kurds on side. Its main faction, the Syrian National Council, even named secular Kurdish dissident Abdulbaset Sayda as its leader last year.

But mounting violence between the Kurds and al-Qaeda loyalists - who form a major battlefield component of the Sunni Arab-dominated rebellion - has sparked a deepening rift between the Kurds and the mainstream opposition to President Bashar al-Assad.

"The PYD is a group hostile to the Syrian revolution," the National Coalition, the opposition group recognised by most Arab and Western governments, said in its statement formalising the breach with the main Kurdish group.

"Its declaration of self-rule amounts to a separatist act shattering any relationship with the Syrian people who are battling to achieve a free, united and independent state, liberated from tyranny and sovereign over all its territory," the alliance said.

It accused the main Kurdish faction of "attacking units of the Free Syrian Army... and of shirking the struggle against Assad's regime. □

Yazidis in Iraq A tough time

by F.V.T. | LALISH

SINCE far back in time Yazidis have gathered every year at Lalish, a village in Iraqi Kurdistan, to celebrate the Feast of Assembly, their faith's most important annual rite. Yet this year the minority's conical temples and tombs stood empty. Even Baba Sheikh, the Yazidis' leader, was too afraid to attend the seven-day festival.

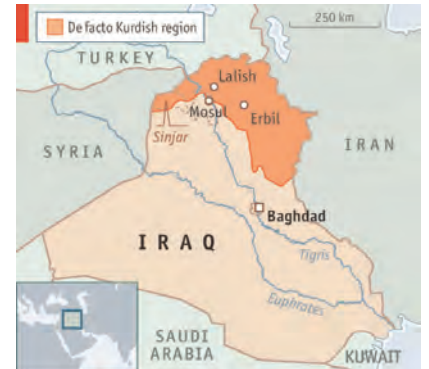
A recent upswing in violence has pushed Iraq's monthly death toll close to 1,000. The region around the capital, Baghdad, has borne the brunt of the carnage. But attacks have also increased in the relatively peaceful Kurdish autonomous region in the north, where much of Iraq's Yazidi community of 70,000-300,000 lives.

They have reason to be fearful. In bordering districts of Iraq proper, such as the city of Mosul and the Sinjar region to the west,

armed Islamist groups have often singled out Yazidis as targets. On August 14th 2007, nearly 800 people perished when four massive car bombs flattened two Yazidi villages, the bloodiest single incident since the American invasion in 2003.

The Kurdish-speaking Yazidis are a double minority in Iraq; they are both non-Arab and non-Muslim. Their esoteric faith dates back 4000 years and incorporates Sufi practices and more recently Christian baptism. Its central belief is in seven angels, the most controversial of which is Melek Taus, a fallen angel. This has led some Muslims to accuse them of being devil-worshippers and infidels.

Persecution under Saddam Hussein drove thousands of Iraqi Yazidis to Europe. Many more have fled since the dictator's fall, as surrounding communities of Sunni Muslims have radicalised and spawned groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, an al-Qaeda affiliate. With the central government in Baghdad now losing its grip across a swathe of Sunni-majority territory, such groups have increasingly free rein to impose their will. On September 29th a series of explosions shook Erbil, the Iraqi Kurds' capital.



The civil war in neighbouring Syria is now having a similar effect, with fighting in the country's north-east pitting Kurds against Islamist radicals. Over the past year nearly all of Syria's small Yazidi community has streamed across the border to Iraqi Kurdistan. "I don't think I'll go back," says Ahmed Suleiman Rashed, a former local official from Hasaka in north-east Syria, some of whose relatives drowned while trying to make it across the sea to Europe. "There is nothing left here for us."

Disunity could scupper Syria Kurdish region

By Prashant Rao | AFP

The announcement of a new transitional authority in Syrian Kurdistan marks a key point in the ethnic group's moves towards self-rule, but experts say disunity and war could still scupper their hopes.

Tuesday's declaration of a temporary autonomous administration in Kurdish-dominated parts of northern Syria, a plan initially mooted in July, came after Kurdish forces made territorial gains against jihadists.

But it was marred by several major Kurdish groups failing to sign on to the announcement.

That lack of consensus, coupled with the raging Syrian civil war that has killed more than 120,000 people since 2011, could undermine Syrian Kurdish efforts to gain an unprecedented level of autonomy and emulate the successes of their Iraqi Kurdish neighbours.

"If it succeeds, it will be a very important turning point for the Kurds in Syria, from a state which rejected giving them even citizenship to having a self-ruling area inside Syria," said Asos Hardi, an Iraqi Kurdish journalist and analyst in Sulaimaniyah, the second largest city in the northern autonomous region.

"But I am cautious about the reaction from different sides -- I am cautious that a fight may happen, and Kurdish citizens may pay the cost of this."

Hardi pointed in particular to the reactions of other Kurdish groups and Arab-dominated parties opposed to the rule of embattled Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, both of which criticised the decision.

Currently, the transitional authority is



AFP/ Mourners attend the funerals in Derik on October 18, 2013 of four fighters of the Committees for the Protection of the Kurdish People killed in fighting against Jabat al Nusra

formed by the powerful Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and several other smaller groupings, but not the Kurdish National Council which includes a broad spectrum of parties.

KNC members called the declaration "rushed" and "one-sided", and expressed concern that the move will become a long-term obstacle towards ending the Syrian war.

Arab groups have said the decision threatens the country's long-term unity.

"The formation of any local administration in the Kurdish areas in West Kurdistan is a must," said Bahjat Bashir, a member of the opposition Syrian National Council, referring to Syria's Kurdish areas by the oft-used West Kurdistan name.

"But it has to meet the conditions of success, and the first of those is the parti-



A Syrian Kurdish woman at a training session organized by the Kurdish Defense Units on October 19, 2013 in Derik (al-Malikiyah in Arabic)

cipation of all of the active political powers.

"Apparently the brothers in West Kurdistan rushed in announcing this government," Bashir said.

"The management of the region cannot be done by a single party without the agreement or coordination of the Syrian opposition."

Turkey says declaration 'not possible'
Turkey, which has supported opposition groups in Syria and sought to make progress on its own long-term dispute with its domestic Kurdish population, has also expressed reservations.

"The PYD claim to declare an autonomous administration is not possible," Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu told the private NTV television in an interview late Tuesday.

"We told them to avoid any attempt to declare a de facto administration which would split Syria."



Kurdish police fortify a checkpoint at the entrance to the oil rich city of Ramlan in Syria's mainly Kurdish northeastern area on October 20, 2013

He added: "I hope they will change their stance."

Kurdish regions of Syria have been administered by local Kurdish councils since forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad withdrew in the middle of 2012.

Kurds, mostly concentrated in the north, represent about 15 percent of Syria's population.

The redeployment was seen as a tactical move by Damascus to free up forces to battle rebels elsewhere and encourage the Kurds to avoid allying with the opposition.

In recent weeks and months, though, Kurdish forces have had their hands full battling jihadists keen to secure a wider corridor between Syria and Iraq to ensure more regular supplies and reinforcements.

Last month, Kurds finally seized a crucial border point with Iraq, providing some respite from regular clashes, and the announcement followed weeks later.

"I was happy and unhappy," said Mahmud Othman, a Kurd member of Iraq's parliament in Baghdad.

"Happy about the fact that there is an administration running the daily work of citizens, and unhappy because some parties are there and some parties are not."

Othman worried that Syrian Kurdish groups would copy their Iraqi Kurd brethren and quarrel internally despite having a common goal, referring to Iraq's two main Kurdish factions fighting a brutal years-long civil war in the 1990s.

"Here, also, parties fought each other," he said. "I hope they will not run through that experience."

Driving out jihadis, Syrian Kurds carve out zone

BASSEM MROUE

BEURUT (AP) - Syria's Kurds have dramatically strengthened their hold on the far northeast reaches of the country, carving out territory as they drive out Islamic militant fighters allied to the rebellion and declaring their own civil administration in areas under their control this week amid the chaos of the civil war.

The moves could be a first step toward creating an autonomous region similar to one Kurds run across the border as virtually a separate country within Iraq. But the Kurds' drive has angered rebels fighting to topple Syrian President Bashar Assad. It even worries some Kurds, who suspect the main faction leading the fighting and the new administration is actually acting on behalf of Assad to undermine the rebellion.

Kurds are the largest ethnic minority in Syria, making up more than 10 percent of the country's 23 million people. They are centered in the impoverished northeastern province of Hassakeh, wedged between the borders of Turkey and Iraq. The capital Damascus and Syria's largest city, Aleppo, also have several predominantly Kurdish neighborhoods.

The declaration of their own civil administration on Tuesday was a sign of Kurds' growing confidence after taking control of most of Hassakeh province in an offensive against jihadis that has accelerated in recent months. The fighters, known as the People's Protection Units, have driven militants out of a string of towns and have captured long stretches along the borders with Turkey and Iraq, easing the way for support from fellow Kurds in those regions.

Only a day after the announcement, activists said Kurdish fighters captured nine villages from jihadis. Kurdish fighters are now in control of all predominantly Kurdish cities in the province as well as dozens of villages and towns, though jihadis continue to control predominantly Arab towns in the province such as Shaddadeh.

"More than 75 percent of the province is in the hands of the People's Protection Units," said Kurdish journalist Malba Ali, who lives in Hassakeh.

Assad's forces largely pulled out of the region late last year when the Syrian military was stretched thin by fighting with rebels elsewhere in the country, effectively ceding control of the area, though they maintain some security posts. Their withdrawal sparked a fierce competition between rebels — mainly Islamic militant factions — and the Kurds.

Kurdish officials say they launched



Kurdish fighters of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) attend a funeral of their fellow soldiers who died fighting the al-Qaeda linked Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, and Islamist Syrian rebel group Jabhat al-Nusra in Qamishli November 14, 2013.



their offensive in recent months after coming under repeated attack by jihadis from two al-Qaida-linked groups fighting against Assad — Jabhat al-Nusra, or the Nusra Front, and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. The Kurds say jihadis wanted to dominate their region and impose their hard-line ideology on the population, which is largely secular.

"As long as there are attacks by these groups, it is our duty in the People's Protection Units to defend our people by all available means," Reydour Khalil, a spokesman for the forces, told The Associated Press by telephone from the Kurdish region.

He said the Kurdish force has been so successful against the jihadis — who have been among the strongest fighters among the rebels — because "it is fighting on its land and among its people."

"It did not come from countries that thousands of kilometers (miles) away" he said referring to foreign extremists among the jihadi groups.

The units are dominated by members of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, or PYD, Syria's most powerful Kurdish group, affiliated with the Turkish Kurdish movement PKK, which long fought for autonomy in southeastern Turkey.

The PYD is also the main faction behind the creation of the transitional civil administration for "western Kurdistan," announced Tuesday. The agreement by the PYD and a collection of smaller Syrian Kurdish factions, announced in the nor-

theastern Kurdish-dominated city of Qamishli, created an 82-member assembly along with three local administrative councils. The groups said in a statement that the administration will organize local elections.

The groups insisted the administration would operate only until Syria's nearly 3-year-old civil war is resolved and is not a step toward autonomy.

"There are no preparations for self-rule. We are only working for a transitional administration," PYD spokesman Nawaf Khalil told AP.

But the move was quickly denounced by the main Western-backed Syrian opposition group, the Syrian National Coalition, which accused the Kurdish factions of turning against the revolt against Assad. It said the Kurds' announcement represents "a separatist movement, disavowing any relationship between themselves and the Syrian people, who are struggling for a united nation independent and free from tyranny."

The gains have fueled calls by Kurds for an official autonomous region in Syria similar to that in Iraq. Already, Kurds have been grabbing a level of freedom they long sought in Syria, where for years Assad's governments forbade many expressions of Kurdish identity.

In Kurdish-dominated areas, vehicles sporting license plates reading "Rojava Kurdistan," or "western Kurdistan," have become more common. Kurdish red, green and white flags with a sun in the middle — the same flag flown in Iraqi Kurdistan — fly over homes and public offices. A local police force known "Asayish" has taken over security, and Kurdish language is being openly taught.

"The Kurds are trying to demarcate the border of their region, and Iraqi Kurds are helping them," said Hilal Khashan, political science professor at the American University of Beirut. "In the near future, Kurds will reach a self-rule period."

But not all Kurdish factions support the creation of a Kurdish administration. ➤

➤ Some deeply distrust the PYD, believing it is allied with Assad, effectively holding the region on his behalf, freeing up Syrian troops to fight elsewhere. The PYD denies the accusations.

"The PYD is close or in alliance with the Syrian regime," Ali, the Hassakeh journalist, said. He said he believes the Kurdish offensive is aimed at putting as much territory as

possible under PYD control to boost Assad's position ahead of a Geneva peace conference that the United States and Russia are trying to cobble together.

An umbrella group of 13 Kurdish factions called the National Kurdish Council said it balked at joining the new civil administration, calling it a "premature step."

Mustafa Osso, a senior figure in the council, said the differences don't reach the

level of an "internal conflict" among the Kurds. But he criticized the PYD-led assault against jihadis, saying it was launched without consultation. Instead, he said, the Kurds should be focusing on fighting Assad.

"We are passing through a critical period and we need all efforts to bring down the regime," he said. ♦

THE LAWTON CONSTITUTION

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Time for U.S. to embrace Kurdish self-determination

<http://www.swoknews.com>
by Richard Hart Sinnreich

Back in the fall of 2005, when the internecine warfare in Iraq was at its height, I argued in a column entitled "Acknowledging Honor And Interest In Iraq" that those obligations applied especially to American support of Iraq's Kurds, who alone among their neighbors seemed genuinely interested in building something resembling a peaceful democratic future.

At the time, I pointed out, Kurdish Iraq was the most stable province of that war-torn country, thanks largely to the self-sacrifice and determination of the Kurds themselves. So it remains today, even while elsewhere in Iraq, sectarian violence has mounted to the point where an Iraqi government happy in 2010 to see America's back now pleads with us to reengage.

Recently, another reported event confirms that no ethno-political group in the region more deserves U.S. support than the Kurds. Earlier this week, the Christian Science Monitor reported that Syria's Kurds decisively defeated Al Qaeda-affiliated Syrian rebels and have announced their intention to establish an interim Kurdish government in Syria's majority-Kurdish northeast, with democratic elections to follow.

That achievement, the Monitor noted, "comes on the heels of battle successes against Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), among the most powerful of the myriad homegrown and foreign forces fighting the Assad regime."

It of course is no accident that the geography thus cleansed of Islamist extremists directly abuts Kurdish Iraq, the borders of which mean less than nothing to those whom it separates. Unfortunately, it also abuts Kurdish Turkey, whence much of America's persistent hesitation to endorse what otherwise would be an overwhelming case for political self-determination.

It's past time to reevaluate that policy even at the price of offending the Turks - who, it should be noted, recently have begun to succumb to their own form of Islamic radicalization. Earlier this year, Turkey saw widespread public unrest, triggered in part by perceived government efforts to replace the nation's century-old tradition of secularism with political Islamism.

Moreover, the Turks, it will be recalled, weren't terribly helpful to the U.S. in the early stages of the 2nd Iraq War,

refusing to allow transit by U.S. troops into northern Iraq, and largely severed once close relations with Israel in favor of at least passive support of anti-Israeli elements such as Lebanon's Hezbollah and Palestine's Hamas.

The Syrian civil war has only complicated life for Turkey's government. Having, like our own president, prematurely consigned Syria's embattled President Bashar al-Assad to political if not physical oblivion, Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan now finds himself confronted with the unwelcome military consequences of his careless commitment.

Meanwhile, our own government's attitude toward the Kurds remains utterly ambiguous, despite abundant evidence of their commitment to political and social liberalization, desire to modernize, and - despite manifold disappointments - friendliness toward the U.S. As one writer noted some years ago, the U.S. was willing to mount an air campaign against Serbia to help liberate a much smaller and no more oppressed population of Albanian Kosovars.

It's past time for the U.S. to end its studied indifference to Kurdish aspirations, and embrace, if not outright Kurdish independence, at least a very substantial degree of Kurdish autonomy. At a minimum, any renewed support for Iraq should be premised on the Iraqi government's willingness to accord semi-sovereign political status to Kurdish Iraq, to include its own parliament and judiciary.

Were the Turks sensible, they would reach a similar arrangement with their own Kurdish minority. Either way, however and whenever the current civil war in Syria finally ends, they and we should expect and be prepared to accept the permanent severance of Kurdish Syria from its parent and its eventual amalgamation with Kurdish Iraq.

Whither that amalgamation might lead is hard to forecast. While there's no doubt that the Kurds themselves would prefer outright independence, the obstacles remain enormous. Neither Turkey nor Iran would relish such a development any more than Iraq, and while geography isn't invariably destiny, few attributes of nationhood matter as much.

Even were Iraq eventually to accede to Kurdish independence, and Turkey and Iran to accept it, like all geographically interior states with access to the wider world only through or over other nations' territory, an independent Kurdistan would survive and flourish only on the sufferance of its neighbors. That isn't invariably conducive to peace, as much of the history of Western Europe confirms.

But all that's speculative. What isn't speculative is the reality that, apart from the Israelis, and in some ways even more than them, the Kurds have been and remain the most capable and responsible ethno-political group in an otherwise self-destructive region.

If we insist for whatever reasons on remaining engaged in that troubled region, it would be hard to find more deserving and effective partners. □



17 novembre 2013

Turquie / Kurdistan

Turquie: visite très symbolique - et politique - de Massoud Barzani

Par RFI Avec notre correspondant à Istanbul, Jérôme Bastion

Massoud Barzani a été reçu en grande pompe ce samedi 16 novembre à Diyarbakir, dans le sud-est - à majorité kurde - de la Turquie. Un moment historique, d'autant que le dirigeant de l'administration autonome du Kurdistan irakien était invité par le Premier ministre Tayyip Erdogan. Une rencontre qui doit aider à consolider un processus de paix avec la rébellion kurde paralysé depuis des mois, et aussi empreint de préoccupations électoralistes.



Istanbul et chroniqueur au quotidien turc Radikal.

RFI : Diyarbakir, dans le sud-est de la Turquie est un lieu symbolique puisque la population y est à majorité kurde. Le gouvernement turc veut-il envoyer un message aux rebelles ?

Ahmet Insel : Oui, en partie mais il faut reconnaître que l'organisation PKK - qui mène la lutte armée depuis 1984 contre l'Etat turc et l'armée turque - n'est pas très contente de cette visite parce que sur le Kurdistan irakien, mais encore plus sur le Kurdistan syrien, l'organisation PKK est en rivalité avec l'organisation de Massoud Barzani, le parti PDK. Et le Congrès national kurde qui aurait dû se tenir fin novembre, a été une deuxième fois repoussé à cause de cette mésentente entre les deux organisations.

Donc Diyarbakir est un lieu symbolique pour la population kurde de la Turquie. C'est une étape importante pour la Turquie et pour Massoud Barzani, pour la reconnaissance de l'entité politique kurde au nord de l'Irak, en Kurdistan irakien, parce que jusqu'à très récemment, disons jusqu'à quelques années, la Turquie n'osait même pas prononcer le nom officiel de l'autorité régionale du Kurdistan en Irak. Alors qu'aujourd'hui, Massoud Barzani qui est le chef du gouvernement, est reçu avec les honneurs dignes d'un chef d'Etat régional.

Les pourparlers de paix, comme vous l'avez dit, ont été suspendus. Les Kurdes accusent notamment les autorités turques de ne pas tenir leurs

promesses de réforme. De quelles promesses parle-t-on exactement ?

Du côté de la Turquie, on ne connaît pas la teneur des pourparlers qui sont menés avec Abdullah Öcalan, le chef du PKK, qui est en prison depuis 1999 en Turquie. Nous ne savons pas quelles sont les promesses faites par la Turquie. Pour ce qui est des revendications des Kurdes, du principal parti kurde qui est présent au Parlement, c'est le droit à l'enseignement à la langue maternelle dès l'école primaire, dans les écoles publiques de la région. Donc, un enseignement bilingue, la suppression de toute connotation ethnique dans la définition de la citoyenneté et la reconnaissance de la multiculturalité du peuple habitant en Turquie, et une décentralisation avec la création de régions disposant d'autonomie dans certaines branches des services publics. Sur ces questions-là il n'y a pas d'ouverture.

Comment pensez-vous que la communauté kurde vit cette visite à grand spectacle de Massoud Barzani ?

Disons que la communauté kurde est divisée en deux. Les Kurdes qui sont plutôt conservateurs, évidemment sont très contents. Les Kurdes qui sont plutôt modernistes, qui sont constitués autour du Parti kurde au Parlement, sont plutôt réservés. Mais bien entendu, personne n'ose, ne veut, s'opposer publiquement là-dessus. Il y a quelques grincements. On voit un peu cette opération comme une opération préélectorale du parti de Tayyip Erdogan avant les élections municipales du 31 mars 2014. ♦

Pour Recep Tayyip Erdogan, voilà de quoi, assurément, conquérir le cœur des électeurs de la région, à six mois d'élections municipales qui seront suivies, peu après, d'un scrutin présidentiel au suffrage universel direct. Mais certains, comme Ahmet Türk, l'autorité morale incontestée de l'opposition kurde, n'oublie pas le fiasco des récentes réformes démocratiques ignorant les revendications kurdes, et appellent à l'unité entre tous les Kurdes, comme Abdullah Öcalan, le PKK et le PYD de Syrie que la Turquie tente, avec le soutien de Barzani, de mettre hors course.

▫ **Décryptage avec Ahmet Insel, professeur à l'université de Galatasary à**

Offensive de charme d'Erdogan à Diyarbakir



Par Anne Andlauer / Istanbul

Alors qu'une région kurde autonome semble se dessiner en Syrie, le premier ministre turc cherche des alliés, notamment chez les Kurdes irakiens

Le chef des Kurdes d'Irak, Massoud Barzani, a effectué ce week-end une visite à Diyarbakir, dans le sud-est à majorité kurde de la Turquie. Une visite à l'invitation personnelle du premier ministre turc, dont le gouvernement cherche depuis des mois à faire la paix avec ses Kurdes.

Pour Recep Tayyip Erdogan, il s'agissait d'abord de rassurer son allié nord-irakien, au moment où Ankara réchauffe ses relations avec le gouvernement central à Bagdad. Jadis persona non grata de ce côté de la frontière, relégué au rang de simple «chef de tribu», le président du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, est devenu ces dernières années un partenaire économique et politique à part entière du gouvernement turc. Economique, car Ankara compte sur les riches sous-sols des zones contrôlées par Erbil, capitale des Kurdes d'Irak, pour soulager sa dépendance énergétique et s'imposer comme zone de transit vers les marchés occidentaux. La Turquie, qui n'a pas hésité à court-circuiter Bagdad en signant des contrats gaziers et pétroliers avec Erbil, se propose désormais de jouer les médiateurs entre les deux gouvernements.

Massoud Barzani est aussi l'allié politique d'Ankara depuis qu'il appelle le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), engagé contre l'armée turque dans une guerre de bientôt trente ans, à déposer les armes pour nouer le dialogue.

PKK et gouvernement Erdogan ont bel et bien entamé, il y a un an, un «processus de paix», auquel Barzani apporte un soutien apprécié. Mais après huit mois de cessez-le-feu, le processus patine. «Erdogan essaie de prendre à revers ses propres Kurdes en Turquie. Il veut montrer que son gouvernement n'est pas responsable de l'enlèvement actuel», analyse Jean Marcou, directeur des relations internationales à l'Institut d'études politiques de Grenoble. Le premier ministre a donc fustigé, ce week-end à Diyarbakir, «ceux qui veulent saboter le processus, [...] ceux qui se nourrissent du sang des jeunes, de la vente de la drogue», dans une diatribe à peine voilée contre le PKK et ses partisans.

«De surcroît, poursuit Jean Marcou, Erdogan entend gêner le BDP [Parti pour la paix et la démocratie, pro-kurde] lors des élections locales de mars 2014. L'un des grands rêves du Parti de la justice et du développement [AKP] d'Erdogan a toujours été de conquérir les bastions kurdes dans la région et d'affaiblir le parti kurde parlementaire. Il n'y est pas parvenu en 2009, il va probablement essayer de le faire à nouveau en 2014, en s'appuyant tant sur les efforts de cette année pour résoudre la question kurde que sur les bonnes relations entretenues avec les Kurdes nord-irakiens.»

Cette visite à Diyarbakir, ponctuée par l'inauguration d'infrastructures publiques à hauteur de 396 millions de francs, a donc pris des allures de campagne électorale malgré une visite de courtoisie – surprise et inédite – du premier ministre turc au maire BDP de la ville.

Pour tenter de conquérir le cœur des Kurdes, Recep Tayyip Erdogan pouvait compter sur la présence à ses côtés d'une figure aussi respectée que Massoud Barzani, mais aussi sur celle d'un duo de vedettes de la chanson kurde, Ibrahim Tatlis et Sivan Perwer. Ce dernier foulait de nouveau sa terre natale, après 37 ans d'exil et de procès pour ses œuvres en langue kurde. «Nous avons mis fin aux politiques d'assimilation», s'est exclamé Erdogan, avant de promettre une Turquie «où ceux qui sont dans les montagnes [les combattants du PKK] en descendront et où les prisons se videront». L'amnistie de milliers de combattants et de prisonniers kurdes est l'une des principales revendications du PKK. Si Recep Tayyip Erdogan s'est bien gardé d'être plus explicite à ce sujet, son usage du mot «Kurdistan», pour la première fois samedi, n'a échappé à personne. «Le premier ministre a fait un pas en avant très courageux vers la paix. Je veux que mes frères kurdes et turcs apportent leur soutien au projet de paix», a renchéri Massoud Barzani devant des milliers de personnes brandissant des drapeaux kurdes et turcs, et des fanions de l'AKP.

Le chef du Kurdistan irakien est lui-même en quête d'appuis à l'heure où la crise syrienne tend à diviser les Kurdes de la région. «Barzani et son régime s'étaient présentés comme les rassembleurs et les modérateurs des Kurdes; force est de constater qu'ils ont échoué, observe Jean Marcou. En réalité, une région kurde autonome est en train de se créer en Syrie, et elle est dominée par des gens avec qui Massoud Barzani entretient de très mauvaises relations: le Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD) de Saleh Muslim.» Un voisin inquiétant, affilié au PKK, auquel la Turquie s'efforce depuis des mois de barrer la route, avec l'appui de Barzani. □

Turcs et Kurdes d'Irak tentent de marginaliser le PKK

Le premier ministre turc et le chef de la région autonome kurde d'Irak se sont vus à Diyarbakir

Istanbul

Correspondance

Tout Diyarbakir était convié à une cérémonie nuptiale peu commune, samedi 16 novembre. Près de 400 couples ont été mariés collectivement par le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, et par le chef de la région autonome kurde d'Irak, Massoud Barzani, dans le rôle des grands prêtres. « *Faites au moins quatre enfants* », leur a recommandé le premier, tandis que le second, venu avec trois caisses remplies d'or, récompensait, comme le veut la tradition, les jeunes mariés. Même l'orchestre avait fière allure avec deux célébrités de la chanson : Sivan Perwer – de retour en Turquie après trente-sept ans d'exil – et Ibrahim Tatlis.

Mais la principale union que l'on fêtait, samedi, était celle de deux peuples, turc et kurde. « *Deux peuples frères, qui partagent la même foi* », a souligné le premier ministre turc qui, dans son discours, a bravé un vieil interdit en prononçant le mot « Kurdistan ». Cette visite de M. Barzani, la

première en vingt ans dans la grande ville kurde de l'est de la Turquie, a été qualifiée d'« *historique* » par la presse turque.

La célébration du rapprochement entre le gouvernement turc et le président du Kurdistan irakien (KRG) avait pour objectif de relancer le processus de paix, au point mort, entre la Turquie et la guérilla du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). « *Nous soutenons le processus de toute notre force, a clamé M. Barzani. Nous savons tous qu'il y a vingt ans, venir ici et prononcer ce discours en kurde aurait été impossible. Le temps de vivre ensemble au Moyen-Orient est venu.* »

Le chef kurde a invité le PKK à déposer les armes. Lancées fin 2012, les négociations ont permis d'établir un cessez-le-feu, pour la première fois en trente ans de conflit. Depuis son île-prison, dans l'ouest du pays, le chef Abdullah Öcalan a remis au printemps sa feuille de route, promis la fin de la lutte armée et le retrait de ses troupes du territoire turc. Mais faute de réformes concrètes de la part d'Ankara, l'élan est retombé, cet automne. A Diyarbakir, M. Erdo-

gan a promis la fin de la « *politique d'assimilation* » par la République turque. « *Nous verrons ceux qui sont dans les montagnes en descendre et nous verrons les prisons se vider* », a-t-il prophétisé. Les Kurdes réclament la libération de milliers de prisonniers politiques.

Impératifs stratégiques

Cette offensive conjointe était destinée à marginaliser un peu plus le PKK sur ses propres terres, au moment où ses ambitions se renforcent, notamment à la faveur du conflit en Syrie. Le premier ministre turc a fustigé « *ceux qui se nourrissent du sang des jeunes* », en référence à la guérilla marxiste. « *Il serait préférable pour Barzani de conquérir les cœurs des Kurdes plutôt que celui d'Erdogan* », critique pour sa part le journaliste kurde irakien Kamal Chomani, pour qui le show de Diyarbakir avait surtout un but électoral.

M. Erdogan a annoncé une série d'investissements, la construction de routes et de logement sociaux. Des élections municipales se tiendront fin mars et le parti au pouvoir, l'AKP (Parti de la justice et du

développement), espère ravir la mairie au Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP), la vitrine légale du PKK.

L'alliance conclue par la Turquie avec Massoud Barzani répond à des impératifs stratégiques. En froid avec le gouvernement central irakien, dominé par les chiites, le KRG a commencé à exporter le pétrole extrait de son sol, sans le consentement de Bagdad. Un pipeline a été construit vers la Turquie. Dans un paysage régional traversé par des lignes de fracture confessionnelles, l'axe sunnite Ankara-Erbil apparaît comme un élément de stabilité.

La visite à Diyarbakir de M. Barzani est aussi le signe des rivalités qui s'aiguisent entre le chef des Kurdes irakiens et le PKK, les deux forces politiques dominantes dans les régions kurdes. Une division attisée par le conflit en Syrie. Le Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), la branche syrienne du PKK, vient de poser les jalons d'une administration autonome au Rojava, le Kurdistan de Syrie. Une initiative condamnée par Ankara et Erbil. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Le Monde 16 novembre 2013

Allemagne : plusieurs milliers de Kurdes manifestent contre l'interdiction du PKK

Le Monde.fr avec AFP |

Quelque 20 000 personnes, selon les organisateurs, ont défilé samedi 16 novembre à Berlin pour demander la levée de l'interdiction du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) en Allemagne en vigueur depuis vingt ans.

Placée sous le mot d'ordre "Soutenir le processus de paix, lever l'interdiction du PKK", la manifestation s'est déroulée dans le calme dans le centre de Berlin malgré des contrôles massifs de la police, selon le collectif de 52 groupes et organisations régionaux et nationaux à l'origine de ce rassemblement. La



police de Berlin ne fournit généralement pas d'estimations chiffrées sur le nombre de participants à un défilé.

"Des autobus [transportant des manifestants] ont été arrêtés

[par la police] et ont été fouillés pour trouver d'éventuelles affiches du dirigeant [emprisonné] du PKK Abdullah Öcalan", ont indiqué les organisateurs dans un communiqué, pré-

cisant que des amendes ont été infligées à ceux en possession d'un portrait du leader historique kurde.

L'Allemagne avait interdit le PKK le 27 novembre 1993. En Turquie, le conflit avec les rebelles du PKK a fait plus de 45 000 victimes depuis 1984.

Malgré son interdiction, le PKK bénéficie toutefois de soutiens solides en Allemagne, du fait de la présence depuis des années de près d'un demi-million de Kurdes, la plupart de nationalité turque. Quelque 11 500 d'entre eux sont d'ailleurs fichés comme soutenant activement le mouvement séparatiste, selon l'Office allemand pour la protection de la Constitution, chargé de la traque des organisations extrémistes. □

Turcs et Kurdes : un peu moins ennemis, pas encore amis

Les honneurs réservés à Massoud Barzani, président du Kurdistan irakien, lors de sa récente visite en Turquie détonnent avec la position d'Ankara qui refuse l'autonomie de sa propre population kurde. Pour la presse locale, ce progrès ne signifie pas que la question kurde soit réglée.

www.courrierinternational.com
Pierre Vanrie

"CE FUT UN JOUR HISTORIQUE POUR LES TURCS ET LES KURDES À DIYARBAKIR", titre Hasan Cemal sur le site T24 à propos de l'événement du 16 novembre dans cette grande ville à majorité kurde du sud-est anatolien. En effet, ce jour-là, le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a reçu en grande pompe Massoud Barzani, président de la Région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, avec à la clé un concert donné par le chanteur kurde Sivan Perwer, qui, à cette occasion, revenait en Turquie après un long exil. Sivan Perwer s'est produit sur scène en compagnie du chanteur Ibrahim Tatlisès (voir vidéo ci-dessous), lui-même d'origine kurde et très populaire au-delà des frontières de la Turquie.

"La rencontre entre Erdogan et Barzani et les discours qu'ils ont tenus constituent, du point de vue de la paix dans la région, un développement majeur. Les chants en kurde entonnés par le duo formé pour l'occasion par Sivan Perwer – qui occupe une place très importante dans le cœur des Kurdes de Turquie malgré un exil de trente-sept ans – et Ibrahim Tatlisès étaient vraiment très enthousiasmants." De plus, "l'accueil réservé à l'aéroport de Diyarbakir au Premier ministre Erdogan par une délégation du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie [BDP, prokurde et proche du PKK], la visite effectuée par Erdogan à la municipalité de Diyarbakir [une première] où il a rencontré le maire BDP Osman Baydemir donnaient à la rencontre du 16 novembre un caractère vraiment exceptionnel".

A fortiori dès lors que cet événement s'inscrit notamment dans le cadre de la campagne des élections municipales qui se tiendront le 30 mars 2014 où le parti du gouvernement l'AKP et le BDP sont rivaux. Le BDP avait d'ailleurs envisagé de boycotter l'événement avant finale-



▲ Le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien Massoud Barzani (à gauche), le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan (au centre) et le chanteur kurde Sivan Perwer, le 16 novembre à Diyarbakir, au sud-est de la Turquie. (Photo AFP/ Mehmet Engin)

ment de négocier sa participation. Hasan Cemal estime toutefois que cette rencontre ne restera dans l'Histoire que "s'il ne se résume pas à de la basse récupération électorale et à condition que le PKK, sa direction militaire et son leader emprisonné Abdullah Öcalan soient associés au processus de paix".

Ce n'est pas avec Barzani qu'il faut faire la paix

Le quotidien Özgür Gündem, proche du BDP et du PKK, ne cache pas dans son éditorial une certaine distance vis-à-vis de cet événement perçu comme de la propagande électorale de l'AKP et comme la preuve de la faiblesse de la Turquie face à la montée en puissance des Kurdes de Syrie : "Un des sujets importants des discussions entre Erdogan et Barzani et du meeting de Diyarbakir concernait la situation dans les régions kurdes du nord de la Syrie. C'est ainsi que ces deux leaders qui s'avèrent impuissants face à l'évolution dans le Kurdistan syrien [où le PYD, le principal parti kurde syrien, pro-PKK, vient d'annoncer l'instauration d'une administration autonome] se sont rencontrés à Diyarbakir pour mettre en garde et menacer les Kurdes de Syrie. Cette réaction peut paraître normale de la part de ces deux perdants, sauf que vouloir utiliser Diyarbakir et ses habitants pour mener une telle manœuvre

n'a pas du tout été apprécié par la population de Diyarbakir qui ne s'est d'ailleurs pas déplacé en masse."

Murat Yetkin dans Radikal estime néanmoins que l'AKP a, avec cet événement, réussi un coup politique "en contrant la propagande du BDP qui prétend que le processus de paix est au point mort. En effet, les déclarations d'Erdogan sur les "prisons qui vont être vidées" [de militants kurdes] sont de nature à redonner l'initiative à l'AKP sur ce dossier." "En utilisant Barzani, Erdogan assure à son parti le vote kurde conservateur [dans la perspective des élections municipales et présidentielle à venir]. Par ailleurs, par rapport au dossier syrien, il installe Barzani dans une situation d'acteur incontournable, ce qui lui permet de rappeler à Öcalan [le chef emprisonné du PKK avec lequel l'Etat turc a engagé le dialogue] qu'il n'est pas le seul leader kurde qui compte sur ce dossier." Ahmet Hakan dans Hürriyet déclare quant à lui que "tout ce qui s'est passé à Diyarbakir, c'est bien beau, mais que la paix, ce n'est pas avec Barzani qu'il faut la faire mais avec le PKK". ♦

Erdoğan's move deepens the disintegration of the Kurds



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This weekend's Diyarbakır visit of the president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and chairman of the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) Massoud Barzani, is bound to create significant outcomes in many chapters, from Turkish domestic politics to the future of the relations of the Kurds among themselves in the Middle East, and to regional power equilibriums.

Of course, it would be correct to read this visit as a direct major political initiative of the host, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. With it, Erdoğan has once again demonstrated that he is a politician open to unexpected political moves.

With this latest maneuver, the prime minister is aiming to kill many birds with one stone. However, these calculations, which are expected to yield political gain, also have very serious risks.

1. It is a step that can be regarded as a milestone in the history of Kurds that Barzani, after almost 20 years, will come for a high-profile visit to Diyarbakır, which is one of the most important centers of cultural and political attraction of the entire Kurdish geography. Barzani is a leader who has his mark on the historic gains of the Kurds in Iraq in the past 20 years, and it carries major symbolism that a personality who has this identity will be welcomed with the red carpet in Diyarbakır, the leading city of Kurdish identity in Turkey. The visit also shows how warm the relations between the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and the KDP have become.

2. In extending this invitation, it is out of the question to think that Erdoğan does not have some tactical expectations before the local elections and the presidential elections to be held in 2014. The AK Party mostly trails behind the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) in geographies where the Kurdish population is the majority. The most important political rival of Erdoğan in this region is the Kurdish political movement led by Abdullah Öcalan's spiritual guidance and consisting of the BDP-PKK components. However, there are also significant numbers of Kurds who vote for the AK



Party. Erdoğan, in cooperation with Barzani, is seeking to strengthen the conservative segments of the Kurdish electorate, as well as aiming to attract the undecided Kurds, and if possible to attract the grassroots of the BDP. By accepting this invitation, Barzani is inevitably accepting his engagement in the domestic political equations in Turkey.

3. The fact that BDP circles are bothered by this visit is an open indication that they are interpreting this move as a move directly against themselves. In this aspect, we can say that Erdoğan is aiming to push the Kurdish political movement to a corner by taking Barzani to his side in a city that is the stronghold of the BDP. He is attempting a major challenge that carries a message for the BDP, "I am not leaving this neighborhood to you."

4. We should also note that the visit coincides with a period when the peace process is deadlocked and has created a disappointment in the Kurds because of the inadequacy of the democracy package.

Erdoğan, with this Barzani move, is now in possession of a strong argument to repel those criticisms which say his commitment to the process has retreated. Maybe the prime minister wants to gain time.

5. Of course, we can also say that this visit has further crystallized - not only in Turkey but also across the region - the separation and disintegration of the Kurds. We are observing today that the Kurdish geography in the Middle East is witnessing an undeclared cutthroat competition between two leaders. These two rivals are Massoud Barzani and

Abdullah Öcalan, who resides in his cell at İmralı. The rivalry between the two is also seen today in the power struggle in northern Syria between the KDP and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which in line with the PKK. It is meaningful that the visit comes right after the PYD declared an interim rule in Syria the other day. In this aspect, Erdoğan has put Turkey's weight on Barzani's side in the power struggle in northern Syria.

6. Barzani's arrival coincides with the phase when energy agreements between Turkey and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) have finalized. The Diyarbakır summit may help iron out the objections of Baghdad and Washington about the pipeline projects via Turkey.

7. No matter how you slice it, one of the most noteworthy outcomes of the visit is that the alliance that has been shaping for a while between Erdoğan and Barzani will be elevated to a strategic level in the Middle East power equation. The biggest unknown and risk of this step is the response that Öcalan and Kandil will give, at a time when the inaction of the PKK has matured. The response of Kandil (the mountainous area where PKK units are based) is especially important: Will it opt for a severe retaliation in the event that it sees this move as a siege move against itself, or will it stomach it? Probably the toughest question emerges here at this point. □

Sedat Ergin is a columnist for daily Hürriyet in which this abridged piece was published on Nov. 14. It was translated into English by the Daily News staff.

Iraqi Kurdish leader Barzani urges support for peace process in Diyarbakır rally with Turkish PM



Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (L) and the President of the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) Masoud Barzani (C) greet the crowd during a mass opening ceremony in Diyarbakır, Nov. 16. AA photo

www.hurriyetdailynews.com
DİYARBAKIR

The leader of the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government, Masoud Barzani, has lent his full support to the Turkish government's peace bid during a joint rally with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Diyarbakır today.

"My request from my Kurdish and Turkish brothers is to support the peace project. I want to tell them that we support the peace process with all our force," Barzani told the crowd during his first official visit to southeastern Turkey.

"The time in the Middle East for living together has come. We can carry our people to happier days if we follow the methods of living together. Wars have been tried. The days when the blood of a young Turkish man was spilled by a Kurdish youth or the blood of a young Kurdish man was spilled by a Turkish youth are over," Barzani said.

The Iraqi Kurdish leader finished his speech with a few words in Turkish. "Long live Turkish and Kurdish brotherhood. Long live peace. Long live freedom," Barzani said.

A new Turkey 'where prisons empty'

For his part, Erdoğan begun his speech by commemorating Barzani's father, a religious leader, who found refuge in the eastern district of Şemdinli district 81 years ago after villages in northern Iraq were bombed.

"Just like your father and your uncles, welcome to the Turkish Republic, the land of your brothers," Erdoğan said, addressing Barzani. Erdoğan also welcomed Kurdish musician Şivan Perwer and cited Ahmet Kaya, another iconic Kurdish musician who died 13 years ago to the day in forced exile after being demonized in



Şivan Perwer (R) is greeted by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at the Diyarbakır Governor's Office on Nov 16. AA photo

Turkey for announcing that he would include a Kurdish song in a new album.

"I wish one person could have been here too, another voice of this land could have been among us," Erdoğan said, reciting the lyrics of one of Kaya's most known - and saddest - folk tunes, "Diyarbakır Türküsü."

Erdoğan also pronounced the word "Kurdistan" for the first time as he greeted the people "of the Kurdistan region in northern Iraq."

During his speech, Erdoğan stressed the difficulties in and resistance to solving the Kurdish issue and asked the Kurdish population to support the ongoing resolution process.

"We will witness a new Turkey where those in the mountains come down, the prisons empty and the 76 million [citizens of Turkey] become one," Erdoğan said, hinting at a general amnesty demanded by many Kurdish groups, including the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP).

"In Diyarbakır, the city of brotherhood, we are brothers from time immemorial. We are not fellow travelers, we also

share the same faith," Erdoğan said.

"What can cause more indignation than a mother unable to speak with her child in her own language? I know how Perwer's records were hidden and listened to in secret. I have heard a lot of stories of unsolved murders or exile," Erdoğan said, vowing the government's determination to solve the Kurdish issue.

"I have one request. If you support this process, believe me, it will become bigger. If you look after this spring, it will become permanent. If Diyarbakır looks after this hope, the little trees will become sycamores. Don't forget, words are more effective than guns, politics are more effective than violence," Erdoğan said, stressing that the Kurdish population should feel like it is part of the republic.

"This republic belongs as much as to Diyarbakır residents as to İzmir, Istanbul or Ankara residents. This state is your state. This flag is your flag. You are true citizens of this country, the owner of this state. Nobody can treat you as a second-class citizen, Nobody can assimilate you," he said.

Today's visit is expected to revive a stalled Kurdish peace process and deal with the latest developments in northern Syria, where the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) has announced the establishment of a constituent assembly as a "first step" toward an autonomous administration. Both Ankara and Arbil have criticized the stance of the Syrian Kurdish organization, which is ideologically close to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Earlier, Erdoğan made his first visit in 11 years to Mayor Osman Baydemir at the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality. Prominent politicians such as independent Diyarbakır deputy Leyla Zana, independent Mardin deputy Ahmet Türk and Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) lawmakers Sırrı Sakık and Altan Tan also participated in the meeting.

Baydemir said the meeting had been very fruitful. "This meeting is contributing to peace based on the brotherhood law which is needed by us all."

Baydemir, who will not run in the upcoming local elections, added that he joked with Erdoğan on his project ideas. "I said we could have asked him for ideas for projects had he come earlier," Baydemir told reporters.

Erdoğan then visited the governor's office, where he was joined by Barzani and Perwer, who came this morning with a convoy from Arbil.

Deputy Prime Ministers Bülent Arınç, Beşir Atalay and Bekir Bozdağ joined Erdoğan during the visit. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, who returned from Myanmar yesterday, was also in Diyarbakır after postponing a visit to Washington that was due to start today. □

Kurdistan Parties in Mixed Reaction to Barzani's Diyarbakir Visit

rudaw.net

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – As Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani spent his second day in Diyarbakir, Kurdistan parties expressed mixed reactions to the visit, with some praising it and others saying it was designed to boost the chance of the ruling Turkish party in next year's election.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the main ally of Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), called the visit "crucial and historical," and said it hoped Erbil can help Kurds everywhere achieve their rights.

"Until yesterday, the words 'Kurd' and 'Kurdistan' were banned in Turkey and the Kurdish language was illegal. Today, the Kurdistan Region president conveys the message of peace and brotherhood in the Kurdish language in Amed (Diyarbakir)," Xendan news quoted PUK deputy leader Barham Salih as saying.

"It's the duty of the Kurdistan Region to help achieve the rights of the Kurds in the other parts of Kurdistan," he stressed. He warned that the stability and development of the Middle East rests on respecting the rights of the Kurds.

In Diyarbakir on Saturday, Barzani confirmed his full support for Ankara's ongoing peace

process with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

In a speech before thousands of people carrying Kurdistan and Turkish flags, he said: "My request from my Kurdish and Turkish brothers is to support the peace project. I want to tell them that we support the peace process with all in our power," Barzani told the crowd.

Barzani arrived in Diyarbakir at the invitation of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Both leaders stressed the importance of bringing peace to Turkey's Kurdish regions and ending more than three decades of conflict between the PKK and Turkish military that claimed tens of thousands of lives.

Meanwhile, the Kurdistan Region's opposition Change Movement (Gorran), took a harsher view of the visit, saying it was meant to boost the chances of Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the March general election. It accused Barzani of partisanship.

"The trip has to do with business and the upcoming elections," said a Gorran official. "It's in the interest of the AKP party because of the polls," he said, expressing suspicions that the AKP's goal in hosting Barzani is to try to win Kurdish votes at the polls.

Ali Bapir, leader of the Islamic League (Komal), told



Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani speaks to the media, standing next to Diyarbakir mayor Osman Baydemir.



Kurdistan president Massoud Barzani (R) and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan waving to the public in Diyarbakir, Turkey's Kurdish region [northern Kurdistan] November 16, 2013. Photo: AA



Massoud Barzani arrived in the Turkish territory by crossing Khabur border gate and directed his motorcade to the Kurdish city of Diyarbakir.

Rudaw his party is unaware of the agenda of Barzani's visit. "If the trip is for encouraging the peace process, its a good thing," he said.

The PKK itself has so far remained quiet about Barzani in Diyarbakir, but the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) MP Pervin Buldan accused Barzani of insincerity.

"While Barzani talks about peace in Amed, he closed all doors on us in Erbil," said Buldan, who was recently in Kurdistan trying to visit with PKK officials at their Qandil Mountain base to discuss the peace process.

"They made lots of difficulties for us at the checkpoints when we were on our way to

Qandil," she added.

As Barzani and the Turkish premier attended the first day of speeches and a music concert for peace, a number of PKK and BDP supporters gathered outside, waving their party flags and portraits of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan.

The Kurdistan Region and Turkey have elevated their diplomatic, trade and energy ties to unprecedented levels in the last several years. Earlier this month, Erbil and Ankara signed a multi-billion dollar energy package to export Kurdish oil and gas to feed Turkey's growing energy needs. □

Syria's Kurds: In or Out?

The announcement of an autonomous Kurdish government in Syria has raised questions about their post-war plans for their territory

By : Sherzad Shekhani
Sunday, 17 Nov, 2013
<http://www.aawsat.net>

Erbil/Beirut, Asharq Al-Awsat—Following military gains in northeastern Syria, the war-torn country's Kurds have taken steps towards bolstering their geopolitical presence this week. On November 12, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) released a statement announcing that a transitional civil administration would be established in northeastern Syria.

The announcement appears to have irritated the Syrian National Coalition, the main umbrella organization for groups opposed to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. On November 12, the Coalition welcomed into its ranks the Kurdish National Council, a collection of Kurdish political parties that has a troubled history with the PYD despite being its sometime ally in the Kurdish Supreme Committee. The following day, the Coalition issued a statement condemning the PYD's decision to establish an autonomous administrative region, declaring that "their actions represent collusion with the Assad regime, regardless of their slogans."

Every group in Syria has a different opinion about how the next stage of the conflict will and should unfold, but the PYD's recent decision—and the criticism that followed it—is a clear sign that Syria's Kurds do not have a unified vision of their place in Syria, either during the civil war or after. Some Syrian Kurds agree with the Syrian National Coalition's opinion that any move towards independence from Syria only bolsters Assad's position, but other Kurds deny this just as fervently. As the civil war rages on, the situation in the Syrian Kurdish regions—which the Kurds consider to be the western part of Greater Kurdistan—could lead to startling developments that will have repercussions on the wider revolution in the near future. Indeed, the conflict has already brought about changes in the political map.

KURDS AND THE SYRIAN CRISIS

The most prominent Kurdish player in the Syrian crisis thus far has been the PYD, which is considered the Syrian wing of the powerful Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) based in Turkey, which has fought for Kurdish rights and an independent state in Kurdish parts of Turkey since the 1970s. But despite the civil war in Syria and the uncertain political situation in Kurdish-dominated areas of the war-torn state, this party's impact at the grassroots level has unexpectedly surpassed that of most other long-established political powers in

this part of Syria.

The party has already announced the formation of a temporary government, and is moving quickly to make that a reality. According to some observers, the transitional authority could eventually evolve into the first fully independent Kurdish state. At the very least, it could create conditions favorable to the establishment of a semi-autonomous Kurdish state along the lines of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq.

Such autonomy for a Kurdish region would inevitably affect all of Syria, but in such uncertain times very few are focusing on the future. For now, the attention is on the military position of the group, and especially the dual war the Kurds have been fighting—one against the regime of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, and another against Islamist groups including the Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Speaking with Asharq Al-Awsat, Nawaf Khalil, a member of the PYD's media committee, pointed out that the Kurds in Syria are at the forefront of the opposition to the regime, saying, "We are in communication with the militarized opposition, led by the Free Syrian Army, and we stand with every group that accepts our existence and our rights. . . . We are waging fierce battles against some of the Islamist groups, especially Al-Nusra Front and ISIS." He added: "We succeeded in expelling the regime's forces, and today we work to do the same to the Islamists. We know that we are defending ourselves, and not attacking anyone."

Bezor Berik, a Kurdish activist from Qamishli, also told Asharq Al-Awsat that the Kurds were fighting a two-front war, adding there "is a clear division of northern Syria between the PYD and the Islamist opposition forces."

Field reports suggest that the PYD's forces control more than two-thirds of Kurdish lands in Syria, most of which are in the governorate of Al-Hasakah in the north of the country, where Kurds make up 70 percent of the population.

Observers have also reported that the PYD's forces are trying to establish a presence in some northern towns in which Kurds are a minority and Arabs a majority, including the strategic border towns of Jarablus and Azaz, which opposition fighters have used as routes to transport supplies from Turkey. A step like this would likely provoke a violent response from certain opposition groups.

Redor Khalil, the spokesperson for the

People's Protection Units (YPG), a militia tied to the PYD, denied this in a statement to Asharq Al-Awsat. "I'm not saying that we will do that...let us wait to see if the opposition groups in these areas will guarantee the Kurds safe movement in that area first."

REGIONAL REPERCUSSIONS?

Kurdish military gains in Syria mean that there is growing confidence that attempts to set up a transitional governmental authority in Kurdish-dominated areas will succeed. This could threaten not only the unity of Syria, but also potentially destabilize neighboring countries, which suffer from similar ethnic and sectarian divisions. With approximately one fifth of its population claiming Kurdish ethnicity and a long history of armed conflict with its Kurdish minority that it is only now beginning to resolve, Turkey in particular has been increasingly concerned by the growing independence of Syria's Kurds.

Perhaps the biggest fear is that a repeat of the Kurdish experiment in Iraq might tempt the remaining two parts of Kurdistan—in Turkey and Iran—to move towards a similar goal, in the greater hope of establishing an independent and unified Kurdish state.

Last month, the Turkish government broke ground in a project to construct a wall along its borders with Syria, saying it was needed to ensure border security. The project, however, sparked protests. The Kurds claim that it aims to prevent closer relations between the Kurdish regions across the border in the two countries, and most Syrian Kurdish leaders believe that Turkey is seeking to isolate its Kurdish population from the Syrian population by erecting the wall.

Moreover, many Syrian Kurds consider the developments taking place on the ground in Syria, especially bloody war waged against the Kurdish citizens of Syria by the Al-Nusra Front and ISIS, as being driven by Turkey. Kurdish leaders support these claims by arguing that these forces are using armored vehicles and heavy artillery in their battles, implying that these are provided—or at least tolerated—by Turkey. The Syrian Kurdish leadership also accuses Turkey of opening its border crossings to allow Islamic militants in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Arab countries to use Gaziantep and Antakya as a starting point in their journey to Syrian Kurdistan.

The fierce ongoing war between Islamic militants and popular defense forces associated with the PYD suggest that the success of the Kurdish forces in rolling back

the gains achieved by the Al-Nusra Front and ISIS is due in large part to the loss of popular support for the Islamists, in favor of the Kurdish forces.

FIGHTING, INSIDE AND OUT

The situation on the ground in Syria and the growing uncertainty over the Turkish position on its Kurdish minority have created difficulties for the region's many Kurdish political parties. Growing disputes over the goals of the Kurdish movement present yet another obstacle to the Kurdish side, and none more noticeably so than the clash between the PYD and parties loyal to Iraqi Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani.

There are efforts to achieve reconciliation between the two parties to allow them to present a united front at the long-delayed Geneva II peace conference. However, the national Kurdish conference that was scheduled for November 24—and which was expected to assume responsibility for the reconciliation efforts—was postponed due to a dispute arising from Iraqi Kurdistan's decision to refuse entry to PYD leader Salih Muslim in late October.

Only a few months ago, relations between Barzani's followers and the PYD were markedly more positive. During a fierce confrontation between the PYD and the Al-Nusra Front in Syria, the Iraqi Kurdistan president gave his strong support to the Kurdish militias. In a statement to Asharq Al-Awsat, the spokesperson for Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party, Jaafar Iminki, said that the support Iraqi Kurdistan would give to Kurds in Syria would be "comprehensive, including logistical support for the fighters of the PYD and all revolutionaries who are defending the land of Syrian Kurdistan."

While tensions between the two sides are certainly not new, they have transformed into something that today resembles open hostility. The PYD and Barzani's Syrian followers, represented by the Kurdish National Council, have taken opposing approaches to the Syrian crisis, and tensions have become so disruptive the two sides began the mediation process to allow them to sit side-by-side at Geneva.

FORGING A NEW ADMINISTRATION, DESPITE DIVISIONS

The infighting between different Kurdish groups has not prevented the PYD's leadership from proceeding with its plan to establish a local government in the areas under its control. Sherzad Al-Yezidi, the spokesperson of the People's Council of Western Kurdistan, which is aligned with the PYD, views the project as "an imperative matter, as the citizens of the Kurdish areas are in dire need of a local government to organize their affairs and to help prepare the new phase of their political lives."

Dr. Jafar Akash, a representative of the PYD, told Asharq Al-Awsat that the Kurds are determined to form a new administration despite the split between his party and the Kurdish National Council: "We are

going to the peace conference [Geneva II], but prior to that, we will announce the formation of an administration responsible for our regions," adding, "This new administration will be a regional government responsible for the management of affairs in the regions liberated from the Damascus-based regime. Representatives of every political and religious power, including the parties associated with the [Kurdish] National Council and the Kurdish Supreme Committee, have joined Assyrian, Syriac and Arab representatives. This administration will select members of the Syrian delegation who will participate in the Geneva II conference."

Many questions remain about what this new transitional authority aims to do. It seems nobody can really agree on what an administrative body for Syrian Kurdish areas would do, whom it would work with, or how it would fit into post-conflict Syrian society and politics.

Shalal Gado, a leader of the Kurdish Democratic Left Party, which is part of the Kurdish National Council, spoke of the Kurds' goals, saying, "The rumors spreading that the Kurds aim to secede from Syria and divide it are complete fabrications. . . . There is not a single Kurdish political faction in Syria demanding secession. Rather, the Kurds are generally proud of belonging to this nation, even though others are trying to ensure that we remain second-class citizens in Syria after the war, which our people obviously completely reject."

From the other side of the Kurdish divide, PYD representative Dr. Jafar Akash told Asharq Al-Awsat that through the transitional authority, the Kurds will work on "achieving democracy, establishing legitimate national rights for the Kurds, confirming the principle of political partnership and the right of the Kurds to practice their customs and traditions, ending the injustice inflicted on the Kurdish people throughout history, and confirming their participation in future governments based on popular representation and in accordance with the size of their population."

In his conversation with Asharq Al-Awsat, Gado spoke of more everyday goals for the transitional authority: "At this crucial point, founding a joint transitional administration made up of the different groups in Syrian Kurdistan is most important. Most Kurdish cities are outside of the regime's control, and this leaves a substantial administrative, financial, security and legal vacuum. We must work to fill this vacuum by forming a cooperative transitional administration, tasked with setting a draft constitution and preparing for transparent and fair parliamentary elections under international observation. The four million residents of this region need a local government to manage their affairs."

Asharq Al-Awsat also spoke with Louay Al-Mokdad, a media and political coordinator for the Free Syrian Army and member of the Syrian National Coalition. He said: "The

Free Syrian Army and the Syrian opposition look to the Kurds as an essential component of the Syrian community, and they have shared in the nation's suffering under Assad's regime, both father and son, for decades. We fully understand how the regime has abused them, and how it denied them their rights for many long years, and we fully respect their unique character."

Al-Mokdad pointed to "the existence of many Kurdish military units, like the Mashaal Temmo Brigade, fighting alongside the FSA." However, he also noted that "some of the armed Kurdish units have committed violations of the rights of citizen since they have made agreements with the regime. This is similar to what the PYD's units did when they oppressed certain groups of Kurdish protesters who came out in their regions."

Al-Mokdad said: "We stand firm against the abuse and murder of Kurdish people, just as we reject such crimes against Arabs. We absolutely reject the crimes that have been committed against our Kurdish brothers by Al-Nusra Front, ISIS, as well as some other undisciplined militias. At the same time, we implore our Kurdish brothers of all parties and groups to respond to the call of the nation, and to put the Syrian cause before narrow interests and short-sighted thinking."

Al-Mokdad expressed hope that the coming period, after the signing of an agreement between the FSA and the Kurdish Supreme Committee, "will be one of harmony among the different groups that make up the Syrian people, and that they will fight together against Assad's regime." He stressed that "the FSA sees Syria as single bloc, without distinguishing between the Kurdish, Alawi, or coastal regions, because we are all revolting against the same regime, from the various lands of Syria."

He said he rejects "the secession of any group from Syria, whether Kurdish, Alawite, Druze, or Sunni," explaining that "we will not accept cross-border organizations nor the division of Syria into several entities. However, at the same time we insist on equal rights for Arabs and Kurds, who ought to enjoy full respect for their unique national characters."

Nawaf Khalil, PYD media committee member, expressed hope that the opposition forces re-examine their policy and draw up plans to unite all groups to reach a free and democratic Syria. He denied that Syria's Kurds have any "separatist goals," saying that "our project today is self-administration to meet the needs of our people, and not secession."

After the downfall of the regime and elections, Kurds will accept only that they be like any other citizen of Syria, while holding on to our national identity and getting our rights."

□ □ □

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan rencontre Massoud Barzani

Par Jean Marcou
<http://ovipot.hypotheses.org>

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan était ce week-end, comme prévu, à Diyarbakır pour y rencontrer le président de la région kurde d'Irak du nord, Massoud Barzani. Ce séjour avait comme premier objectif affiché de raviver le processus de règlement de la question kurde, entré en sommeil, depuis que les événements de Gezi Parki ont ébranlé la Turquie, en mai-juin derniers. De fait, il n'est pas étonnant qu'il se soit attaché à entretenir une symbolique forte.

RENCONTRE HISTORIQUE OU COUP DE BLUFF ?

Le premier ministre, qui effectuait sa première visite officielle dans une municipalité tenue par le BDP, a notamment été Erdogan-Barzani accueilli à l'aéroport par le maire de la ville, Osman Baydemir et par la célèbre députée Leyla Zana. Il a rencontré rapidement Massoud Barzani à la préfecture de la ville. Puis les deux hommes se sont rendus à un meeting se tenant dans le quartier de Kantar. Massoud Barzani, qui a pris la parole le premier, a souligné le caractère historique de cette rencontre qui aurait été impossible «il y a encore 15 ou 20 ans», en rendant hommage à Recep Tayyip Erdoğan et en souhaitant que «ses frères turcs et kurdes soutiennent le processus de règlement.» Pour sa part, le premier ministre turc a qualifié Diyarbakır de «ville de la fraternité», en appelant Kurdes et Turcs à déjouer les tentatives de sabotage du processus en cours. On a surtout observé qu'il n'a pas hésité à prononcer le terme de «Kurdistan irakien» pour la première fois, à faire allusion à une possible amnistie des prisonniers politiques et à rappeler la mémoire du chanteur kurde Ahmet Kaya, mort en exil en 2000, à Paris, en déclarant notamment : « J'aurais aimé qu'il puisse aussi être là aujourd'hui. »

Des chanteurs kurdes, il y en avait pourtant et pour tous les goûts ce 16 novembre à Diyarbakır ! Car participaient aussi à ce meeting Ibrahim Tatlıses et Şivan Perwer ; le premier, vedette adulée de la variété turque depuis près de 40 ans, le second, chanteur engagé, rentré pour l'occasion d'un exil de 37 ans. Les deux artistes ont délivré des messages de paix, consacrant le caractère œcuménique d'une cérémonie qui ne suffira peut-être pas à relancer le processus de règlement de la question kurde en Turquie, mais qui montre en tout cas que l'entreprise n'est pas morte et qu'elle fait encore rêver. Toutefois pour que le rêve devienne réalité, il faudra plus que des symboles. Depuis 10 ans, l'AKP nous a habitué à ces postures spectaculaires. De la réhabilitation de Nazım Hikmet aux excuses pour les massacres de Dersim, en passant par les messes à Trabzon ou à l'église d'Akdamar, la liste est déjà longue... La recherche d'images fortes et la chasse aux tabous ont été quasiment érigées en stratégie par la formation au pouvoir, ce qui lui permet de montrer qu'elle ne connaît pas de phénomène d'usure et qu'elle reste l'acteur qui par excellence peut changer la société turque. Il reste que cette attitude



a généralement été suivie par des résultats décevants, la montagne ayant trop souvent tendance à accoucher d'une souris.

Pour que le processus de règlement reprenne de façon crédible, il faut donc que des gestes significatifs interviennent rapidement. Après le cessez-le-feu proclamé par le leader du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, le 21 mars dernier, jour de Newroz-Nevruz, un retrait des troupes du PKK a commencé, en mai, sans grand enthousiasme chez les rebelles, puisqu'il



n'aurait concerné que 20 à 30% de leurs effectifs. Est-ce pour rappeler qu'il est toujours présent en Turquie et qu'il faut compter avec lui, que le PKK a frappé sans faire de victimes, un convoi de l'armée turque, la veille de la rencontre de Diyarbakır? Toujours est-il que depuis que les événements de Gezi ont ravi la vedette à la question kurde, les deux protagonistes s'accusent mutuellement de ne pas tenir parole.

UN MESSAGE AU PKK ET AU PYD

Mais au-delà du «processus du règlement», la rencontre de Diyarbakır s'inscrit dans la réorganisation en cours des équilibres politiques, au sein d'un Moyen-Orient instable dont les Kurdes sont désormais un acteur majeur. En recevant une fois de plus Massoud Barzani comme un chef d'Etat en Turquie, et de surcroît à Diyarbakır, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan confirme l'alliance et les intérêts convergents de son pays avec les Kurdes modérés et réalistes de la région d'Irak du nord. Le message s'adresse ici certes aux Kurdes de Turquie et plus particulièrement à leurs organisations légales (le BDP) ou illégales (le PKK), mais aussi au PYD, qui a pris le contrôle du nord de la Syrie où il s'apprête à établir une région kurde autonome. La formation de Saleh Muslim inquiète Erdoğan et Barzani, parce qu'elle est en fait la branche syrienne du PKK et qu'elle entretient des liens suspects, tant avec le gouvernement fédéral Bagdad, qu'avec le régime de Damas. Ces derniers jours, Massoud Barzani s'est d'ailleurs employé à saper l'image de libérateur du PYD, en expliquant à qui veut l'entendre que tous les territoires qu'il a pu acquérir en Syrie, ne sont en fait que des cessions consenties par Bachar el-Assad. Le gouvernement turc a, quant à lui, reçu Saleh Muslim, deux fois, cet été, pour s'enquérir de ses projets. Incitant un moment à l'optimiste, ces contacts n'ont finalement pas été convaincants, la Turquie reprochant aux Kurdes syriens leurs relations avec Damas, le leader du PYD accusant Ankara de soutenir les milices islamistes qu'il affronte dans des combats au cours desquels son propre fils a perdu la vie très récemment.

LES KURDES, ACTEURS ASCENDANTS MAIS DIVISÉS

En réalité, c'est bien un grand jeu kurde qui est également derrière la rencontre de Diyarbakır. Au cours des dernières années force est de constater que les Kurdes sont devenus un acteur important du Moyen-Orient. Ce n'est pas par hasard que Recep Tayyip Erdoğan a parlé du «Kurdistan irakien», car la région autonome est devenue un quasi-Etat, et l'obtention de ce statut consacre la politique réaliste de ses dirigeants, en particulier de Massoud Barzani. En ce qui les concerne, les Kurdes de Turquie se sont imposés à plusieurs égards : leur parti parlementaire (le BDP) est entré au parlement devenant en fait la quatrième formation du pays, tandis que le PKK devenait, même si cela n'a pas été officialisé, un véritable partenaire dans la recherche d'une solution négociée. Enfin, à l'occasion de la guerre civile qui ravage la Syrie, la branche la plus radicale des Kurdes syriens contrôle désormais des zones importantes dans le nord de ce pays.

Ces avancées ont pourtant une faille qui est de taille, car elles montrent que les dirigeants et instances kurdes qui sont dans une phase ascendante actuellement sont aussi divisés, et que leurs divisions ont tendance à s'accroître au fur et à mesure qu'ils montent en puissance. Il y a là une faiblesse que les autorités de leurs pays d'origine (Turquie, Irak, Syrie notamment) peuvent être tentés d'exploiter... □





Syrie. Le PYD est sorti de son ambiguïté... à son détriment

Par LEVERRIER Ignace
<http://syrie.blog.lemonde.fr>

L'article consacré au "cavalier seul du PYD", la branche syrienne née de l'explosion en 2003 de l'ancien Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), a suscité des cris d'orfraie. Il importe donc de dire plus clairement ce qu'il en est de ce parti et des relations ambiguës qu'il entretient, aujourd'hui comme hier, avec le régime syrien. Autorisé à revenir dans un pays où il était pourchassé, le PYD a bénéficié, depuis les premiers mois de la révolution, du soutien des moukhabarat pour imposer sa seule autorité sur les régions à fort peuplement kurde. Le PYD a prétendu avoir "libéré" la Jazireh et certaines autres zones, alors que les forces militaires du régime lui en avaient remis les clés sans qu'il ait eu à combattre, et que, tapis dans l'ombre, les services de renseignements sont restés sur place, dispensés d'intervenir directement grâce à la coopération de ses milices. Le PYD a rendu service à l'Armée libre et à la révolution en se battant contre des djihadistes qui ne sont nulle part les bienvenus en Syrie, mais il n'a fait que déplacer le problème en les repoussant au-delà des limites de son domaine. Le PYD contraint enfin les uns et les autres à s'interroger sur ses motivations et à se demander si, en restreignant l'usage de ses armes aux limites du Kurdistan de l'Ouest, il n'espère pas finalement la survie d'un régime auquel ses manières de faire l'apparentent.

Le 20 avril 2011, préoccupé par son incapacité à juguler le mou-

vement de contestation qui a éclaté à Daraa un mois plus tôt, le régime syrien contrevient aux accords d'Adana signés avec la Turquie en 1998. Alors que ces accords faisaient de la lutte commune contre le Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) d'Abdullah Öcalan une priorité, les responsables sécuritaires syriens ferment les yeux sur le retour en Syrie de Mohammed Saleh Mouslim, président du Parti de l'Union démocratique, aile syrienne de ce parti, dont le nom figure sur la liste des terroristes recherchés. Et ils s'abstiennent d'intervenir lorsqu'il entame un cycle de réunions publiques destinées à relancer la mobilisation de ses partisans.

Pour dissuader les Kurdes syriens et leurs frères "étrangers" de s'engager dans la révolution, Bachar al-Assad a en effet entrepris de donner satisfaction à certaines de leurs revendications. Il a ordonné d'entamer le processus de restitution de la nationalité syrienne à ceux d'entre eux qui l'avaient perdue suite au recensement organisé à cet effet dans le seul gouvernorat de Hassakeh, en octobre 1962. Et il a prescrit à ses moukhabarat de les laisser s'organiser dans certains domaines comme ils souhaitent le faire depuis des décennies. Ils ont donc ouvert des écoles en langue kurde et créé au sein de certains établissements officiels des filières d'enseignement en kurde. Ils ont ouvert des centres culturels kurdes. Ils ont redonné vie à des associations kurdes longtemps interdites. Ils ont recommencé à publier livres et journaux dans leur langue...

La décision de laisser Mohammed Saleh Mouslim rentrer dans son pays - s'il n'a



Mohammed Saleh Mouslim et l'emblème de son parti

pas été directement encouragé à le faire - en dit long sur les intentions du pouvoir en place. Elle montre que Bachar al-Assad a choisi comme partenaire, parmi la population kurde de Syrie. Non pas les partis politiques présents sur place, dont le ralliement à la Déclaration de Damas pour le Changement national démocratique (2005) dit clairement quel processus ils privilégient pour récupérer leurs droits nationaux, politiques et culturels. Mais le parti de type totalitaire et stalinien dont son père s'est servi durant près de 20 ans pour exercer des pressions sur la Turquie à l'extérieur, et pour réduire au silence les revendications des Kurdes syriens à l'intérieur. Il est nécessaire de rappeler en effet que, pour Abdullah Öcalan hébergé et protégé en Syrie, ses frères Kurdes syriens ne doivent se faire aucune illusion : sa lutte pour la création d'un "grand Kurdistan libre et démocratique" concerne la seule Turquie, à l'est et au sud de laquelle celui-ci doit trouver place.

On verra bien observer que les ponts étaient loin d'être rompus, à ce moment-là, entre Damas et Ankara. Le gouvernement de Recep Tayyip Erdogan n'était pas encore l'un des

boucs émissaires favoris d'un régime incapable de répondre aux attentes de sa population. La Turquie n'accueillait alors aucune opposition syrienne structurée, et aucun combattant islamiste ne s'était avisé d'utiliser le territoire turc pour aller faire en Syrie une guerre ou un djihad auquel personne - à la notable exception du pouvoir en place... - ne songeait encore.

Dès son retour en Syrie, le PYD se désintéresse de la révolution pour s'occuper de son projet, c'est-à-dire, après la réouverture de ses bureaux et la mobilisation de ses cadres opportunément amnistiés par les autorités, la mise en place des structures qui lui permettent d'asseoir son autorité et d'exercer son contrôle sur l'ensemble des zones à forte population kurde de Syrie. Arabes, kurdes, assyriennes et autres, les formations politiques qui le souhaitent sont associées à des "élections". Elles débouchent sur la création de "conseils municipaux" alternatifs, destinés à prendre la place de ceux précédemment contrôlés par le gouvernement, et d'un "Conseil du Peuple du Kurdistan de l'Ouest", une sorte de parlement tout à sa dévotion. Mais cette association s'apparente fortement à celle des ⇒

⇒ partis politiques regroupés en Syrie autour du Baath, au sein du Front national progressiste : elle inclut la reconnaissance de la suprématie du PYD et le cantonnement de tous dans un rôle de comparse de l'unique parti à détenir, avec le contrôle d'une milice armée, des arguments aussi contraignants que convaincants.

Il est erroné de croire que, pour maintenir l'ordre, dans la Jazireh en particulier, les forces du PYD ont récupéré les postes et les missions assumés par les forces armées et les services de renseignements, une fois ceux-ci appelés à la rescousse des forces régulières en difficulté dans d'autres régions de Syrie. La réalité est un peu différente. Si la plupart des militaires ont effectivement été transférés, tel n'est pas le cas des services de renseignements. Les moukhabarat n'ont jamais déserté les lieux, et ils s'y trouvent jusqu'à ce jour. Ils ont simplement, à la demande de la tête du régime, adopté un profil aussi discret que possible, facilitant ou laissant faire ce qui, en d'autres temps et venant d'autres que le PYD, aurait suscité de leur part des réactions immédiates et justifiées des vagues d'arrestation.

En contrepartie de l'apparence de pouvoir qui lui est ainsi octroyé sans qu'il ait eu à combattre, d'une part, en échange des moyens mis à sa disposition - locaux du Parti Baath et d'autres organisations de masse, moyens financiers, véhicules de l'administration... -, d'autre part, et moyennant finalement l'autorisation pour ses hommes de se déplacer en armes, le parti de Mohammed Saleh Mouslim doit interdire, dans les villes et les villages où se déroulent des manifestations, les expressions trop ostentatoires de soutien populaire à la révolution.

Par les Unités de Protection du Peuple (YPG), le bras armé dont il se dote en recrutant des volontaires et en acceptant par-

fois dans ses rangs des chabbiha jusqu'alors au service du régime, le PYD s'emploie à imposer aux comités locaux de coordination et aux autres cadres de mobilisation contre le pouvoir des restrictions qui ne tardent pas à devenir des motifs de friction. Symbole de ralliement des révolutionnaires et signe de rejet du régime en place, le "drapeau de l'Indépendance" - dans lequel une bande verte remplace la bande rouge du drapeau de la République arabe unie - est interdit. Cette mesure arbitraire suscite d'autant plus de colère et d'incompréhension parmi les contestataires que les forces du PYD n'hésitent jamais à brandir, avec leur propre drapeau, des photos d'Abdullah Öcalan... et que, tout en interdisant aux manifestants d'appeler à la chute du régime, ils les incitent à lancer des vivats en faveur de leur leader.

Une multitude d'exactions et de crimes, de la restriction au franchissement des frontières aux assassinats ciblés de militants et de responsables d'autres partis politiques kurdes, conduisent les habitants de la région à s'interroger sur la coopération du PYD avec les services de renseignements, et, dans certains cas, avec les forces armées.

- S'agissant des moukhabarat, la répartition des rôles est patente dans l'installation des barrières et des postes de sécurité que les uns gardent de jour et les autres de nuit. Mais également dans la recherche et la remise de certains opposants, dont les YPG s'emparent et qu'ils livrent sans état d'âme aux services ayant commandité leur capture.

- S'agissant des forces armées, leur éloignement n'est pas synonyme d'impossibilité d'intervenir, le PYD apparaissant en mesure de réclamer à tout moment leur soutien aérien lorsqu'il est en difficulté. Un autre visage de la coopération entre le PYD et les forces du régime est dévoilé lors de l'af-

faire d'Afrin, à la fin du mois de mai et au début du mois de juin 2013. Sans le soutien apporté par les combattants locaux du PYD, la base aérienne de Menneg, située quelques kilomètres plus au sud, serait tombée bien plus tôt, et avec moins de pertes humaines, entre les mains des groupes coalisés pour obtenir sa reddition.

Parmi les révolutionnaires, les opposants et les combattants de l'Armée syrienne libre, personne ne pleure sur le sort des djihadistes défaits ou tués par le PYD lors des affrontements qui les opposent depuis quelques mois, de Aïn al-Arab à la frontière irakienne, pour le contrôle des silos à grains, des installations pétrolières et des postes frontaliers, principales sources de revenus dans la région. Mais ils s'étonnent que, pour ce faire, le PYD reçoive le soutien des forces régulières syriennes et occasionnellement celui de l'armée irakienne, dont la dénonciation des interventions sur le territoire syrien n'équivaut pas à un plaidoyer en faveur des groupes radicaux. On ne peut les blâmer de considérer que, pour le régime au moins..., les forces du PYD apparaissent comme des alliés à protéger et à défendre. On ne peut davantage leur interdire de se demander si, en s'employant à préserver l'intégrité et la sécurité du territoire sur lequel le PYD exerce présentement son autorité, le régime cherche d'abord à protéger cet allié ou à faire en sorte de pouvoir récupérer un jour la région qu'il lui a confiée pour qu'il en assure à son profit la garde...

Car telle est la question que beaucoup se posent en constatant les évolutions dont les zones kurdes sont le théâtre. Cette question ne porte pas sur la légitimité de la revendication des Kurdes à voir enfin reconnaître leurs droits nationaux, politiques et culturels, constamment bafoués dans la République Arabe Syrienne. Elle porte davantage sur le

cadre juridico-politique qui permettra aux Kurdes de gérer de manière autonome, sans porter atteinte à l'unité de la Syrie, les régions dans lesquelles ils sont majoritaires et aspirent à vivre conformément à leurs coutumes, leurs idées et leurs principes. Elle porte d'abord et avant tout sur le jeu du PYD.

Le parti de Mohammed Saleh Mouslim prétend faire partie de l'opposition. En attesterait la présence de son chef à un poste de vice-président du Comité de Coordination des Forces de Changement démocratique... rallié à la mise à l'écart de Bachar al-Assad. Mais, à la différence de la majorité de la rue kurde et des partis du Conseil national kurde, désormais intégré dans le Conseil national des Forces de la Révolution et de l'Opposition syrienne, le PYD donne à penser que, en fin de compte, il serait plutôt favorables au maintien du système actuel, avec lequel il coopère et dont les méthodes semblables aux siennes n'ont rien pour lui déplaire. Quoi qu'il en dise, il se montre très loin de la révolution, à laquelle il ne prend aucune part, et, en limitant ses efforts à la défense et à l'organisation des zones sous son contrôle, il ne contribue nullement à accélérer la chute du régime.

L'annonce unilatérale de la prochaine mise en place d'une "administration provisoire pour les régions du Kurdistan de l'Ouest" l'a fait sortir de l'ambiguïté. A son détriment...



A Diyarbakir, Kurdes et Turcs tentent de réanimer le processus de paix

RÉCIT ♦ Erdogan a, pour la première fois en public, employé le mot «Kurdistan», censuré par la TRT, la télévision publique.

Ragip DURAN (à Istanbul)

Ils étaient côte à côte, face à la foule de dizaines de milliers de personnes dans les rues de Diyarbakir, capitale du sud-est anatolien à majorité kurde. Le Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, et le président de l'administration autonome du Kurdistan d'Irak, Massoud Barzani, ont tenté, samedi, de relancer le processus de paix moribond entre Ankara et les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). «Le Turc et le Kurde ne doivent plus se déchirer et ils ne se déchireront plus», a martelé le leader de l'AKP, le parti islamo-conservateur au pouvoir depuis 2002, promettant : «Les prisons se videront [plus de 5 000 cadres et élus nationalistes kurdes sont emprisonnés, ndr] et les gens quitteront les montagnes.»

Erdogan a, pour la première fois en public, employé le mot «Kurdistan» - qui sera censuré par la TRT, la télévision publique. Fort de son prestige de dirigeant



du quasi-Etat kurde d'Irak, Massoud Barzani a lancé le même appel : «Nous soutenons le processus de paix de toutes nos forces.» La scène est historique, l'enjeu aussi, car le processus de paix doit mettre fin à un conflit qui, depuis 1984, a fait plus de 45 000 morts.

L'hiver dernier, le patron des services secrets turcs, Hakan Fidan, avait commencé à négocier directement avec le leader historique du PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, condamné à la prison à vie, qui a appelé à la fin des com-

bats dans un message public, en mars. Le PKK a alors entamé le retrait de ses combattants vers de nord de l'Irak, et le gouvernement a notamment autorisé l'enseignement privé en langue kurde, des gestes encore loin des revendications des Kurdes en matière d'autonomie et d'identité. Le processus s'enlise d'autant plus qu'à la veille de municipales et d'une présidentielle prévues en 2014, ni l'AKP au pouvoir ni le BDP (le Parti pour la paix et la démocratie, principale formation kurde, proche du PKK, avec 29 députés sur 548) ne

peuvent faire trop de concessions.

Le BDP était le grand absent de la rencontre à Diyarbakir. Erdogan l'a critiqué de front : «Il se comporte comme le parti unique ici, dans cette région, et ne respecte pas autrui.» Il n'en reste pas moins incontournable. Quel que soit le prestige dont jouit Massoud Barzani, les 15 millions de Kurdes de Turquie, notamment ceux qui vivent dans le sud-est, continuent de se reconnaître en Ocalan et dans le BDP qui, lors des dernières municipales, en 2009, remportait 66% des voix à Diyarbakir. Or, au sein du BDP comme du PKK, l'exaspération monte contre l'attitude du gouvernement. «Nous avons fait tout ce qu'il faut pour la paix, mais le gouvernement n'a même pas fait un tout petit pas pour nous accorder des droits», relevait Abdullah Ocalan dans un message depuis sa prison. Quelques militants du BDP brandissaient une pancarte ironique : «Barzani, tu vas être candidat de l'AKP à Diyarbakir ?» ♦

Les Kurdes, entre puissance montante et tensions internes

Par Ihsan Dagi

Les mouvements kurdes en Irak, en Syrie et en Turquie montent en puissance et en popularité. En Irak, un Etat semi-indépendant est apparu après une décennie de luttes qui ont commencé au lendemain de la chute de Saddam Hussein. En Turquie, le PKK et son leader, Abdullah Öcalan, sont en pourparlers avec le gouvernement turc dans le cadre du processus de paix. En Syrie, une entité autonome kurde sous la direction du Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), branche syrienne du PKK, est en train de se former. Si l'on compare la situation à celle d'il y a environ dix ans, les Kurdes connaissent leur âge d'or, notamment grâce aux leaders kurdes tels que Massoud Barzani, Jalal Talabani ou Öcalan.

Le retour de la paix en Turquie renforcerait l'autorité du KRG



De tous les acteurs kurdes, Barzani est le seul à être à la tête d'une autorité semi-étatique, le Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan (KRG). Après des décennies de luttes, les Kurdes d'Irak ont atteint un statut non néglig-

geable et Barzani en est bien conscient. Ce qu'il souhaite avant tout, c'est assurer les possessions des Kurdes et son parti, le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK). Barzani, réaliste, essaie de poser les bases politiques et économiques d'une autonomie kurde au Kurdistan à l'intérieur comme à l'extérieur de l'Irak. Ce qu'il redoute le plus, c'est d'être entraîné dans les affrontements kurdes en Syrie, en Turquie et en Iran. Le leader du PDK soutient le processus de paix entre le PKK, dont la force militaire principale se trouve dans les frontières du KRG, et la Turquie, partenaire commercial vital et pays de transit des exportations de pétrole et de gaz du KRG. La paix en Turquie devrait voir la disparition d'une source de tensions entre la Turquie et le KRG : la présence du PKK dans les monts Qandil du Kurdistan irakien. Le retrait du PKK ferait monter l'autorité du KRG, renforçant

ainsi la création d'un Etat, et lui permettrait de renforcer sa coopération économique et politique avec la Turquie, son partenaire émergent de la région.

La puissance montante du PYD en Syrie inquiète

Si le processus de paix en Turquie est bien accueilli par Barzani, la puissance montante et les aspirations du PYD en Syrie inquiètent. La montée de la politique kurde dans la région a ravivé la rivalité entre Kurdes. Le PKK a abandonné sa lutte armée en Turquie et est actuellement en pourparlers avec le gouvernement turc. Le PYD, contrôle aujourd'hui les régions kurdes de Syrie (Rojava) où il se prépare à déclarer l'autonomie. Le PKK ne veut pas abandon-

ner les possessions du PYD en Syrie en contrepartie d'un processus de paix incertain en Turquie. De son côté, le contrôle des territoires sur la frontière du sud de la Turquie par le PYD est problématique pour Ankara. Le PYD affirme que des groupes affiliés à al-Qaïda et soutenus par la Turquie se battent contre les forces kurdes dans la région de Rojava.

Des tensions entre mouvements kurdes

Barzani soutient le processus de paix en Turquie et semble être un médiateur entre le gouvernement turc et le PKK. Mais mécontent que le PYD domine le terrain et ne permette pas aux partis kurdes pro-Barzani d'être actifs à Rojava, il l'accuse de collabo-

rer avec Bachar al-Assad. Tandis que du côté du PYD, le leader Salih Muslim cherche à coopérer avec le gouvernement de Nouri al-Maliki. Finalement, avec sa visite à Diyarbakir et sa rencontre avec Erdogan, Barzani montre son opposition à un Rojava autonome. Dans la dernière décennie, nous avons pu constater la montée des acteurs politiques kurdes au Moyen-Orient. Nous pourrions maintenant être témoins de tensions entre les mouvements kurdes de la région, les priorités de chaque acteur étant différentes et se heurtant les unes aux autres. ■

Le Point

21 novembre 2013

Irak: 32 morts dans un attentat, plus de 5.800 depuis janvier

Le bilan de la flambée de violences qui ensanglante l'Irak depuis janvier a grimpé à plus de 5.800 morts jeudi après un nouvel attentat à la voiture piégée ayant tué 32 personnes dans un marché bondé au nord-est de Bagdad.

Les violences de plus en plus meurtrières font redouter une accélération des attaques sanglantes à l'approche des élections générales du 30 avril.

Les autorités irakiennes observent avec inquiétude le rôle croissant d'Al-Qaïda dans le conflit en Syrie voisine et redoute sa propagation sur ses terres.

Jeudi, une voiture piégée a explosé près d'un café dans un marché bondé tuant au moins 32 personnes au nord-est de Bagdad, ont indiqué un colonel de la police et un médecin.

L'attentat a également fait 40 blessés, ont ajouté ces sources précisant qu'il a eu lieu à Saadiyah, dans la province multi-communautaire de Diyala.

La voiture a explosé vers midi (09H00 GMT) dans un secteur qui compte une importante communauté de Fayli ou Kurdes chiïtes, dans une région que se disputent le gouvernement central et la région autonome du Kurdistan.

Les insurgés exploitent souvent les tensions entre les deux parties pour mener leurs attaques.

Le 14 novembre, 32 personnes ont été



Au moins quinze personnes ont péri dans des attaques samedi en Irak, dont dix dans un double attentat près d'une mosquée chiïte de la ville mixte de Touz Khourmatou (Nord), selon des responsables.
- Sabah Arar/AFP

tuées par un kamikaze qui a pris pour cible un rassemblement de fidèles lors des commémorations religieuses chiïtes de l'Achoura, les plus importantes pour cette communauté musulmane majoritaire en Irak souvent visée par des attaques d'extrémistes sunnites.

Mercredi, une série d'attentats à la voiture piégée et d'attaques à travers le pays s'est soldée par 59 morts et plus de 100 blessés.

Toujours jeudi, des responsables à Diyala ont fait état d'un autre attentat ayant fait un mort.

Ils ont en outre fait état de la récente découverte de 12 corps d'habitants qui avaient été enlevés par un groupe de personnes se présentant comme des membres des forces de sécurité.

Les 12 victimes ont été exécutées et leurs corps jetés dans une rivière.

Face à la flambée de violences qui ensanglante l'Irak depuis le début de l'année, le Premier ministre chiïte Nouri al-Maliki a demandé fin octobre la coopération de Washington pour lutter contre le réseau extrémiste sunnite Al-Qaïda, qui a revendiqué plusieurs de ces attentats. Les soldats américains ont quitté l'Irak il y a bientôt deux ans.

Selon des experts et des diplomates, l'escalade en Irak est liée au conflit en Syrie, qui a enhardi les groupes liés à Al-Qaïda.

Le réseau Al-Qaïda en Irak "est parvenu à reconstruire ses forces dans certaines régions" irakiennes, a récemment déclaré à l'AFP Safa Hussein, conseiller

national adjoint à la sécurité.

"Leur capacité à mener des attaques a augmenté", souligne-t-il. "Maintenant, ils ont les moyens de passer la frontière, et de puissants, très puissants alliés en Syrie".

Selon lui, ces insurgés "comprennent maintenant qu'ils ne peuvent réaliser leur ambition d'établir un Etat. Ni de défaire le gouvernement".

Mais "ils peuvent établir un contrôle indirect sur certaines zones, et faire de l'Etat un Etat défaillant, ce qui crée un très bon climat pour leur épanouissement", souligne Safa Hussein.

La paralysie de l'appareil politique, entraînée en grande partie par les différends entre sunnites et chiïtes, est associée à une corruption endémique contribuent à alimenter l'instabilité. L'Etat peine en outre à fournir les services de base comme par exemple l'électricité et l'eau potable.

Plus de 5.800 personnes ont péri depuis le début de l'année dans des violences, dont 964 en octobre, le mois le plus meurtrier depuis avril 2008, selon des chiffres officiels.

Les violences se déroulent sur fond de profond mécontentement de la minorité sunnite envers le gouvernement dominé par les chiïtes, accusé en particulier de multiplier les arrestations arbitraires.

L'ONU et de nombreux diplomates ont appelé M. Maliki à adopter des réformes pour éviter une plus grande marginalisation de cette communauté. □

(AFP)

Turkey's Kurdish opening

A meeting between the Turkish prime minister and the president of the autonomous Kurdish region in Northern Iraq is being seen as historic. For the first time, Prime Minister Erdogan referred to Kurdistan by name.

<http://www.dw.de>

Author Ayhan Simsek

The meeting on Saturday (16.11.2013) between Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the president of the autonomous Kurdish region in Northern Iraq, Massoud Barzani, in Diyarbakir has opened a new era in Turkey's relations with the Kurds. According to veteran Turkish Kurdish politician Hasim Hasimi, it would be hard to overestimate the historic nature of the event.

"The Diyarbakir meeting of two of the region's symbolic figures is the beginning of a new era," he told Deutsche Welle. "For the first time, in Diyarbakir, Prime Minister Erdogan used the term Kurdistan. We have seen the flags of Turkey and Kurdistan together. All the taboos have been broken."

For years, Turkey's Kurds have been deprived of their basic political and cultural rights. The Turkish government was always concerned about the country's territorial integrity and looked at any Kurdish political movements with suspicion.

Turkish officials refrained from using the term "Kurdistan," even when referring to the semi-autonomous administration just across the border in Northern Iraq, the official name of which is the Kurdistan Regional Government, and even though its president has become an important political ally for Turkey.

'SELF-CONFIDENT TURKISH STATE'

The Turkish state has in recent times been slowly moving towards greater recognition of Kurdish interests, but this meeting, according to Sedat Bozkurt, a journalist specializing in Kurdish policy, brings that process to a new level.

"Diyarbakir is a pro-Kurdish stronghold. If the Turkish state can host a Kurdish leader here with Kurdish flags, this is significant," says Bozkurt. "First, it shows the recently developed self-confidence of the Turkish state. And secondly, it shows the confidence of the Turkish state in its Kurds, and that the state is now far from worrying about separation or division."

There are Kurdish-majority areas in four countries in the region - Iran, Syria, Iraq and Turkey - but Turkey has by far the largest Kurdish population, estimated at around 15 million. Turkey has only recently expanded political and cultural rights for its Kurdish citizens in the course of its EU membership process.

But for 29 years, the banned Kurdish organization PKK carried out an armed campaign for self-rule which claimed more than 45,000 lives. In March this year, Abdullah Öcalan, the jailed leader of the PKK, called for a ceasefire and urged his armed followers to withdraw from Turkish soil. The Turkish government has been holding talks with Öcalan, which are continuing despite setbacks.



ERDOGAN'S POLITICAL CALCULATION

Bozkurt argues that while Erdogan's meeting with Barzani is significant for Turkey's reconciliation efforts with the Kurds; Erdogan had his own good political reasons to make the move.

He argues that the majority of Turkey's Kurds had long identified with Barzani's political movement, the conservative-traditional Kurdistan Democratic Party KDP. But the armed conflict had led Kurds to support the leftist PKK, and Erdogan's opening towards Barzani is intended to make Kurdish politics more manageable for him.

"Erdogan has made a significant political move aimed at bring together conservative Kurds in Turkey, and he has introduced Barzani as a symbol," says Bozkurt. "It's an attempt by Erdogan to diversify Kurdish politics."

Barzani's growing influence is likely to tempt Kurdish voters away from the PKK.

The Turkish pro-Kurdish BDP party, which shares the same grassroots support as the PKK, has offered mixed reactions to Barzani's visit, with some deputies publicly criticizing him for his cooperation with Erdogan.

PARTY RIVALRY

The PKK and the KDP have long been competitors, and they clashed fiercely in Northern Iraq in the 1990s. Recent developments in Syria have further intensified their rivalry. The PKK-affiliated Syrian Kurdish group PYD is moving towards autonomy in Kurdish parts of Syria, and that has led Barzani's KDP to view the leftist grouping as a rival for transnational leadership of the Kurds.

But Hasimi sees differences and competition between the Kurdish groups as normal. For him, what is significant is that both Erdogan and Barzani in Diyarbakir were calling for Kurdish unity and not confrontation.

"In Diyarbakir, the Turkish prime minister promised that the reconciliation process will continue to snowball," says Hasimi. "With his speech he strengthened trust in this process."

For Hasimi, the process of continued reform and negotiations with PKK leader Öcalan is likely to face several provocations, but he sees it as the only way ahead.

'THE PEACE PROCESS IS IRREVERSIBLE'

Bozkurt also views the reconciliation process with Kurds as irreversible. "From now on, if the PKK moves towards the armed struggle again, then it would lose support at the grassroots," he says. "And if it's the government which breaks the process, it would face new attacks. From now on this process is irreversible. There may be some tensions and setbacks, but the reconciliation process will continue." ■

Politicians hit below belt in Kurdish debate

www.hurriyetaidailynews.com
ANKARA

The usual hostile Tuesday exchanges between party leaders get some added spice, as politicians pull no punches after PM Erdoğan's Diyarbakır trip

No stranger to recriminations in the fractious world of Turkish politics, Turkey's Parliament was the site of added drama yesterday as the government and opposition parties vented their fury at each other over Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's weekend visit to Southeast Anatolia.

In a departure from the norm, Erdoğan was not the main source of frustration for opposition leaders yesterday, as Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) leader Masoud Barzani and Kurdish singer Şivan Perwer – both of whom met Erdoğan in Diyarbakır on Nov. 16 – as well as late Kurdish singer Ahmet Kaya, were also the subject of either bitter criticism or praise from opposition leaders.

From the point of view of the opposition, the gathering in Diyarbakır was unsatisfactory and insincere or even amounted to treason.

For his part, Erdoğan stood solidly behind the approach he displayed in Diyarbakır regarding the Kurdish issue, while particularly using the term "Kurdistan" once more in apparent defiance against criticism by ultranationalists to his approach and language.

Furthermore, Erdoğan recalled that the Ottoman Empire used to call the Black Sea region "Lazistan," while the founding Parliament of the Republic of Turkey used to call the southeastern Anatolian region "Kurdistan." His remarks referring to the provincial administration of the Ottoman Empire are likely to spark yet another wave of criticism since they could be interpreted as a sign of Erdoğan's desire to implement a federal system.

"A big state cannot be built with fear.

Those who are afraid of words, of concepts, of taboos ... cannot build a big state," Erdoğan said, addressing his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) deputies.

The prime minister urged those who labeled his jargon in Diyarbakır as "separatist" to read the minutes of the founding Parliament of 1920.

"Then, was Mustafa Kemal a separatist, too? Were all the deputies at the time who used the word 'Kurdistan' separatists, too?" he asked, particularly targeting the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). "Was the late Alparslan Türkeş, who said 'We have a Kurdish son-in-law,' a separatist, too?" he asked, referring to the founder of the MHP.

On Nov. 16, thousands gathered to hear Erdoğan and Barzani speak, opening a day of ceremonies including a performance by Perwer, who had fled Turkey in the 1970s, and a wedding of 400 couples.

In Diyarbakır, while welcoming Perwer, Erdoğan also cited Kaya, another iconic Kurdish musician who died 13 years ago to the day in forced exile after being demonized in Turkey for announcing that he would include a Kurdish song in a new album.

In Ankara, yesterday, Erdoğan maintained that those who at the time almost lynched Kaya and those who attacked the present government during the Gezi Park unrest were actually identical.

HALABJA AND ULUDERE

Main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu praised Kaya and acknowledged that Perwer was a prominent singer who sang touching songs about sorrows of people, noting that he was always affected by Perwer's song about the Halabja Massacre, in which over 5,000 Kurds were killed with poison gas by Saddam Hussein's Iraqi government in 1988.

"Now I want to ask Şivan Perwer. How dare you could rhapsodize [Prime Minister] Recep Tayyip Erdoğan when he did not give an accounts about our 34 people killed in Uludere [in a botched air raid by Turkish jets in 2011]?" Kılıçdaroğlu told his deputies. "An artist should be against a tyrant, like Ahmet Kaya. You should be as brave as Ahmet Kaya."

According to him, Erdoğan was exploiting Kaya by saying the late singer would side with the government.

"How can a dictator mention the name of Ahmet Kaya? If Ahmet Kaya – who was courageous and a revolutionary – was alive, he would side with the Gezi protesters and Erdoğan would be against Ahmet Kaya," he said.

As expected, National Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli was highly critical of the visit in Diyarbakır, although his remarks were much more strongly worded than usual.



The prime minister urges those who labeled his jargon in Diyarbakır as 'separatist' to read the minutes of the founding Parliament of 1920. DAILY NEWS photo / Selahattin SÖNMEZ

"The prime minister did what his absent quality requires: He invited Barzani to Diyarbakır and embraced his counterpart like a 'beloved person' who is in love with his lover," Bahçeli said in his well-known style.

PRISONS AND EXILE

Bahçeli also described Perwer and Kaya as "dissolute" friends of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) who supported terrorism.

According to Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) co-leader Selahattin Demirtaş, the government was inconsistent with the approach it displayed in Diyarbakır.

"While you [Erdoğan] are shedding tears for artists [like Perwer], who lived in exile for years ..., over 300 prisoners from Diyarbakır, Batman and Siirt prisons were sent to prisons in western cities that are hundreds of kilometers away from their families. While you say exiles should return back to their home on one hand, you send people into exile from their homelands on the other. Is this your way of emptying prisons?" Demirtaş said.

"Why are you emptying prisons in Diyarbakır, Batman and Siirt by sending the prisoners into exile? Some 322 prisoners were abruptly sent into exile on the same day [Erdoğan] was there. Are you opening space for new operations and new detainees? Will you maintain the resolution process with new political operations?" Demirtaş asked.

Despite touching upon the joint visit of Erdoğan and Barzani, Demirtaş took pains to not pronounce the name of the Iraqi Kurdish leader even once in his speech.

"The situations of prisons are important for us because we are the party of a movement which evolved from the resistance of Mazlum Doğan in Diyarbakır No. 5 prison," Demirtaş said.

Doğan, one of the founders of the PKK, immolated himself in the notorious Diyarbakır Prison in 1982 in protest at the coup-era state's inhuman treatment of political protesters. □

The Kurdish Crescent: New Trends in Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran

THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE
for Near East Policy

Michael Knights and David Pollock
www.washingtoninstitute.org
November 21, 2013

On November 14, 2013, Michael Knights and David Pollock addressed a Policy Forum at The Washington Institute to discuss their recent trips to the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Kirkuk, and Azerbaijan. Knights is a Lafer Fellow with the Institute and has worked extensively in Iraq as an advisor to local governments, security forces, and foreign investors. Pollock is the Institute's Kaufman Fellow, focusing on the political dynamics of Middle Eastern countries. The following is a rapporteur's summary of their remarks.



MICHAEL KNIGHTS

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of Iraq has achieved a good measure of basic stability and security. Though there are still significant tensions

between political factions in the KRG, the government is adept at preventing these tensions from boiling over. The KRG has stretched out leadership transitions using a form of "managed democracy." What matters now is how the KRG uses the political space it has created by delaying presidential and provincial elections: will it take the opportunity to share power between the executive presidency and the parliament, and will it devolve powers to local governments at the provincial level?

In terms of enforcing its internal borders, the KRG blunted Iraqi federal government military threats to the disputed areas in 2012. That year could be labeled the "year of deployments," during which the KRG consistently outperformed the Iraqi federal government in military face-offs along their disputed border. By contrast, 2013 has been the "year of detente." Seeing the 2014 national polls looming on the horizon, the Iraqi government started embracing a conciliatory approach toward the KRG. Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki is seeking, in effect, a nonaggression pact with the Kurds. A shared recognition of the rising al-Qaeda threat has also bolstered the detente between the federal government and the Kurds. As 2013 comes to a close, the federal government and the Kurds can no longer waste their time engaging in futile political bickering, given these bigger fish to fry.

The next stage for the KRG is to demonstrate the economic viability of its landlocked region. In the coming year, the KRG is very likely to export significantly more of its oil and gas independent of Baghdad's control, probably using a direct pipeline to Turkey as well as small amounts of exports by truck. The Iraqi federal government has ceased making substantive threats regarding this issue, and Ankara's commitment to independent KRG oil and gas exports is solidifying. Washington has counseled Erbil and Ankara not to openly break with Baghdad on the exports issue, but the U.S. government will tolerate direct KRG exports if Baghdad acquiesces to them.

In the longer term, the independent KRG exports need to be underwritten by a final arrangement on Baghdad-KRG revenue sharing. Such an arrangement should be regulated by law, but the hydrocarbon law debate has dragged on for years and will not be resolved until 2015 at the earliest. In the absence of such a law, the KRG could take one of two routes. The route of maximum independence would be to keep 100 percent of the earnings from its own exports, using them to cover all its own oil contractor costs while keeping the rest for KRG government revenue. The other route would be for the KRG to maximize its finances while relinquishing some political independence; this would entail handing the export earnings over to Baghdad in return for 17 percent of

the overall federal oil revenues (that is, from oil exported from the south as well as from the KRG). This latter route is only possible if Baghdad covers the full costs of contractors in the KRG; so far, Baghdad has only been willing to cover a small part of these costs. Some midway solution between these two poles will likely emerge from the hydrocarbon law debate.



DAVID POLLOCK

Kurdistan's ties with the federal government of Iraq are undoubtedly important. But of even greater historic significance is the rapprochement, albeit fragile, between Ankara and Iraq's Kurds - and with Kurds inside Turkey and, to some extent, inside Syria as well. It can be said that KRG-Turkey ties are growing. The Turks are increasingly accepting the idea of an autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq.

As for Iran and the goals it is seeking to achieve in the KRG, they can be summed up as follows:

1. Keeping an eye on both Iranians and Kurds in the KRG, specifically dissidents and Iranian expats.
2. Ensuring that the KRG embraces policies that support Iran's interests in Iraq and the region at large, particularly Syria.
3. Ensuring that leaders in the Kurdistan region of Iraq do not form alliances with other groups, such as dissident Shiites.

It can be said, in turn, that Iraq's Kurds have no other choice but to yield to a certain degree of Iranian leverage.

As for Kurds outside Iraq, the political picture is quite mixed. In Turkey, the relationship between Ankara and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), with which it has fought a decades-long war, is currently an uncertain detente.

In Syria, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) is an organized faction that controls "Syria's Kurdistan," also known as Rojava, and this group calls the shots in areas located in northern Syria. The Democratic Union Party (PYD) is not as closely affiliated with the PKK as some have suggested and has limited relations with the KRG; indeed, the KRG has decided to step away from the Syria conflict. Ankara, meanwhile, is unnerved by the PYD's military success in Syria, fearing that it could destabilize the Syrian-Turkish border. That said, it seems that the Turks will ultimately accept the idea of having a Kurdish autonomous region along this border. However, both Turkey and the KRG are highly suspicious of the PYD's ambitions, which could extend beyond Syria.

In Iran, the Kurds will not be able to achieve the progress achieved by their Syrian and Turkish counterparts, much less the autonomy gained by Iraqi Kurds, although they still harbor hopes for change within the Iranian establishment.

An important issue for U.S. policy toward the Kurds involves visa problems for people from the KRG. Even some KRG officials have had significant problems getting U.S. visas because of their past activities in the armed struggle against Saddam Hussein. The U.S. government needs to find a way to remove this stumbling block to better relations with the KRG and two of its major political parties -- the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) - which are friendly to the United States. ♦

This rapporteur's summary was prepared by Noam Raydan.

Across the Zagros: Iranian influence in Iraqi Kurdistan

The complicated relationship between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan have eased in recent weeks

George Richards for the Tehran Bureau
the-guardian.com,

The complicated relationship between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan has been thrown into stark relief in recent weeks. On 30 October, Adel Murad, a founding member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), publicly voiced his support for the involvement of Iran, rather than Turkey or Saudi Arabia, in Iraqi affairs. The PUK is one of the largest political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan and its leader, Jalal Talabani, is the president of all Iraq, although he has been receiving treatment in Germany for a stroke he suffered in December 2012.

But on the news that Tehran had hanged two Kurdish activists on 25 October, protests were held in Iraqi Kurdistan, including outside the Iranian consulate in Erbil, opposing the Iranian government and supporting the Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK), a Kurdish political movement engaged in a long-running armed struggle against Tehran. One of the two Kurds hanged, Habibollah Golparipour, was referred to by PJAK as a "senior leader." In response to the hangings, PJAK issued a statement claiming that it had taken revenge by killing ten Iranian revolutionary guards. A third Kurdish activist was subsequently hanged in Iran on 4 November.

These contradictory developments surrounding relations with Iran reflect the complex political landscape in Iraqi Kurdistan. In the aftermath of the 1990–91 Gulf war and the demilitarisation of Iraqi Kurdistan by Baghdad, a bitter civil war broke out between the left-wing PUK, under Talabani, and the more conservative Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), led by Massoud Barzani.

In 1998, the PUK and KDP signed a peace treaty and later joined forces in support of the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. Kurdish guerilla fighters, called peshmerga, fought alongside American troops in the conflict. Following the invasion, the PUK and KDP held the balance of power in Kurdistan: ruling the region in coalition, and sharing out key political offices – the presidency of Iraq is held by the PUK's Talabani, and the presidency of Iraqi Kurdistan by the KDP's Barzani.

Relations between Kurds and the Iranian government differ according to on which side of the Zagros mountains you stand. In

Iran, the conflict between PJAK and Tehran has thrown salt on a long-open wound in the relations between minority Kurds and the Iranian authorities. Iranian Kurdish activists say that the promises of reform made by President Hassan Rouhani and members of his new administration seem not to apply to their region.

For Iraqi Kurds, relations with Iran must be seen through the prism of relations between Iraq as a whole and its eastern neighbour. Between 1980 and 1988, Iraq and Iran fought the longest conventional conflict of the twentieth century, and their rulers continued to espouse radically opposed visions for their countries: the political Shia Islam of Khomeini and his fellow clerics, against the Arab nationalist secularism of Saddam Hussein and the Sunni minority he led.

After 2003, with the United States, Iran's sworn enemy, embroiled in a bloody insurgency in Iraq, Tehran leveraged its popularity among the resurgent Iraqi Shia majority. Iran's influence in Iraq was illustrated by the juxtaposition of American president George W Bush's fleeting, unannounced, and heavily secured visits to US airbases in Iraq, and Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's open-top motorcade from Baghdad airport, along a road once lined with snipers and car bombs and called by western media the "most dangerous road in Iraq" or the "Highway of Death," to a red carpet reception in Baghdad by the Iraqi president – none other than the PUK's Talabani, a fluent Farsi speaker. Sharpening the contrast, American and British officials had been banned from using the same airport road and typically travelled by helicopter to Baghdad's well-defended Green Zone.

Since 2003, following the fall of their opponents in Baghdad and with newfound autonomy and increasing security and stability, the Iraqi Kurds have gradually, but discernibly, strengthened relations with Iran. The affair did not start auspiciously. Unsettled by the participation of the peshmerga in the US-led invasion of Iraq, and worried that PJAK would find a safe harbour in Iraqi Kurdistan from which to redouble its campaign against Tehran, Iran angered the Iraqi Kurds by flouting territorial sovereignty and shelling peshmerga positions in Iraq. As recently as 2010, two weeks of Iranian air strikes and shelling sought to cripple PJAK bases in the region, and Kurdish media reported Iranian ground incursions into Iraqi Kurdistan.

Since then, Iran has grown more confident of its regional influence and, concurrently, less belligerent. In August 2010, the last US combat brigade withdrew from Iraq. After the 2010 Iraqi elections, Iran played a role in brokering the agreement in Tehran that formed a Shia-led (and broadly pro-Iranian) coalition in Baghdad, with Nouri al-Maliki, a Shia, appointed as prime minister. Those negotiations also involved the Kurds, with Talabani returning as president of Iraq, meeting a key Kurdish demand.

Political relations between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan continued to strengthen: in August 2013, the prime minister of Iraqi Kurdistan, Nechirvan Barzani, visited Tehran for Rouhani's inauguration. An earlier visit in 2011 by the president of Iraqi Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, to meet with Ahmadinejad, his then-counterpart, was heralded by energy industry analyst John Daly as "proof of the changing regional dynamics," in which Iran was successfully subverting America's influence over Iraqi affairs.

And instead of throwing its weight about militarily, Iranian influence on daily life in Iraqi Kurdistan is now softer, but no less persuasive. Trade between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan is making far greater inroads than military operations ever did. Last year saw a visit to Iraqi Kurdistan by the Iranian vice president for international affairs and a delegation of more than 100 Iranian companies as part of the Iranian-Kurdistan Region Economic Forum.

This July, the Iranian first vice president welcomed the Iraqi Kurdistan minister of housing and development, amid announcements that a new bilateral trade agreement had been signed and that trade between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan was expected to surpass \$4 billion in 2013. In 2000, before the war, the officially reported volume of trade was only \$100 million.

But Iran still has some way to go to catch up with another regional heavyweight, Turkey. The historical relationship between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan is similar to Iran's. Like Tehran, there is deep-rooted hostility between Ankara and its Kurdish citizens. Like Iran and PJAK, Ankara has been embroiled in a long-running conflict inside Turkey with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a left-wing Kurdish movement whose leader, Abdullah Öcalan, is

➔ currently in prison. Like Iran, Turkey shelled, bombed, and even sent ground troops against PKK positions inside Iraqi Kurdistan in the aftermath of the US-led invasion.

Earlier this year, however, the PKK signed a ceasefire with Ankara and the two sides are engaged in peace negotiations. And Turkey has moved even more vigorously than Iran in investing in Iraqi Kurdistan, throwing its weight into politically important, big-ticket infrastructure projects. Half of all foreign companies registered in Iraqi Kurdistan are Turkish, and trade between Ankara and Erbil is \$8 billion, double the Iranian figure. Oil-rich Iraqi Kurdistan has attracted investment from the major international energy companies – and the largest oil producer in the region is the Turkish company Genel Energy, listed in London and run by former BP chief Tony Hayward.

Erbil is finalising the connection of its oil supplies to the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline, which carries oil from Iraq proper to energy-hungry Turkey and the port of Ceyhan. At the end of October, Erbil announced its plans for a second pipeline that will directly link Iraqi Kurdistan to Turkey, free from any interfer-

ence from Baghdad. Even the ancient round citadel in Erbil bears the hoardings of 77 Construction group, a major Turkish-Iraqi joint venture.

Although currently smaller than the Turkish connection, the economic relationship between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan is blossoming, and it is by no means a one-way street. Over the years, there have been well-documented allegations of sanctions-busting oil smuggling from Iraqi Kurdistan to Iran, in defiance of Baghdad and the international community.

These allegations were denied in July this year by Ashti Hawrami, the Iraqi Kurdistan oil minister, although in August Reuters claimed that as many as 30,000 barrels per day of crude oil were being smuggled from Iraqi Kurdistan to Iran's Bandar Imam Khomeini terminal on the Persian Gulf. A rise in smuggling across the Kurdistan-Iran border was recently reported, along with an increase in the deaths of kulbars, or smugglers, totalling around 100 over the past two years. Similar allegations have been made in respect of arms trafficking and money laundering.

The relationship between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan is thus more evenly balanced than might be expected, even surprisingly so. After all, Iran is a powerful country of 80 million people that operates a globally infamous nuclear programme, while Iraqi Kurdistan is but a region of Iran's smaller, western neighbour. But there are opportunities on both sides. Trade is blossoming, and Iranian cultural influence in the area is centuries old. Iran has fostered good relations with the KDP and the PUK, both of which are increasingly striving to hedge Iraqi Kurdistan's economic growth with inbound investment from a basket of neighbouring countries. Politically, Iran has achieved a government in Baghdad with ties to Tehran through its negotiations with the Iraqi Kurds, in return for which the Kurds have held onto the presidency of Iraq.

In all these areas, Iran has dealt with Iraqi Kurdistan as an equal. But the recent hangings in Iran reminded Iraqi Kurds of something they seemed to have forgotten: when it comes to the Kurds inside Iran, especially PJAK, no amount of friendship with Iraqi Kurdistan will temper Tehran's fury. ♦



November / 20 / 2013

OPINION/ MUSTAFA AKYOL

A Turko-Kurdish axis?

www.hurriyetdailynews.com

In Turkey, some things are going really bad, while other things are going not that bad. Among the latter, there is Ankara's historic reconciliation with Kurds, both at home and abroad, which took a bold step forward in Diyarbakır last weekend.

First, a summary of what happened: Two key leaders, the prime minister of Turkey, Tayyip Erdoğan, and the president of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KRG), Massoud Barzani, came together to witness the mass wedding of some three hundred couples. (It is a culturally important phenomenon in the region to co-witness a wedding.) In their speeches, they gave powerful messages.

Erdoğan promised a Turkey where "prisons are empty" and "those who are in the mountains come down," a euphemism for the farewell to arms by the Kurdish guerrillas. Meanwhile Barzani supported the Turkish PM and praised his effort towards "peace and brotherhood."

An important detail, and a first, was that Erdoğan used the word "Kurdistan," in reference to the KRG. That is crucial, because many Turks, who are fearful of a would-be Kurdistan inside Turkey, cannot accept there is already a Kurdistan on the other side of the Iraqi border. That is why the state TV, TRT, could not dare to quote Erdoğan accurately and rather opted to censor the word "Kurdistan." The K word, in other words, is still toxic. But more and more Turks will eventually get used to it.

Another important detail was Erdoğan, for the first time, visited the offices of the Diyarbakır municipality, which is held by his main political opponent in the region, the Peace and Democracy Party, or the political wing of the armed and outlawed PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party). His handshake with Mayor Osman Baydemir was a sign of peaceful times.

The presence of Şivan Perwer, a popular Kurdish singer who has been living in Europe for more than three decades due to the ban on his songs in his home country, Turkey, was also symbolically important. His songs are known to have inspired many Kurdish youngsters who joined the "guerrillas."

His return to Turkey, and his support for peace, might encourage the same youngsters to leave arms.

All in all, the Diyarbakır meeting underlined the great transformation in Turkey relating to the Kurds: Ankara, which for decades saw all Kurds, in Turkey or abroad, as a problem, is now willing to see them as an asset. This was a strategic chance first imagined by the late Turgut Özal, who led Turkey in the fateful decade of 1983-1993, but is now realized by the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government. (Other problems with the AKP should not overshadow this progress on Turkey's most serious issue.)

Of course, the most crucial element in this Kurdish peace process; the deal with the PKK, is not fully realized and is in fact in a fragile state. Voices from both within the PKK and the government accuse each other of not being brave, honest or good willed enough. Yet it is a comforting fact that the ceasefire that was announced at the beginning of this year is still valid. And the weekend in Diyarbakır raised more hope for a truly and consistently peaceful southeast. □

Trente ans d'exil et un film

Dans le cadre de la Semaine de la solidarité internationale, Zirek présentait hier son film « Pari(s) d'exil ». Portrait d'un homme apatride.

Zirek est né dans un petit village frontière entre la Turquie, l'Iran et l'Irak, mais sa carte de séjour le définit comme un « réfugié apatride ex-turc ». Un statut particulier que lui ont conféré les Nations Unies à sa demande.

C'est en 1982 qu'il arrive en France. « Après le coup d'État de 1980, j'ai attendu un changement de politique, mais... » Mais celui-ci n'arrive pas.

Grâce à un faux passeport, il s'installe à Paris, « le centre culturel du monde pour moi ». Car outre ses études en économie, Zirek est également comédien. Dans son village d'Hakkari, il faisait partie d'une association culturelle et faisait du théâtre, chose interdite pour les Kurdes en ce temps-là. « Chaque fois que je faisais un spectacle, je faisais deux à trois mois de prison. Mais on était jeune, on se prenait



■ « Je ne suis rien, mais je suis tout », explique Zirek en parlant de sa nationalité.

Photo ER

pour le Che. »

En France, il a la chance de rencontrer Ylmaz Guney, réalisateur turc d'origine kurde, Palme d'or au Festival de Cannes en 82 pour « Yol » (La Permission) et jouera dans le film qui suit « Duvar » (Le Mur). Il s'affirme dans son métier de comédien et jouera aussi pour Godard et Costa-Gavras.

« C'était la vraie... »

Il y a de cela trois ans et demi, Zirek se lance dans la réalisation de son propre film « Pari(s) d'exil ». Un

film intime, basé sur sa propre histoire.

« Je voulais amener mon père ici. J'avais appris la mort de ma mère trois ans après son décès et ne voulais pas que ça recommence. Mais il n'a pas eu de visa. Alors il m'a dit: envoie ton fils, qu'il vienne toucher la terre. » Celui-ci a alors 13 ans, est né en France, ne parle pas la langue et ne comprend pas vraiment pourquoi il est là. S'en suivent de longs échanges téléphoniques sur le questionnement du jeune homme: « Les conversations résonnaient le soir dans ma tête. » Zirek les couche alors sur le papier « et, arrivé à 250 pages, le scénario était là ».

Le film est terminé depuis 2011, « mais je voulais d'abord que la famille le voie ». Il faut dire qu'il y met beaucoup de lui, comme la fois où il brûle la photo de sa mère: « C'était la vraie, je n'ai pas triché. Dans ce film je revis mon exil. » Une chose dont justement il n'arrivait pas à parler avec ses enfants.

Depuis ce voyage, ses trois enfants vont là-bas une fois par an. Le père voit l'évolution de la ville par leurs yeux, mais n'a toujours pas le droit d'y retourner. Même après trente ans d'exil. Un comble pour lui alors qu'aujourd'hui « le monde est devenu un petit village ».

Christine CORBIER



Photo ER

■ Dans le cadre de la semaine de la solidarité internationale, Zirek présentait hier son film avec un collectif d'associations verdunoises.

Nouvel épisode de la guerre secrète saoudo-iranienne



DÉCRYPTAGE

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MINUTIEUSEMENT préparé, le double attentat suicide, qui a visé mardi l'ambassade d'Iran à Beyrouth, marque une nouvelle escalade dans la guerre secrète meurtrière que se livrent l'Arabie saoudite sunnite et l'Iran chiïte, avec pour toile de fond le conflit syrien. L'aide logistique que Téhéran et son allié libanais du Hezbollah apportent à Bachar el-Assad est insupportable à Riyad. Surtout depuis qu'en juin dernier, le régime de Damas, fortement épaulé par les combattants du Hezbollah, a repris aux rebelles la ville stratégique d'al-Qusayr, verrou par lequel transitaient armes et combattants en provenance du Liban. Un franchissement d'une « ligne rouge » que l'Arabie saoudite s'est juré de faire oublier.

À défaut de pouvoir systématiquement frapper en Syrie, la mouvance djihadiste élargit le conflit, en ripostant contre l'allié chiïte libanais de Damas, devenu ces dernières années la bête

noire de la monarchie saoudienne. De premières représailles eurent lieu le 15 août lorsqu'un attentat à la voiture piégée - le modus operandi d'al-Qaïda - fit 27 morts dans la banlieue sud de Beyrouth, fief du Hezbollah. Depuis, les accès au réduit du « Parti de Dieu » ont été strictement contrôlés. Mais l'ambassade d'Iran se trouve hors de ce périmètre sécurisé.

Otage de la guerre

Dans le contexte d'une guerre régionale en Syrie, exacerbée par les tensions chiïtes-sunnites, l'attentat de mardi n'a guère surpris. Des informations sur la présence de voitures piégées à travers le Liban circulaient depuis plusieurs semaines. Ces engins de mort seraient confectionnés dans la ville libanaise d'Ersal, bastion djihadiste à partir duquel les rebelles passent en Syrie voisine, avant d'y revenir lorsque le feu est à leurs trousses. C'est le cas actuellement.

Appuyée une nouvelle fois par le Hezbollah, l'armée syrienne a lancé une vaste offensive dans la région de Qalamoun, juste en face d'Ersal. Or les loyalistes, qui ont pris mardi la ville de

Qara, seraient sur le point de couper définitivement la route d'Ersal, ultime voie d'approvisionnement en armes et en combattants à partir du Liban. Il y avait donc urgence à riposter pour la mouvance djihadiste. D'autant que la semaine dernière, son ennemi juré, Cheikh Hassan Nasrallah, le chef du Hezbollah, les a doublement défiés. D'abord en sortant à deux reprises en public dans Beyrouth. Initiative exceptionnelle, qui n'a même pas suscité de réaction de la part d'Israël qui l'a pourtant dans le viseur depuis la guerre de 2006. Mais surtout en affirmant haut et fort que sa formation continuerait de lutter aux côtés d'Assad en Syrie.

Les djihadistes ne s'en cachent pas : les attentats se poursuivront au Liban tant que la milice pro-iranienne combattra en Syrie. Bref, la fragile mosaïque libanaise, déjà terriblement affectée par un afflux massif de réfugiés syriens, se retrouve plus que jamais otage de la guerre qui déchire son voisin.

Que peuvent faire les autorités de Beyrouth ? Envoyer l'armée agir contre Ersal ? Cela risquerait d'aggraver encore les tensions communautaires. Une possible détente réside dans un accord entre Iraniens et Américains sur le nucléaire, qui pourrait à terme se traduire par un partage des influences entre Iraniens et Saoudiens au Moyen-Orient. Mais nous sommes encore loin de cette avancée. ■



15 novembre 2013

Décapitée, la rébellion syrienne perd du terrain

RÉCIT ♦
L'armée d'Al-Assad, qui mène une contre-offensive, a tué plusieurs chefs de groupes armés.

Luc MATHIEU

L'hiver s'annonce meurtrier pour les rebelles syriens. Confrontés à une contre-offensive d'ampleur des troupes du régime de Bachar al-Assad, ils accumulent les revers depuis plusieurs semaines dans le nord du pays. Alors qu'ils ont cédé plusieurs villes et bases stratégiques, ils doivent désormais encaisser la perte de plusieurs de leurs commandants.

Jeudi, Abou al-Tayyeb, chef du

renseignement de Liwa al-Tawhid, l'un des principaux groupes de la rébellion, a été tué lors d'un raid de l'aviation du régime sur une base militaire dans la région d'Alep, la grande ville du Nord, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). La frappe a également blessé Abdel Kader Saleh, le chef du groupe, ainsi qu'un autre commandant. Trois autres leaders de bataillons rebelles ont péri lors de combats contre les troupes loyalistes près de l'aéroport international d'Alep et dans la ville de Ma'arat al-Artiq (Nord).

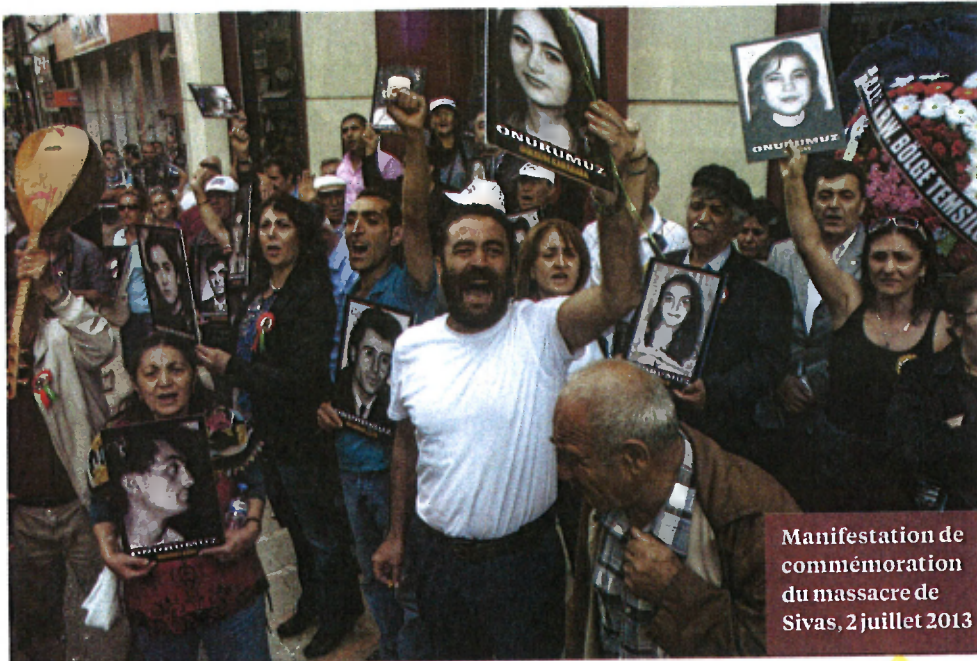
La contre-offensive du régime a débuté en août avec la reprise, après des bombardements massifs, d'Ariha, une ville située sur la route reliant Lattaquié, un bastion du régime, à Alep. Les forces

loyalistes ont ensuite regagné le district de Safira, au sud-ouest d'Alep, contrôlée par la rébellion depuis un an. Là aussi, les bombardements ont été particulièrement violents, plus de 130 000 personnes ayant dû fuir la zone, selon Médecins sans frontières. L'armée syrienne, alliée à des combattants du Hezbollah libanais et des miliciens chiïtes irakiens, tente depuis de reprendre l'aéroport international d'Alep.

Inquiets de ces revers, inédits dans une région en majeure partie perdue par le régime depuis plus d'un an, rebelles et jihadistes ont lancé en début de semaine dernière des appels à « la mobilisation générale ». Leur préoccupation est d'autant plus grande



qu'ils doivent également encaisser une série de défaites dans les zones kurdes du nord-est du pays. Selon l'OSDH, les combattants des Unités de défense du peuple (YPG), la branche armée du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) en Syrie, ont chassé les jihadistes de 19 villes et villages depuis la fin octobre. Ces victoires ont poussé plusieurs formations kurdes à annoncer mardi la création d'une administration autonome dans la région. La Turquie a immédiatement répliqué qu'il n'était « pas question d'accepter une telle chose en Syrie ». ♦



Manifestation de commémoration du massacre de Sivas, 2 juillet 2013

TURQUIE

LA FRONDE DES ALEVIS

Minoritaires dans un pays à majorité sunnite, discriminés, ils ne supportent plus la dérive islamiste du gouvernement

PAR LAURE MARCHAND

Le «**paquet de démocratisation**» du Premier ministre dévoilé au début de l'automne, c'est un peu comme «*la hotte du père Noël*», commente, sarcastique, Aysegül (1) sur son compte Facebook. Il y a les chanceux, qui ont été gâtés par les réformes accordées par Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, et ceux qui n'ont rien obtenu, ou si peu que cela est vécu comme une insulte. Les 12 à 15 millions d'Alevs, minoritaires dans une Turquie majoritairement sunnite, et dont Aysegül fait partie, se rangent dans cette seconde catégorie. L'université de Nevşehir, petite ville de l'Anatolie, sera rebaptisée du nom de l'un de leurs saints, Hacı Bektaş Veli. Voilà l'unique mesure concédée par le chef du gouvernement.

Mettre fin aux discriminations à l'encontre de cette communauté qui rassemble environ 20% de la population est pourtant essentiel à la préservation de la cohésion sociale en Turquie, met en garde les observateurs de la vie politique. «*Ils sont citoyens d'un Etat dans lequel ils ne parviennent pas à*

jouir de leurs droits», s'inquiète l'intellectuel Ahmet Altan, qui n'a «*jamais vu autant de tensions interethniques sunnites-Alevs qu'aujourd'hui*».

Ces musulmans vénèrent Ali, ne font pas le ramadan et boivent de l'alcool. Hommes et femmes prient ensemble. Leurs cérémonies religieuses se déroulent dans les *cemevi*, que le gouvernement islamo-conservateur actuel, comme les précédents, refuse de reconnaître comme des lieux de culte. De même, ils doivent toujours suivre les cours de religion sunnite à l'école. Une obligation pourtant condamnée par la Cour européenne des Droits de l'Homme.

«*La division entre Alevs et sunnites est une des lignes de fracture les plus sensibles de la Turquie, selon l'éditorialiste Semih Idiz. Elle peut encore exploser, comme l'ont montré les horribles événements qui ont ponctué notre histoire.*» Plusieurs massacres se sont produits depuis la fondation de la République turque en 1923. Et, en 1993, une foule d'islamistes extrémistes a mis le feu à

l'hôtel Madimak, dans la ville de Sivas, où des intellectuels majoritairement alevs étaient réunis, faisant 35 victimes. «*Pour moi, être alevite, c'est la peur dans les yeux de ma mère*», se souvient Asli Dogan. La jeune femme avait 13 ans lors de l'incendie : «*Nous regardions les informations sur Sivas à la télévision, des gens avec des bâtons sont sortis de la mosquée devant notre immeuble en hurlant "Allah Akbar"*».

Cette haine remonte à l'Empire ottoman. En mai, le gouvernement en a ravivé la mémoire en annonçant que le troisième pont sur le Bosphore porterait le nom de Yavuz Sultan Selim, qui fit massacrer 40 000 de ces «*hérétiques*» au XVI^e siècle. Quelques jours après l'inauguration du chantier, les Alevs participaient en masse à la gigantesque contestation contre Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, accusé de dérives autoritaires, place Taksim.

Ils restent d'ailleurs en première ligne dans la fronde antigouvernementale qui a fait six morts au cours des cinq derniers mois. Trois des victimes sont alevs, et trois sont alaouites. Ces derniers, arabophones, sont des cousins très lointains des premiers, turcophones. Ils vivent dans la province turque de Hatay, dans le sud du pays. Il s'agit de l'ancienne province d'Alexandrette cédée à Ankara par la France, alors puissance mandataire en Syrie. Ces citoyens turcs arabophones appartiennent à la même famille religieuse que Bachar al-Assad.

La situation est d'autant plus sensible que la politique ouvertement pro-sunnite d'Ankara envers la Syrie attise la colère. Les amalgames entre Alevs et Alaouites sont légion. Résultat, les deux minorités se rapprochent. Or les haines confessionnelles dans le pays voisin ont déjà surgi de ce côté de la frontière. Le ressentiment des Alaouites turcs contre le Parti de la Justice et du Développement (AKP), au pouvoir, auquel ils reprochent de soutenir les mouvements djihadistes en Syrie, augmente de façon préoccupante. Des troubles agitent à intervalles réguliers la région de Hatay. Cependant, à quelques mois des élections municipales et présidentielle, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan n'a pour l'instant pas fait le choix de l'apaisement mais celui de flatter son électorat sunnite. ■

(1) Le prénom a été modifié.

SYRIE : LES ENJEUX DE L'INTROUVABLE CONFÉRENCE GENÈVE 2

ANALYSE

PAR BENJAMIN BARTHE
Service International

Annoncée, repoussée, oubliée, puis réannoncée, re-repoussée et ainsi de suite depuis six mois, la conférence de paix sur la Syrie, baptisée Genève 2, n'en finit pas d'user les nerfs des diplomates onusiens qui s'échinent à la mettre sur pied. Longtemps elle a semblé inatteignable, telle une lubie poursuivie par quelques idéalistes, alors que les vrais débats se déroulaient sur le terrain, armes à la main. Mais la perspective de voir des représentants du régime et de l'opposition syrienne s'asseoir à la même table a gagné quelques degrés de réalisme. Genève 2 pourrait s'ouvrir, dans le meilleur des cas, courant décembre.

C'est un communiqué de la Coalition nationale syrienne (CNS), diffusé le 11 novembre, qui a mis en lumière ces progrès. Dans ce texte, le principal rassemblement d'opposants au régime syrien se disait prêt à participer à ces pourparlers, « sur la base d'un transfert du pouvoir à une autorité transitoire », dotée des « pleins pouvoirs exécutifs » et formée par « consentement mutuel ». Une formulation conforme au document de Genève élaboré en juillet 2012 par les Etats-Unis et la Russie, restée lettre morte depuis, en raison de divergences d'interprétation entre les deux grandes puissances. « Il faut être réaliste, plaide Najib Ghadbian, l'ambassadeur aux Etats-Unis de la Coalition. Nous ne pouvons pas nous permettre d'être vus comme les responsables de l'échec de la solution politique. »

La Coalition a précisé que « Bachar Al-Assad et ses associés ne joueront aucun rôle dans la phase transitoire et dans la future Syrie », en accord avec un communiqué adopté à Londres, le

22 octobre, par les Amis de la Syrie. Mais ce rajout au texte initial ne doit pas faire illusion : le principal courant de l'opposition, autrefois hostile au communiqué de Genève, se fait à l'idée que la démission de Bachar Al-Assad ne peut être que l'aboutissement des négociations et non un préalable à leur ouverture. « Aujourd'hui, c'est ridicule de poser des conditions pareilles, confie un conseiller de la Coalition. On sait très bien que les Russes n'accepteront jamais cela. Et, en même temps, des informations nous laissent penser que Moscou n'est plus à 100 % derrière Bachar. Une délégation qui sait parler politique pourrait s'entendre avec les Russes. »

Deuxième évolution, qui découle de la précédente : le principe de s'asseoir en face d'un émissaire du président syrien n'est plus une ligne rouge. Au début de l'année, la proposition du premier chef de la CNS, le cheikh Moaz Al-Khatib, d'ouvrir des négociations avec Farouk Al-Sharaa, le vice-président syrien, en délicatesse avec

le régime, avait été très mal accueillie par les militants. Aujourd'hui, la perspective de négocier avec Walid Mouallem, le ministre des affaires étrangères syrien, probable chef de la délégation que le régime pourrait envoyer à Genève, suscite moins d'opposition. « Pour tous nos membres, qui ont perdu des proches dans la répression, le sujet a été longtemps tabou », explique Munzer Akbik, le chef de cabinet du nouveau président de la CNS, Ahmed Jarba. En filigrane de cette évolution, on peut lire l'impact de l'enlèvement des combats et la prise de conscience, après la volte-face américaine sur les armes chimiques, qu'il est vain de parier sur une intervention étrangère.

La baguette magique des « khawaja »

Troisième signe encourageant : en limitant ses demandes d'avant-conférence à la libération de prisonniers et à l'acheminement d'aide humanitaire dans les zones assiégées par l'armée, la CNS se rapproche des positions de son

concurrent au sein de l'opposition syrienne : le Comité de coordination nationale pour le changement démocratique (CCN), une coalition de partis et de personnalités issus de la gauche laïque, critique de la militarisation du soulèvement. « C'est la baguette magique des khawaja ("étrangers"), sourit l'un de ses dirigeants, Haytham Al-Manna, en référence aux pressions exercées par les Amis de la Syrie sur la CNS. Le communiqué de Londres, c'était pour sauver la face. Tous les pays qui ont reconnu la CNS comme le représentant du peuple syrien lui demandent d'aller à Genève. A moins de perdre leur soutien, elle ne peut plus dire non. »

Reste un obstacle, et pas le moindre. Même s'il a très tôt signalé sa disposition à participer à Genève 2, le régime n'a jamais reconnu explicitement le communiqué de juillet 2012, censé servir de socle à cette conférence. Dernièrement, Bachar Al-Assad, confiant dans sa capacité à l'emporter militairement, évoquait même la possibilité de se présenter à l'élection présidentielle, prévue en 2014. Le CCN, proche de Moscou, s'accommode de cette ambiguïté. « Le régime viendra à la conférence, dans l'idée de désarticuler l'article sur la formation de "l'autorité transitoire", le seul qui lui fait peur, prédit Haytham Al-Manna. Mais, si toutes les autres parties autour de la table insistent sur ce point, il ne pourra pas finasser. »

La CNS, très suspicieuse à l'égard du Kremlin et peu confiante dans le soutien de la Maison Blanche, redoute un processus à rallonge, qui l'éloigne de son objectif initial. « Nous irons à Genève pour lancer une transition démocratique, prévient Khaled Saleh, un porte-parole, pas pour faire gagner du temps au régime. » A supposer que la conférence s'ouvre effectivement, quelle probabilité de réussite faut-il lui accorder ? « Nulle ou presque », prédit un cadre de la CNS, avec un sourire dépité. ■

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Irak : 4 morts et 12 blessés dans des fusillades et explosions à Diyala

27 novembre 2013 - Agence de presse Xinhua

Quatre personnes ont été tuées et douze autres blessées dans des fusillades et des explosions distinctes, dont un attentat suicide, dans la province irakienne de Diyala (est), ont annoncé mercredi des sources officielles.

Un membre des peshmerga (gardes kurdes) a été tué et neuf autres blessés lorsqu'un kamikaze a conduit sa voiture bourrée d'explosifs dans leur poste de contrôle à Jbara, à une centaine de kilomètres au nord de Baqouba, chef-lieu de la province situé à 65 kilomètres au nord-est de Bagdad, a confié à l'agence Xinhua le maire de la ville Aref Adel via téléphone.

Jbara fait partie des régions disputées par les Kurdes et les autorités de Bagdad. Les Kurdes souhaitent annexer ces régions adjacentes à la région du Kurdistan, mais Bagdad s'oppose fermement à leur tentative.

Dans un incident distinct, des hommes ont fait irruption dans la maison d'un membre du groupe paramilitaire Sahwa soutenu par le gouvernement, au petit matin, tuant le membre visé et son épouse, a affirmé une source de la police provinciale.

Parallèlement, des hommes ont abattu un civil près de sa maison à Bani Saad, à une vingtaine de kilomètres au sud-ouest de Baqouba, a-t-elle ajouté.

Une bombe placée en bord de route a explosé au passage d'une patrouille militaire à Hashmiyat, près de Baqouba, endommageant un véhicule militaire et blessant trois soldats à son bord, toujours selon la même source.

La province de Diyala, qui s'étend de l'est de Bagdad à la frontière orientale du pays, est devenue instable depuis l'invasion de l'Irak en 2003, en dépit de la multiplication des opérations militaires contre les groupes militants. □

Les négociations de Genève divisent le pouvoir iranien

Les milieux conservateurs s'opposent à toute nouvelle concession sur le dossier nucléaire

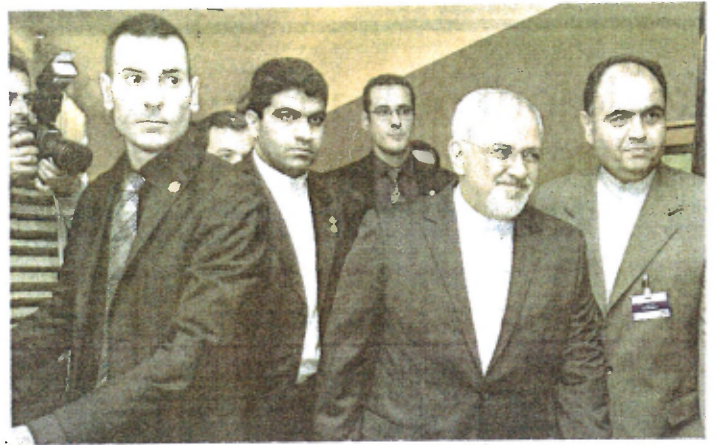
Quelques heures avant le début des négociations sur le dossier nucléaire iranien à Genève, Ali Khamenei est enfin sorti de son silence, mercredi 20 novembre. Prononçant un discours à Téhéran devant une dizaine de milliers de *bassidjis* (la milice islamique du régime), le Guide suprême, la plus haute autorité du pays et qui a le dernier mot sur la question nucléaire, a défini « la ligne rouge » que devrait respecter l'équipe des négociateurs. « Je ne me mêle pas des détails des pourparlers, mais il ne faut pas reculer, même d'un iota, sur les droits du peuple », a-t-il précisé, faisant allusion au droit « indéniable » des Iraniens à l'enrichissement de l'uranium.

« L'Etat américain a été toujours despotique, malveillant et haineux à l'égard du peuple et du régime islamique », a ajouté Ali Khamenei, avant de s'en prendre aux autorités françaises qui « se sont abaissées » face à Israël et aux Etats-Unis. Paris a été pointé du doigt par les responsables politiques iraniens, ainsi que par la presse et par des internautes sur les réseaux sociaux, qui

l'accusent d'avoir bloqué un accord lors de la dernière session de négociations entre Téhéran et les « 5+1 » (les cinq membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies plus l'Allemagne), du 7 au 10 novembre à Genève.

Le récent voyage en Israël du président français François Hollande et la convergence de ses points de vue sur le contentieux nucléaire iranien avec ceux de l'Etat juif ont également suscité de vives réactions en Iran. « C'est une honte pour le peuple français, a soutenu Ali Khamenei. Mais il faut qu'il trouve une solution à cela. »

Si le Guide a pris soin d'insister sur son soutien au gouvernement du président Hassan Rohani et aux « responsables des négociations », la presse iranienne et plusieurs responsables politiques conservateurs n'ont eu de cesse de les critiquer. Une centaine de parlementaires (sur un total de 290 élus) hostiles au gouvernement, ont rédigé une proposition de loi qui, si elle était votée, interdirait à Mohammad Javad Zarif, le



Le ministre iranien des affaires étrangères, Mohammad Javad Zarif (deuxième à partir de la droite), à son arrivée à Genève, vendredi 22 novembre. FABRICE COFFRINI/AP

La convergence des points de vue de François Hollande avec ceux de l'Etat juif a suscité de vives réactions en Iran

ministre des affaires étrangères, de céder sur certains sujets cruciaux. Le gouvernement serait ainsi obligé de poursuivre le développement de « tous les sites nucléaires » et « l'enrichissement de l'uranium à 20 % ». Autant de points au cœur des négociations avec le groupe 5+1.

Le plus important quotidien ultraconservateur, *Kayhan*, a, quant à lui, mis en garde les diplomates iraniens contre de « nouvelles concessions » lors de ce round de discussion prévu pour durer jusqu'à vendredi. Son rédac-

teur en chef, Hossein Shariatmadari, nommé par le Guide suprême, a fait valoir, le 20 novembre, que « Téhéran avait déjà rempli certaines exigences du groupe des 5+1, sans avoir rien obtenu de concret en retour. Voilà pourquoi c'est maintenant à eux de faire quelques concessions à notre pays ». Cette prise de position sonne comme une mise en garde du Guide à l'attention du président Rohani.

Le président continue toutefois de défendre la nécessité de trouver un accord à Genève. « Si les négociations aboutissent, cela sera dans l'intérêt de toute la région, mais aussi du monde occidental », a-t-il déclaré, mercredi, lors d'une réunion avec le gouvernement. Afin de rappeler au monde occidental que le temps pour parvenir à un accord n'était pas infini, Hassan Rohani a encore une fois évoqué « cette occasion exceptionnelle », rendue possible, selon lui, par son élection le 14 juin. « Il faut que tout le monde utilise cette fenêtre », a-t-il conclu. ■

GHAZAL GOLSHIRI

LIBAN

Au moins dix morts dans une double explosion à proximité de l'ambassade d'Iran à Beyrouth

BEYROUTH. Deux explosions très puissantes, qui ont retenti, mardi 19 novembre, en milieu de matinée, à proximité de l'ambassade d'Iran à Beyrouth, dans le sud de la capitale libanaise, ont fait au moins dix morts. Une source sécuritaire libanaise a attribué cette attaque à une voiture piégée, tandis qu'une autre a rapporté que deux roquettes avaient été tirées vers l'ambassade, dont les alentours ont été dévastés. La guerre civile en Syrie, voisine du Liban, a accentué les tensions entre les sunnites et les chiïtes, en particulier le Hezbollah, qui s'est engagé à combattre aux côtés de Damas aussi longtemps que nécessaire. ■ - (AFP, Reuters.)



Kurds are now shaping the Middle East

With governments embroiled in uprisings, Kurds are beginning to benefit – is autonomy in north-east Syria just the start?



Ranj Alaaldin
theguardian.com

The leading Syrian Kurdish rebel group has said it intends to form a government in Kurdish-dominated north-east Syria, where it has been operating as the de facto government since last year. This signals the emergence of another autonomous Kurdish region, following the autonomy that Iraq's Kurds have enjoyed since the 1990s.

The Middle East's Arab spring uprisings have placed the region's Kurds in the rare situation where their powerful and historically hostile neighbours are engaged in conflicts elsewhere, and find their domestic stability undermined and weakened as a result.

Turkey, for example, has spent the best part of its history struggling with its Kurdish issue and the political and territorial demands of its 20 million Kurds. Over the course of the past 30 years, at a cost of more than 40,000 lives, it has suppressed Kurdish human rights and waged war with Kurdish rebel group the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' party), which seeks a combination of demands related to autonomy and human rights.

Yet, Ankara dramatically miscalculated at the advent of the Syria conflict by supporting Sunni Arab groups and hardline Islamists, which disregarded the rights and demands of Syrian Kurds. The position backfired after Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, responded to Turkey's swift support for the Syrian opposition by allowing the Kurds in the north-east to take control of several towns and cities.

Turkey fears the rise of the Kurds in Syrian Kurdistan because the PYD (Democratic Union party), a sister grouping of the PKK, is now the de facto government of the region. This has emboldened the PKK and strengthened its hand both within Turkey and regionally. Assad's carte blanche for the PYD to consolidate its position in the region and establish checkpoints, educational and



A member of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union party's armed wing flashes a victory sign in Ras al-Ain, north Syria. Photograph: Stringer/Reuters

healthcare services, allowed the group to entrench its dominance and influence. It has a well-trained and armed group of fighters known as the YPG (People's Protection Unit).

The PYD announcement, last Tuesday, included the creation of a parliament of 82 members elected from three districts across the region, which will each have their own local assemblies. The plan is due to be implemented within six months, meaning that the PYD will officially secure its control over large swaths of strategically important land with significant energy resources. This will enhance the prospects of Turkey's own restive Kurds to achieve similar rights and edge toward achieving territorial autonomy.

Ankara may be able to maintain the territorial integrity of the Turkish state by committing to the fragile but historic peace deal with the PKK, which was announced in March after the imprisoned PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, called on fighters to lay down their arms. The settlement is, however, still some way from being realised, and there is still little to suggest that Turkey's domestic politics can muster the political will to implement the necessary reforms.

The underlying weakness in the Kurdish

cause remains one of division. Iraqi Kurdistan's main party, the Kurdistan Democratic party (KDP), has a historic rivalry with the PKK/PYD.

The Iraqi Kurdistan president, Massoud Barzani, has just been hosted by the Turkish state in Diyarbakir, the largest Kurdish city in Turkey. While the event was a historical one signaling the change in Turkish-Kurdish relations, it was equally the result of Turkish realpolitik and efforts to weaken the Kurdish hand on the regional front. The Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, is also courting the Kurdish vote for forthcoming elections in Turkey.

The composition of both the Iraqi and Syrian state remains under threat, which could catapult the Kurds into a greater position of strength. At the least, they could operate with increased leverage over their Arab counterparts. At most, the disintegration of Iraq and Syria could produce a Kurdish state of some shape and form.

Whatever the future may hold for the Kurds, they have emerged as important shapers of the Middle East, rather than its victims. ♦

Push on Iran nuclear deal strains U.S.-Israeli ties

WASHINGTON

BY DAVID E. SANGER
AND JODI RUDOREN

To the Israeli government, the preliminary deal with Iran that the Obama administration is trying to seal this week is a giveaway to a government that has spent two decades building a large nuclear program. It enshrines the status quo — at a time when the Iranians are within reach of the technical capability to build a bomb — and rewards some unproven leaders with cash and sanctions relief.

President Obama and his top aides see the same draft deal in different terms. To them, it is a first effort to freeze the Iranian program, to buy some time to negotiate a better deal, and to stop two methods of developing a bomb, one involving uranium, the other plutonium. In return, the Iranians get modest relief from sanctions, but not what they desire, the ability to sell oil around the world. That would come only later as part of a final agreement that would require the Iranians to dismantle much of their nuclear infrastructure.

Those two views have politicized the question of whether the accord that the United States and its European allies are considering should be termed a good deal. It is a fundamental disagreement that has left in tatters whatever halfhearted efforts Mr. Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel have made over the past five years to argue that they are on the same page on Iran.

Every time Mr. Obama and his secretary of state, John Kerry, ask for a little time to test the new Iranian leadership's claims that it is ready for a new approach, Mr. Netanyahu responds that the proposed agreement is "a very bad deal," "extremely dangerous" or, as he said in an interview with CNN on Sunday, "an exceedingly bad deal." And he has often raised the specter of an Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear facilities even if a deal is signed, something the Obama administration believes would split apart the global coalition it has built to squeeze Iran.

Yet the disagreement is about more than negotiating tactics. In interviews, both American and Israeli officials conceded that the terms of the preliminary accord reflect a difference in goals. Mr. Obama speaks often of his determination to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon; Mr. Netanyahu sets a higher bar of preventing Iran from gaining, or keeping, the capability to build one.

Mr. Netanyahu "will be satisfied with nothing less than the dismantlement of every scrap of the Iranian nuclear infrastructure," one administration strategist said the other day. "We'd love

that, too — but there's no way that's going to happen at this point in the negotiation. And for us, the goal is to make sure that we are putting limits and constraints on the program, and ensuring that if the Iranians decided to race for a bomb, we would know in time to react."

The White House, alarmed by Mr. Netanyahu's outspoken opposition and by an effort in Congress to enact a new round of sanctions on Iran that Israel supports, is trying to shore up its own arguments. Mr. Obama is bringing the leaders and ranking members of the Senate foreign relations, intelligence, armed services and banking committees to the White House on Tuesday to make the case that if Iran is going to be coaxed into a deal, the country's new leaders must go home with some modest appetizer of sanctions relief — as an indication that the United States is ready to deal.

The details of the proposal have been closely held by the administration — and, the Israelis claim, from Jerusalem — but what is known about the deal gives both sides plenty of talking points.

While the Americans say it "freezes" the Iranian program and rolls it back, in fact only some elements are frozen, and rollbacks in the initial accord are relatively minor. For example, Iran would

The disagreement reflects a clash of fundamental goals.

continue adding to its stockpile of low-enriched uranium, meaning uranium enriched to reactor grade, or less than 5 percent purity. But the United States maintains that under details it cannot yet disclose, the overall size of Iran's stockpile would not increase.

The reason appears to be that Iran would agree to convert some of its medium-enriched uranium — fuel enriched to 20 percent purity, or near bomb grade — into an oxide form that is on the way to becoming reactor fuel. But that process can be easily reversed, notes Olli Heinonen, former chief inspector of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Mr. Netanyahu's camp and some Israeli analysts say the Israeli leader's unstinting opposition is both substantive and political. He truly believes that a deal lifting sanctions without fully halting enrichment and dismantling centrifuges is a mistake. But he has also staked his premiership on fighting the Iranian nuclear threat, and the change in approach by his closest allies leaves him a bit rudderless.

David E. Sanger reported from Washington, and Jodi Rudoren from Jerusalem. Steven Erlanger contributed from New York, Isabel Kershner from Jerusalem, and Mark Landler from Washington.

U.S. weighs destroying Syria arsenal aboard barge

WASHINGTON

BY THOM SHANKER
AND ERIC SCHMITT

Unable to find a country willing to dispose of Syria's chemical weapons, the United States is considering plans to place the chemical components of the weapons on a barge where they would be dissolved or incinerated, according to senior American officials.

The two systems under review are intended to destroy the precursor materials that are designed to be combined to form chemical munitions. Syria's smaller arsenal of operational chemical weapons would be destroyed separately, officials said.

Officials from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which is operating in Syria to locate and identify the weapons, would monitor the destruction, which would be carried out following safety standards set by legislation in the United States and the European Union, according to officials familiar with the proposal. The system could be operational in 75 days.

The seaborne options have received more serious consideration after Albania on Friday turned down an appeal by the United States to destroy the weapons on its territory; the decision followed street protests by thousands of Albanians. Norway rejected an earlier request, saying it did not have the expertise or the facilities to destroy the weapons.

Under one plan, five incinerators operating at temperatures of 2,700 degrees Fahrenheit, or 1,480 Celsius, aboard the barge would be able to destroy all of Syria's most serious precursor materials for chemical weapons in less than 60 days. Officials said the byproducts would be harmless salts and other solids.

No American companies, ships or personnel would be involved under this proposal, although officials said it was possible that the American military would help provide security in the international waters where the barge would be situated, whether by assigning warships or surveillance planes to the mission.

The second proposal focuses on a highly sophisticated mobile system developed by the Pentagon, known as the Field Deployable Hydrolysis System, which is designed to convert chemical agents into compounds that cannot be used for military purposes by mixing them with water and other chemicals and then heating them, American officials said.

Syrian refugee crisis is called the most dire in a generation

KILIS, TURKEY

BY NORIMITSU ONISHI

As the boom of shelling resounded along Turkey's border with Syria here on a recent afternoon, Zakaria Deeb had nowhere left to run.

He had traveled 100 miles to Kilis with his family, chasing a false rumor that refugees would be allowed into a Turkish-run camp in the city, about 50 miles north of the Syrian city Aleppo. Instead, along with hundreds of other Syrians, the Deebes were now squatting in a gravel-strewn field across from the camp, sleeping under plastic sheets hanging from the branch of a cypress tree.

Nearly three years of civil war in Syria have created what the United Nations, governments and international humanitarian organizations describe as the most challenging refugee crisis in a generation — bigger than the one unleashed by the Rwandan genocide and laden with the sectarianism of the Balkan wars. With no end in sight in the conflict and with large parts of Syria already destroyed, governments and organizations are quietly preparing for the refugee crisis to last years.

The Deebes fled their home a year ago because of fighting between Syrian rebels and government forces. Recent clashes between Kurdish fighters and the Qaeda-linked Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, pushed them into Turkey. Now, just on the other side of the border here, ISIS fighters were battling yet another rebel group, the Northern Storm.

"We expected the revolution to be over quickly, like in Libya and Egypt, but it's been nearly three years already, and God knows when this war will end," Mr. Deeb, 31, said, peering at the plumes of white smoke rising inside Syria. Children shrieked as another large mortar shell exploded across the border.

A stray bullet from Syria had landed inside the camp in the morning, wounding a 5-year-old girl in the foot. "If this camp is full, we're willing to go to any camp inside Turkey," he said. "We don't want to go back to Syria."

Syrians have been pouring out of their country in recent months, fleeing an increasingly violent and murky conflict that is pitting scores of armed groups against one another as much as against the government. Numbering just 300,000 one year ago, the refugees now total 2.1 million, and the United Nations predicts their numbers could swell to 3.5 million by the end of the year.



Syrians crossing into Turkey last month. The total number of Syrians who have fled their country is now 2.1 million, up from 300,000 a year ago, and could reach 3.5 million by year-end.

"The fighting continues, people are getting displaced and we don't know how long it's going to take," said Amin Awad, the head of the United Nations' refugee agency in the Middle East. "Therefore, aside from making sure the humanitarian operations are running, we need to support the host communities and governments."

The exodus has stretched the resources of the region's host countries — Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and even Turkey, the biggest and richest by far. Camps are full. But so are many neighborhoods in cities, towns and villages, where the

"The Syrian refugees want more than what we can provide."

Syrians' presence has raised rents, undercut wages and increased tensions. In Lebanon, the smallest of the host countries and the most politically fragile, Syrian refugees are expected soon to make up a quarter of the population.

The flood has also raised fears that the refugees will import the Syrian conflict into the host countries, and destabi-

lize the fragile borders. Like the other host countries, Turkey, which is actively supporting the Syrian opposition, was struggling to control the mass movements across its border.

In Hatay, Turkey's southwestern province, hundreds of Syrians could be seen crossing illegally, unchecked by border guards or soldiers. Stretches of the border appeared porous and lawless. Criminal gangs thriving in the cross-border smuggling of gasoline and other goods could be seen working in broad daylight, using walkie-talkies to direct trucks into and out of Syria.

A few miles from one of the biggest smuggling centers, the Turkish border town Beş Arslan, soldiers could sometimes be seen chasing individual Syrians clambering down a hill into Turkey. In a cat-and-mouse game played out over the day, Syrians crouched behind trees and rocks, some successfully slipping into Turkey; others were caught by soldiers and sent back.

Those turned away often try again later in the day. As soon as darkness fell, hundreds of Syrians began pouring out of Beş Arslan onto the highway, where relatives and taxi drivers were waiting.

Slipping in and out of the headlights, they stuffed large suitcases into vehicles that quickly took them deeper into Turkey.

Turkey has already spent \$2 billion sheltering 200,000 Syrian refugees in 21 camps. But an estimated 400,000 live in Turkish communities, and many have exhausted their savings and are turning to Turkey for help. Turkish officials, who have been praised for their well-run camps, are expressing frustration.

"The Syrian refugees want more than what we can provide," said Suleyman Tapsiz, the governor of Kilis. "So we're caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, if we provide good services, more and more people will come. On the other hand, if we don't provide good services, we risk being labeled a government that doesn't provide humanitarian help properly."

The United Nations has asked for more than \$5 billion in humanitarian aid this year for Syria, its biggest financial appeal ever for a single crisis. Officials say the high costs result not only from the scale of the crisis but also from the difficulties of catering to a refugee population used to middle-class conditions.

Dry food rations have been typically distributed inside refugee camps during crises in Africa, while registered Syrian refugees are given vouchers or debit cards to buy food at supermarkets. The cost is greater, but the Syrians prefer the freedom of preparing their own meals.

Governments and humanitarian groups are increasingly working under the assumption that the crisis will last a long time.

The Danish Refugee Council recently established two community centers in Turkey where refugees can study Turkish and English, as well as take computer lessons and learn other skills. In the center in Altinozu, in Hatay Province, the Syrians and Turkish locals have also mixed in cooking classes and soccer matches.

At a Turkish-language class offered by the city of Gaziantep, a few dozen Syrian men and women were being taught the pronunciation of vowels and the differences with Arabic.

Anas Hejazi, 26, was attending the class with his father. They both worked as dentists in Damascus before coming to Turkey six months ago. Acquiring some Turkish, he hoped, would increase his chances of eventually earning a license to practice.

"I need to enter the Turkish community because my life is now here," he said. "I need to speak their language."

Ayatollah's speech colors talks

GENEVA

BY MICHAEL R. GORDON
AND JODI RUDOREN

The anti-Zionist speech by Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, continued to stir controversy on Thursday as international negotiators resumed talks here with Iranian officials on Tehran's nuclear program.

Politicians in Israel expressed outrage not only about Ayatollah Khamenei's description of Israel on Wednesday as "the rabid dog of the region," but also about the mild condemnation the speech elicited from the United States and much of Europe.

Hilik Bar, the deputy speaker of Israel's Parliament and a member of the opposition Labor Party, wrote to John Kerry, the secretary of state, and Catherine Ashton, the European Union's foreign policy chief, insisting that they "stand up against the dark, racist statements and incitement."

The French president, François Hollande, responded sharply to Ayatollah Khamenei's speech on Wednesday, saying that "Iran must offer answers" in the nuclear talks "and not a certain number of provocative statements."

But a senior Obama administration official was more circumspect Wednesday night in responding to the ayatollah's speech, which also assailed the United States and France.

"I don't ever like it when people use rhetoric that in any way talks about the U.S. in ways that I find very uncomfortable and not warranted whatsoever," said the official, who cannot be identified under the diplomatic protocol for briefing reporters.

"There are decades of mistrust between the United States and Iran, and we certainly have had many people in

Politicians in Israel expressed outrage.

our society say difficult things about Iran and Iranians," the official added. "So I would hope that neither in the U.S. nor in Iran would leaders use rhetoric that may work well in a domestic constituency, but add to the decades of mistrust on both sides."

In his televised address to thousands of militiamen in Tehran on Wednesday, Ayatollah Khamenei said that Israel was "doomed to extinction." He had harsh words for France, which has been outspoken about the need to constrain Iran's nuclear program. Ayatollah

Khamenei accused French leaders of "kneeling before the Israeli regime."

The ayatollah also accused the United States of "inhuman deeds," citing its decision to use atomic weapons against Japan during World War II, its treatment of Native Americans and slavery. But he also said that the Iran wanted friendly ties with all nations, including the United States.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seized on Ayatollah Khamenei's speech to press his case against the pending deal with Iran that is being hammered out in Geneva.

"This reminds us of the dark regimes of the past that plotted against us first, and then against all of humanity," Mr. Netanyahu said at a meeting with Russian Jewish leaders during a visit to Moscow. "The public responded to him with calls of 'Death to America! Death to Israel!'" Mr. Netanyahu noted. "Doesn't this sound familiar to you? This is the real Iran! We are not confused. They must not have nuclear weapons."

But some Israeli analysts said the statements from Ayatollah Khamenei were more likely a sign that Iran was on the brink of reaching an agreement in Geneva and that he was concerned about hard-liners at home.

"As Iran approaches some kind of détente with the West, we can expect its rhetoric on Israel to become harsher," Brandon Friedman, a researcher at Tel Aviv University's Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, told The Jerusalem Post. Ayatollah Khamenei "wants to set the stage for a deal," Mr. Friedman said, and "needs to reinforce the remaining pillar of ideology: the Little Satan, or Israel." For decades, Iranian leaders have referred to the United States as the Great Satan.

American officials, representatives from five other world powers and Ms. Ashton are trying to conclude an interim accord with Iran that would halt Iran's nuclear advances for six months, so that negotiators could pursue a more comprehensive agreement.

Ms. Ashton met with Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's foreign minister, on Thursday afternoon, "seeking further progress," her spokesman said.

After that meeting, Iran's top nuclear negotiator, Abbas Araçchi, said Iran had regained "some" of its "lost trust" in the nuclear negotiations, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported.

Michael R. Gordon reported from Geneva, and Jodi Rudoren from Jerusalem. Thomas Erdbrink contributed reporting from Tehran.

Comment le pétrole a fait de la Turquie une proche partenaire du Kurdistan irakien

Enquête

Elisa Perrigeur, à Istanbul
<http://www.latribune.fr>

Dix ans après la guerre d'Irak, la province autonome du Kurdistan irakien (KRG), dans le nord du pays, est devenue l'un des principaux partenaires de la Turquie, séduite par ses ressources énergétiques. À Bagdad, le gouvernement central conteste la légalité des accords contractés par le KRG. L'idylle turco-kurde accentue la fragilité géopolitique de tout le Proche-Orient.

D'ici à quelques semaines, l'or noir coulera à flots entre les montagnes et vallées du Kurdistan irakien et le sud de la Turquie. Un nouvel oléoduc de 281 km transportera le pétrole extrait des champs de Taq-Taq (au nord de l'Irak) au port turc de Ceyhan, à proximité de la frontière syrienne.

Le long tuyau devrait voir passer 300.000 barils de pétrole par jour (bpj) l'année prochaine, 1 million en 2015, puis 2 millions en 2019, selon l'ambition des autorités. 10 milliards de mètres cubes de gaz par an seront aussi transférés d'ici les prochaines années. Véritable arme économique, il offre au Kurdistan irakien la possibilité d'exporter son pétrole en direct pour la première fois et d'accentuer son pouvoir régional.

La consommation Turque doublera dans le dix ans

Tony Hayward, l'ex-patron de British Petroleum, le surnomme la « frontière ultime du pétrole ». Le gouvernement autonome du Kurdistan irakien (KRG) - officiellement reconnu par la Constitution irakienne en 2005 - dispose d'un trésor noir très convoité qui fait sa fortune depuis la fin de la guerre d'Irak, il y a dix ans.

Sous les terres fertiles des trois gouvernorats du territoire dorment pas moins de 45 milliards de barils de brut, soit 7% des réserves mondiales et plus de 30% des réserves de l'Irak, selon les experts. Le nouveau pipeline viendra seconder l'oléoduc de 970 km



Un centre de contrôle de la Botas Petroleum and Pipeline Corporation, à 35 km à l'ouest d'Ankara, qui transporte le gaz naturel irakien à travers la Turquie, « terre de transit énergétique ».

qui relie la ville de Kirkouk au terminal de Ceyhan.

Cible fréquente des sabotages récurrents depuis la guerre d'Irak, ce dernier a explosé des dizaines de fois en 2013. L'infrastructure qui délivre quelque 1,6 million bpj en provenance d'Irak, n'a la possibilité d'importer que 700.000 bpj en provenance du KRG et atteint ses limites.

Or, dans les montagnes du Nord, les champs pétrolifères fleurissent et les petites compagnies pétrolières, aujourd'hui autour de 40, prolifèrent.

Cet or noir est une aubaine pour la Turquie, énergétiquement dépen-

« La Turquie et le KRG projettent de multiplier par dix la production de pétrole régional, annonce le professeur Seyfettin Gürsel, les extractions se multiplient. » Cet expert de l'université de Bahcesehir à Istanbul vante « une opportunité extraordinaire avec un impact très positif sur la création d'emplois dans la région pour les années à venir ».

dante. Alors qu'Ankara importe pour 50 milliards de dollars de gaz et de pétrole par an (en partie de l'Iran, de Russie et de l'Azerbaïdjan pour le gaz), elle pourra assouvir ses besoins grandissants. La consommation de gaz et de pétrole de ses 75 millions d'habitants devrait en effet doubler dans les dix prochaines années. Rien d'étonnant à ce que ce soit une compagnie turco-britannique, Genel Energy, basée à Ankara, qui exploite aujourd'hui le champ pétrolifère de Taq-Taq, d'où partira le pipeline. Un pipeline

« La Turquie sert de pont entre les pays émetteurs et consommateurs, précisait en mai dernier, lors d'une conférence, le président Abdullah Gül, il est pour nous naturel de vouloir devenir un hub. »

qui va davantage confirmer la position de la Turquie comme « terre de transit » énergétique.

Selon un accord ratifié le 6 novembre dernier entre les deux pays, après un passage en Turquie, les énergies seront acheminées vers les marchés mondiaux et notamment l'Europe. Une route énergétique qui s'ajoute aux nombreuses que compte déjà la Turquie. Les oléoducs et gazoducs, Kirkouk-Yumurtalik, Bakou-Tbilissi-Ceyhan, Blue Stream... sillonnent déjà le pays et en font une voie essentielle pour le ravitaillement ➤

► européen, important des énergies de la mer Caspienne, de la mer Noire et des régions d'Asie centrale.

Le prochain champ de la bataille énergétique ?

Les rêves énergétiques de la Turquie et du KRG sont néanmoins le cauchemar de Bagdad. Dix ans après l'intervention américaine, les divisions règnent toujours en Irak et le gouvernement central de Bagdad s'inquiète du développement insolent de sa province autonome (+ 8% de croissance annuelle), qui dispose toujours de 17% du budget national.

D'après plusieurs observateurs, si le Kurdistan irakien, qui compte 5 millions d'habitants, devenait indépendant, il deviendrait l'un des dix pays les plus riches de la planète et le quatrième plus gros producteur de pétrole mondial. Si Erbil assure qu'elle reversera 83% des bénéfices de l'oléoduc à Bagdad, la capitale continue de qualifier le pipeline d'« illégal », tout autant que les accords directement signés entre le KRG et les compagnies pétrolières. « Tous les contrats doivent passer par le gouvernement central », martèle l'Irak, qui accuse en filigrane la province autonome de dilapider les ressources de l'Irak.

Aussi, l'afflux, depuis 2003, des géants du pétrole au Kurdistan irakien, réputé plus stable, n'a fait qu'attiser sa colère. Aujourd'hui, dans le viseur de l'Irak, on compte entre autres Gazprom, Chevron, Exxon Mobil ou encore Total, sociétés ayant paraphé des contrats avec les autorités locales du KRG. Total a signé en juillet 2012 un accord pour une participation de 35% dans deux permis d'exploration du bloc Harir et vient tout juste d'y dénicher un gisement. Si la compagnie française assure qu'elle investira également dans d'autres projets en Irak, Bagdad a évoqué le fait de placer le groupe français sur « liste noire. » Une menace qu'elle a déjà mise à exécution avec l'américain Chevron, qui ne peut aujourd'hui plus travailler avec l'Irak, en dehors de la province autonome. Les avertissements de Bagdad à Ankara sont tout aussi clairs que pour les pétroliers.

L'Irak et la Turquie, qui tentent pour l'heure un apaisement des relations afin de faire face à la crise syrienne, ne s'accordent pas sur l'or brut. Le Premier ministre irakien, Nouri al-Maliki a d'ores et déjà fustigé les « efforts » de la Turquie pour « diviser l'Irak entre entités arabes et kurdes ». Le politicien a prévenu en début d'année : « Si la Turquie veut établir de



bonnes relations avec l'Irak, cela doit d'abord passer par le gouvernement central. »

Enfin, les États-Unis, qui ont un pied stratégique en Irak depuis l'intervention en 2003, ont assurément pris parti. Victoria Nuland, porte-parole du département d'État américain a enjoint, fin 2012, la Turquie et les autres « États voisins » à « éviter toute action ou commentaire qui pourrait contribuer à accroître les tensions » avec Bagdad.

D'après l'expert Seyfettin Gürsel, « les champs pétroliers du Kurdistan irakien pourraient devenir le prochain terrain de bataille du Proche-Orient. Ces zones redéfinissent clairement les relations stratégiques de la Turquie dans la région ».

Une liaison stratégique, mais dangereuse

Le Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, ne tergiverse pas, assurant que les « relations économiques se renforceront avec le Kurdistan, malgré la position des États-Unis ». Sumru Altug, spécialiste de l'université de Koç, à Istanbul, égrène :

« La moitié des entreprises opérant au KRG sont turques. 2.500 transports de marchandises passent la frontière chaque jour. De nombreuses banques et entreprises de construction turques se sont installées dans le Nord. »

L'experte détaille : « Le commerce bilatéral entre les deux parties s'élève aujourd'hui à 8 milliards de dollars et devrait atteindre 20 milliards d'ici à dix ans. »

Outre les bénéfices financiers, ces deux territoires trouvent dans ce mariage économique leur compte sur le plan géopolitique. La Turquie sunnite, cernée par l'Iran, l'Irak et la Syrie, tous à majorité chiite, trouve dans le KRG un allié régional indispensable et de plus en plus puissant. Cette liaison Turquie-Kurdistan est d'autant plus inattendue que ce dernier est longtemps resté considéré comme une menace pour Ankara.

La Turquie craignait un rapprochement du KRG avec le groupe du PKK (parti des travailleurs kurdes) qui, en guérilla contre Ankara depuis 1984, tente actuellement un processus de paix. Pour le professeur Seyfettin Gürsel, les deux parties y trouvent leur compte :

« La Turquie est aujourd'hui devenue le garant de l'existence du Kurdistan autonome vis-à-vis de Bagdad, clarifie l'universitaire. À l'inverse, un rapprochement avec le KRG peut aider le processus de paix de la Turquie avec le PKK, même s'il reste difficile. »

International New York Times NOVEMBER 25, 2013

A nuclear pause, but issues remain

WASHINGTON

Accord is modest step toward goal of extending time to build a weapon

BY DAVID E. SANGER

An interim accord struck with Iran on Sunday interrupts the country's nuclear progress for the first time in nearly a decade, but requires Iran to make only a modest down payment on the central problem.

The deal does not roll back the major-

NEWS ANALYSIS

ity of the advances Iran has made in the past five years, which have drastically shortened what nuclear experts call its "dash time" to a bomb — the minimum time it would take to build a weapon if Iran's supreme leader or military decided to pursue that path.

Lengthening that period, so that the United States and its allies would have time to react, is the ultimate goal of President Obama's negotiating team. It is also a major source of friction between the White House and two allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia, which have made no secret of their belief that they are being sold down the river.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel has described the terms of the accord announced early Sunday as a "bad deal" that does not require Iran "to take apart even one centrifuge." That bitter assessment reflects the deep suspicion inside Mr. Netanyahu's government that Mr. Obama will settle for a final agreement that leaves Iran a few screwdriver turns short of a weapon.

The Saudis have been equally blistering, hinting in vague asides that if the United States cannot roll back the Iranian program, it may be time for Saudi Arabia to move to Plan B — nuclear weapons of its own, presumably obtained from Pakistan, which entered the nuclear club on Saudi subsidies.

Such warnings are part of the expected theater of these negotiations, in which the United States must look simultaneously accommodating enough to a new Iranian leadership to keep fragile talks going and tough enough to its allies and Congress that it cannot be accused of naiveté. That is why Mr. Obama, speaking at the White House late Saturday, called the interim deal a necessary first step.

Iran's agreement to convert or dilute the fuel stocks that are closest to weapons grade, Mr. Obama said, means that the deal would "cut off Iran's most

likely paths to a bomb." But it would cut them off only temporarily, long enough to pursue negotiations without fear that Iran would use the time to inch closer to a weapons capability.

But the rollback he won for this first stage, according to American intelligence estimates, would slow Iran's dash time by only a month to a few months.

The most immediate risk to the interim agreement comes from hard-liners in Washington and Tehran who, after examining the details, may try to undo it. Mr. Obama met with senators from both parties last week, hoping to dissuade them from imposing new sanctions just as he was lifting some in an effort to coax Iran toward disarmament. But even some of his closest allies are unconvinced: Senator Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York, signed a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry last week noting that the temporary accord "would not require Iran to even meet the terms of prior United Nations Security Council resolutions," which require complete suspension of nuclear production.

On the Iranian side, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, which American intelligence agencies have accused of running a secret weapons-design program, may try to chip away at the accord as well.

Mr. Kerry and his chief negotiator, Wendy R. Sherman, say they have no illusions that the interim agreement solves the Iranian nuclear problem. It simply creates time and space for the real negotiations, they say, where the goal will be to convince Iranian leaders that the only way to lift the most crippling sanctions — those that have cut the country's oil revenue in half — is to dismantle large parts of a program on which they have spent billions of dollars and staked national pride.

"Rollback may be a step too far for the Iranians," said Vali R. Nasr, the dean of the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University. Iran's recently elected president, Hassan Rouhani, "can't go there for some time," Dr. Nasr said, "because he can't be seen at home giving up such a huge investment or abandoning national security."

Lurking over the American negotiating team is the specter of what can go wrong even with a seemingly good deal to buy time. As Ms. Sherman was coaxing Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad

Javad Zarif, toward the interim agreement, the North Koreans were restarting a nuclear reactor that they had partly dismantled in a similar agreement struck late in the administration of President George W. Bush — a deal

meant to halt North Korea's ability to produce plutonium fuel for weapons.

The complexity of the task ahead is evident from a glance at the main measurements of Iran's progress since Mr. Obama took office in 2009, promising a new opening to the Iranians — an opening they had largely rejected until this summer, when the mounting toll of economic sanctions helped Mr. Rouhani win the presidential election.

At the beginning of Mr. Obama's presidency, Iran had roughly 4,400 pounds of low-enriched uranium, barely enough for a bomb. It now has about 19,800 pounds, by the estimates of the International Atomic Energy Agency. A few thousand centrifuges were spinning in 2009; today there are 18,000, including new models that are far more efficient and can produce bomb-grade uranium faster. A new heavy-water reactor outside the city of Arak promises a new pathway to a bomb, using plutonium, if it goes online next year as Iran says it will.

True rollback would mean dismantling many of those centrifuges, shipping much of the fuel out of the country or converting it into a state that could not be easily adapted to bomb use, and allowing inspections of many underground sites where the C.I.A., Europe and Israel believe hidden enrichment facilities may exist. There is no evidence of those facilities now, but, as a former senior Obama administration official said recently, speaking anonymously to discuss intelligence, "there has never been a time in the past 15 years or so when Iran didn't

have a hidden facility in construction."

There is also the problem of forcing Iran to reveal what kind of progress it has made toward designing a weapon. For years, its leaders have refused to answer questions about documents, slipped out of the country by a renegade scientist nearly eight years ago, that strongly suggest work on a nuclear warhead. Inspectors have never been able to interview Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, the academic believed to be in charge of a series of weapons development projects.

The good news for the American negotiators is that if there are no hidden facilities, it would take Iran several months to produce weapons-grade fuel from its current stocks, and perhaps a year or more to fashion that fuel into a usable weapon and shrink it to fit atop one of the country's Shahab missiles. Even then, a single weapon would do Iran little good next to Israel's 100 or more and the United States' thousands, as Mr. Zarif, the foreign minister, often points out. But the mere knowledge that Iran was on the cusp of a weapon would affect the perception of its power around the world, and that may be all its leaders seek.

Ultimately, the toughest challenge for Mr. Obama may be bridging the gap between the United States' interests and those of Israel and Iran's Sunni Muslim neighbors. For Mr. Obama, the interim deal to freeze Iran's program is a major victory, and a deal that rolled it back,

even to where it was when he took office, would be an even bigger win. After all, his stated goal has always

been to prevent Iran from getting a bomb, not to prevent it from getting the capability to do so. He knows he cannot

destroy, by bombs or deals, whatever knowledge Iran has gained of how to build a weapon. It is too late for that.

Le Monde

Samedi 23 novembre 2013

FRANCE ET TURQUIE, UNE PARTITION À CONTRETEMPS

ANALYSE

PAR GUILLAUME PERRIER
Istanbul, correspondance

Dans un calendrier présidentiel déjà chargé de dossiers casse-tête, François Hollande a ajouté une étape supplémentaire. Le président de la République se rendra en Turquie les 27 et 28 janvier 2014, pour une visite d'Etat, la première depuis 1993. Une éternité. Le dernier voyage avait donné l'occasion à François Mitterrand d'inaugurer l'université francophone Galatasaray d'Istanbul, clé de voûte de la coopération franco-turque.

Vingt ans ont passé. La Turquie a vu la montée en puissance de Recep Tayyip Erdogan, premier ministre depuis 2003, et a entamé des négociations d'adhésion avec l'Union européenne, devenant l'un des pays émergents les plus dynamiques. Les chefs d'Etat américain, russe, chinois, allemand, japonais, britannique, brésilien, sud-africain, sont tous venus humer l'air d'Ankara et d'Istanbul. La France s'est contentée d'une visite de travail de Nicolas Sarkozy dans la capitale turque en 2011, en cinq heures chrono. Un saut de puce perçu comme une marque de mépris, qui ne faisait que confirmer les rapports exécrables entre les deux exécutifs. La Turquie espère que la visite de M. Hollande mettra fin à cette période de glaciation. « Sa venue devrait permettre de renouer avec la France », a déclaré Zafer Caglayan, ministre de l'économie.

À l'exception notable du dossier syrien, France et Turquie jouent le plus souvent une partition à contretemps. Pourtant, Paris s'est longtemps montré bienveillant devant l'ambition turque d'intégrer le marché commun. Mais le ton change radicalement avec les élections européennes de 2004, marquées par une poussée des mouvements populistes, hostiles à l'entrée de la Turquie musulmane dans le « club chrétien ». Alors que Bruxelles et Ankara célèbrent l'ouverture des négociations d'adhésion, Jacques Chirac, menacé par l'ascension de Nicolas Sarkozy, se range au côté des turco-sceptiques. La France, comme l'Allemagne, défend désormais l'idée d'un « partenariat privilégié » comme alternative à une adhésion à l'UE.

Cette frilosité tranche alors avec le réformisme volontaire qui caractérise le premier mandat de Recep Tayyip Erdogan (2003-2007). Des transformations spectaculaires interviennent grâce à la dynamique européenne : la tutelle de l'armée est démantelée, la démocratie progresse, l'économie se libéralise, la diplomatie régionale s'affirme. Mais la France tarde à prendre en compte cet élan. L'ambition européenne de la Turquie se heurte à un rejet froid, incompréhensible vu d'Istanbul, et une profonde cassure s'installe entre Paris et les élites turques francophiles. Les milieux économiques se désespèrent d'un tel manque de pragmatisme.

Entre les deux pays se dresse aussi la « question arménienne » à l'origine de sévères crises diplomatiques. Ankara s'est braqué lorsque, en 2001, la France a reconnu officiellement le génocide de 1915. Idem en 2006 et en 2012 avec le vote d'une loi pénalisant le négationnisme. La dernière tentative, la loi Boyer, sera finalement censurée par le Conseil constitutionnel. Depuis son élection, M. Hollande, partisan déclaré d'une loi contre la négation, a mis ses projets en sourdine pour ne pas réveiller la colère turque. Mais sa position reste inconfortable. Le ministre de l'éducation nationale, Nabi Avci, s'en est pris violemment, le 10 novembre à Paris, aux manuels d'histoire des collégiens français, accusés « d'attiser la xénophobie ».

Les questions mémorielles

Sur le dossier européen comme sur les questions mémorielles, les lobbies d'affaires se sont mobilisés sans relâche pour assouplir la position française et attirer l'attention sur le marché turc. Les échanges commerciaux, répétitifs, représentent plus que pour le Brésil ou l'Inde, même si les parts françaises ne cessent de se réduire. Et les contrats d'équipement (défense, aviation, transports, énergie), qui constituent le gros des exportations hexagonales, sont largement tributaires de l'atmosphère politique. De passage en octobre, le ministre du redressement productif, Arnaud Montebourg, a évoqué avec Recep Tayyip Erdogan « des turbulences inutiles » dans la relation bilatérale et s'est dit « captivé par la Turquie ». Areva et GDF Suez font partie du consortium qui s'est vu attribuer la deuxième centrale nucléaire turque.

Dernièrement, la France a tenté de relancer le processus européen, mais sa position sur l'adhésion reste trop floue. Pour reconquérir Anka-

LA FRANCE
A TENTÉ
DE RELANCER
LE
PROCESSUS
EUROPÉEN,
MAIS
SA POSITION
SUR
L'ADHÉSION
RESTE FLOUE

ra, Paris a également évité de se prononcer sur les questions démocratiques. Des accords de coopération antiterroriste contestés ont été signés en 2011 par le ministre de l'intérieur de l'époque, Claude Guéant, et un silence pesant entoure l'enquête sur l'assassinat de trois militantes du PKK, à Paris, en janvier.

Surtout, la visite de M. Hollande interviendra quelques mois après la violente répression des manifestations de la place Taksim et juste avant des élections municipales à fort enjeu, en mars. Le timing provoque la colère des démocrates turcs. En se rendant à Ankara « pour signer quelques contrats », M. Hollande légitimerait, selon eux, le pouvoir autoritaire et contesté de M. Erdogan, à l'heure d'une nécessaire remise à plat. En tentant de se rapprocher de la Turquie au moment où cette dernière s'éloigne des valeurs européennes, la France prend encore le risque de nager à contre-courant. ■

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Iran accord opens new diplomatic possibilities in Middle East for the U.S.

WASHINGTON

BY MARK LANDLER

For President Obama, whose popularity and second-term agenda have been ravaged by the chaotic rollout of the health care law, the preliminary nuclear deal reached with Iran on Sunday in Geneva is more than a welcome change of subject.

It is also a seminal moment — one that thrusts foreign policy to the forefront in a White House preoccupied by domestic troubles, and one that presents Mr. Obama with the chance to chart a new American course in the Middle East for the first time in more than three decades.

Much will depend, of course, on whether the United States and the other major powers ever reach a final agreement with Iran to curb its nuclear ambitions. Mr. Obama himself said Saturday night in Washington, after the agreement was announced, that it “won’t be easy, and huge challenges remain ahead.”

But the mere fact that after 34 years of estrangement, the United States and Iran have signed a diplomatic accord — even if it is a tactical, transitory one — opens the door to a range of geopolitical possibilities available to no American leader since Jimmy Carter.

“No matter what you think of it, this is a historic deal,” said Vali R. Nasr, dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. “It is a major seismic shift in the region.”

Mr. Obama has wanted to bring Iran in from the cold since he was a presidential candidate, declaring in 2007 that he would pursue “aggressive personal diplomacy” with Iranian leaders, and ruling out the concept of leadership change, which was popular at the time.

But the president has sought to avoid being consumed by the Middle East, in part so he could shift America’s gaze to Asia. He has tended to view Iran through two narrower prisms: his goal of curbing the spread of nuclear weapons and his desire to avoid entangling the United States in another war in the region.

On Friday, Mr. Obama huddled in the Oval Office with Secretary of State John Kerry over the fine points of a proposal to the Iranians. He was intent on making sure that Iran halted all testing at a heavy-water reactor, a senior administration official said, and in tying any reference to Iran’s enrichment of uranium only to a final agreement.

Still, pursuing a broader diplomatic opening, Mr. Nasr said, could alter other American calculations in the region — including Syria, where the Iranian-backed

group Hezbollah is fighting alongside President Bashar al-Assad’s government, and Afghanistan, where the Iranians could be helpful in brokering a post-war settlement with the Taliban.

The prospect of such a long-term strategic realignment is precisely what has so alarmed American allies like Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf emirates and Israel, whose leader, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, condemned the deal on Sunday as a “historic mistake.”

It is also what has stirred opposition from lawmakers, including those of Mr. Obama’s party, who complain that the deal eases pressure on Iran without extracting enough concessions.

“It was strong sanctions, not the goodness of the hearts of the Iranian leaders, that brought Iran to the table,” Senator Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York, said Sunday. Mr. Schumer said he would support a push in the Senate to pass additional sanctions against Iran after Congress returns from the Thanksgiving break. A day earlier, Mr. Obama warned that new sanctions would “derail this promising first step, alienate us from our allies and risk unraveling the coalition that enabled our sanctions to be enforced in the first place.”

On Sunday, administration officials called lawmakers to defend the deal and head off the legislation, while Mr. Obama called Mr. Netanyahu to hear his concerns before the next round of talks.

Michael Mann, the European Union foreign affairs spokesman, said Monday that European Union sanctions against Iran could be eased as soon as December, The Associated Press reported from Paris. Oil prices fell and world equity markets rose as investors responded to the easing of Middle East tensions.

To some extent, Mr. Obama finds himself in a predicament similar to that of his policy toward Syria, where allies like Saudi Arabia favor more robust support of the rebels fighting Mr. Assad. Some experts predicted that the tensions over Iran would only deepen because the administration would be determined to prevent the deal from unraveling.

“The administration is now a little bit hostage to Iran’s behavior going forward,” said Elliott Abrams, a foreign policy official in the Reagan and George W. Bush administrations. “Iran’s bad behavior — whether it’s the Revolutionary Guard in Syria or the ayatollah’s vicious speeches about Israel — it’s going to be linked to the deal.”

The bitterness in Israel may hurt another of Mr. Obama’s priorities: a peace accord between the Israelis and Palestinians. Administration officials said they believed that Mr. Netanyahu would be able to separate his anger about the Iran

deal from any decision about whether to make concessions to the Palestinians. But outside experts have their doubts.

“The Palestinian issue is the big casualty of this deal,” one former Obama administration official, Bruce O. Riedel of the Brookings Institution, said. “Now that they have an Iran deal, over the strong objections of Israel, it’s going to be very hard to persuade Netanyahu to do something on the Palestinian front.”

For Mr. Obama, resolving the threat of Iran’s nuclear program might be worth taking that chance. He has risked angering European allies, particularly France, by authorizing secret negotiations between the United States and Iran conducted in parallel to the multilateral talks involving Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia. Those talks, reported earlier by The A.P., fleshed out many of the principles that wound up in the interim agreement. Mr. Obama was briefed on their progress by Jake Sullivan, who is the national security adviser to Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. and who conducted the talks with Deputy Secretary of State William J. Burns.

Over the course of the negotiations, aides say, Mr. Obama became well versed in the minutiae of Iran’s nuclear program. At a presentation last week with lawmakers, he ticked off the elements of sanctions relief that the West was prepared to offer Iran.

In a phone call Saturday afternoon with Mr. Kerry, who was then in Geneva, Mr. Obama went over the final wording, focusing on the preamble, which refers to a “mutually defined enrichment program” with Iran — essentially the provision that will allow Iran to enrich uranium, a privilege it does not currently have from the United Nations.

As Mr. Obama looks ahead, however, it is not the fine details but the big picture that is likely to dominate his attention. Among the decisions he faces is whether to treat Iran’s nuclear program as a discrete problem to be solved, freeing him up to focus more on Asia, or as the opening act in a more ambitious engagement with Iran that might give it a role in Syria, Afghanistan and other trouble spots. Aides say that Mr. Obama is open to that but that it will depend on factors out of America’s control, like moderates’ gaining ground in Iran. And given the sensitivities the interim deal has aroused in the Middle East and on Capitol Hill, the White House is being careful to cast the coming negotiations narrowly.

“First and foremost, this has been a multifaceted, multiyear process to address a serious security concern,” said Tom Donilon, who was national security adviser to Mr. Obama and coordinated Iran policy before leaving the White House in July.

Doctor's Orders

How a neurosurgeon from Maryland cleaned up one of the most notoriously violent cities in Iraq.

BY Michael Knights
www.foreignpolicy.com

KIRKUK, Iraq — When I traveled to Kirkuk in years past, this northern city was a byword for ethnic violence and the deep-seated animosities that were in the process of unraveling Iraq.

Under Saddam Hussein, the city and surrounding rural areas were brutalized in a massive social engineering program termed "Arabization," which resulted in the ethnic cleansing of Kurds and Turkmen to make way for Arab settlers. Since Saddam's fall, the Kurds have gained the upper hand -- but continue to face relentless resistance from Arab diehards. In the last six months, for instance, al Qaeda operatives have hit Kirkuk with an astounding 22 car bombs and four attacks by terrorists wearing suicide vests. That's a remarkably high figure for a city of less than half a million souls, putting it in the same league as insurgent hotbeds like Fallujah and Mosul.

But I had heard something was changing in Kirkuk, and wanted to see for myself. On Oct. 27, I traveled to the city and got an inside look at the government's operations under its dynamic governor, Najmaldin Karim, a neurosurgeon who lived for over three decades in Silver Spring, Maryland. Upon my departure from the city, I experienced a most unusual sensation -- optimism for Iraq. The progress I could see was subtle but unmistakable: Car bombings have begun to decline, and projects to construct new roads, bridges, and sewage networks are gathering pace. New parks, a key sign of communal pride and public life, are beginning to grow green.

The average citizen in Kirkuk lives life on two levels. On one level, he or she is just trying to get along, make a living, and keep their families safe. But at another level, each major ethnic group can point to communal trauma inflicted by the region's violent past. For example, Turkmen and Kurds dominated Kirkuk in the decades before the oil industry rose in the 1920s -- but were later oppressed by successive Arab-led governments in Baghdad, who evicted them from their properties to make way for Shiite and Sunni Arab settlers. Following Saddam's fall and a mass return of displaced persons, the Kurds now make up the majority of the provincial council, dominate the security forces in Kirkuk, and set the political agenda for the province.



The effects of settlement and resettlement have now created an ethnic knot that is almost impossible to unravel. Kirkuk is essentially the site of the world's most exquisitely intractable land dispute: Kurdish refugees, for instance, squat in government buildings that were built on demolished houses taken by Saddam from Turkmen town-dwellers. Meanwhile, young Arabs who were born and grew up in Kirkuk -- and who knows nothing but life as residents of the city -- fear the loss of their residency because their parents came as settlers under Saddam Hussein.

The struggle for power between the central government in Baghdad and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) also reverberates across Kirkuk. Both Baghdad and the KRG, which controls the areas right up to the northern suburbs of Kirkuk city, lay claim to the Kurdish-controlled areas. The conflict has prompted tense military stand-offs and frozen in limbo the question of whether the city falls under the control of the KRG or the central government.

For a long time, these challenges seemed insurmountable. Slowly but surely, however, Kirkuk's administrators have reestablished a degree of normalcy -- even prosperity -- to their corner of Iraq.

Much of the credit should go to Karim, who was sworn in as Kirkuk's governor in April 2011. The governor, a native of Kirkuk and a Kurd, has a long history of political involvement in the region: After completing his medical studies in Mosul, he joined the peshmerga, the Kurdish paramilitary fighters, and participated in the anti-Saddam insurgency throughout the early 1970s. When that struggle collapsed, he traveled to the United States in 1975 as the personal physician for the Kurdish leader

Mustafa Barzani, the father of current KRG President Massoud Barzani. While in the United States, Karim served the Kurdish exile community as the head of the Washington Kurdish Institute, and also ran a successful medical practice as a neurosurgeon in Maryland for over 30 years.

In 2010, Karim returned to Iraq and won a seat in parliament, but soon grew frustrated by the deadlock at the national legislature. He refocused on local politics in his native Kirkuk, where the Kurdish-majority provincial council appointed him to fill a void in the province's leadership. Though a card-carrying member of one of the Kurdish parties, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Karim stands in good stead with the Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party, due to his service to Barzani's father.

Since returning to serve Kirkuk, Karim has shaken up the local government -- and ruffled more than a few feathers in the process. The governor is all business, and can seem gruff at first glance. After decades running a busy medical practice in the West, he is impatient with the red tape that strangles governance in today's Iraq. But in local government meetings and in visits around the city, the governor appeared to be winning the respect and affection of Kirkuk residents.

As I shadowed Karim as he went about his daily routine, I could see why. While governors often act as a crippling bottleneck on local development in this country, Karim's office was efficient: Every morning, he turns to an enormous ledger of authorizations and letters to dispatch, then holds disciplined roundtables with key municipal leaders. The afternoons and evenings, meanwhile, are reserved for a more traditional ad hoc agenda of personal meetings.

One of Karim's key challenges is that Kirkuk's disputed status makes it something of a political orphan. Neither Baghdad nor the KRG want to invest heavily in the province, in case it reverts to the other in the future. As one frustrated provincial council member put it: "To them both, we are another country."

Though a Kurdish politician through and through, Karim has tried to remove Kirkuk from these ethnic battles -- sometimes clashing with the KRG in the process. Though some of Kirkuk's electricity and security assistance are provided by the KRG, the provincial government gets 95 percent of its budget from Baghdad. This affects Kirkuk's attitude to the federal government: For instance, Karim showed all due deference to Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki when he made a surprise visit to Kirkuk in May 2012. On Nov. 6, the governor welcomed to Kirkuk the BP ■■■

■■■ CEO Bob Dudley and the federal minister of oil -- a move that the KRG criticized on the grounds that Kirkuk is a disputed area, and that the KRG should be consulted on any oil deals.

At other times, the governor has pushed back against Baghdad. He strongly resisted Baghdad's attempt to take over security in Kirkuk by establishing the controversial Tigris Operations Center, a new headquarters led by an unapologetic Saddam-era general with a history of needling the Kurds in Kirkuk. Karim also requested that the KRG place Kurdish peshmerga forces under the provincial council's command to secure the city's southern flank and commissioned an anti-car bomb trench to funnel vehicle traffic to new checkpoints. Car bombings launched from the Arab farm belt are now reducing from weekly to monthly occurrences. Roadside bombs have declined in frequency and lethality, while rocket attacks have gone from a regular event to a rare nuisance.

Second only to security improvements, the governor's focus is winning the uphill battle to spend Kirkuk's investment budget. The federal treasury in Baghdad provided Kirkuk with around \$763 million in 2013 -- buoyed by a "petrodollar" scheme that provides the province with \$1 per barrel of oil produced or refined, and \$1 per 150 cubic meters of gas processed. This figure is likely to increase fivefold next year under new provincial powers legislation.

Though the petrodollars only arrived from Baghdad in June, Kirkuk had already spent \$430 million by late October or 54 percent of its total budget in just five months. Further spending is also in the works before

the end of 2013. By Iraqi standards, just managing to execute the budget is a remarkable achievement: In 2012, Kirkuk spent 88 percent of its budget, while the governor's office in the southern province of Basra spent 35 percent -- and had to send the unspent funds back to Baghdad.

The trick, local officials related, is preparation of procurement plans before time and streamlined tendering -- vital factors that are lacking in much of Iraq. To ensure the money is well spent, the governor's office performs basic due diligence on contractors, and gives them trial runs to assess whether they can deliver. If they succeed, they get used again; if they underperform or inflate the price of their work, they get blacklisted.

Corruption and misuse of public funds also appear to have been kept at a minimum. A Facebook site has been set up by the governor's staff to receive feedback on projects from the general public. Through the site, citizens have alerted the governor's office to shoddy workmanship in some local projects and explained the needs of their individual neighborhoods. It's an example of how new media has helped close the gap between provincial leadership and their constituents.

In the near future, as Kirkuk's petrodollars rise from hundreds of millions to billions, these basic measures must give way to true institutional capacity-building. The governor's office will need to be able to tender and award mega-projects and ensure that oil money doesn't encourage large-scale corruption. But for now, Kirkuk's budget management is far ahead of most other Iraqi provinces.

There's no denying Kirkuk still has a long way to go to achieve basic security and prosperity. But for the first time in a long time, there may just be a light at the end of the tunnel. Terrorist attacks are becoming less destructive, though the raw numbers of attacks in Kirkuk city remains largely unchanged at roughly 24 per month. Economic reconstruction also has a long road ahead: The bones of the city -- water, sewage system, electrical supply, and roads -- need to be painstakingly rebuilt after a half-century of neglect. Booming oil revenues, however, could give Karim a chance to do just that.

In late October, I left Kirkuk in the pre-dawn dimness and found myself in Dubai by the afternoon. The contrast between Kirkuk's downtrodden shabbiness and the bustling Gulf emirate was stark -- though less extreme than it would have been just a few years ago. Some of Kirkuk's brand-new thoroughfares and spaghetti junctions recall the early threadbare days of Dubai's rise as a metropolis. Billions of dollars are coming in to Kirkuk in the near future, and there is growing hope that the provincial leadership can spend them wisely. In Iraq, hope is arguably at least as valuable a commodity as oil -- and much rarer.

In this visit, I saw a glimpse of the potential inherent in Kirkuk and perhaps in the whole of Iraq. An idea -- loyalty to Kirkuk and all her people -- is resulting in progress, thanks to the combination of effective leadership and oil wealth. If this can continue in fractured Kirkuk, might not the same formula work one day in Iraq writ-large? That may be optimistic, but it's certainly not impossible. ♦

Kurdinet November 27, 2013

Suicide bomb attack kills four Kurdish Peshmerga personnel in Khanaqin

Ekurd.net
KHANAQIN, Diyala province,— A Kurdish official said that a suicide attack car bomb targeted the headquarters of Kurdish Peshmerga forces in Khanaqin [Xaneqîn] district of Diyala province and has killed four Kurdish security Peshmarga forces personnel and caused some casualties.

Khanaqin's mayor, Mohammed Mulla Hussein said "A suicide car bomber blew himself up at the entrance of the headquarters of Peshmerga forces in Jabarah county of Khanqin, local sources reported.

He added: "The attack resulted in the deaths of three members of the Peshmerga and wounding 10 others."

The wounded were taken to Kalar and Kifri hospitals to receive treatment, the source added.

Meanwhile the Anadolu news agency reported that 4 Peshmergas have been killed in the attack.

Khanaqin sits on the border of Diyala and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region, and considered of the disputed areas between Baghdad and Erbil, which permits the presence of Kurdish security forces on its territory.

Diyala province, a restive part of Iraq outside the autonomous



region of Kurdistan but home to many Kurds. The Diyala district, which includes a string of villages and some of Iraq's oil reserves, is home to about 175,000 people, www.Ekurd.net most of them Kurdish Shiites.

Kurdistan government says oil-rich Khanaqin should be part of its Kurdish region, which it hopes to expand in a referendum. In the meantime, Khanaqin and other so-called disputed areas remain targets of Sunni Arab insurgents

During the Arabisation policy of Saddam Hussein in the 1980s, a large number of Kurdish Shiites were displaced by force from Khanaqin. They started returning after the fall of Saddam in 2003.

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is related to the normalization of the situation in the Kurdish areas outside Kurdistan region (disputed areas) like Khanaqin. ●

Six mois de trêve pour sortir de la crise iranienne

L'accord conclu à Genève dans la nuit de samedi à dimanche esquisse un règlement dans le dossier du nucléaire



De gauche à droite, le ministre iranien des affaires étrangères, Mohammad Javad Zarif, la chef de la diplomatie européenne, Catherine Ashton, le secrétaire d'Etat américain, John Kerry, et le ministre des affaires étrangères, Laurent Fabius, le 24 novembre, à Genève. FABRICE COFFRINI/AFP

Genève
Envoyé spécial

Le pas lourd de fatigue mais le regard rieur, Mohammad Javad Zarif a été accueilli par une salve d'applaudissements de la presse iranienne lorsqu'il a fait son apparition devant les médias du monde entier, à 4 h 30 du matin, dimanche 24 novembre. Quelques instants plus tôt, le ministre iranien des affaires étrangères venait de signer, au Palais des nations de Genève, un accord inédit sur le programme nucléaire de son pays, aux premières heures d'une aube glaciale sur les rives du lac Léman.

Après dix ans de tentatives infructueuses, d'escalades et de surenchères en tout genre, le moment ne pouvait être que solennel. Catherine Ashton, la diplomate en chef de l'Union européenne, mandatée par les grandes puissances (Etats-Unis, Russie, Chine, France, Royaume-Uni et Allemagne)

pour conduire les négociations avec l'Iran, a lu, d'un ton empreint de gravité, le communiqué final de ces entretiens avec M. Zarif à ses côtés. Le propos était chirurgical et technique, reflet de décennies de méfiance partagée.

D'où la méthode adoptée. Le texte de quatre pages, signé dimanche, n'est qu'un « accord intérimaire » de six mois. Les premières mesures énoncées ne seront reconduites que si les promesses se traduisent en actes. « Cette phase ne comporte pas d'engagements non réversibles, chacun pourra se retirer du processus s'il s'estime floué », relève Ali Vaez, spécialiste de l'Iran à l'International Crisis Group. A terme, les parties en présence visent à parvenir, dans une deuxième étape, à un accord final qui, lui, sera contraignant. Autrement dit, l'Iran sort de son isolement mais doit encore démontrer sa crédibilité.

L'incertitude a plané jusqu'au bout sur la conclusion d'un accord,

à l'issue de la troisième séance de négociations en moins de six semaines. « A 1 heure du matin, dimanche, on ne savait toujours pas si les Iraniens allaient dire oui », indique une source diplomatique européenne. Au final, cet accord impose à l'Iran d'arrêter l'enrichissement d'uranium au-dessus de 5% et d'installer de nouvelles centrifugeuses, de neutraliser ses réserves enrichies à 20% et de geler le projet de réacteur à eau lourde d'Arak. En échange, l'Iran obtiendra une levée partielle des sanctions.

Dès le paraphe du texte, John Kerry a aussitôt recadré l'objectif dans ses premières déclarations. Le secrétaire d'Etat américain s'est voulu ferme et rassurant envers tous ceux qui sont vent debout contre cet accord, aux Etats-Unis, en Israël et dans les pays du Golfe. L'objectif des négociations, a-t-il répété, est « d'empêcher l'Iran d'obtenir une arme atomique ».

Après moult accolades entre les signataires au Palais des nations, M. Zarif a, lui aussi, voulu jouer l'apaisement, mais plus en rond. Un mélange d'épuisement et de soulagement se lisait sur son visage lorsqu'il a pris la parole devant la presse dans un silence quasi religieux. Un contraste saisissant après le bourdonnement fié-

La philosophie du document est d'« arrêter la pendule » sur les deux voies qui mènent vers la bombe atomique

vreux qui a entouré ces quatre journées de chevauchée diplomatique. « Il est important que nous voyions l'opportunité de mettre un terme à une crise qui n'est pas nécessaire » et

que « nous ôtions tous les doutes sur la nature exclusivement pacifique du programme nucléaire iranien ».

La philosophie du document est d'« arrêter la pendule » sur les deux voies qui mènent vers la bombe atomique, soit par l'enrichissement de l'uranium (usines de Natanz, Fordow), soit par celle de l'acquisition de plutonium (réacteur d'Arak), estime François Nicoullaud, ancien ambassadeur de France à Téhéran au moment des premières négociations internationales sur le nucléaire, en 2003. Au bout du compte, dit-il, « l'accord offre de sérieuses garanties sur la non-prolifération nucléaire aux Occidentaux et accorde aux Iraniens de substantiels allègements des sanctions » en vigueur depuis 2006.

Le dosage de ces mesures, le rythme de leur mise en œuvre et les mécanismes de surveillance à mettre en place pour vérifier leur application seront au cœur des tractations épineuses qui vont désormais démarrer pour parvenir à un accord final après des années de dialogue de sourds entre l'Iran et les Occidentaux. « C'est un terrain sur lequel il est très délicat de manœuvrer car nous devons surmonter des décennies de suspicions réciproques », a averti un responsable américain.

Dans l'immédiat, le résultat permet à chacun de sauver la face. Il y avait urgence, la fenêtre de tir était limitée. Plus les négociations initiales auraient trainé en longueur, plus les opposants à tout accord auraient repris courage. La menace d'adoption de nouvelles sanctions par le Congrès américain, début décembre, risquait de fragiliser la marge de manœuvre du président iranien, Hassan Rohani, dont la crédibilité repose sur sa capacité à desserrer l'étau des sanctions, qui font perdre 4 milliards de dollars (3 milliards d'euros) par mois à l'économie du pays, selon John Kerry.

La satisfaction est notamment perceptible en France. « On était parti sur une mauvaise voie il y a dix jours, la barre a été redressée », se félicite un proche du dossier. Une référence à la précédente rencontre, du 7 au 10 novembre, lorsque le ministre des affaires étrangères, Laurent Fabius, avait provoqué un électrochoc en mettant sur la place publique les « lignes rouges » françaises, notamment sur le réacteur à eau lourde d'Arak, dévoilant ainsi les divergences entre les Six. « On n'est pas de triomphalisme, mais on est arrivé là où on voulait », insiste un diplomate. « Maintenant, il faut mettre l'accord en

musique », poursuit-il.

L'exécution de la partition va cependant demander du doigté. Le texte à peine signé, MM. Zarif et Kerry en donnaient déjà une lecture divergente, dimanche à l'aube, lors de leurs conférences de pres-

se. Le chef de la diplomatie iranienne a affirmé que l'accord contient une « référence claire selon laquelle l'enrichissement va continuer » et a ajouté : « Nous estimons que c'est notre droit », alors que cette question a été le principal obstacle à un compromis depuis le début des négociations avec Téhéran. M. Kerry a immédiatement rejeté cette interprétation. « L'accord ne dit pas que l'Iran a le droit à l'enrichissement », a-t-il insisté.

En réalité, le document admet de façon implicite l'existence d'un programme d'enrichissement puisqu'il prévoit que l'Iran arrête d'enrichir l'uranium au-dessus de 5%. Mais il affirme qu'en cas d'accord final son usage sera soumis à un « encadrement et des conditions », ce qui revient à dire qu'il ne pourra pas être utilisé à des fins militaires.

Le hasard du calendrier a fait que les Iraniens ont aussi pu se targuer d'un autre succès en marge des négociations : la première victoire (3-2), samedi, de leur équipe masculine de volley-ball dans un championnat mondial face aux Etats-Unis. Et l'un des hommes du match était un certain Zarif... ■

YVES-MICHEL RIOLOS

L'Iran devra cesser d'enrichir l'uranium à plus de 5 %

VOICI LES PRINCIPAUX POINTS, tels que communiqués par la Maison Blanche, de l'accord intérimaire sur le programme nucléaire iranien conclu à Genève, dans la nuit du samedi 23 au dimanche 24 novembre, entre l'Iran et le groupe « 5+1 » (les cinq membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité, plus l'Allemagne).

Les engagements pris par l'Iran

– A accepté de cesser tout enrichissement d'uranium « à plus de 5 % et de démanteler les processus techniques nécessaires pour enrichir à plus de 5 % ».

– S'est engagé à neutraliser son stock d'uranium enrichi à près de 20 % en le diluant ».

– « Ne construira pas de nouvelles centrifugeuses à uranium, et interrompra sa progression vers la mise en fonctionnement d'un réacteur dans son usine [nucléaire] d'Arak qui produirait du plutonium ».

– « Ne construira pas d'usine capable (...) d'extraire du plutonium à partir du combustible usagé ».

– « Permettra l'accès quotidien de ses sites à des experts de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique et communiquera des don-

nées sur le fonctionnement du réacteur d'Arak ».

Les engagements pris par les membres du groupe des « 5+1 »

– Consentiront à un allègement des sanctions « limité, temporaire, ciblé et qui pourra être annulé », équivalant à quelque 7 milliards de dollars (5,2 milliards d'euros).

– N'imposeront pas de nouvelles sanctions pendant la fenêtre de six mois si l'Iran respecte ses engagements.

– Suspendront « certaines sanctions sur l'or et les métaux précieux, le secteur automobile et les exportations pétrochimiques de l'Iran », et permettront « des réparations et des inspections en Iran pour certaines compagnies aériennes iraniennes ».

– Débloqueront 4,2 milliards de dollars environ (3 milliards d'euros environ), produits de sanctions sur les ventes de pétrole iranien. En revanche, la plupart des sanctions américaines, commerciales et financières, resteront en vigueur dans les six mois à venir, comme les sanctions décidées par le Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies. – (AFP) ■

« Téhéran est vivant aujourd'hui »

Les Iraniens partagés entre allégresse et colère

Ce lundi 25 novembre était le centième jour de l'arrivée au pouvoir du gouvernement. « Je suis ravi que nous ayons obtenu un accord avant cette date. » C'est par ce message, publié sur son compte Twitter, que le président, Hassan Rohani, a annoncé, dimanche 24 novembre, la nouvelle de l'accord conclu à Genève, promesse électorale au cœur de la campagne qui a mené à son élection dès le premier tour, le 14 juin.

Soucieux de parer aux réactions hostiles des plus conservateurs, le chef de l'Etat, en habile politique, a adressé, quelques heures après l'accord, une lettre au Guide suprême, Ali Khamenei, qualifiant le compromis obtenu de « victoire ». « Vos enfants révolutionnaires ont pu, grâ-

ce à des négociations compliquées et dures, prouver sur la scène internationale la légitimité du droit du peuple iranien de poursuivre ses activités nucléaires », a fait valoir le président. La réponse du Guide suprême est mitigée. « Obtenir ce que vous avez écrit mériterait que nous remercions et saluions l'équipe des négociateurs et ses collaborateurs. » La plus haute autorité iranienne a tout de même réitéré son insistance sur la nécessité de « persévérer » face aux exigences de l'Occident.

Dans une autre tentative de neutraliser l'aile dure de la République islamique, Hassan Rohani avait invité les familles des scientifiques nucléaires assassinés ces dernières années à sa conférence de presse, dimanche matin, à Téhéran.

Les Iraniens, nombreux à avoir suivi le déroulement des négociations à Genève, ont investi, dès l'annonce de l'accord, les réseaux sociaux pour faire part de leur joie. « Je n'arrive pas à croire qu'il est possible de se réveiller le matin, de suivre l'actualité et de rire de joie. Il est donc toujours possible que la question du programme nucléaire, avec toutes ces sanctions et leurs conséquences désastreuses sur notre vie, soit enfin résolue », écrit une jeune Iranienne sur sa page Facebook. « Peut-être que l'avenir nous réserve des jours meilleurs. Peut-être que nous pourrions vivre plus tranquillement », espère un autre internaute.

« Une nouvelle ère »

Une jeune photographe, vivant à Téhéran, décrit la capitale : « Aujourd'hui, c'est comme si une nouvelle ère avait commencé. Beaucoup de gens se rassemblaient devant les marchands de journaux et débauchaient de l'accord nucléaire. Dans l'air, il y a eu de la joie et de l'étonnement. Téhéran est vivant aujourd'hui. » A son retour au pays dans la

nuit de dimanche à lundi, le ministre des affaires étrangères, Mohammad Javad Zarif, a été accueilli en héros par une centaine de sympathisants à l'aéroport de Mehrabad.

Mais des voix discordantes se sont également fait entendre pour dénoncer ce qu'elles qualifient d'« échec » et de « honte ». « L'histoire

va témoigner qu'une personne nommée Zarif a mis fin au progrès du pays, en échange de 4 milliards de dollars [3 milliards d'euros, fonds iraniens gelés à l'étranger qui devraient être débloqués], sans que les droits de l'Iran soit reconnus », se désole Mohammad sur Google+. « Monsieur Zarif! Nous avons négoc-

ié pendant dix ans pour obtenir un tel accord [pitoyable]? », demande Youssef sur sa page Facebook.

Le Parlement iranien a connu une séance publique agitée dimanche. « Selon la Constitution, cet accord aurait dû être confirmé par le Parlement. Est-ce logique que les députés n'aient pas été mis au cou-

rant? », interroge le parlementaire conservateur Abolghasem Jarareh. Soixante-dix députés (sur 290) ont déjà signé une lettre demandant la convocation de Hassan Rohani et Mohammad Javad Zarif. ■

GHAZAL GOLSHIRI

International New York Times NOVEMBER 27, 2013

Iran accord widens rift between U.S. and Saudis

WASHINGTON

Kingdom fears losing power in Middle East as American priorities shift

BY ROBERT F. WORTH

There was a time when Saudi and American interests in the Middle East seemed so aligned that Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the cigar-smoking former Saudi ambassador, was viewed as one of the most influential diplomats in Washington.

Those days are over. The Saudi king and his envoys — like the Israelis — have spent weeks lobbying fruitlessly against the interim nuclear accord with Iran that was reached in Geneva on Sunday. In the end, there was little they could do: The Obama administration saw the nuclear talks in a fundamentally different light from the Saudis, who fear that any letup in the sanctions will come at the cost of a wider and more dangerous Iranian role in the Middle East.

Although the Saudis remain close American allies, the nuclear accord is the culmination of a slow mutual disenchantment that began at the end of the Cold War.

For decades, Washington depended on Saudi Arabia — a country of 30 million people but the Middle East's largest reserves of oil — to shore up stability in a region dominated by autocrats and hostile to another ally, Israel. The Saudis used their role as the dominant power in OPEC to help rein in Iraq and Iran, and they supported bases for the American military, anchoring American influence in the Middle East and beyond.

But the Arab uprisings altered the balance of power across the Middle East, especially with the ouster of Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian president, a close ally of the Saudis and the Americans.

The United States has also been reluctant to take sides in the worsening sec-

tarian strife between Shiite and Sunni, in which the Saudis are firm partisans on the Sunni side.

At the same time, new sources of oil have made the Saudis less essential. And the Obama administration's recent diplomatic initiatives on Syria and Iran have left the Saudis with a deep fear of abandonment.

"We still share many of the same goals, but our priorities are increasingly different from the Saudis," said F. Gregory Gause III, a professor of Middle East studies at the University of Vermont. "When you look at our differing views of the Arab Spring, on how to deal with Iran, on changing energy markets that make Gulf oil less central — these things have altered the basis of U.S.-Saudi relations."

The United States always had important differences with the Saudis, including on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the spread of fundamentalist strains of Islam, Mr. Gause added. But the Obama administration's determination to ease the long estrangement with Iran's theocratic leaders has touched an especially raw nerve: Saudi Arabia's deep-rooted hostility to its Shiite rival for leadership of the Islamic world.

Saudi reaction to the Geneva agreement was guarded on Monday, with the Saudi Press Agency declaring in a statement that "if there is good will, then this agreement could be an initial step" toward a comprehensive solution for Iran's nuclear ambitions.

In recent days, Saudi officials and influential columnists have made clear that they fear the agreement will reward Iran with new legitimacy and a few billion dollars in sanctions relief at exactly the wrong time. Iran has been mounting a costly effort to support the government of the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, including arms, training and some of its most valuable Revolutionary Guards commandos, an effort that has helped Mr. Assad win important victories in recent months.

The Saudis fear that further battlefield gains will translate into expanded Iranian hegemony across the region. Already, the Saudis have watched with alarm as Turkey — their ally in supporting the Syrian rebels — has begun making conciliatory gestures toward Iran, including an invitation by the Turkish president, Abdullah Gul, to his Iranian counterpart to pay an official visit earlier this month.

In the wake of the accord's announcement on Sunday, Saudi Twitter users posted a wave of anxious, defeatist comments about being abandoned by the

United States.

In many ways, those fears are at odds with the facts of continuing American-Saudi cooperation on many fronts, including counterterrorism.

"We're training their National Guard, we're doing security plans and training for oil terminals and other facilities, and we're implementing one of the biggest arms deals in history," said Thomas W. Lippman, an adjunct scholar at the Middle East Institute who has written extensively on American-Saudi relations.

And despite all the talk of decreasing reliance on Saudi oil, the Saudis remain a crucial producer for world markets.

But none of this can obscure a fundamental split in perspectives toward the Geneva accord. The Saudis see the nuclear file as one front in a sectarian proxy war, centered in Syria, that will shape the Middle East for decades to come.

"To the Saudis, the Iranian nuclear program and the Syria war are parts of a single conflict," said Bernard Haykel, a professor of Near Eastern studies at Princeton. "One well-placed Saudi told me, 'If we don't do this in Syria, we'll be fighting them next inside the kingdom.'"

How the Saudis propose to win the struggle for Syria is not clear. Already, their expanded support for Islamist rebel fighters in Syria has elevated tensions across the region. After a double suicide bombing killed 23 people outside the Iranian Embassy in Beirut last week, the Arab news media was full of panicky reports that this was a Saudi "message" to Iran before the nuclear talks in Geneva. A day later, a Shiite group in Iraq claimed responsibility for mortars fired into Saudi Arabia near the border between the two countries.

The Saudi-owned news media has bubbled with vitriol in recent days. One prominent columnist, Tarik Alhomayed, sarcastically compared President Obama to Mother Teresa, "turning his right and left cheeks to his opponents in hopes of reconciliation."

American efforts to assuage these anxieties, including Secretary of State

"Our priorities are increasingly different."

John Kerry's trip to Riyadh this month, have had little effect.

The Saudis have already broadcast their discontent about the Iran agreement, and America's Syria policy, by refusing their newly won seat on the United Nations Security Council last

month. It was a gesture that many analysts ridiculed as self-defeating.

Beyond such gestures, it is not clear that the Saudis can do much. The Obama administration has made fairly clear that it is not overly worried about Saudi discontent, because the Saudis have no one else to turn to for protection from Iran.

The Saudis have increased their support for Syrian rebel groups in the past two months, including some Islamist groups that are not part of the secular American-backed coalition.

In its most feverish form, the Saudis' anxiety is not just that the United States will leave them more exposed to Iran, but that it will reach a reconciliation and ultimately anoint Iran as the central American ally in the region. As a Saudi newspaper, Al Riyadh, put it recently in an unsigned column: "The Geneva negotiations are just a prelude to a new chapter of convergence" between the United States and Iran.

That may seem far-fetched in light of the entrenched anti-Americanism of the Iranian government. But the Saudi king and his ministers have not forgotten the days of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi of Iran, who cherished his status as America's great friend in the region.

"The Saudis are feeling surrounded by Iranian influence — in Iraq, in Syria, in Lebanon, in Bahrain," said Richard W. Murphy, a retired American ambassador to the region. "It's a hard state of mind to deal with, a rivalry with ancient roots, a blood feud operating in the 21st century."

International New York Times

NOVEMBER 26, 2013

Syrian foes to meet in January for first talks

GENEVA

BY NICK CUMMING-BRUCE

The Syrian government and the opposition will hold their first negotiations in Geneva on Jan. 22, a United Nations official said Monday after a meeting of American, Russian and United Nations officials.

"We will go to Geneva with a mission of hope," Martin Nesirky, a spokesman for Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, said in a statement. He said the aim of the conference would be to create a transitional government based on mutual consent and with full executive powers, including authority over Syria's military and security agencies.

International New York Times

NOVEMBER 28, 2013

Syria agrees to join peace talks, but in defiant tone

BEIRUT, LEBANON

BY BEN HUBBARD

The government in Syria announced on Wednesday that it would take part in talks scheduled for January to try to end the country's civil war and that its official delegation would attend with the blessing of President Bashar al-Assad but that it did not intend "to hand over power to anyone."

The statement adds to the difficulties faced by international powers convening the talks, set to open on Jan. 22 in Geneva. The negotiations are meant to lead to the creation of a transitional government that would lead Syria out of the crisis. But key issues, including who will attend and the role of Mr. Assad, have yet to be decided, and there is little sign that any of the warring parties are ready to compromise.

In the announcement, the Syrian Foreign Ministry said the official delegation to Geneva would be sent by Mr. Assad to serve the interests of the Syrian people and "getting rid of terrorism." The Assad government refers to the

rebels fighting for its ouster as terrorists and has said in the past that it will not negotiate with those who have taken up arms against the state.

The statement, published by the Syrian Arab News Agency, also struck out at Britain and France for saying that Mr. Assad has no role in Syria's future.

"Our people will not let anyone steal their exclusive right to decide their future and their leadership," it said.

It also remains unclear who will represent the opposition.

Gen. Salim Idris, who heads the Free Syrian Army, said on Tuesday that conditions were not right to hold the conference since it had not been made clear that it would result in Mr. Assad's ouster.

"We will not stop fighting at all, either during the Geneva conference or after the Geneva conference," General Idris said in an interview with Al Jazeera television. Instead, he called for more arms and ammunition, saying the rebels' military might would "strengthen the negotiators who represent the opposition in Geneva."

The opposition's nominal political leadership, the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, has repeatedly said that it will not attend peace talks that do not guarantee Mr. Assad's ouster.

"We did not make a final decision yet on our participation in the Geneva conference," the coalition's leader, Ahmad al-Jarba, said in Cairo on Tuesday, according to The Associated Press. The group plans to decide during a meeting next month.

Monday's talks allowed officials to assess the readiness of Syria's rebel factions and of President Bashar al-Assad's government for long-awaited negotiations on ending the fighting and forming a transitional government.

On Sunday, Lakhdar Brahimi, the United Nations and Arab League special envoy for Syria, discussed arrangements for the conference with members of the Syrian opposition in exile who were to meet officials from United Nations humanitarian agencies in Geneva on Monday, an aide to the special envoy said.

At a meeting in Istanbul this month, Syria's fractured opposition coalition agreed to attend a peace conference. That breakthrough enabled officials to begin the process of setting a date for the conference, but efforts to convene the negotiations, known as Geneva II, in December still face considerable challenges, diplomats said.

Syrian opposition members briefed Mr. Brahimi on their efforts to broaden support, but diplomats said the opposition was facing fierce resistance from more militant fighters inside Syria and that the coalition was still struggling to put together a credible negotiating team.

Opposition groups have insisted that Mr. Assad leave office as part of any settlement, but government officials have been equally adamant that that would not happen, with one official saying earlier this month that "we are not going to Geneva to hand over power."

The question of Iran's participation in Geneva II also remains undecided. Mr. Brahimi, who believes Iran, as a significant regional player, should be present, had talks with Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's foreign minister, who was in Geneva for negotiations about Iran's nuclear program. The accord reached with the United States and other world powers on Sunday is expected to make Western governments more comfortable with Iran's presence at Syria talks, a senior diplomat in Geneva said, though Washington and Saudi Arabia have so far opposed Iranian involvement.

"Nobody knows what they're going to do, but there's a lot of activity," said a senior European official in Geneva, speaking on the condition of anonymity in line with diplomatic practice. Mr. Brahimi "has the idea that everybody just needs to start talking, and once that happens they will find a way forward," he said.

Kurdish Militias Drive Out Jihadists, Bring Stability Back to Parts of Syria

In the chaos of civil war, Syria's Kurds are managing to do the unthinkable—drive out foreign fighters, avoid provoking Assad and start establishing a pocket of stability.



By **Jamie Dettmer**
www.thedailybeast.com

Qamishli, Syria — It is a rare sight in war-torn Syria—children clutching bags or wearing small backpacks, walking singly or in groups to still-intact schools for a day of classes.

And yet, here in Qamishli and other towns and villages nearby, it is a common scene now that Kurdish militias have cleared the area of jihadists.

In other northern and eastern provinces, warfare between rebels battling to oust President Bashar al-Assad and Syrian government forces has wreaked such massive destruction on the countryside, there are no schools or teachers available to hold classes. Where jihadists hold sway, parents often don't want to risk their children venturing out of the house.

By contrast, in much of the Kurdish-dominated northeast of the country, services are functioning, schools are open and locals don't have to fear being kidnapped by foreign militants. And the Kurds are breathing a collective sigh of relief, thankful to be free of the months-long reign of terror visited on them by Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and al Shams (ISIS).

"There was fear. People were kidnaped for ransom and some of them never returned," says Mikhtar, a 57-year-old porter. "We are safer now."

There is alarm, though, at a burgeoning bombing campaign by jihadists. The latest attack was on November 11 when a suicide bomber exploded a large device in a truck outside the offices of the Kurdish Red Crescent, killing 11 people, including a nurse and several children. In all, since the summer, there have been 37 car or roadside bombings and two suicide attacks in the area.

Safety is a relative concept. For many Kurds, the attitude is: better a few bombings than jihadists actually occupying towns and inflicting a reign of terror—kidnappings for ransom and beheadings for minor infractions of their rigid Islamic code.

"There was a lot of worry—we used to close the shop very early because we were frightened about safety," says Dania, a well-kept middle-aged owner of a women's clothing boutique in downtown Qamishli, the largest town in the northeast. "There were kidnappings and killings by jihadists and also by ordinary individuals. If someone

had a problem with another person they would just kill them because there was no security."

Another reason to close shop early was that jihadists might have seen what Dania sells—high-end, often figure-hugging fashions, such as a short red dress that holds pride of place in her store window. "They could have killed me, if they had discovered I was selling clothes like this," she laughs. Dania says even the exchange rate between the Syrian pound and the dollar has stabilized, although prices are still high, double and sometimes more than what they were before the start of Syria's brutal 33-month civil war. "People are buying again," she says.

For their liberation from jihadists, many Kurds thank the dominant Syrian Kurdish party, the Democratic Union Party, or PYD, the largest and best-organized of 17 major Kurdish political factions. The PYD is the only party that has an armed wing and its fighters form the backbone of the People's Defense Units, or YPG, although many volunteers in the volunteer militias are not party members but support

Kurds are breathing a collective sigh of relief, thankful to be free of the months-long reign of terror visited on them by Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and al Shams (ISIS).

rival Kurdish political factions. Many of the PYD cadres are former members of Turkey's separatist Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, which has conducted a three-decade-long insurgency against Turkish authorities.

But while there are trappings of stability, the times are anything but normal. Shops and street vendor carts may be well-stocked with an array of locally grown fruit and vegetables, but anything produced outside Syrian Kurdistan is difficult and expensive to come by because of the closing of the borders with Turkey and Iraq. Both countries fear a refugee flood.

Jihadists, radical Islamists, and mili-

tias affiliated with the Western-backed Syrian National Coalition—which has dubbed the PYD and other Kurdish factions hostile to the revolution—control territory to the west. To the south are more jihadists. And in the Kurds' midst remain Syrian soldiers, who control about 20 percent of the city, although it is rare to encounter regime troops outside Qamishli.

But within this beleaguered Kurdish pocket, confidence is growing—so, too, is ambition, and Kurds are clinging to the hope that they can weather the storm and avoid the destruction that has been visited on other parts of the ravaged country.

Earlier this month, the PYD announced its intention of holding elections and establishing a semi-autonomous regional government. PYD cadres say a self-governing Syria Kurdistan—they call it Rojewa—ideally would remain part of a post-war Syria, an arrangement modeled on what Iraqi Kurds secured for themselves after the fall of Saddam Hussein.

The self-rule declaration, which came in the wake of a string of Kurdish victories over Jihadist and Islamist rebels, angered all the other major players in the Syrian civil war—from the Turks and Gulf Arabs to the jihadists and the SNC, and even Kurdish leaders in neighboring Iraq, who fear that Turkish wrath at seeing the emergence of yet another Kurdish statelet will disrupt their own warming relations with Ankara.

"It was not the right time," sniffs Fuad Hussein, the chief of staff of Iraqi Kurdistan's president, Masoud Barzani.

Like many self-rule foes, Hussein dismisses plans for a regional government as a PYD bid to establish a political monopoly. "It is dangerous to have a one-party system in Syrian Kurdistan, many other parties have been marginalized or ignored," he says.

PYD critics point to the heavy-handed suppression of a pro-FSA protest in early summer in the town of Amuda in which seven civilians were killed.

There are serious divisions in Syrian Kurdish politics—the fault lines more often than not determined by whether a faction is aligned with the PKK or sees Iraq's Barzani as the transnational standard-bearer of the Kurds. But at ground level in Qamishli, and other towns and villages in the Kurds' pocket of control, it is a challenge to find criticism of the plan to hold elections for a regional government.

And there is a strong sense of common Kurdish purpose when it comes to →

⇒ practical governance, establishing law and order and crafting local governments that run parallel to the Syrian state apparatus that remains.

To improve the quality of life, factional disputes are being cast aside.

In much the same way that there are still Syrian government forces present in parts of Qamishli, there are still government functionaries. But in the same way that the Kurds try to ignore the presence of Syrian soldiers, they are ignoring as much as they can the Syrian state apparatus when it comes to their everyday lives and basic needs and services. They go instead to their own new local Kurdish authorities that have been created from the ground up by volunteers and activists drawn from different political factions and from no factions at all.

In marked contrast to rebel-held areas in northern Syria, the Kurdish pocket is not only functioning consistently when it comes to schools but also when it comes to basic needs and services. And that is due as much to broad local activism as it is to the influence of the PYD, according to Moaze Abdel Kareem, a 32-year-old pharmacist who heads the new Kurdish-controlled Qamishli city council.

“When the situation started to collapse in the city because of the revolution there

was nobody to clean the streets, the trash piled up causing health and hygiene problems and people started to volunteer to do something about it,” says Kareem, who was elected co-president of the Qamishli council by volunteers and activists at a conference in early summer.

Volunteer committees started forming a year ago, focusing at first on trash collection and other basic services. Local volunteerism snowballed and the conference that elected Kareem also established 32 committees to supervise a variety of services and needs—including public health, sewage, water supplies, security, and women’s issues.

Other towns have adopted the Qamishli approach, once jihadists have been expelled by the YPG—ground-up activism establishing local governance. “There are some things you still have to go to state functionaries for like applying for a passport,” says Kareem. “But mostly you come to us.” Funding of the new local councils comes from voluntary donations and service-fees.

The establishment of parallel local governance has a longer-term purpose too: the Kurds quite simply hope the Syrian state apparatus will wither away by public neglect. Kareem and his fellow co-president, a vivacious 30-year-old woman, Sama Bekadash, say it is a non-confrontational

way of trying to make the Syrian army and government irrelevant and using the civil war as opportunity to achieve that.

Assad withdrew his forces from much of Syria’s Kurdistan early in the civil war to focus on the uprising elsewhere. The lack of open conflict with Assad’s remaining forces has prompted the charge that the Kurds are in league with the Syrian government.

Kareem says those who make that charge just don’t understand the Kurds’ strategy.

“The Kurdish people, from the start, they supported the revolution and they believed in the same dream of the Arab Spring, of having a free democratic society,” he says. “We have had a lot of people imprisoned and tortured by Assad over the years. We started to think we might be able to achieve our aims through peaceful means, as much as we can. We are not only avoiding a fight with the Syrian army but also would prefer not to fight the Free Syrian Army. But we will defend our geography.”

They may well have to—and not just from the jihadists. The biggest fear of YPG commanders is that if Assad continues to make military advances against the rebellion and succeeds in capturing the half of the city of Aleppo held by the rebels, then he may be tempted to move on them. ■



NOVEMBER 25, 2013

The Rise of Greater Kurdistan

Ted Galen Carpenter
<http://nationalinterest.org>

The status of the Kurdish people, the largest ethnic group in the world without a homeland, has been a source of instability in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran for decades. But with the onset of the civil war in Syria, a new theater has surged in prominence regarding that issue. For months, Syrian Kurdish militias have battled other—primarily Islamist—factions within Syria’s rebel movement. They have been surprisingly successful [3], scoring major military victories in the northeastern part of the country against the Al Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), both affiliated with Al Qaeda. Given the widespread collapse of the authority that Bashar al-Assad’s government exercised in northeastern Syria, the Kurds have been poised for months to expand greatly their power in that area.

Following the latest victories over Islamist forces in late October and early November, Kurdish leaders in Syria finally took the next step. They announced [4] the creation of an “interim autonomous government” for Syria’s Kurdish region. It was quite clear that this was not a temporary meas-

ure. The same announcement confirmed that elections for a long-term government would follow shortly.

That development caused uneasiness in neighboring capitals. While Assad seems to have written-off any attempt to regain control of territory in the northeast—at least until he’s able to suppress the larger, Sunni Arab insurgency seeking to overthrow his government, both Ankara and Baghdad are concerned about what the birth of a new, essentially independent, Kurdish political entity might imply for their countries.

Turkish leaders seem increasingly uncertain about how to deal with the Kurdish issue. Ankara has waged an armed struggle for decades against home-grown secessionists, led by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). And Turkish officials were noticeably unhappy when Kurdish forces in Iraq exploited the U.S. decision to impose a no-fly zone over northern Iraq during the 1990s to establish a self-governing region there.

But in the past few years, the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has made more serious efforts to address Turkey’s domestic Kurdish problems

through the political process rather than mere brute force. And Ankara’s relationship with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq has become far more nuanced and complex than before. Indeed, economic ties between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan continue to grow at a very brisk pace. Turkish businesses see Kurdistan as a most attractive region for investment, and pipelines between northern Iraq and Turkey are essential outlets for Kurdistan’s oil production [5]. The ingredients for a lucrative [6], mutually beneficial, commercial relationship are clearly present. But security considerations also may be leading Ankara to adopt a more flexible attitude toward the KRG. With the resurgence of violence elsewhere in Iraq, some Turks now even seem to view a stable, peaceful region governed by the KRG as a possible buffer between Turkey and a chaotic “rump” Iraq.

At the same time, Turkish leaders are not placid about the emergence of yet another de facto Kurdish political entity on their country’s border. Even before the formal proclamation of an interim autonomous government for Syria’s Kurdish region, officials in Ankara warned that such a step was unacceptable. Turkish deputy prime minister Bulent Arinc emphasized that →

his country was committed to Syria's territorial integrity and stated bluntly that his government would not tolerate the creation of an autonomous Kurdish region on Syrian soil. Turkish officials especially fear that before long, such a Syrian entity would merge with its ethnic brethren in Iraq to form a greater Kurdistan, and that development might become an irresistible political magnet for Turkey's own Kurdish minority.

Ankara's policy regarding the Kurdish issue now seems ambivalent, even a bit muddled. But at least Turkish officials are trying to address the re-emergence of the Kurdish issue as a major concern in the Middle East. U.S. officials, on the other hand, are acting like deer caught in the headlights. There are few signs of a coherent policy, despite growing evidence that the "Kurdish question" is becoming an ever more prominent and potentially disruptive factor. Washington officially con-

tinues to support the regime in Baghdad as the legitimate government of all Iraq, even as that government exercises no meaningful authority over the Kurdish north. The Obama administration professes to share Ankara's commitment to Syria's territorial integrity and sovereignty, even as the country fractures and the Kurdish region in the northeast moves rapidly toward de facto independence.

Admittedly, the Kurdish issue poses a thorny diplomatic problem for Washington. The Kurdish population in Iraq is easily the most democratic, procapitalist and pro-Western faction in that troubled country. And although it is too soon to tell for certain, Syria's Kurds seem to have a similar orientation. But existing countries in the Middle East worry greatly about the implications of spreading Kurdish autonomy, and Washington is reluctant to ignore, much less dismiss, their objections.

U.S. leaders need to ask themselves, however, whether the existing policy of insisting on a united Iraq and a united Syria is now devoid of any connection to realities on the ground. Giving consideration to establishing ties with an independent Kurdistan that extends across the Iraq-Syria border would undoubtedly make the governments of Syria, Iraq and Turkey unhappy. But one of the crucial tests of statesmanship is recognizing when an existing policy has become untenable. U.S. leaders must at least begin to consider whether that time has arrived regarding the Kurdish issue.

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THE HUFFINGTON POST
THE INTERNET NEWSPAPER: NEWS BLOGS VIDEO COMMUNITY

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Kurdistan's Recent Election: Its Achievements and Challenges



Delovan Barwari

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The Kurdistan Region of Iraq held its fourth legislative elections on September 21, 2013. The electoral experience was a significant democratic achievement as it uncovered the fundamental issues influencing voter choice, measured party identification and legitimized KRG's authority and its domestic and foreign policy.

While the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) reasserted its position as the leading party in Kurdistan region with 38 seats, the Movement for Change (Gorran) officially positioned itself as the second largest party with 24 seats, placing the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) into the third with 18 seats. Further, the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) and Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG) both managed to increase their presence in the parliament. Hence, the new reality illuminates a slight shift in the geopolitical map of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

In essence, the above scenario validates the notion that the fate of political parties is contingent upon the trust and content of the mainstream, as elections enable voters to hold leaders and parties accountable for their performance while in power and serves as an impetus for the evolution of democratic governance. Consequently, ignoring the voters' expectations will ultimately bring their demise. Therefore, political parties must deeply understand the volcanic issues that influence the voters' choice in order to take concrete steps to regain their trust and strengthen their conviction.

Although the current Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), a coalition government shaped mainly by the KDP and PUK, has made significant strides in democratic enhancements, economic and infrastructure development, education, and the energy sector, the election results sheds light on the discontent of a segment of the Kurdish society. Hence, it should be carefully studied and addressed.

The first parliamentary session for the newly elected parliamentarians was held on November 6, which marked a new phase that will shape the next KRG cabinet. It was followed by a visit to the city of Slemani on November 19 by the incumbent KRG Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani, who is also KDP's candidate for the upcoming premier role. He met with KDP's strategic ally, the PUK, and the opposition block (Gorran, KIU, and KIG) in a bid to form a broad-based cabinet.

Based on a Rudaw report, the atmosphere of the meetings was relatively positive as the involved parties have signaled their inclination to join the upcoming cabinet. Yet, it is unlikely that the entire opposition will take part in the future government.

Although a broadly inclusive administration could bring the Kurdish parties closer and help stabilize the Kurdish house, it may have negative consequences: First, a very broad-based government would certainly diminish the role of the opposition, which should work as a watchdog to monitor the government. Second, ministries' would likely fall under the influence of their respective parties' agenda, which could reduce the efficiency of the KRG and steer it away from its programs.

On another note, although the PUK came in the third place, its decline should not greatly influence its relations with the KDP as it is the second most influential player in terms of military, security, and finance. Therefore, its inclusion in the upcoming government is vital for the security and stability of the Kurdistan region. With that being said, PUK's significance was addressed by Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani while visiting Slemania.

As the KDP is the key party spearheading KRG's domestic and foreign policies, including the oil and gas initiatives, its electoral victory has legitimized and cemented its authority again. Thus, KRG's status quo -- its policy and disputes with the central government in Baghdad over the fate of the disputed areas, hydrocarbon rights, the question of the Kurdish security forces and its growing economical relations with Turkey is likely to be unchallenged.

Yet, Gorran's unconventional preconditions for participating in the forthcoming government and their growing relations with Iran and the deterioration of KDP's relations with the

→ Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) because of their auto-
cratic actions in the Syrian Kurdistan are grave concerns that
require resolutions based on common grounds.

Finally, KRG's stability and relative security is the fundamen-
tal ingredient that has made the economic development and
democratic achievements possible. Hence, the September 29 ter-
rorist attacks highlights the looming dangers of the Syrian civil

war and the unrest in Iraq's Sunni and Shia regions: It could
potentially endanger the Kurdistan region the same way violence
has spilled over into Lebanon. Therefore, the KRG ought to form
a cohesive and relatively inclusive government to truly address
the core internal issues and build closer ties with the PYD to com-
bat the Al-Qaeda. □

REUTERS

Feud between Turkey's Erdogan and influential cleric goes public

ISTANBUL -November 21, 2013 - By Seda Sezer (Reuters)

**A FEUD BETWEEN Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan and
an influential Islamic cleric has spilled into the open months
ahead of elections, highlighting fractures in the religiously conser-
vative support base underpinning his decade in power.**

Erdogan's government has incensed followers of Fethullah Gulen, a
U.S.-based Islamic preacher whose supporters say they number in
millions, with plans to abolish private 'prep' schools many of which
are financed and run by Gulen's movement.

The reclusive cleric drew parallels with the behaviour of the secular-
ist military in the build up to past coups.

Gulen has built a global network of schools over the past four
decades promoting Turkish language and culture. In doing so, he
has established a powerful movement whose members hold influen-
tial positions across Turkish society, from the police and judiciary to
the central bank, political parties and media.

"The draft bill regarding closing of prep schools and reading rooms
came like a dagger to our heart," an editorial on one of Gulen's offi-
cial websites said, an unusually blunt expression of opposition to
Erdogan's government.

In a voice recording on another site, Gulen recalled the actions of the
military, staunch guardians of Turkey's secular order, which staged
three coups between 1960 and 1980 and forced Turkey's first
Islamist-led government from power in 1997.

"They could even want to shut the gates of heaven," he said. "We
have seen this during the 1960 coup and have been slapped by it. We
have seen the (1971) coup and been kicked by it. We have seen the
1980 coup and we've all been hit by them."

Gulen's sympathisers, largely drawn from the same religiously-min-
ded professional class which helped sweep Erdogan's Islamist-roo-
ted AK Party to power in 2002, revere him as an enlightened, pro-
Western face of progressive Islam.

His critics see a more sinister agenda, accusing members of his
Hizmet movement of furtively seeking to infiltrate state institutions
and wield power through undemocratic means.

Closing its prep schools in Turkey - schools that provide high-stand-
ard private education to prepare children for high school and uni-
versity - could deprive the movement of one of its sources of finan-
cing.

In an interview on Turkey's ATV television late on Wednesday,
Erdogan was defiant, referring to the Hizmet movement as the
"opposing side".

"If they are expecting a turnaround, they should know it is not going
to happen," he said, but denied that the draft bill on prep schools was
targeting Gulen.

"Why should we side against the movement now? We find it very
strange that our brothers are attacking us."

POLITICAL SWAY

Erdogan, accused by critics of pursuing an increasingly authoritarian
style of government, has in the past said his relationship with Gulen
is an issue he prefers to keep out of the public eye.

But the secretive nature of the Hizmet movement means its impact
on forthcoming elections - local polls next March, a presidential race
a few months later in which Erdogan is expected to stand, and gene-
ral elections in 2015 - is hard to quantify.

Surveys commissioned by the AK Party have put the level of voters
the movement could sway at around 3 percent of the electorate,
while other sources have suggested they control up to 8 percent,
according to Turkish media reports.

Gulen left for the United States in 1999, shortly before the start of a
case against him on charges of plotting to destroy the secular state
and establish Islamic law.

He was acquitted but has lived there ever since, presiding over a
movement with influence from the United States to Africa, the
Middle East, Central Asia and Europe.

In a statement on the web site of the Journalists and Writers
Foundation, which has Gulen as its honorary leader, the movement
said it had no plans to establish its own party.

But its real power lies within the AK Party bureaucracy and ranks
and its ability to rally support for or against Erdogan.

Erdogan has won three elections in a row since 2002 and presided
over an economic boom in Turkey. On the electoral map nearly all of
the country - apart from the Aegean coast, the mainly Kurdish sou-
theast corner and a small region on the European continent - is AK
Party orange.

But there are signs of fracture within the party.

Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc, a co-founder with Erdogan of
the AKP and a long-time ally, sparred with Erdogan this month over
his suggestion that regulations be drawn up to stop male and female
students living together.

During anti-government protests over the summer, when Erdogan
dismissed the demonstrators as looters and oversaw a heavy-handed
police crackdown, both Arinc and President Abdullah Gul - both
seen as Gulen sympathisers - struck markedly more conciliatory
tones.

Erdogan has said that the prep schools, estimated to number around
4,000 in Turkey, boost inequality by placing an unfair financial bur-
den on lower-income families and that in any case, only around a
quarter of them are run by the Hizmet movement.

Not everyone is convinced.

"The real target is to deal a serious blow to Gulen's movement,"
Rusen Cakir, a columnist in the pro-government Vatan newspaper,
wrote this month.

"The first question that comes to mind is why Erdogan is taking such
a risk before local elections, and presidential elections shortly after.
Does he want to test the Gulen movement's strength at the ballot
box?" ○

Turkey border wall highlights Kurdish divisions

By Lauren Williams
The Daily Star
www.dailystar.com.lb

NUSAYBIN, Turkey: Cut into the grass on one of the mountains overlooking the winding highway leading to the far southeastern Kurdish quarter of Turkey is the country's crescent flag, along with a statement reading: "How happy I feel when I say I'm Turkish." Arriving in the Kurdish city of Nusaybin, the site of recent protests against a wall constructed by the government to enforce separation with its twin city of Qamishli over the Syrian border, Mayor Ayse Gokkan issues an entirely different greeting: "Welcome to Kurdistan."

The "Wall of Shame," as it has been dubbed, has prompted an outcry in Turkey, where Gokkan, a member of the pro-Kurdish opposition party, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), went on a nine-day hunger strike to protest the barrier.

The concrete and barbed wire, 1,300-meter wall has divided the neighboring countries' Kurdish community, with its history of intermarriage and cultural ties. It has also thrown sensitive peace talks between the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) into doubt, as the two sides try to end a decades-old conflict.

But it has also exposed a deepening rift between Kurdish rivals in Syria as they try to exploit the country's war to extend influence over a potentially autonomous territory, while escalating a battle over resources.

"The Turkish government says it is for security, but if that is so, why are they sending Islamists across the border?" Gokkan says, in reference to Turkey's earlier support for Islamist rebels fighting both Assad and the Kurds along the Turkish border.

The PKK's Syrian arm, the PYD and its armed wing the YPG, have been making steady territo-

rial gains in northeastern Syria, including territory that hosts some of the country's key oil and gas wells and reserves. PYD leaders told The Daily Star that they now control approximately 70 percent of the 40,000 square kilometer area, known as Rojava and, in a controversial move, last month declared a "temporary autonomous" Kurdish authority.

The apparent ease with which the PYD appeared to consolidate control over the territory has prompted repeated allegations that the party is working with embattled President Bashar Assad, who, locked in battle against mainly Sunni Arab forces backed by Turkey, the U.S. and Gulf States, ceded the territory to the Kurds in an attempt to strengthen his hand against Turkey.

The YPG forces have also been engaged in intense and bloody battles with Al-Qaeda-linked Islamist rebels fighting Assad along the Turkish border that have killed hundreds on both sides.

Al-Qaeda-linked rebels also seized control of Syria's largest oil field last week, the Omari oil field in eastern Deir al-Zor province, raising the possibility that the Syrian state will now be completely dependent on oil imports.

All of this has served to unnerve Turkey, analysts say, at a time of delicate peace talks with the PKK, just months ahead of elections in early 2014, and while Erdogan negotiates an extended pipeline deal with the PYD's staunchest Kurdish rivals, the Kurdistan Region Government in Iraq, headed by Massoud Barzani.

Analysts and Erdogan opponents say it was no coincidence that the wall construction coincided with Barzani's landmark visit to Turkey last month, when he stopped in the Kurdish city Diyarbakir. Barzani and Erdogan are believed to be negotiating an extension of an energy deal that would see the KRG pipe oil in to Turkey, bypassing Baghdad, at a time of growing Turkish energy needs.

Barzani has closed the borders between Kurdish Iraq and Turkey, accusing the PYD of "autocratic" moves in Syria and a lack of consultation with Syrian Kurds in their announcement of autonomy.

The PYD's leader, Saleh Muslim, retorted that the PYD enjoyed majority support among Syria's Kurds and accused Barzani of "interference."

"Barzani is claiming he is for Kurdish rights in Syria because of the benefits he gets with the Turkish government," he told The Daily Star from Geneva, where preparations are underway for peace talks.

"Yes, we want an autonomous Kurdish state in Syria in the future, but right now what we are working toward is a temporary, civil administration until a peace process is concluded."

Muslim also denied that there had been any sale of oil from wells under YPG control.

"Some of them are under the control of YPG forces and some of them are under control of ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria, an Al-Qaeda-linked militia]. From what we have heard, ISIS is selling some of it on the black market," he said.

"The YPG is not selling any. It is secured by their forces. This oil is for all Syrians later on."

Even if the PYD does manage to secure an autonomous zone in the future, the party faces many obstacles to profit from its oil resources, according to Soli Ozel, a lecturer of international relations at Istanbul's Kadir Has University and a columnist with Turkey's Haberturk newspaper.

"The PYD will have a really hard time because it will be surrounded by enemies. Barzani wouldn't have any sympathy for them, Al-Qaeda won't deal with them and I am not sure the Assad government would recognize any autonomous state. ... So how they can get out of that position, I have no idea," he said.

"But it does strengthen their hand in negotiations. They can go to the USA and at least have something in their hand to bargain with."

Ozel believes that neither the PYD nor the KRG front will back down on its ambitions in northern Syria.

"Obviously the entire choreography of Barzani visit and the wall and everything that came was geared toward putting pressure on Syria's Kurds," he says.

"The PYD has gained the upper hand and that made Turkey and Barzani very

unhappy."

"Barzani probably thinks that there is a lot of sympathy for the PKK in Iraq, in his own base, and he doesn't want another area in his own neighborhood controlled by his rivals."

Ozel described Turkey's strategy, as manifested in the border wall, as "classic divide and rule."

"The Turkish government wishes to weaken the PKK as much as it can and part of that strategy is to weaken the PYD," he said.

Ozel said the battle for control of resources in Syria was frequently overlooked in discussions of the Kurdish issue but it remained essentially "political and ideological."

"Everyone knows there are resources there but my sense is that, even if there wasn't oil in Rojava, you would still have conflict between Turkey, the PYD and Barzani."

Nusaybin's mayor, Gokkan, acknowledges that the wall has served to galvanize Kurdish anger in Turkey, but says fears of calls for similar or united autonomy in Turkey are unfounded.

"Everybody knows that Kurds will support Kurds," she said, saying the divide was "an issue of human rights."

"We want rights and democracy in our country. But we don't want a greater autonomous Kurdistan. We want the right to have dialogue with our people," she said.

"We believe that the Kurds in Syria should decide for themselves how they want to live."

Gazing listlessly out across the wall separating him from his hometown of Qamishli, Abu Raed, with a toddler on the end of each arm, says he fears further conflict will erupt over Syria's Kurdish areas.

"I came here one year ago because my wife is from here and because of all the trouble. Turkey says this is to prevent terrorists from crossing ... but we haven't had anything like this between Kurds for 50 years. It's so cynical," he said.

"I am not happy with the way the PYD is making decisions, but at this stage I don't care. I have a family and just want to get them out," he said, before furtively moving away as a Turkish armored police van lumbered alongside menacingly.

□□□

Sulaimaniyah scene of power struggle among Iraqi Kurdish parties

Infighting and growing polarization between leaders in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah have raised concerns about the unity of Iraqi Kurdistan.

<http://www.al-monitor.com>
Author Mushreq Abbas

On Nov. 11, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Massoud Barzani warned against dividing Iraqi Kurdistan, asserting that administratively separating Sulaimaniyah province from the rest of the region constitutes a "red line." Barzani's warning was elicited by the fracture in Sulaimaniyah between the Movement for Change (Gorran), led by Nawshirwan Mustafa, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by ailing Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, who remains abroad for medical treatment.

On the surface, the conflict revolves around the demand by the Movement for Change that the PUK governor of Sulaimaniyah, Bahrouz Mohammed Saleh, be replaced by one of its own members. The movement's primary argument for such a change is that the current governor is unelected — he was appointed in an acting capacity by the KRG government with the PUK's blessing — and that it came in second in the legislative elections held on Sept. 21, behind the Barzani-led Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) but ahead of the PUK, which in Talabani's absence has suffered a decline in popularity. The Movement for Change believes that Barzani and Talabani are purposefully impeding local elections in the region for fear of losing ground to the movement.

The KRG responded to the movement's demand by asserting that Saleh's appointment was legitimate since the PUK had garnered the majority of votes in Sulaimaniyah in the last local council elections, held in 2005. The conflict's roots, however, run deeper than who occupies the governorship of Sulaimaniyah. Rather, it involves the opposing views about the future of Iraqi Kurdistan held by the various political parties. The reality is that there has long been talk of forming a "Sulaimaniyah region" administratively independent from Erbil.

This sort of talk, including in the media, will not lead to positive developments in relations among the Kurdish parties, but could instead drag them back to the way things stood between KDP-controlled Erbil and PUK-controlled Sulaimaniyah in the 1990s, when a civil war raged between the Barzani and Talabani camps. After that, the two sides agreed to independently and autonomously administer these cities and environs, a situation that continued until the two administrations were unified under the KRG at the beginning of 2006.

Seven years later, however, the two cities are still not fully administered under a single governing entity. Until mid-2012, each still had separately handled budgets. That same year, it was announced that all Peshmerga forces would be placed under the Ministry of Interior. Yet, despite such efforts aimed at unification, Sulaimaniyah has remained independent from Erbil. This ongoing division figured among the numerous explanations cited for the PUK's poor results in the recent parliamentary elections.

Some leaders in the PUK have broached the idea of forming an alliance between their party and the KDP through a "strategic agreement." Others who oppose such an arrangement, however, argue that it would not give Sulaimaniyah equal footing with Erbil. This is the point at which the Movement for Change emerged as an alternative symbol of Sulaimaniyah's independence from Erbil.

The quest for truly independent decision-making for Sulaimaniyah and regression to competition are not departures from the history of the related regional conflict involving the Kurdish areas. Iranian influence



A view of the city of Erbil, capital of the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Sept. 20, 2013. (photo by REUTERS/Thaier Al-Sudani)

in Sulaimaniyah and Turkish influence in Erbil have their roots in the region's past, going back to the conflict between Talabani and Barzani forces. There are also reasons having to do with the social fabric of the main cities, with opponents of the Iranian regime — such as Komala, the Iranian Kurdish opposition party based in Sulaimaniyah — and opponents of the Turkish regime, of note, the Kurdistan Workers Party, which is based in Erbil.

The alliance between Barzani and Talabani, as two personalities who carry a great deal of local sway and enjoy extensive regional relationships, has tangibly contributed to the political, economic and security leaps experienced by Iraqi Kurdistan. The area has been transformed over the years into a center for regional and international politics, allowing it to tip the scales in Iraqi political machinations. The alliance has also led the region to enjoy friendly relations with Iran, Turkey and Arab states in the same way that it has been on good terms with France and Russia as well as the United States.

Yet, Talabani's absence from the political scene, as well his party's inability to agree on a figure to lead during this period, not only threatens the PUK itself but also the balance of power in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Barzani's warnings regarding a redivision of the region into two administrations stem from this potential problem.

For Barzani, strategies for maintaining balance in internal Kurdish affairs as well as in Iraq, regionally and internationally depend on a convergence of interests. Any tilt in the balance in this volatile region would be seen as a potential and direct threat that could bring down the entire system.

The Movement for Change cannot risk pushing the region toward this fate and lacks the necessary cards to maneuver and exert sufficient pressure. Regardless, with its considerable weight in the streets of Sulaimaniyah, it will certainly try to capitalize on the sway it has to adjust the current configuration within Iraqi Kurdistan in a way that ensures its relevance. ♦

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Après Genève, espoirs de détente au Proche-Orient

Analyse

En réponse à plusieurs élus du Congrès, qui relayaient lundi 25 novembre les critiques formulées par Israël à l'encontre de l'accord sur le nucléaire iranien, scellé ce week-end, Israël, le président américain Barack Obama a défendu le travail de son secrétaire d'Etat, John Kerry, fruit, selon lui d'une nouvelle approche diplomatique. « Nous ne pouvons pas exclure les solutions pacifiques aux problèmes mondiaux, a-t-il dit. Faire le dur et provoquer, c'est peut-être facile sur le plan politique, mais ce n'est pas ainsi qu'il faut agir pour notre sécurité. »

A l'exception de l'Etat juif, qui l'a qualifié d'erreur « historique », le texte, qui limite le programme nucléaire iranien en échange d'un allègement des sanctions pesant sur Téhéran, a été salué, à des degrés divers, par quasiment tous les acteurs de la scène politique moyen-orientale. Si les alliés de Téhéran, comme la Syrie, l'Irak et le Hezbollah ont applaudi sans réserve le rapprochement entre les grandes puissances occidentales et le régime des mollahs, les pétromonarchies du golfe Arabo-Persique ont manifesté un optimisme plus mesuré.

La percée de Genève peut-elle initier une dynamique diplomatique vertueuse, susceptible de casser la logique des blocs (« axe du mal » chiite contre alliés du « Grand Satan » américain) qui gouverne la région et contribuer à apaiser ses nombreux foyers de tension ? Décryptage.

Syrie : vers une conférence de paix ?

La coïncidence a frappé tous les observateurs. Lundi 25 novembre, trente-six heures après la conclusion des négociations entre l'Irak et le groupe des « 5 + 1 », le secrétaire général des Nations unies déclarait que la conférence de paix sur la Syrie, dite Genève 2, envisagée puis reportée à maintes reprises depuis six mois, se tiendrait finalement le 22 janvier. Il serait néanmoins erroné de voir dans cette annonce une première retombée bénéfique du pacte de Genève. « Les deux négociations sont parallèles, il y a des influences inévitables, mais sur Genève 2, il y avait un

L'accord sur le nucléaire iranien pourrait contribuer à apaiser la tension entre l'axe chiite et le camp pro-américain

accord de principe depuis longtemps », explique-t-on dans l'entourage de Lakhdar Brahimi, l'envoyé spécial de l'ONU et de la Ligue arabe sur le dossier syrien.

C'est le fait que la Coalition nationale syrienne (CNS), la principale plateforme d'opposition au régime Assad, se soit résolue à participer à la conférence, lors de son assemblée générale organisée à Istanbul du 9 au 11 novembre, qui a incité l'ONU à avancer une date. Il n'est pas impossible, en revanche, que le réchauffement entre Washington et Téhéran, l'un des principaux protecteurs du pouvoir syrien, facilite la tenue de ces pourparlers, encore largement hypothétique. « Qui de l'Iran ou de l'Occident influencera l'autre, cela reste à voir », affirme, avec prudence, Munzer Akbik, le chef de cabinet d'Ahmed Jarba, le chef de la CNS, qui rappelle les deux conditions que celle-ci pose pour participer à Genève 2 : l'acheminement d'aide humanitaire dans les localités assiégées depuis des mois par l'armée syrienne et la libération de femmes et d'enfants.

L'autre point de friction, susceptible d'amener à un énième report de la conférence, tient à la présence de l'Iran, réclamée par les autorités syriennes, mais refusée par l'opposition. « Les Français et les Américains ont mis un peu d'eau dans leur vin, témoigne une source proche du dossier. Ils comprennent que si l'Iran fait partie du problème, il pourrait faire partie de la solution. Mais ils hésitent à franchir le pas pour ne pas embarrasser la Coalition. »

Golfe : un voisin moins menaçant

L'Arabie saoudite, rival numéro un de Téhéran dans la course au leadership régional, a été le dernier Etat du Moyen-Orient à réagir au rapprochement de Genève. « S'il existe une bonne volonté, cet accord pourrait représenter un premier pas vers un règlement global

du dossier du programme nucléaire iranien », estime Riyad, qui se veut le défenseur des intérêts sunnites dans la région. Plus tôt, tous les autres pays du Conseil de coopération du Golfe, également angoissés à l'idée de devoir cohabiter avec un Iran doté de l'arme atomique, avaient exprimé leur satisfaction. « C'est un accord qui écarte l'option de la guerre, se félicite Abdelkhalik Abdullah, un politologue émirati. Le risque de frappes contre l'Iran, qui auraient déstabilisé tout le Golfe, est devenu quasiment nul ». La méfiance reste cependant de mise face à un voisin, qui est accusé d'interférer dans les affaires de plusieurs pays de la péninsule, comme le Bahreïn, où la monarchie sunnite est en butte à une contestation à dominante chiite. « Il est trop tôt pour parler d'un apaisement des tensions sectaires », dit M. Abdullah.

Israël : un compromis pas si mauvais

Le compromis obtenu dimanche 24 novembre à Genève est, d'un point de vue israélien, bien meilleur que celui qui a failli être signé deux semaines plus tôt. Il neutralise le stock d'uranium déjà enrichi par l'Iran à 20 % et met un coup d'arrêt à la centrale à eau lourde d'Arak, en cours de construction. Ce que le premier ministre israélien Benyamin Nétanyahou déplore, c'est que l'arrangement intérimaire entérine la capacité de l'Iran à enrichir et ne démantèle aucune installation existante.

Malgré ces critiques, l'avenir d'Israël est toutefois plus sûr avec un Iran inspecté sous toutes les coutures et engagé par un accord signé avec la communauté internationale. La posture maximaliste du gouvernement israélien est peut-être destinée à maintenir la pression jusqu'à un accord final. Elle peut également devenir un but en soi et camper Israël en puissance refusant toute avancée vers la paix dans la région, que ce soit

avec les Palestiniens, « ennemis de l'intérieur », ou avec l'Iran, épouvantail régional. Auquel cas, cette politique finirait par entrer en collision avec celle menée par les Etats-Unis, soucieux de sortir d'une confrontation qui fait de Washington l'otage des monarchies sunnites du Golfe.

De fait, un Iran pacifié et plus proche des Etats-Unis serait une aubaine pour Israël, à qui les révolutions arabes ont bénéficié plus qu'on ne le pense. Effrayé initialement par une lame de fond qu'il n'avait pas vu venir et qui a emporté certains de ses partenaires traditionnels, dont l'Egyptien Hosni Moubarak, l'Etat juif est aujourd'hui entouré de pouvoirs affaiblis. L'Egypte est dirigée par des généraux laïcs et nationalistes, féroce anti-islamistes et peu sensibles à la cause palestinienne. La Syrie de Bachar Al-Assad, en pleine guerre civile, est exsangue et a perdu sa principale arme stratégique, son arsenal chimique. Le Hezbollah libanais a perdu des forces et beaucoup de popularité à cause de son engagement pro-Assad en Syrie. L'Irak n'est pas près de retrouver sa puissance du temps de Saddam Hussein. Quant aux pays du Golfe, ils sont contraints à une alliance de circonstance avec leur voisin juif, de peur de revenir à l'époque du Shah, lorsqu'Israël et l'Iran coopéraient ouvertement. ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD
ET BENJAMIN BARTHE

En Syrie, les Kurdes prennent le large

Par CHRISTOPHE AYAD

Depuis le 12 novembre, le Kurdistan syrien dispose de sa propre administration autonome. L'annonce a été faite par le principal parti kurde syrien, le PYD, frère jumeau du Parti des travailleurs kurdes (PKK) d'Abdullah Öcalan, en Turquie.

En vertu de cette décision, la région kurde de Syrie – appelée le Kurdistan-Occidental – est divisée en trois zones, dotées chacune d'une assemblée locale, d'une administration ainsi que de représentants élus au sein d'un gouvernement provisoire régional, qui gèrera les territoires kurdes dans le nord-est et le nord de la Syrie, le long des frontières turque et irakienne.

« Les premières responsabilités de l'administration de transition vont être de préparer des lois sur les élections locales et de préparer les élections générales », explique le communiqué du PYD, qui ajoute que cette entité a vocation à gérer les questions « politiques, militaires, économiques et de sécurité dans la région et en Syrie ».

Depuis le retrait gouvernemental de l'été 2012, villages et villes kurdes sont administrés par des conseils locaux, la plupart du temps sous contrôle du PYD, et de son bras armé, les YPG (forces de défense nationale kurde).



Dans les faits, l'annonce du PYD ne change donc rien pour l'instant, mais c'est un nouveau coup dur pour les révolutionnaires syriens. En annonçant une autonomie de facto, le PYD fragilise encore un peu plus la crédibilité de la rébellion anti-Assad, incapable d'unifier les rangs des forces anti-gouvernementales et candidate à la direction d'un pays en cours de dépeçage, avant même la fin de la guerre civile en cours avec le régime.

PRATIQUES HÉGÉMONIQUES

La Coalition nationale syrienne (CNS) a d'ailleurs vivement réagi à cette annonce, traitant le PYD de « formation hostile à la révolution syrienne » et qualifiant l'administration qu'elle veut mettre en place d'« acte séparatiste brisant toute relation avec le peuple syrien qui se bat pour parvenir à un Etat syrien uni, indépendant, libre, non dictatorial et souverain sur son territoire ». Le communiqué se termine par une violente charge contre le PYD, « une formation qui

soutient le régime de [Bachar] Al-Assad et agit contre les intérêts du peuple syrien et les principes de sa révolution ». Le fait qu'Ahmed Jarba, l'actuel président de la CNS soit originaire des tribus arabes de Deir ez-Zor, en compétition récurrente avec les Kurdes pour les terres de cette province, n'est pas étranger à la violence de la réaction de la Coalition.

Depuis le début du soulèvement, en mars 2011, le PYD n'a cessé de louvoyer, à son propre profit. Conciliant avec le régime qui l'a ménagé pendant les premiers mois du soulèvement, il s'est ensuite allié aux autres formations kurdes regroupées au sein du Conseil national kurde (CNK), bien plus proche de l'opposition démocratique syrienne, afin de bouter le régime hors des zones kurdes. Avant de faire cavalier seul pour son seul compte, sans attendre l'opposition, ni même le CNK, dont un membre a désapprouvé la « démarche précipitée et unilatérale » du PYD, qui « va dans la mauvaise direction ». Les autres partis kurdes se méfient, en effet, des pratiques hégémoniques du PYD.

Le PYD, pour sa part, reproche à l'opposition syrienne non islamiste de n'avoir rien fait pour défendre les localités kurdes attaquées depuis le printemps par des groupes djihadistes comme l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIIL), le Front Al-Nosra, et même des formations salafistes comme Ahrar Al-Cham, qui reprochent toutes au PYD son marxisme « impie ». Outre les manipulations de la Turquie voisine, qui voit d'un très mauvais œil l'émergence d'une entité kurde syrienne autonome alliée au PKK, le Kurdistan syrien est d'autant plus convoité que s'y trouve l'essentiel des – petites – réserves pétrolières du pays. ■



Possibles exportations de brut du Kurdistan d'Irak vers la Turquie en décembre

ANKARA, 27 novembre 2013 (AFP)

LE PREMIER MINISTRE turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a reçu mercredi à Ankara son homologue du Kurdistan irakien pour finaliser un ambitieux contrat énergétique, critiqué à Bagdad, qui pourrait voir les premiers barils de brut exportés en Turquie avant la fin 2013.

M. Erdogan et son ministre de l'Energie Taner Yildiz se sont entretenus pendant trois heures avec Nechirvan Barzani, le Premier ministre de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien (nord) riche en hydrocarbures.

Aucune déclaration n'a été faite après la rencontre mais, dès son arrivée mardi soir dans la capitale turque, M. Barzani a confié à la presse que les premières livraisons de pétrole kurde pourraient avoir lieu "avant Noël".

Le projet de contrat entre Ankara et le Kurdistan irakien prévoit notamment la construction d'un nouvel oléoduc d'une capacité de 300.000 barils par jour, soit une petite portion des quelque 2,25 millions de barils/jour exportés par l'Irak le mois dernier.

Afin de diversifier son approvisionnement en énergie, largement dépendant de la Russie et de l'Iran, la Turquie a engagé depuis plusieurs mois des négociations avec le Kurdistan irakien.

"Nous avons dit aux Kurdes d'Irak que s'ils étaient en mesure d'acheminer leur pétrole jusqu'à la frontière, nous le leur acheterions", a indiqué à l'AFP une source gouvernementale turque.

Ces discussions ont suscité la grogne du pouvoir central à Bagdad, en conflit avec

Erbil notamment au sujet du partage des revenus de l'exploitation des hydrocarbures.

Dans une déclaration à l'AFP à Bagdad, le porte-parole du Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki a affirmé que le gouvernement irakien avait "informé l'ambassadeur turc à Bagdad de sa forte opposition à la signature d'un accord avec le Kurdistan sur un oléoduc".

Une telle signature, si elle a lieu, "nuirait fortement aux relations entre Bagdad et Ankara", a averti Ali Moussawi.

Auparavant, le vice-Premier ministre irakien en charge de l'Energie Hussein Chahristani avait insisté auprès de l'ambassadeur turc sur la nécessité de "régler les problèmes concernant la livraison illégale via la frontière turque, à l'insu du gouvernement fédéral (de Bagdad) et de son ministère du Pétrole", selon ses services.

Selon l'ex-directeur du groupe énergétique turc Botas, Mete Goknel, le projet d'accord entre la Turquie et le Kurdistan irakien prévoit la construction d'un oléoduc de 220 km entre le champ pétrolier de Khurmala, au sud d'Erbil, et Habut, à la frontière turque.

Cet oléoduc doit être relié à celui qui relie déjà Kirkouk (Irak) au port de Ceyhan (Turquie), a précisé M. Goknel à l'AFP.

Outre ses liens économiques, le gouvernement turc a renforcé sa coopération politique avec le Kurdistan irakien alors que les pourparlers de paix engagés il y a un an entre Ankara et les rebelles Kurdes du parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) sont au point mort.

Dans le même temps, Ankara a engagé un rapprochement avec Bagdad, en proposant ses bons offices à l'Irak pour tenter de régler son différend avec la province du Kurdistan concernant l'exploitation et la vente de son pétrole. ●

International New York Times

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Syrians turn their backs on rebel cause

DAMASCUS, SYRIA

Assad exploits divisions as corruption, jihadists and exhaustion take toll

BY ANNE BARNARD,
MOHAMMAD GHANNAM
AND HWAIDA SAAD

In a terrace cafe within earshot of Syrian Army artillery, a 28-year-old graduate student wept as she confessed that she had stopped planning antigovernment protests and delivering medical supplies to rebel-held towns.

Khaled, 33, a former protester who fled Damascus after being tortured and fired from his bank job, has quit working in Turkey with the exile opposition, disillusioned and saying he wishes the uprising "had never happened."

In the Syrian city of Homs, a rebel fighter, Abu Firas, 30, recently put down the gun his wife sold her jewelry to buy, disgusted with his commanders, who, he said, focus on enriching themselves. Now he finds himself trapped under government shelling, broke and hopeless.

"The ones who fight now are from the side of the regime or the side of the thieves," he said in a recent Skype interview. "I was stupid and naïve," he added. "We were all stupid."

Even as President Bashar al-Assad racks up modest battlefield victories, his greatest success to date may well be that he is wearing down the resolve of some who were committed to his downfall.

People have turned their backs on the opposition for many different reasons after two and a half years of fighting, some disillusioned with the growing power of jihadists among rebels, some complaining of corruption, others just exhausted with a conflict that shows no signs of abating.

But the net effect is the same, as some of the Syrians who risked their lives for the fight are effectively giving up, finding themselves in a kind of checkmate born of Mr. Assad's shrewdness and their own failures — though none interviewed say they are willing to return to his fold.

Their numbers are impossible to measure, and there remain many who vow to keep struggling. Yet a range of Mr. Assad's opponents, armed and unarmed, inside and outside Syria, tell of a common experience: When protests began, they thought they were witnessing the chance for a new life. They took risks they had never dreamed of taking. They lost jobs, houses, friends and relatives,



The damage from two and a half years of war in a Damascus suburb. The government has used heavy weaponry on rebel supporters to an extent that shocked even their opponents.

suffered torture and hunger, saw their neighborhoods laid to waste. It was all they could do, yet it was not enough.

What finally forced them to the sidelines, they say, was the disarray and division on their side, the government's deft exploitation of their mistakes, and a growing sense that there was no happy ending in sight. Some said they came to believe that the war could only be won by those as violent and oppressive as Mr. Assad, or worse.

Such conclusions have been expressed by more and more people in recent months, in interviews in Damascus, Lebanon, Turkey and via Skype across rebel-held areas in Syria. Many more fighters say they continue mainly because quitting would leave them feeling guilty toward other fighters.

"It's undeniable that a lot of your early activists are disillusioned," said Emile Hokayem, a Syria analyst at the Institute for International Strategic Studies. In revolutions, he added, it is often "your most constructive, positive people who are engaged early on who find themselves sidelined."

Because such groups tend to be more vocal, he said, their views may be magnified beyond their numbers. Most are urbanites who had little understanding of the conservative poor whose mobilization is the backbone of the insurgency, he said. But their backing off has real impact, he said, especially on local governance, where they tended to be active.

Early on, these people say, activists, euphoric at being able to protest at all, neglected to build bridges to fence-sitters, or did not know how. Homegrown fighters desperate for help welcomed foreign jihadists, and many grew more religious or sectarian in tone, alarming Mr. Assad's supporters, dividing his op-

ponents and frightening the West out of substantially supporting them.

With a ruthless foresight, Mr. Assad followed the playbook of his father and predecessor, Hafez al-Assad, and Syrian forces cracked down early and hard on the civilian, educated opposition, erasing the space where a middle ground could have emerged. They used heavy weaponry on rebel supporters to an extent that shocked even their foes, while pursuing a deliberate and increasingly successful strategy of persuading Syrians and the world that their opponents were a greater danger.

With the help of staunch allies, they hung on through a war that has destroyed much of Syria and its economy, leaving millions hungry and homeless and even critics wistful for better days.

"They changed the battle," the former activist in Damascus said. "Now people are trying to survive more than they are fighting for their rights."

She and her friends, she said, sometimes think "they are geniuses, this regime. They worked from day one to make it like this, and they succeeded. We were just fooled — going in the same direction they drew for us."

Those still active say that as others drop out, their work becomes harder. One activist who still tries to deliver humanitarian supplies from Damascus to blockaded rebel-held areas expressed frustration that pharmacists and others who once helped her obtain baby formula now refuse, out of fear and despair. Another says that as young, motivated people flee the country, there are few to help with political organizing.

Mr. Assad has moved to capitalize on opponents' despair, offering amnesties to rebels who lay down arms, even calling for army defectors to return to gov-

ernment forces. But Abu Firas, the former fighter in Homs, laughed out loud at the idea of surrender.

"O.K., I will be on Addounia TV as a hero for the pro-regime people," he said sarcastically, referring to state television, "while my people spit on the TV, calling me traitor and coward."

"And the day after," he added, "I will find myself in Saidnaya prison" — a government facility — "spending 31 years in the rule of a military court or court of terrorism."

The former activist in Damascus said that if the government prevails, she will leave the country or face arrest. She believes that they know about her activities but have not arrested her "because I'm not doing anything that hurts them now." But later, "they will remember," she said. "They will take everybody."

Each of the disaffected has a story of personal betrayal or disappointment. For the former activist, it came when she realized there was "a difference in values" between her and some of the fellow protesters she had trusted, especially some who took up arms.

"They think that they are in the right and they have the authority to do anything they want," she said. "They are fighting for Islam or their beliefs, maybe

"The ones who fight now are from the side of the regime or the side of the thieves."

not any more to bring down Assad."

Abu Firas, in Homs, said that at first he felt proud to carry his gun, even forgoing food or cigarettes during a government blockade. But things "went ugly," he said, when some commanders made profitable deals with government soldiers, endangering fellow rebels.

"Selfishness and greed just came to the surface," he said, adding that he tried to smooth out the problems, "but it didn't work because you can't think right when you are hungry."

"I think these corrupted commanders do not want this war to end," he added. "Did I say war, not revolution?"

Yes, unfortunately I did."

Ammar, 21, stayed in his hometown, Qusayr, recording videos for the rebels through a blistering defeat, living on little food, fantasizing about chocolate. He had given up a comfortable life; he studied English literature and his family owned apricot orchards. When they fled to another rebel-held area, despite their sacrifices, they were kicked out of mosques and forced to sleep on streets.

"I reached a stage where I hated the revolution," he said, visiting Beirut, where he obtained a visa to immigrate to Sweden. "I don't want to be an activist any more. I want to be a football player. I want to eat a lot of chocolate."

Anne Barnard reported from Damascus, Syria, and Beirut, Lebanon, and Mohammad Ghannam and Hwaida Saad from Beirut.

Iran invites inspectors to examine nuclear site

LONDON

Proposal to visit facility signals first tangible step since Geneva agreement

BY ALAN COWELL

Five days after Iran struck a landmark accord with world powers on its nuclear program, the International Atomic Energy Agency announced on Thursday that Tehran had invited its inspectors to visit a heavy-water production plant linked to the deal — the first tangible step since the agreement was concluded.

In a speech in Vienna, the director general of the agency, Yukiya Amano, said the invitation was for inspectors to travel to the plant in Arak, in central Iran, on Dec. 8. Mr. Amano told reporters that it was "for sure" that inspectors would accept the offer.

The invitation was limited to the heavy-water production facility on the same site as a reactor under construction to which international inspectors have had some access, Mr. Amano said. The facility producing heavy water, used in some types of reactors to control nuclear activity, has been off limits to inspectors for more than two years.

Part of the deal in Geneva specifically provided for Iran not to produce fuel for the Arak plant, install additional reactor components there or put the plant into operation. If it becomes fully operational, the reactor would produce plutonium that could be used in a nuclear weapon.

In return for that and other curbs on Tehran's nuclear program, the powers promised a limited easing of the punitive international economic sanctions that have crippled the Iranian economy.

The speed with which Tehran offered access to Arak was taken by some analysts as a sign that Iran's leaders wanted to press ahead soon with implementation of the deal, which is intended as an interim accord lasting six months during which negotiators are to discuss a comprehensive settlement.

The dispute hinges on the purpose of Iran's nuclear program, which Western leaders say is designed to acquire the technology for atomic weapons. Iran says the program is for peaceful purposes.

Mr. Amano also told the agency's board on Thursday that Catherine

Ashton, the European Union's top foreign policy official who played a central part in the Geneva negotiations, had told him in a letter that the I.A.E.A., the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, "will have an important role in the verification of the nuclear-related measures" agreed to in Geneva.

He suggested that the agency might need more money and experts to fulfill that role.

"We are now looking at the way in which the elements of the agreement



HEINZ-PETER BADER/REUTERS

Yukiya Amano, the I.A.E.A. chief, said inspectors would accept the offer "for sure."

Inspectors with the United Nations are expected to travel to the plant in Arak, in central Iran, on Dec. 8.

relevant to the agency could be put into practice," he said. "This will include the implications for funding and staffing. This analysis will take some time." Diplomats said the review could take until January.

Mr. Amano, who visited Tehran on Nov. 11, said he had agreed with high-ranking officials there that Iran would permit "managed access" to at least two contentious sites — the Gachin mine in Bandar Abbas and the Arak plant, which Iranian officials say is designed to produce medical isotopes.

The term "managed access" usually denotes arrangements allowing host countries to protect information that they consider proprietary or secret, while permitting inspectors to collect the data they require, officials said.

The promise of inspections did not extend to the Parchin military site southwest of Tehran, where I.A.E.A. inspectors suspect that Iran at one time tested triggering devices for nuclear weapons.

The watchdog has also questioned whether the Gachin mine, which produces yellowcake uranium for conversion to nuclear fuel, is linked to Iran's military. Mr. Amano's announcement on Thursday did not specifically mention access to the mine. But, he said, "all other outstanding issues" relating to the I.A.E.A.'s differences with Iran would be addressed "in subsequent steps."