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ROJAVA: TURKISH THREATS ARE INCREASINGLY HEAVY

Turkish threats to Rojava are increasing. Having massed troops opposite Kilis, on the Turkish side of the border at the end of June and in July and between Jerablus and al-Bab on the Syrian side, Turkey has been shelling Afrin all week, according to the Syrian Centre for Human Rights (SCHR), hitting a dozen villages, injuring a dozen civilians. According to the YPG a woman and her two children were killed and 7 young teenagers wounded in the Shahba region. Recently promoted to Canton status by the Rojava authorities and just South of the area controlled by the

Turks and the forces they control, between Jerablous and Azaz, Shahba forms a strategic corridor between Afrîn and Kobanê, vital to the Turks as well as the for Rojava.

The Dogan news agency describes the Turkish attacks as “retaliations” to shots fired against the Turks from Mount Parsa. While the YPG is calling on the international coalition to act and put an end to these attacks, the Turks have announced that they wish to take control of Tell Rifaat, about 10 km South of Azaz and then to besiege Afrin, 20 km to the West. In Afrin, a demonstration on the

5th against these attacks on brought together tens of thousands of people while the YPG described the Turkish deployment as a “declaration of war” that was in danger of provoking confrontations. The Turkish Deputy Prime Minister, Numan Kurtulmuş, replied that Turkey had not declared war but that it “would respond to any hostile moves by the YPG. On the evening of 7th the Turkish Air Force bombed Rojava and Sinjar (in Iraq (*Rûdaw*)). More than ever there is Turkey is a world of difference between Turkey’s statements about “*preserving Syria’s territorial integrity*” and its own invasion of Syrian soil...

The “war of words” is also waged by the pro-AKP daily *Sabah*, which announced that the Ankara-backed Syrian rebels were ready to carry out anti-YPG operations and that the Russians could ensure their air diver. On the 8th, President Erdogan who was chairing the G20, declared that Turkey would never authorise the formation of a Kurdish State in North Syria and would not hesitate about “using its right to self-defence” if its security was threatened by “the support and arming of terrorist groups and by the setting up of terrorist pockets near our borders”. On the 17th, the *Anatolia* news agency unhesitatingly published an article entitled “The USA is increasing its presence in by supporting the PKK/PYD in Syria” in which it revealed the location of several American and French Special Forces units, this putting them in danger, according to the Pentagon.

At the diplomatic level, since Turkey has failed to alter American support for the SDF tried to negotiate with Russia an agreement that would enable it to attack Afrin. On the 2nd, the Turkish President met the Russian Defence Minister, Sergueï Shoïgou, at Istanbul, together with the head of his Intelligence Service (MIT), Hakan Fidan and General Hulusi Akar. This meeting aroused some concern in Rojava, fearing the possibility of a Russo-Turkish “exchange” should Moscow wish to secure the evacuation of rebels from Idlib to areas in Syria that Ankara already and could then direct towards Tell Rifaat, a town at present held by the YPG...

Was this the result of these contacts? On the 13th Bahjat Abdo, who leads the defence of Afrin stated on *Kurdistan 24* that the Russians had asked the Canton's

authorities to let the Syrian Army enter it to stop the Turkish attacks. The reply was that the regime had been driven out of Afrin 5 years earlier and that there was no reason for it to return... the reason for the changes in Turkish lines after their negotiations with the Russians could be wither Turkey being obliged to make the rebels it armed it “swallow” the concessions it made there or else due to its obsessional distrust of the Kurds or that dissensions had appeared between the Turkish Army and the these back-up troops it supported. Indeed, on the 6th it was learnt that Ankara had disarmed a Kurdish militia that was opposed to the YPG and even jailing its leader for 3 weeks. The latter was accused by Ankara of having “used the militia to increase its influence in the region”

Confrontations between the SDF and Turkish-backed rebels also took place at the middle of the month in Aleppo Province, where rebels of the *Ahl al-Diyar* lost about 15 of their fighters. Finally on the 31st, some Turkish militia crossed the border with bulldozers near Kobanê before having to retreat following warning by the YPG.

Thus it is under the constant threat from the Turks that the Rojava Cantons and the SDF have continued their fight against the 2,500 jihadists who are anchored in the town of Raqqa, which the SDF, for the first time, entered from the South. Taking the al-Hal Market. On the 3rd, the women's units from Sinjar (YJS) announced they were taking part in the attack side by side with the YPJ “to take part in the liberation of the women (Yezidis) kidnapped by ISIS”. The next day the US Command announced that the SDF, this time attacking from the East, having succeeded

in making 25m breaches in the Rafiqah wall surrounding the city. Then, on 17th, the SDF announced it had taken back another quarter, Yarmouk, At the Southern limits of the town. According to the SCHR the SDF do not yet control the whole of this quarter and held about 35% of the city. According to Nasrin Abdulla, Commander of the YPG on the 27th, 45% of the city was freed, a figure confirmed by the SCHR. However the next day one of the principal YPG commanders, Sipan Hemo, stated that they might interrupt the operations if the Turkish attacks against Rojava continued: certain units like the *Jaish al-Thurwar* coming from Shabha, had had to abandon the protection of their own lands, threatened by the Turks.

These advances at Raqqa are taking place in a civil war context, in which at Astana as in Geneva, the outside powers are negotiating more and more openly the zones they influence, over the heads of the Syrians whatever their tendencies. After two days of virtually unsuccessful negotiations, on the 4th and 5th at Astana, a representative of the opposition considered that the agreement on the “de-escalation zones” essentially represented “the strengthening of the Russian and Iranian influence in the field (*Reuters*). The US and Russia announced a cease fire agreement for the South and Southwest of the country after the Trump-Putin meeting at the G20. Negotiated with the help of Jordan, the agreement should take effect on Sunday 9th at mid-day, Damascus time, controlled by the Russian military police. However it was only on the 26th that the Russian Army announced it had deployed 4 battalions of military police to ensure security in the two “de-escalation zones”.

Speaking at Geneva in the 11th, to open 5 days of negotiations, the Special UN Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, pointed out that these cease fire agreements would make help to civilians easier and might enable the stabilisation of the country but warned that they could only play a temporary role if one wanted to avoid partition. De Mistura also stated in an interview with *Sputnik* that the Syrian Kurdish should take part in the process of drafting the country's future constitution and that the country's Kurdish community could not be ignored — a dig at Turkey that excluded from the start the PYD from any negotiations — but neither UNO nor its Special Envoy had the means for imposing anything in the field. So long as ISIS remains a threat the SDF enjoys the support of the US-led coalition, but what will come after? ? Ilham Ahmed, co-president of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), the political expression of the SDF, attempted from Kobane on the 25th to answer this question in an interview given to

Associated Press: *"Once Raqqa is won back from ISIS" she declared, the United States should "continue its action in the country to guarantee its stability until its policy can be decided"*. She added that we cannot limit ourselves to fighting ISIS in the military field but, to avoid the reappearance of similar groups, we must build a democratic system. In Ms Ahmed's opinion the civilian Councils set up by SDF in the liberated towns could serve as models for Syria's other regions. She made the point that the composition of Raqqa's Council will change after the total eviction of ISIS to include tribal chiefs who had not previously been represented as their regions are often still under jihadist control. On 23rd the assistant commander of the anti-ISIS coalition, the British General Rupert Jones, in a press conference rightly praised the Raqqa civilian Council after meeting some of its members who had *"done a remarkable job to providing humanitarian aid got displaced persons"*.

It should be noted that on the

11th the SDF women's commander, Rojda Shiya, announced the formation of a battalion of women recruited from Syrian Arab women throughout the country. This worried the jihadists, for whom nothing is more terrifying than to fall in battle against women. It will also worry Turkey who will see in this the spreading of the Rojava *"terrorist centre"* to non-Kurdish women.

On the 29th, the Hawar news agency announced that the Constituent Assembly of the North Syrian Democratic Federation (the self-proclaimed autonomous federal structure that will include Rojava) had approved the electoral law and that its Council had decided deadlines for the Federation's elections: 22nd August for municipal elections, 3 November for local administrations. The elections for representatives to the Democratic Conference of the Peoples of North Syria and the regional Councils will be held on 19th January 2018.

TURKEY:

THE CYCLE IF REPRESSION AND VIOLENCE IS STILL GOING STRONG

The AKP authorities continue to persecute and convict the HDP elected representatives, M.P.s and mayors alike. On the 3rd the vice-President of the HDP parliamentary group, Ahmet Yıldırım, received a suspended sentence of to 1 year and 2 months jail and banned from any political action for *"insulting the President"*. He had stated in a press communiqué about the curfew on the Cizre quarter of Şırnak *"the precious Padishah in his palace and all those around him will be taken to court. I say clearly that Yayip Erdogan is not any cleaner than Tansu Çiller"* His lawyers have appealed.

On the next day the trial of the former co-President of the HDP, Figen Yüksekdağ, opened in Ankara. She is accused of *"terrorist propaganda"* on behalf of the PKK during the October 2014 protests at Turkey's the closing of the borders during the Jihadist attack on Kobanê. Clashes with the police had caused dozens of deaths at the time — the HDP imputed the violence to the police. The international delegation that came to attend the session was forbidden to enter the court as the lacked *"authorisation by the minister of the Interior"*. Facing a 30-year prison sentence, she was greeted as she entered the court with slo-

gans of support. Other *"proofs"* presented against her are her speeches as HDP co-President, her support for an *"autonomous and democratic administration"* (written into the HDP's programme) and the use of the term *"massacres"* for the army operations in the Kurdish provinces. UNO has mentioned the possibility of *"war crimes"* — will Turkey charge its General Secretary with *"propaganda for a terrorist organisation"*?

On the 7th the new parliamentary regulations, approved by the AKP and the MHP, were presented. They foresee a fine for any M.P. using the term

“Kurdistan” in a parliamentary session. On the same day Selahattin Demirtaş, the other imprisoned co-President of HDP, refused to be taken to court in handcuffs. His lawyers left the court in protest. He is accused of “public humiliation of the Turkish government, judicial organisation, Army and police” on the basis of statements made on social networks. In one of the statements being used against him, dated last April, he said he had found the words that exactly defined the present AKP policy “The fundamental base of the AKP government is to create an atmosphere of fear make it felt by everyone. During such periods fearing the government and the power it exercises is very human — but do not forget that courage is equally human and that the only way not to transmit this fear to our children is to act with courage”.

On the 15th the HDP Member of parliament Abdullah Zeydan, imprisoned since last November was sentenced to over 8 years jail for “propaganda for a terrorist organisation” and links with the PKK. Then on the 17th the HDP Member for Sanliurfa, Ibrahim Ayhan, arrested last February, received 15 months jail for the same charges. In 2015 he had shared on the social networks some photos of PKK members: Ismail Aydemir, killed in Dersim (Tunceli), and Aziz Güler, killed by ISIS, with the following message: “Rebel commander in Dersim, Baran Dersim [Aydemir’s pseudonym] and resistance fighter in Kobanê, we cherish your memories”. Also sentenced for the same charges: Abdullah Zeyda, M.P. for Hakkari, to 8 years and 45 days prison and Çağlar Demirel, M.P. for Diyarbakir to 7-and a half years. Two other M.P.s Dilan Tasdemir, vice-co-president of the party and Adem Geveri were arrested, one at Ataturk Airport of Istanbul and the other in Ankara.

A new arrest warrant was issued on the 19th against the co-mayor of Diyarbakir Firat Anlı, released the 14th but the Public Prosecutor opposed the release. The two co-mayors of de Diyarbakir, Firat Anlı and Gültan Kışanak had been incarcerated on the 25th and arrested in 30th October for “terrorist propaganda”... On the 27th living abroad after proceeding had been started against them they were stripped of their parliamentary offices because of their absence and risk being deprived of their nationality.

Amongst the rare acquittals is that of Leyla Zana on the 11th at Diyarbakir for “insufficient evidence” for the charges of “membership of a terrorist group” and “terrorist propaganda”. Awarded the Sakharov Prize by the European Parliament, she has already served 10 years prison for similar charges and for having added a few Kurdish words while swearing her oath as M.P. Another release was the HDP Member for Siirt, Besime Konca, following her appeal against her two and a half year sentence for “terrorist propaganda”.

On the 25th about ten HDP Members of Parliament launched a campaign of protest in the Diyarbakir Park against the repression. They plan to remain in the park for 24 hours a day for a week. Hundreds of police and armoured cars and water cannons have surrounded the quarter and forbidden access to the shady parts of the park so as to force the protesters to remain in the sun. The HDP spokesman, Osman Baydemir, told the journalists “This police blocking shows up the country’s situation. A political party that won 70% of the votes (in this city) cannot hold a meeting in the park (...) Fascism can only be stopped by

democratic struggle. (...) without violence or animosity”. The HDP envisages organising demonstrations until 4th November, the anniversary of the arrest of its two co-presidents.

Human Rights defenders are also targeted. On the 17th the Istanbul Court ordered the incarceration before trial of six of them, including the manager in Turkey of Amnesty International, Idil Eser, and two German and Swedish trainers, all arrested in the middle of a training session in Amnesty’s premises. They are accused of helping an armed terrorist group. Four of them were released and forbidden to leave the country before their trial. On the 24th the trial began of 17 journalist of the opposition daily *Cumhuriyet*, against whom the Prosecution has called for up to 43 years prison for “supporting a terrorist organisation”. The 324-page charge sheet accuses the paper of being controlled by Fethullah Gülen. The paper had published evidence of the military aid provided by the Turkish Intelligence Services (*MIT, Millî İstihbarat Teşkilatı*) to the Syrian Islamists.

The CHP (once the Kemalist regime’s sole party), which had, however, voted for the law lifting the parliamentary immunity and having started the witch hunt against the HDP members of Parliament, has finished by realising the consequences of that vote. This late awakening has resulted, on 14th June, in the sentencing to 25 years jail of the CHP Member of Parliament, CHP Enis Berberoğlu, who had provided *Cumhuriyet* with the video incriminating the MIT. On the 4th, the 20th day of the “March for Justice” organised to protest at this sentence, its leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, appealed to the European Human Rights

Court against the decision of the Electoral Commission to take into account ballot papers that had not been validated in last April's referendum. The day before the march had been joined by representatives of HDP on their way to the prison in which Figen Yüksekdağ is being held. The latter called from her cell for a common opposition struggle. In reply the Turkish President made his favourite accusations against his CHP opponents — *“acting in concert with terrorist groups”* and *“taking the road to Qandil [and] Pennsylvania”*.

To this month's repressive record should be added 7,395 civil servants, teachers, police and army officers fired from their positions by a new decree issued to commemorate the attempted coup d'état of last July, which was also celebrated in Turkey on the 15th and 16th by several “national unity marches”. In fact the number of civil servants fired in the course of the year amounted to 110,000.

The acts of violence continue: fighting between the Turkish Army and the PKK and attacks by the latter. Two local AKP leaders were shot: Orhan Mercan at Lice

(Diyarbakir) in the evening of the 30th June (an action claimed by the PKK) and Aydın Ahi at Özalp (Van) on 1st July. Also on the 1st, the Turkish Army announced it had eliminated by air strikes 5 Kurdish fighters who were preparing to attack an Army base in Mardin Province, as well as 5 others in battle at Bingol, 4 others in Iraqi Kurdistan and another 3 in various provinces. On the same day the Mayor of Mergasur, a town in Iraqi Kurdistan near the Turkish border, stated that the fighting had given rise to a fire that was still not under control. On the 3rd, according to several Turkish official sources, the PKK had carried out several attacks: one remote controlled bomb killed a soldier at Cukurca (Hakkari), another had wounded two “village guards” at Çaldıran (Van), one of which later died in hospital, and a third attack killed two labourers working on an access road to an army base.

The Ministry of the Interior, for its part, announced that the police had killed 55 “terrorist” the previous week. In the morning of the 7th a remote-controlled bomb exploded without causing any casualties as a convoy was

passing by. This convoy was carrying the district governor of Baykan (Siirt) — an action claimed by the PKK on the same day. On the 17th a bomb exploded near Yukçekova (Hakkari) as an Army convoy was passing, wounding 17 soldiers. On the 13th the governor of Istanbul announced the arrest of 44 suspects and the TAK attacks last year, including one for the attack on the Istanbul stadium that had caused 46 deaths in December and another in the attack on a police convoy that caused 11 deaths in June.

Iraqi Kurdistan was hit all through the month: in the 12th Turkish artillery shelled from 2 to 10 a.m. zones near Amedî, suspected of harbouring PKK fighters, forcing the residents to flee from their homes. On the 15th the Anatolia news agency announced air strikes had killed 4 Kurdish fighters near Basyan. Other strikes took place against sur Qandil on the 29th, causing a fire on Mount Kurazhari (Shiladze district) and on the evening of 30th North of Dihyk (equipment damaged and one person wounded). Finally on the evening of the 28th four picnickers were wounded near de Zakho by artillery fire

EUROPE:

VERBAL CONDEMNATIONS OF TURKEY — BUT AID CONTINUES...

The Turkey-European Union fracture (and at bilateral level between Turkey and several EU members particularly Germany) continues to grow wider. On 6 July the European Parliament called for the suspension of discussion on Turkey's membership — passed by 477 against 64, with 97 abstentions. Indeed the vote was only non-binding report on Turkey and the reporter Kati Piri recommended this decision in the

event of the reforms wanted by President Erdogan being carried out but the message is clear. Another sign of tension — four days earlier the European United Left Group had nominated Selahattin Demirtaş, co-president of the HDP and imprisoned for the last 8 months for the 2017 Václav Havel Prize, arguing that his fight in favour of the rights of the Kurdish people. This Human Rights prize, attributed every year since 2013 by the Parliamentary Assembly of the

council of Europe in partnership with the Václav Havel Library and the Charter 77 Foundation went last year to the young Yezidi activist Nadia Mourad. She won it for drawing the International Community's attention to the sexual slavery imposed by ISIS on its captive Yezidis.

On the same day, in Germany, the ANF news agency, close to the PKK, reported the discovery of a second agent of the MIT

(Turkish Intelligence Service). A first spy, Mehmet Fatih Sayan, had recently been arrested. Like him, Mustafa Karadaş, discovered by phone tapping, was charged with preparing for the assassination of Kurdish activists on German soil (he had a list of potential targets). The embarrassing point is that he seems to have served as an informer to the German Intelligence at the same time... As partners in NATO, Germany and Turkey are led to exchanging information — hence an ambiguous situation: the two countries also exchange reciprocal accusations of espionage... This could explain why the German press has made little mention of this discovery: the situation is tense enough between the two allies. Since, following repeated refusals by Turkey to allow German members of parliament to visit troops stationed in the NATO base at Incirlik, the latter began as of the 9th, to withdraw from it. The previous month the *Bundestag* endorsed the decision to move them to Jordan next October (*Reuters*). On 15th Turkey once again forbade visits by German members of Parliament to the base at Konya just a few days before a planned visit. The Chairmen of the German Parliament's Defence Commission, Wolfgang Hellmich (SPD) declared that as the Konya setup was a NATO base, this fresh Turkish decision was becoming "really a NATO problem...".

Another issue of tension is the arrest on 5th July of the German Human Rights activist Peter Steudtner together with 5 other Human Rights defenders, including *Amnesty International's* manager in Turkey Idil Eser. Steudtner, as a specialist in non-violent actions, was taking part in the training of such a group in

the *Amnesty International* premises in Istanbul. The German Foreign Minister demanded his release on the 18th, a demand described by Turkey on the 20th as "unacceptable" and an attempt to interfere with the Turkish judiciary system. Following these statements the German Foreign Minister, Sigmar Gabriel, warned German citizens not to go to Turkey, pointing out that "any German going to Turkey could be arrested". Alongside this the German weekly *Bild* published an article saying that Germany was going to suspend the sale of arms and military cooperation with Turkey.

This tension had side effects on the legal level: on the 13th a Stuttgart court, having sentenced a person accused of membership of the PKK, propaganda, collecting funds and recruiting for that organisation mentioned, in the clauses explaining its sentence, some attenuating circumstances, the fact that the accused had "personally suffered ill treatment from the Turkish State before he left the country, because of his Kurdish ethnic origins"...

Tensions are also in danger of increasing with Sweden, where the Green and Left members of Parliament announced on the 10th that they had jointly filed a complaint to the International Office of the Ministry against the Turkish President and Prime Minister accusing them of "genocide, crimes against Humanity and War Crimes" in military operations in Turkish Kurdistan and the acts of violence they caused. Naming Binali Yıldırım and several other Ministers, this complaint is the first ever filed in Sweden against a Head of State while still in office. It was made possible by a law passed in 2014 allowing Swedish courts to pass judge-

ment on crimes against humanity regardless of who were their authors or the place where they were committed. Should the court decide to open a preliminary enquiry, it could result in warrants being issued for the arrest of the Turkish President. The Green M.P., Carl Schlyter, has stated that he hoped that other European members of parliament would follow the Swedish example — the impossibility of travelling in Europe could oblige Mr Erdogan to alter his policies.

These problems, which are accumulating have any concrete results? So far this has not been the case — at least not so far, whereas after the Army coup of 1980, the EU had frozen relations with Turkey. So far European aid continues to arrive, and the amount of up to 4.45 billion is planned from now till 2020, to be added to the 200 millions already paid.

Last April, in reply to the following question: "Europe has already given more than 6 billion to Turkey — whose fault is it?" *Europe 1* published on its web site the following answer (the figures are still true valid): "It is true that Turkey has also received a little more according to the figure the European Commission has given us. They have received seven billion euros have already and six billion more are due to be paid to them in the next three years, There are two main sources: three billion promised for managing the refugees, which was agreed last year, of which a third has already been paid, and the pre-membership aid instrument, which Turkey has been receiving since 2002 and which were beefed up when negotiations began in 2005". (<http://www.europe1.fr/emissions/le-vrai-faux-de-l-info2/combien-leurope-a-t-elle-deja-donne-a-la-turquie-3305624>).

KURDISTAN: MOSUL FALLS — SOME MOVES TOWARDS RE-ACTIVATING PARLIAMENT?

On 10th July the Iraqi forces, while announcing they had taken back the whole of Mosul, made an additional step towards a post-ISIS full of uncertainties. Kurdistan seems to be moving towards agreement on the referendum and the reactivation of Parliament — in an economic context that is still as painful for the population. On the 6th President Barzani reaffirmed that he would not retreat on the referendum whatever the reactions by Baghdad or the neighbouring countries...

Arriving in Mosul on the 9th, the Iraqi Prime Minister congratulated his troops in their “total victory”. However there was a bitter after-taste to this: 9 months to take back a city that the jihadists had conquered in 2014 in a few days, a field of ruins, thousands of dead and 900,000 displaced persons. After taking the al-Shifaa quarter the Iraqi troops had advanced despite ISIS suicide counter-attacks, sometimes using disguised women mingling with the fleeing civilians. One of them had made 15 victims near the al-Nuri Mosque in the morning of the 3rd creating extreme tension between the troops and the inhabitants. Four days after Abadi’s declaration of victory, fighting was continuing round pockets of Jihadists with helicopters flying overhead and while an American General stated that there were probably still 200 jihadists in the city.

On the 15th a military parade celebrating the victory took place... in Baghdad. On the 17th ISIS attacked a village to the Northwest of Mosul Province, killing 5 people including the village head and capturing 5

others. The fate of ISIS’s leader, Abou Bakr al-Bagdadi, remains uncertain: on the 11th the Syrian Centre for Human Rights told *Reuters* he was dead according to unofficial jihadist sources but on the 17th Lahur Talabani, the PUK head of security, stated that in his opinion he was still alive and living South of Raqqa, adding that he had experience of clandestine life.

Accusations of Iraqi abuses during the battle of Mosul have rapidly increased. On the 1st, witnesses declared to *Human Rights Watch (HRW)* that they had been present when civilians fleeing Mosul were beaten up and had heard officers boast of illegal executions. The NGO demanded an independent enquiry. On the 11th, *Amnesty International* in its turn suspicions of violations of Human Rights by Iraqi troops and their American NCOs by using their weapons in a way that uselessly endangered civilian lives. According to *Médecins sans Frontières* the human cost of the final attack was “devastating” for the town’s civilians. On the 27th HRW published a report accusing a unit, trained by American soldiers, of illegal executions (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/27/iraq-us-trained-forces-linked-mosul-war-crimes>). They demanded that the US suspend any assistance to the 16th Division pending an Iraqi enquiry.

Certainly the recapture of Mosul does not mean the end of fighting. According to security sources the jihadist organisation still has 4,000 activists in Iraq plus over 3,000 paid members and controls three towns: Tel Afar, 77 on East of Mosul and near the Syrian borders, al-

Qaim, to the West of Anbar and Hawija, South of Kirkuk. This last has become its principal base in central Iraq from which it sends incessant attacks towards Touz Khourmatou and tries to infiltrate Kirkuk. On the 3rd the Peshmerga’s Ministry demanded that the coalition take part in the attack on Hawija but it seems to want to liberate Tell Afar first and then the Ramadi region. On the 5th, three jihadists who had infiltrated from Hawija were arrested in Kirkuk before being able to act. On the 14th the police arrested a woman suspected of being an ISIS cadre and on the 17th, although a jihadist attack caused 5 deaths the security services arrested 5 suspects of Hawija origins plus 35 others South of the town. West of Touz Khourmatou, a town of mixed Kurdish/Turkemenian population, the Peshmergas began at the end of June to dig a 43 km long trench along the front to protect themselves. One of them was killed by a sniper near the village of Zarga, targeted during a night attack on the 3rd. On the 28th the explosion of a pickup parked in front of a restaurant on the Kirkuk-Baghdad road, near Touz Khourmatou wounded 3 people. It is still not known whether it was a remote controlled bomb or a suicide attack. On the evening of 29th an attack on Zarga caused 2 deaths and 2 wounded. Since 2014 the Peshmergas have suffered 1,745 killed, 10,069 wounded and 63 missing in the war against ISIS.

At the political level, the referendum on self-determination, set for 25th September continues to provoke reactions: on the 4th the Shiite leader Moqtada al-Sadr called for it to be postponed or even cancelled; on the 10th the

Turkish President re-iterated his opposition, the former governor of Mosul, Athîl al-Nujaîfi, demanded its cancellation in that province where the *Hashd al-Shaabi* are very numerous, out of fear of “negative consequences”. The Iraqi Prime Minister described the referendum as “unconstitutional” but Russia let its differences be heard: Sergueï Lavrov declared in the 24th on an interview with *Rûdaw* that it corresponded “with the right of the Kurdish people to express their aspirations”.

On the 9th a delegation of the referendum Commission led by Masud Barzani and including members of the KDP, PUK, some Turkomenians, some Christians and some Yezidis flew to Brussels to promote and explain the referendum to the European officials as well as to strengthen bilateral relations with EU leaders. On the 12th Masud Barzani argued before the European M.P.s that Baghdad had not observed the 2005 Constitution and that all the Iraqi governments, both Sunni and Shiite had “had treated the Kurds with hostility” asking the countries of the EU of they did not officially support the referendum at least “to remain neutral”.

While most of the political parties in Kurdistan support the principle of a referendum as conforming to the right of the Kurds to self-determination, the issue of the reactivation of parliament remains a serious point of disagreement. The KDP and Masud Barzani are sometimes accused of using that vote in their interest — as was said on 1st July by Kawa Mohammed, head of the *Gorran* block in the Iraqi Parliament. The PUK, through the voice of one of its leaders, Mahmoud Sangawî, reiterated its position on the 8^t : support for the referendum but condi-

tional to the reactivation of Parliament. This position was reaffirmed on the same day by the joint Gorran-PUK leadership, then on the 13th by the PUK Political Office. While the PUK had sent members to the meeting of the Referendum Preparatory Committee, namely Qubad Talabani, the Deputy Prime Minister, and Najmladdine Karim, the Governor of Kirkuk, they went by virtue of their offices, not as party representatives. On the 11th Gorran and the Kurdistan Islamic Group (*Komal*) expressed a similar position. They also demanded that the November elections be advanced and be held on the same day, or the day before, the referendum (or that the referendum date be brought back) so that Parliament could be reactivated. On the next day Gorran and the Kurdistan Islamic Union (*Yekgirtû*) published a joint communiqué expressing the same position.

On the 19th a decree signed, by Masud Barzani on the 12th, was officially published setting the parliamentary elections on 1st November. This aroused the opposition of those political leaders who had demanded that the two elections coincide, as had been made in writing by several members of the independent High Electoral Commission, who also argued that this would enable the budget to be reduced...

On the 22nd, the NTV Channel announced that Gorran had chosen Rauf Osman as Chairman as the new President of the General Council and on the 25th it elected 7 members of the Executive Committee and a new General Coordinator, Omar Saïd Ali, a former Peshmerga and a member of the PUK until 2009. As soon as elected Ali reiterated the importance Gorran attached to the existence of a Parliamentary

system in Kurdistan. The next day a KDP delegation, led by Adham Barzani, Masud Barzani's cousin, visited Gorran at Suleimaniyah. At the subsequent press conference they stated they had come to congratulate Gorran on the election of its new leaders and to express the KDP's determination to “resolve their differences together”. On the 27th, according to *Rûdaw* the PUK announced that the Kurdistan Parliament should be reactivated before the 10th August and that “no more time must be lost” in organising a general meeting of all the parties that had decided on the referendum together.

However the agreement is far from fully reached. On the 30th the Referendum Committee demanded that the political parties work together and put an end to the blockage on the question of the Parliament in the next two weeks to enable the Council to start preparations for the referendum. On the 31st, however, Gorran's coordinator of external relations, Hama Tawfiq Rahim, replied that that his movement could not send a representative to the Committee until parliament had decided on the question, adding that the referendum should be discussed in Parliament and that it was not up to the political parties to make decisions on the Region's laws...

Another aspect that is rarely mentioned in the media is the growing exasperation of the population faced with an economic situation that is not improving and reduces the legitimacy of the referendum that is seen as being far from their daily lives. On the 31st, a demonstration took place before the Erbil offices of the KRG to protest against the austerity measures. Amongst the demands is one

that the arrears in salary be credited to a special account that could enable government services to be paid (e.g. electricity and water). Pressure from neighbouring countries is also arouse anxiety: Iran is suspected of having cut the water of rivers that flow to Kurdistan to express its opposition to the referendum. On the 26th the owner of the NRT channel, Shaswar Abdulwahîd Qadir, even announced that he'd wage a campaign of "NO for the time

being" (*nexêr le êsta da*) recommending postponement to secure more international support and also to enable national reconciliation between the parties and the creation of a unified Peshmerga force. The next day a group of members of parliament file a complaint against him.

On the 30th the Referendum Committee announced that a delegation was going to Baghdad before August 10th for discussions about the referen-

dum. Iraq is worried that the aim of the referendum is more about the disputed territories than independence... On the 19th, Salah Dilo, the KDP leader in Kirkuk stated that a Referendum Preparatory Committee would rapidly be set up in that city insisting that the referendum would be held in Kirkuk at the same time as in the other town of the Kurdistan Region and those Kurdish territories outside the regions administration.

FRANCE: CHRIS KUTSCHERA, A GREAT AND KNOWLEDGABLE FRIEND OF THE KURDS HAS DEPARTED...

We were sorry to hear that on 31st July the journalist Chris Kutschera, born in 1938, a very knowledgeable and friend of the Kurdish people has departed at Guéret following a long illness.

All the people who are interested in the Kurds know Chris Kutschera's name. His book, published in 1979 entitled *The Kurdish national movement* had, like the one edited by Gérard Chaliand *The Kurds and Kurdistan* the first works in the French language to give the Kurds their place in the world. They are probably still the best introduction in French to the long history of the Kurds' political struggle for their rights. Chris Kutschera then give us a sequel to *The Kurdish national movement* entitled *The Kurdish Challenge or the crazy dream of independence* before managing, in 2005, the collective work devoted to the crimes of Saddam Hussein, *The Saddam Hussein Black Book*.

This journalist who has also written many articles for the *Monde Diplomatique*, *Confluences*

Méditerranée, Politique Internationale, Les Cahiers de l'Orient, passed over 40 years travelling all over Kurdistan, journeys, which have enabled him to meet practically all the leaders of the various different Kurdish political organisations. He regularly posted articles on his web site (<https://www.chris-kutschera.com/>).

Many of his works and articles have been translated into Kurdish, in both Soranî and Kurmançî dialects — but also into English, German or Dutch and of course into Turkish, Arabic and Persian

While Bernard Kouchner had agreed to write a preface to *The Saddam Hussein Black Book* it was Danielle Mitterrand who wrote one for the *Kurdish Challenge* and in her own contributing article paid tribute to Kutschera's competence: "Thanks to his personal knowledge of the principal actors of contemporary Kurdish history and his many travels in the region for over 20 years, Chris Kutschera has information drawn from the best sources".

The book in which Kutschera

has collected all his photo archives in 2007 remains *Stories / Kurdistan / Histoires*. Unknown to many, Chris Kutschera is really a pseudonym for two people, Paul and Edith — Paul writing the articles and Edith taking the press photos — Kutschera being the maiden name of Paul's mother. It is Paul who has left is recently. In *Stories / Kurdistan / Histoires*, published in three languages, French, English and Kurdish (Sorani dialect) that can be seen in all the libraries of Iraqi Kurdistan, can be seen pictures of all the Kurdish leaders and officials with whom the couple has rubbed shoulders, from Mollah Mustafa Barzani to Jalal Talabani, including Adnan Muffî and the poet Hajar Charafkandi... Flipping through these pages of photos (some of which go back to the 60s) also means reading the captions, which are often biographies of the people show. These short captions are often very personal, and show, reading between the lines, the deep relations that linked "Chris Kutschera" throughout their lives with the Kurdish people. Here is an example, that accompanies a photo of Franso Harîrî: "A

Kurdistan Christian he has always been very close to the Barzanis. He is mayor of Galala during the 70s but I only photographed him in 1974, on the Korek front, where he was in charge of military operations. With a smile on his lips he has just announced on his field telephone that his Peshmergas have

just shot down a Mig of the Iraqi Air Force. I only discovered 20 years later his passion for football. Becoming governor of Erbil, he became responsible for the town football team which has just won the Iraqi Cup. He is overjoyed and is posing with the medals that the players have slipped round his neck".

Not only do these short captions enable us to see and literally to live those people who have become friends of Chris Kutschera but they reveal the kind of deep and empathic relations that Chris Kutschera established with his "contacts" and so show the kind of sensitive and humane person that he was.

Does the US have answer for Turkish threats against Syrian Kurds?

Turkish military actions against US-allied Syrian Kurdish forces could threaten to upend plans for unseating the Islamic State (IS) in Raqqa, Syria, and for what comes next.



Week in Review
July 2, 2017
www.al-monitor.com

“**Though pointing to Idlib as the next destination,**” Fehim Tastekin reports, “Turkey’s field operations signal double objectives. First, Turkey wants its own troops in the de-conflicting, or ‘safe,’ zones determined during peace talks in Astana, Kazakhstan. Second and more important to Turkey is to take advantage of the competition between rival coalitions west of the Euphrates. With the United States and Kurds on one side and Russia, Iran and the Syrian army on the other, Turkey hopes to break up the corridor carved out by the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG). Ankara considers this stretch of land a threat to Turkey’s national security.”

“According to information leaked to the news media by official Ankara sources,” Tastekin continues, “TSK [Turkish military] forces will cross into Syria from three locations and establish control over an area 35 by 85 kilometers (21 by 52 miles). This corridor would start at Daret Izza and extend to Obin and Khirbet al-Joz. Another area of land, starting from Turkey’s Hatay border and extending 35 kilometers to Sahl al-Ghab, would also be controlled by the TSK. In this security configuration around Idlib, Turkey’s Free Syrian Army (FSA) allies would also have a role. So far, as many as 2,000 FSA soldiers have been put on alert.”

Tastekin reports, “Kurds insist that the Syrian army is cooperating with Turkey in this operation, at Russia’s behest. But there are no real indications of Russians and the Syrian army wanting to suppress the Kurds. To the contrary, the feeling in Damascus is that Russia and Syria would prefer to keep the Kurds as their ally.”

The US State Department, at least publicly, does not have an answer as to whether Turkey’s moves might complicate its overall Syria strategy. Asked by a reporter June 29 whether the United States was concerned about Turkish threats and attacks on the Syrian Democratic Forces (or SDF, which is made up primarily of YPG fighters), State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert replied, “The reason that the United States is involved in Syria is to take out [IS]. That’s why we care and that’s why we are there. Our focus is on liberating Raqqa right now. Our forces aren’t operating in the area that you’re talking about. I don’t want to get into [Department of Defense] territory. That is theirs. But our focus is on another part of Syria right now.”

That same day, pressed by a reporter as to whether the United States would defend the SDF against Turkey, Col. Ryan Dillon, a spokesman for the Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, said, “We’re not going to get there. I don’t want to speculate on that. We will continue to support our SDF partners in the fight against [IS] in Raqqa and perhaps elsewhere after that.”

And this brings us to Idlib. Tastekin writes: “According to official comments from Ankara, an operation is in progress to add Idlib to the area Turkey controls. Currently, Idlib is divided between Ahrar al-Sham and Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham. Though both Salafi militant groups seek the overthrow of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, they are rivals. Turkey’s presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin talked of a plan calling for Russian and Turkish deployment at Idlib, Russian and Iranian troops around Damascus, and American and Jordanians at Daraa in the south.”



A Turkish army tank drives toward Karkamis on the Turkish-Syrian border in southeastern Gaziantep province, Turkey, Aug. 25, 2016. REUTERS/Umit Bektas

Idlib is, simply put, a time bomb for those who may hope that defeating IS in Raqqa might be the beginning of the end of the counterterrorism campaign in Syria. This column said in March: “While the United States is consumed with planning for unseating IS in Raqqa, Idlib may prove a comparable or perhaps even more explosive fault line because of the blurred lines among anti-Western Salafi groups such as Ahrar al-Sham, which is backed by Turkey, and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.” The latter group is comprised of current and former al-Qaeda and affiliated forces. Ahrar al-Sham’s on-again, off-again ties with al-Qaeda make it, in our view, a fellow traveler, not an alternative, even if the two groups are presently at odds.

Do Turkey’s plans for Idlib include cleaning house on these groups? If not, we can expect Idlib to remain a safe haven for Salafi and terrorist forces seeking to keep up the fight against the Syrian government, while the citizens of Idlib continue to suffer under the brutal and arbitrary rule of these armed gangs.

In a related story, Metin Gurcan reports that Turkey is looking to crack down on “foreign fighters,” including Americans, who have taken up arms with the YPG. Gurcan writes: “There are plenty of allegations, but as of today the media has no evidence that foreign fighters in the YPG are fighting against Turkish security forces in Turkey or Syria. However, the capture of just one YPG foreign fighter in Turkey or one fighting Turkish forces in Syria could rapidly worsen legal and diplomatic relations between Turkey and the Western allies to dangerous levels — especially if that foreign fighter turns out to be a citizen of a NATO country.”

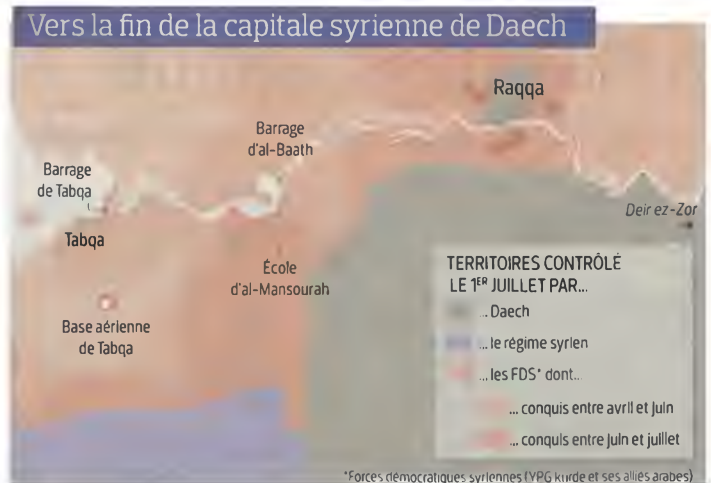
Hamas moves closer to Iran

Adnan Abu Amer writes that the blockade of Qatar led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates continues to push Hamas toward Iran, as Al-Monitor has reported.

On June 14, Mousa Abu Marzouk, deputy head of Hamas’ political bureau, met with Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah. “It is no secret that Hamas, despite having different positions regarding the Syrian crisis, needs Hezbollah when it comes to funding, training, securing supply lines for weapons and providing residence for Hamas cadres in Lebanon,” Abu Amer writes. “For its part, Hezbollah needs a Palestinian movement, such as Hamas, to restore its popularity among Arab public opinion, which it lost after being involved in the wars in Syria, Iraq and Yemen against Sunni Muslims. Hamas, as a Sunni Islamic movement getting closer to the Shiite Hezbollah, may help dispel Hezbollah’s sectarian image. The new rapprochement between Hamas and Hezbollah may contribute to the return of armament and training cooperation programs, with the support of Iran.” ♦

Les forcenés de Daech encerclés à Raqqa

Appuyées par les raids aériens, les FDS préparent l'assaut final de la « capitale » syrienne du califat.



SYRIE Au cimetière des martyrs kurdes de Qamishlo, Ilham caresse la photo d'Arin, 22 ans, tuée par un sniper de Daech le 21 juin à Raqqa. Une larme glisse sur son visage. Sous le portrait de leur leader Abdullah Öcalan, emprisonné en Turquie, une cinquantaine de combattants kurdes lui ont rendu mercredi un dernier hommage avant de l'enterrer aux côtés de dizaines d'autres déjà tombés dans la guerre contre la barbarie djihadiste. « Arin était dans ma brigade, elle combattait pour sa terre, je ne peux dire ce que je ressens », confie sa cheffe d'unité, en treillis, un keffieh noir et blanc sur la tête.

Lancée en novembre, la bataille de Raqqa est entrée dans sa phase finale. Vendredi, appuyées par l'aviation de la coalition internationale emmenée par les États-Unis, les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), auxquelles appartenait Arin, ont fermé la dernière voie de sortie par le sud que pouvaient emprunter les djihadistes pour quitter la « capitale » syrienne du califat.

Conquête comme Mossoul en 2014, Raqqa est devenue le symbole des atrocités commises par les djihadistes en Syrie, ainsi qu'une base pour la planification d'attentats sanglants perpétrés à l'étranger, en Europe en particulier. Sa chute est une priorité de sécurité pour la France, dont des ressortissants ont longtemps été cachés à Raqqa. Mais pour reprendre ce bastion, la coalition internationale a refusé de se joindre à l'armée de Bachar el-Assad et à ses alliés russes.

Sous la houlette de conseillers américains, mais aussi français, des combattants locaux ont donc été formés, en majorité des Kurdes issus du PKK, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, mais aussi des Arabes, venus des tribus locales, qui ont barré la route à l'avancée des forces syriennes et de leurs alliés iraniens à partir du sud de Raqqa. Ce sont ces Forces démocratiques syriennes qui auront la

lourde tâche de gouverner la ville, une fois libérée de l'État islamique.

Après avoir progressé autour de Raqqa, les FDS sont entrés le 6 juin dans le fief djihadiste. Les combattants arabo-kurdes ont, depuis, conquis quatre quartiers, soit environ 25 % de Raqqa, selon les estimations du commandant Nouri Mahmoud, porte-parole des FDS.

« On avance lentement », reconnaît Nouri Mahmoud, depuis la base arrière d'Aïn Issa, à 50 kilomètres au nord de Raqqa. Pour échapper aux snipers et aux obus de mortier tirés par les djihadistes, la progression se fait souvent la nuit, grâce à des jumelles thermiques et aux armes équipées de lunettes de tirs nocturnes. La coalition elle-même intensifie ses frappes durant la nuit, quitte à provoquer des dégâts collatéraux.

« Daech tire sur tout ce qui bouge »

Avec leurs drones lestés de bombes, les djihadistes visent des rassemblements de combattants ou des véhicules militaires. Les FDS prennent position sur les toits des maisons vidées de leurs habitants. « Mais Daech tire sur tout ce qui bouge », dit Nouri Mahmoud.

En trois ans, les djihadistes ont eu le temps de fortifier la ville. Plus que le nombre de « fous de Dieu » encore à Raqqa - 3 000 environ selon la coalition - « ce sont les fortifications et surtout les tunnels qui constituent le principal obstacle à notre avancée », reconnaît le commandant Mahmoud. « Il y a une ville sous la ville, dit-il, et on n'a pas la carte de ces tunnels » où les djihadistes se déplacent à l'abri des frappes de leurs ennemis. Ils ont également pratiqué des trous entre les maisons pour pouvoir se déplacer sans risques.

Appuyés au sol par des conseillers militaires occidentaux, les FDS ont encerclé Raqqa à l'est, au nord puis à l'ouest. Ne restait plus qu'une petite sortie par le sud

le long de l'Euphrate. Le régime syrien et ses alliés russes ont accusé récemment les FDS et leurs conseillers militaires américains d'avoir laissé fuir de nombreux djihadistes vers Deir ez-Zor, pour mettre la pression sur Damas qui tient encore cette ville stratégique en direction de l'Irak. Une tactique déjà utilisée par les FDS quand elles ont repris à Daech durant l'été 2016 la ville de Manbij, à 200 km à l'ouest de Raqqa. « C'est faux qu'on ait laissé partir les djihadistes », répond le commandant Mahmoud. Notre stratégie, jure-t-il, c'est de les encercler et de refermer l'étau sur eux. Russes et Iraniens prétendent même que c'est au cours d'une vague de départs de djihadistes de Raqqa que leur chef, Abou Bakr al-Baghdadi, a été tué le 28 mai par un raid aérien de l'aviation de Moscou. Mais aucune preuve crédible n'est venue étayer ses affirmations. Ce qui est sûr, en revanche, c'est la fuite de chefs de second rang de Daech pour al-Mayadeen, la nouvelle « capitale » de l'EI en Syrie sur la vallée de l'Euphrate. « On ne les voyait plus depuis un certain temps », confirme un habitant de Raqqa, réfugié au camp d'Aïn Issa.

Face à l'avancée des FDS qui ont repris mi-juin le quartier d'al-Senaa, aux portes de la vieille ville, la plupart des djihadistes se regroupent désormais dans le centre-ville de Raqqa et dans la base de la Division 17, une caserne de l'armée syrienne prise par l'EI en juillet 2014 que les djihadistes ont fortifiée en prévision de l'assaut final.

La chute de Raqqa, probablement dans quelques mois, comme celle imminente de Mossoul en Irak, ne signifiera pas la fin de la terreur djihadiste. Depuis plusieurs mois, l'EI regroupe ses forces à l'est de Raqqa, où une autre bataille a commencé pour le contrôle de cette région désertique le long de l'Euphrate aux confins de la Syrie et de l'Irak entre, d'un côté, Washington et ses alliés et, de l'autre, Moscou, Téhéran et Damas. ■

G. M. (ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL À AÏN ISSA)

REUTERS

Exclusive: Kurdish YPG militia expects conflict with Turkey in northern Syria

July 5, 2017 QAMISHLI, Syria/ANKARA (Reuters) - Rodi Said and Dominic Evans

THE HEAD of the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia said on Wednesday that Turkish military deployments near Kurdish-held areas of northwestern Syria amounted to a "declaration of war" which could trigger clashes within days.

Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmus retorted that his country was not declaring war but that its forces would respond to any hostile move by the YPG, which he described as a small-scale army formed by the United States.

The mounting tensions between two U.S. allies in northwestern Syria risk opening yet another front in the multi-sided conflict, in which outside powers are playing ever greater roles.

They could also distract the YPG from the U.S.-backed campaign it is spearheading to capture Islamic State's stronghold of Raqqa, some 200 km (125 miles) away.

Asked by Reuters whether he expected a conflict with Turkey in northern Syria, where the two sides have exchanged artillery fire in recent days, YPG Commander Sipan Hemo accused Turkey of preparing for a major military campaign in the Aleppo and Afrin area.

"These (Turkish) preparations have reached level of a declaration of war and could lead to the outbreak of actual clashes in the coming days," he said in emailed comments. "We will not stand idly by against this potential aggression."

Turkey's policy in northern Syria has been focused on containing the growing sway of Kurdish groups that have established autonomous regions since Syria's war began in 2011.

Ankara says the YPG represents a security threat, seeing it as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has been fighting an insurgency against the Turkish state for decades.

"This is not a declaration of war. We are making preparations against potential threats," Kurtulmus told Reuters in an interview. "Their (YPG) primary goal is a threat to Turkey, and if Turkey sees a YPG movement in northern Syria that is a threat to it, it will retaliate in kind."

President Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey was ready to carry out ground operations against Kurdish forces in northern Syria along with the rebel forces it backs there if necessary.

"If there is a threat against us, our troops will conduct any operations with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) on the ground," he told France 24 television in an interview shown later on Wednesday.

Turkish forces deployed in northern Syria last year in support of FSA groups in an operation that forced Islamic State away from the border and also drove a wedge between YPG-held areas.

In recent weeks, Turkey has sent reinforcements into the area north of Aleppo, according to Turkey-backed rebel groups who have established control over a section of the Turkish-Syrian frontier with Ankara's support.

LONG-TERM PLANS

Hemo was last week cited as saying the YPG had a plan to capture that area between the towns of Azaz and Jarablus. Asked about that remark, he described the Turkish intervention as "occupation" of Syrian land, and



A general view shows the Kurdish city of Afrin, in Aleppo's countryside March 18, 2015

said the YPG had never "threatened Turkey or its security".

Turkey, a NATO member, has been incensed by the U.S. decision to ally with the YPG. Washington took the decision to arm the group before the final assault on Raqqa began in June.

The YPG is fighting under the banner of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which includes Arab fighters.

In separate comments to the Saudi-owned Asharq al-Awsat newspaper published on Wednesday, Hemo said the United States had established seven military bases in areas of northern Syria controlled by the YPG or SDF, including a major airbase near Kobani, a town at the border with Turkey.

Citing operational security, the coalition said it did not confirm or deny information about "specific capabilities, force numbers, locations or movement of forces in Iraq and Syria".

Hemo indicated the YPG would keep fighting Islamic State even after its defeat in Raqqa, saying it was committed with "the international coalition to cleansing Syria of terrorism and establishing a political system capable of achieving real democratic transformation".

Turkish defense ministry sources said last month the United States had pledged that weapons provided to the YPG would be taken back once Islamic State was defeated. Turkey says that is not credible.

"There has never been an incident where a group in the Middle East has been armed, and they returned the weapons," Kurtulmus said. The United States "have formed more than a terrorist organization there, they formed a small-scale army."

He also warned the YPG not to try to drive out Arab or Turkmen residents from the town of Tel Rifaat, which is close to Afrin and controlled by YPG and Arab allies in the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces.

U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has left open the possibility of longer-term assistance to the YPG, saying the U.S. may need to supply them with weapons and equipment even after the capture of Raqqa.

Hemo said U.S. officials had denied any intention to take away the YPG's weapons and that the YPG would be needing more support due to its longer-term plans to tackle the remnants of Islamic State. ●

Iraqi Kurdish leader says no turning back on independence bid

Samia Nakhoul, Maher Chmaytelli and Stephen Kalin (Reuters) - July 6, 2017

ERBIL, Iraq — Iraq's Kurdish leader said on Thursday that there was no turning back on a bid to achieve an independent Kurdish state, but he would pursue it through dialogue with Baghdad and regional powers to avoid conflict.

Masoud Barzani, President of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), told Reuters in an interview that the timetable for independence after a Sept. 25 vote on the issue was "flexible but not open-ended". He expected a "yes vote".

The vote could turn into another regional flash-point, with Turkey, Iran and Syria, along with Iraq the states with sizeable Kurdish populations, all resolutely opposed to an independent Kurdistan in northern Iraq. But Barzani played down such fears.

Within Iraq's borders, there is growing concern the real purpose of the referendum is not secession, but to strengthen Kurdish claims over hotly disputed territory adjoining recognized KRG boundaries, such as the oil-rich region and city of Kirkuk, whose future has been in play for over a decade.

Inside the KRG, parties such as the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) of Jalal Talabani or the dissident Gorran group, all favor independence but not necessarily under the leadership of Barzani and his Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

At his palace in the hillside village of Salahaddin, Barzani said the vote would decide the fate of Kirkuk, which Kurdish Peshmerga forces prevented Islamic State from capturing in 2014.

"Whatever the people of Kirkuk decide within the referendum, that decision should be respected," said a relaxed Barzani.

The Peshmerga effectively runs Kirkuk, also claimed by Turkmen and Arabs. Hardline Iran-backed Iraqi Shi'ite militias have threatened to expel the Kurds by force from this region and three other disputed areas - Sinjar, Makhmour and Khanaqin.

Barzani, a Kurdish nationalist who has long championed the rights of his people, said negotiations with Baghdad, neighbors and international powers would start immediately after the vote in order to reach an amicable agreement.

"Our main goal is to implement and achieve the decision of our people through peace and dialogue," he said, wearing his traditional Peshmerga uniform.

HISTORIC BID

Barzani accused the Shi'ite-led Iraqi government, backed by Iran, of not sticking to a constitutional agreement of allowing the Kurds to have greater powers under a federal state set up after the U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003.

"For 14 years we have been waiting and we have been discussing this partnership but we have always been told it's not a good time and it's not acceptable timing so my question is, when is the right time?"

The Kurds have been seeking an independent state since at least the end of World War One, when colonial powers divided up the Middle East, but their territory ended up split between modern-day Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran.

Saddam's government waged the Anfal campaign against them in the 1980s, killing tens of thousands including with poison gas in the city of Halabja.

Barzani, whose father led struggles against Baghdad in the 1960s and 1970s, grew up in Iranian exile but returned as a teenager, joined the Peshmerga and took on the mantle of resistance. He said the Kurds were ready to take responsibility for the outcome of the referendum.

"We have to rectify the history of mistreatment of our people and those who are saying that independence is not good, our question to them is, if it's not good for us, why is it good for you?"

Barzani played down speculation that the referendum would spark violence, saying "the legitimacy of the people is bigger than the legitimacy of any of the political parties or any of the external interventions".

"I don't think anybody can stand against the big wave of the people of Kurdistan when they decide their destiny. Maybe there will be some attempts to foil (it)... We will try our best not to allow that to happen."

He said he was ready to allay the security concerns of Iraq, Turkey and Iran, saying that postponing independence would actually lead to



Iraq's Kurdistan region's President Massoud Barzani speaks during an interview with Reuters in Erbil, Iraq July 6, 2017. Azad Lashkari

greater instability.

"We have proved that we are factors of stability," he said. "So what we do through a referendum is prevent that upcoming instability. We want to cut any possibility of bloodshed in the future."

AFTER MOSUL

An additional element of regional volatility is Turkey's determination to stop further advances across northern Syria by the Kurdish People's Protection Forces (YPG) militia.

Ankara and the KDP are united in trying to stop the YPG – allied to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) conducting an insurgency in Turkey – from consolidating self-rule in Syria. But Turkey regards Barzani's independence bid as pulling in the opposite direction.

He said his "Kurdish state" would give full assurances to ethnic minorities including Christians, Yazidis, and Shabaks, indicating his Peshmerga forces had already lost hundreds of fighters to retake their areas from Islamic State.

As the battle to recapture the Iraqi city of Mosul draws to a close, Barzani said victory is incomplete without a political reconciliation plan.

He accused the Iraqi government of failing to prepare a post-battle political, security and governance plan.

"I warned if you are not going to have this political plan, the situation will reverse."

He said a high-level committee formed by the Kurdish region, the Baghdad government and a U.S.-led military coalition to help Mosul leaders rebuild the city had never convened.

"I have big concerns about the situation in Mosul and about post-liberation, because the end of Islamic State in Mosul doesn't mean the end of Islamic State. Those factors, the environment that brought it into Mosul have not (changed)."

"I have a big concern about the future of the area. I hope I will be wrong." ♦

Iraqi Kurds admit independence could take years after vote

KRG politicians concede years of international negotiations could follow a September referendum approving break from Baghdad



Wladimir van Wilgenburg
Friday 7 July 2017
<http://www.middleeasteye.net>

ERBIL – True independence for Iraqi Kurdistan could take years to realise after a referendum later this year due to complex negotiations with foreign states hostile to the breakaway from Baghdad, senior officials have conceded to Middle East Eye.

"A day, a month, two years, three years, nobody knows, this depends on the negotiations [with Baghdad and other countries]," said Hoshiyar Siwaily, the head of foreign relations for the ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party.

"It depends on the negotiations, if it progresses, and if we can agree with Baghdad on the first day, independence could come in one day. If we have difficulties with Baghdad, it might take some time.

"When the first stage is complete [the referendum], we will try through peaceful means to persuade Baghdad, the regional countries and international community.

"After that we will start the fourth stage: the actual declaration of independence. During the fifth stage, we will persuade the international community and the UN to recognise

" Any referendum or political process towards independence must be agreed with the government of Iraq "

- Boris Johnson, British foreign minister

this," Siwaily said.

Hemin Hawrami, a senior adviser to Iraqi Kurdistan's president, Masoud Barzani, meanwhile said that he understood the widespread opposition from neighbours and western states for the 25 September vote on independence.

"There is no recognition before the declaration, and all the reactions were expected," he said.

"We don't look it as negative in general. They are not against democratic principles, but [the] timing, yes.

"Maybe they are not happy with the timing, but our argument is that: if not now, tell us when?" he said.

WIDESPREAD OPPOSITION

Turkey and Iran, two regional powers with sizeable Kurdish populations, have strongly

opposed the Iraqi Kurdish decision. Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on Wednesday said the vote was the "wrong way to go" and that the Kurdish government would "regret it".

Iraq's central government has said: "No party can, on its own, decide the fate of Iraq in isolation."

States including Germany, the UK and the US have opposed its timing and the Kurdish leaderships failure to discuss the vote with Baghdad.

"We understand the aspirations of the Kurdish people," said Boris Johnson, the British foreign secretary, last month. "But a referendum at this time will distract from the more urgent priorities of defeating Daesh [Islamic State].

" Federalism in Iraq has failed, partnership with Baghdad has failed, and we don't accept being their subordinates "

- Hemin Hawrami, KRG presidential adviser

"Any referendum or political process towards independence must be agreed with the government of Iraq in Baghdad," he added.

Michael Stephens, a research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute, told MEE that the West would not be able to stand against a mutually agreeable solution.

"It is after all up to Iraqis to decide their own fate," he said.

"But unilateral moves can't be supported both for the precedent they set and also because of the potential for conflict and instability that arises as a result of not co-ordinating the referendum's terms properly with Baghdad."

However, the Kurds say the central Iraqi government would never have accepted the push for referendum, and therefore they preferred



Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's president, has said the KRG would 'regret' their push for independence (AFP)



Masoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (AFP)

unilateral action and then talks with Baghdad, the regional neighbours and the international community afterwards.

"We are waiting for the establishment of high-level referendum committee," said Hawrami.

"This committee will consist of members from all participating political parties, and they will visit all regional countries and capitals around the world to explain our rationale.

"Barzani, in every single meeting [with Western, Iraqi and regional officials], has stated that federalism in Iraq has failed, partnership with Baghdad has failed, and we don't

" A day, a month, two years, three years, nobody knows, this depends on the negotiations "

- Hoshiyar Siwaily, head of KDP foreign relations

accept being their subordinates.

"So Kurdistan is going to hold a referendum on its own self-determination right for independence.

"Is the Arab part of Iraq united?" Hawrami asked about the ongoing problems between the Shia-led government and the Sunni community in Iraq.

"Is it without any regional intervention? Are the Iraqi borders with the other countries controlled? Do we have an inclusive government in Baghdad?"

"The Arab part of Iraq is divided already, and sticking to the 'one Iraq' policy is just beating around the bush without solving the issues that have led to regional instability.

"The 'one Iraq' policy is a Pandora's box, not the independence of Kurdistan."

A Western diplomatic official in Iraqi Kurdistan said the vote was merely to set a "negotiating position" for the Kurds, after which they could declare independence within two to five →

→ years.

"It's to measure support, set a baseline, show they mean it," the official said.

"But it's a process, and the referendum is part of this process. The ultimate objective is independence. But that's the negotiating position."

'WISHFUL THINKING'

Hawrami also admitted the difficult task of assuring world and regional powers that an independent Kurdistan would be "an asset and not a threat".

"We need to visit more countries and give them assurances," he said.

"And especially for Turkey, Kurdistan is going to be a more strategic ally in terms of the energy security.

"This referendum is for Iraqi Kurdistan, it has nothing to do with Kurds in Turkey, Syria, or Iran," he insisted.

"That's why the Iraqi Kurds will move carefully after the referendum."

"Some people accuse us and ask why, after the referendum, we won't immediately declare independence. This is naive thinking," Siwaily said.

"How can you expect one week after 25 September, after the results, without reading the international situation, without talking to Baghdad, without revolving the problems peacefully, to declare independence?"

"You have to be realistic. Wishful thinking is different from the reality. It has taken us 100 years to get to this stage." ♦



The Iraqi government of Haider al-Abadi says no decision can be made in isolation (AFP)

L'Orient
LE JOUR

6 JUILLET 2017

Interview- Barzani plaide pour le dialogue au Kurdistan irakien

S'il table sur une victoire du "oui" lors du référendum organisé le 25 septembre sur l'indépendance du Kurdistan, le dirigeant kurde admet que le calendrier peut être flexible à condition d'envisager une date butoir.

Par Samia Nakhoul, Maher Chmaytelli et Stephen Kalin, 06 juillet 2017
REUTERS
www.lorientlejour.com

La création d'un Etat kurde indépendant demeure un objectif prioritaire, explique le président du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan (KRG) irakien mais ce processus passe par le dialogue avec les autorités de Bagdad et avec les puissances régionales pour éviter un conflit.

Un référendum sera organisé le 25 septembre sur l'indépendance du Kurdistan, région autonome regroupant les provinces de Dohuk, Erbil et Souleimaniyah dans le nord de l'Irak à la frontière avec la Turquie et l'Iran, confirme Massoud Barzani, le président du KRG.

S'il table sur une victoire du "oui" lors de cette consultation, le dirigeant kurde admet que le calendrier du processus d'indépendance peut être flexible à condition d'envisager une date butoir.

Cette consultation électorale risque de provoquer des crispations en Turquie, en Iran et en Syrie, trois pays qui comme l'Irak abritent sur leurs territoires des Kurdes et sont résolument opposés à la création d'un nouvel Etat.

En Irak, des craintes se sont exprimées à propos de ce référendum. Certains estiment qu'il aurait moins pour vocation d'exprimer un sentiment séparatiste des populations locales que de donner une légitimité aux revendications kurdes sur certaines régions voisines de celles officiellement placées sous l'autorité du KRG.

Cela concerne notamment la région de Kirkouk, dont les ressources pétrolières suscitent des convoitises depuis de nom-



breuses années et que les peshmergas ont défendu victorieusement face à l'offensive des djihadistes de l'Etat islamique en 2014.

"Quoi que décident les habitants de Kirkouk, leur volonté sera respectée", affirme Massoud Barzani lors d'un entretien dans son palais dans le village de Salahaddin.

Les combattants kurdes administrent dans les faits Kirkouk dont la propriété est également revendiquée par les Turkmènes et par les Arabes, y compris les miliciens chiites soutenus par l'Iran qui entendent contrôler trois autres régions, celles de Sindjar, Makhmour et Khanakine.

JEU COMPLEXE

Barzani promet que les discussions avec les voisins régionaux et avec Bagdad débiteront tout de suite après le référendum afin de parvenir à un accord amiable.

"Notre objectif est de mettre en oeuvre et de parvenir à une décision pour notre

peuple par la paix et par le dialogue", soutient-il tout en accusant les autorités de Bagdad, soutenues par Téhéran, de ne pas respecter un engagement constitutionnel conclu après l'invasion américaine de 2003 et octroyant des pouvoirs élargis à sa région.

Les Kurdes, s'ils souhaitent une indépendance, avancent en ordre dispersé avec des formations comme l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (PUK) de Jalal Talabani ou le groupe dissident Gorran qui ne souhaitent pas passer sous la coupe du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (KDP) de Barzani.

L'autre acteur majeur dans ce jeu complexe est la Turquie de Recep Erdogan, déterminée à empêcher toute progression des Unités de protection du peuple (YPG), les milices kurdes opérant dans le nord de la Syrie contre les djihadistes de l'EI.

Ankara et le KDP sont sur la même ligne : empêcher les YPG, alliées au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), de renforcer leur autonomie en territoire syrien.

Mais, malgré cette convergence de vues, le gouvernement d'Erdogan estime que l'initiative séparatiste de Barzani va à l'encontre des intérêts turcs.

Pour l'instant, la question d'une entente politique est subordonnée à la reprise de la ville de Mossoul où les combattants de l'EI tiennent encore quelques rues dans la vieille ville.

Anticipant une éventuelle mauvaise volonté des autorités irakiennes, Barzani a mis en garde le pouvoir en place à Bagdad. "Je vous préviens que si nous ne parvenons pas à ce projet politique, la situation va se retourner." (Pierre Sérissier pour le service français) ♦

Fight for Assad or get deported

Ali M. Latifi

BAMIAN, AFGHANISTAN War and poverty have scattered Afghans across the globe like pieces of shrapnel. Millions of Afghans came of age in refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran or as workers in the Persian Gulf nations. The migration continues. The past few years have added a new lethal geography to the Afghan diaspora: the battlefields of President Bashar al-Assad's Syria.

Two years ago, Abdol Amin, 19, left his home in the Foladi Valley in Bamian, one of Afghanistan's poorest provinces, to find work in Iran. Two million undocumented Afghans and a million Afghans with refugee status already lived in Iran. His sister and brother-in-law lived in Isfahan. He hoped to improve on his life of subsistence farming in impoverished Bamian.

Two-thirds of the population in Bamian Province lives on less than \$25 a month. The intense poverty and the absence of opportunity forces thousands of young Afghans from Bamian to travel illegally to Iran in search of work. Many, like Mr. Amin, end up fighting other people's wars.

Mr. Amin managed to earn a meager wage, about \$200 a month, as a bricklayer in Isfahan. Last year, he used his modest savings and went to Iraq with a group of fellow Afghan refugees for a pilgrimage to Karbala, the city where Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, was killed in A.D. 680.

Elated after his pilgrimage, Mr. Amin returned to Iran but couldn't find any work for three months. As often happens with Afghan refugees in Iran, Mr. Amin was humiliated and discriminated against. He lived with the constant fear of being deported. "Iran isn't our country. It belongs to strangers," Mr. Amin said. "Either you suffer and try to make some money or you die."

Last winter Iranian authorities presented Mr. Amin with a proposition. He could gain legal status in Iran and be free of the fear of deportation. The Iranians offered him a 10-year residency permit and \$800 a month if he would go to Syria to "fight to protect" the shrine of Sayyida Zainab, a granddaughter of the Prophet Muhammad.

Around 2013, when Mr. Assad's military was losing ground to the rebels, Iran poured billions of dollars into Syria, brought in Hezbollah fighters and began raising Shiite militias from Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and other places with significant Shiite populations. Iran does want to protect the major Shiite shrines in Damascus, Aleppo and Raqqa; but the use of foreign Shiite

Afghan refugees in Iran have a choice between deportation or fighting in Syria to obtain a residency permit.



Afghan immigrants working at a brick kiln in Pakdasht, Iran.

militias in the Syrian war was simply another element in the larger battle for control and influence in the Middle East run by Qassem Suleimani, the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps' elite Quds Force.

The relationship between Iran and Syria goes back to the Syrian support for Iran during the Iran-Iraq war. They also share an enmity toward Israel, and Syria is the essential axis of transit between Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Most of the weapons in the Hezbollah inventory are sent by Iran through Syria. Mr. Assad's control over Syria allows Tehran to resupply Hezbollah and work toward building a connection to the Mediterranean Sea.

A few months after Iran asked Hezbollah to join the fighting in Syria alongside Mr. Assad's forces, it began raising other Shiite militias. The Fatemiyoun Division (formerly Brigade), a militia of Shiite Afghan refugees, was formed around early 2014 and trained by both the Revolutionary Guards and Hezbollah veterans. Its strength has been estimated at 8,000 to 14,000 men. The Iranian authorities maintain the fighters are volunteers.

The initial recruits to the Fatemiyoun Division were initially Shiite Hazara Afghans, who settled in Iran after the Soviet occupation, after the civil war in the early 1990s and the subsequent Taliban rule. Their recruitment had echoes of how Pakistan — the other major host of the Afghan refugee population — recruited the Sunni Pashtun Afghan refugees and their children to form the Taliban in the mid-1990s.

In the past few years, Iranians have expanded recruitment to undocumented Afghans, like Mr. Amin, recently arrived from Afghanistan in search of economic opportunity. Apart from the refugees' economic anxiety and precarious legal status, the Iranians exploit the Shia faith of Afghan refugees to recruit them to fight for the Assad regime in Syria.

Iranian propaganda framed the Syrian war to these refugees as a Shiite struggle for the defense and protection of the faith and its holy sites. "The fighters have little or no knowledge of the political-security context into which they are marching," said Ahmad Shuja, a former researcher with Human Rights Watch. "They do not speak Arabic, most of them have never been beyond Afghanistan or Iran, many are barely literate, most are devout Shiites."

Mr. Amin, for example, believed that the Syrian war resulted from a dispute between the Nusra Front jihadist group (which was officially founded in 2012) and Mr. Assad. He had been made to believe that the war broke out after the leader of Nusra (who, he said, was related to Mr. Assad) wanted to build a store over a mosque. Mr. Assad, an Alawite, rushed to defend the mosque and protect all religious sites, especially the Shiite shrines, in the country. In turn, in Mr. Amin's telling, Nusra called for Mr. Assad's downfall and the destruction of shrines.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard and Hezbollah fighters trained Mr. Amin and the Afghan recruits of the Fatemiyoun Division in using weapons and tactical movement for a month. Some were trained as snipers; some were trained in tank warfare. After the training they were flown to Syria and sent

Many Afghan refugees end up fighting other people's wars.

to the front lines in Damascus and Aleppo.

Iranians and Mr. Assad's forces used the Afghan recruits as the first-wave shock troops. "We would be the first in any operation," Mr. Amin recalled. Several short memoirs by current and former Afghan fighters in Syria published on the Telegram app, which Mr. Shuja studied, recount the Afghans

being sent to fight the most difficult battles, and speak about heavy casualties among Afghan fighters and the eventual victory after multiple assaults.

Afghans have fought in Damascus, Hama, Lattakia, Deir al-Zor, Homs, Palmyra and Aleppo. In November and December, Mr. Amin was stationed in Aleppo, where the Fatemiyoun Division had the job of helping the Syrian Army retake the eastern part of the city from rebel groups. He and hundreds of other young Afghans fought under the orders of the Revolutionary Guard.

The foreign Shiite militias played a crucial role in supporting Mr. Assad's regime and provided the key ground forces in the decisive battle of Aleppo. The victory in Aleppo turned the tide for Mr. Assad and for Iran, bringing it closer to, as Syria scholar Joshua Landis put it, "the consolidation of this Iranian security arc, stretching from Lebanon to Iran."

Several hundred Afghans have died fighting Mr. Assad's and Iran's war in Syria. The bodies of slain Afghan fighters were paraded around the streets of Tehran and in Qom, in northern Iran, in

elaborate ceremonies before their burials. The Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and General Suleimani have visited the families of Afghan militiamen killed in Syria and expressed gratitude for the sacrifices their sons made in defending the holy shrines and Islam.

In January, I met Murtaza, a 21-year-old Afghan at the Elliniko Airport refugee camp in Athens. He had lived in Qom. "They never make a show of the Iranian fighters who die in Syria, only the Afghans," said Murtaza, who claimed to have seen graves of hundreds of Afghans killed in Syria in Qom. "It is their way of trying to convince the Iranian people that only Afghans, and not Iranians, are dying in Syria."

In June 2016, Haitham Maleh, a Syrian opposition leader, addressed a letter to President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan requesting an end to the influx of Afghan fighters. Afghan deaths in Mr. Assad's war have forced several Afghan clerics to speak out against the Iranian strategy. Even Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the warlord who recently made a peace deal with the Afghan govern-

ment, spoke about it on his return to Kabul. Some estimates put the number of Afghans killed in Syria around 600. Mr. Amin said 15 of his friends were killed in Syria.

After being wounded in Aleppo, Mr. Amin returned to Bamian two months ago with a 10-year Iranian residency in hand and promise of a home in Iran, or in postwar Syria, if he would like to live there. A majority of the Afghans who fought with him in Syria have stayed in Iran. He keeps in touch with them on the Telegram app.

Bamian remains peaceful and poor; the roads leading to the province are still dangerous. Mr. Amin has returned to his old life as a subsistence farmer. "I came back because I wanted to see what would work out better," Mr. Amin told me. "If things are good here, I will stay. If they get worse, then I will go back to Iran, but now I don't have to worry about deportation."

ALI M. LATIFI is a journalist based in Kabul.

REUTERS

Two ruling party officials, 13 militants killed in southeast Turkey

July 2, 2017 DIYARBAKIR, Turkey (Reuters) -

KURDISH MILITANTS shot and killed two officials from the ruling AK Party in southeast Turkey over the weekend, while the Turkish military killed more than a dozen militants in air strikes, state authorities said on Sunday.

Orhan Mercan, the AKP's deputy head in the Lice district of Diyarbakir province, was shot in front of his home on Friday night and died of his wounds in hospital, the provincial governor's office said.

Militants killed Aydin Ahi, deputy head of the AKP in the Ozalp district of Van province on Saturday night, the governor's office said. Security sources said the gunmen seized Ahi from his home at gunpoint and killed him nearby.

Energy Minister Berat Albayrak wrote on Twitter that Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants had killed both men. There was no immediate comment on the attacks from the PKK, but the group has targeted officials from the party in the past.

The PKK launched a separatist insurgency against the state in 1984 and more than 40,000 people, mostly Kurds, have been killed in the conflict. It is designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and European Union.

A ceasefire between the Turkish state and the militants broke down in July 2015 and the southeast region of the country, where the PKK is strongest, subsequently saw some of the worst violence since the insurgency began.

Violence flared across the region on Saturday.

In an air strike in the southeastern province of Mardin, the Turkish military killed five PKK militants preparing an attack on an army base, a general staff statement said.

In separate air strikes on Saturday, the army also killed five PKK fighters in southeast Turkey's Bingol province and another four militants in the Metina region of northern Iraq, the army said.

It said another three PKK militants were killed in clashes on Saturday in the southeastern provinces of Diyarbakir, Hakkari and Sirnak. ●

AFP

Des députés suédois poursuivent Erdogan pour "génocide" dans les régions kurdes

Stockholm, 10 juillet 2017 (AFP)

DES PARLEMENTAIRES SUÉDOIS ont saisi lundi la justice de leur pays contre le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan qu'ils accusent de "génocide" dans les régions kurdes depuis la reprise en 2015 des combats entre l'armée et les séparatistes.

Cinq élus du Parti écologiste et du Parti de gauche ont déposé une plainte devant la Chambre internationale du parquet à Stockholm pour "génocide, crimes contre l'humanité et crimes de guerre", a déclaré Annika Lillemets, une députée des Verts, au cours d'une conférence de presse.

Cette plainte "met en cause le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan ainsi que plusieurs de ses ministres", parmi lesquels le Premier ministre et les ministres de l'Intérieur et de la Défense, a-t-elle ajouté.

Invoquant des rapports du Haut-commissariat des Nations unies aux droits de l'Homme (HCDH) et de l'ONG Amnesty International, les députés suédois affirment que "de vastes parties du Kurdistan turc ont subi une agression militaire et la destruction du fait de l'Etat/gouvernement turc" entre juillet 2015 et décembre 2016.

Dans son rapport publié en mars, le HCDH dénonce "les exécutions extrajudiciaires et le recours excessif à la force" et affirme avoir recensé de "nombreux cas de disparitions, de tortures, de destructions d'habitations et d'édifices du patrimoine culturel".

Les élus à la manœuvre s'appuient sur une loi de 2014 précisant les qualifications de génocide, crime contre l'humanité et crime de guerre, ainsi que sur la compétence universelle de la justice suédoise qui ces dernières années a ouvert plusieurs enquêtes sur des faits présumés commis en Syrie.

Carl Schlyter, un élu écologiste, dit espérer que d'autres parlementaires en Europe les imiteront.

"Si (Erdogan) est empêché de parcourir l'Europe et d'influencer les pays européens comme il veut, j'espère que cela aura un effet sur sa politique", a-t-il fait valoir.

Le parquet a confirmé avoir reçu la plainte des parlementaires. "La police va traiter la plainte et nous déciderons ensuite d'ouvrir ou non une enquête préliminaire, cela peut prendre du temps", a indiqué à l'AFP un représentant de la chancellerie. ●

Referendum on independent Kurdistan puts Iran at crossroads

While Iran is the only country that has long enjoyed close ties with Iraqi Kurds, the upcoming referendum on independence for Iraqi Kurdistan puts it at a crossroads.



Fazel Hawramy
July 7, 2017
www.al-monitor.com

As Iraqi Kurds try to iron out internal differences ahead of their referendum on independence in September, Turkey, Iraq and Iran have all announced their opposition, questioning the timing and fearing the implications of such a move at a time when regional rivalries are at their peak.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran opposes some murmurs about holding a referendum in order to separate one part of Iraq," said Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in a meeting with visiting Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in June, adding that Iraq "should stay unified."

While Turkey and Iraq's opposition is understandable to an extent, Iran's long involvement as well as cultural and historical ties with Iraqi Kurds raises serious questions about the motives for its opposition to the upcoming referendum.

The political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan have all made it clear that their ultimate aim is an independent Kurdistan, but they differ on the approach, meaning that the issue of independence is a matter of "when" rather than "if." The Iranians are perhaps more aware of this than any other actor.

There are over 13 million Kurds on both sides of the Iran-Iraq border. Whether under the shah or the Islamic Republic, Iran has been the only country that has had an overall cordial relationship with Iraqi Kurds, be it secular, Marxist or Islamic parties. The shah and the ayatollahs both adopted the strategy of engaging enemies outside Iran's borders. In Iraq, this has entailed weakening successive Iraqi regimes by partly using the Kurds as a proxy force. Indeed, repression from Baghdad combined with Tehran's assistance to the Kurds greatly contributed to Iraq almost always being at war with a quarter of its population. For instance, the Kirkuk oilfields were attacked by peshmerga, both during the shah's reign in the late 1960s and the ayatollahs in the 1980s. Nonetheless, ironically, while Iran has been wary of Kurdish aspirations for independence, its continuous support for the peshmerga in past decades has ensured that the desire for independence continued burning amongst Kurdish fighters — and their leadership.

However, Iran's assistance to Iraqi Kurds, partly in order to use them against its own rebellious Kurds, has also caused immeasurable damage to its own stability and security. When Iran fought a bloody battle against Iranian Kurds in the 1980s, it had to devote huge resources and enormous manpower to contain them. Most Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) top brass, including top commander Mohammad Ali Jafari and Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani, are veterans of the war in Iranian Kurdistan. Other senior IRGC personnel who have been killed in Syria and Iraq in recent years started their careers in the mountains of Iranian Kurdistan. On the other side of the coin, representatives of the IRGC and the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence have been present in Iraqi Kurdistan since the mid-1980s, offering Tehran close knowledge of the Kurdish leadership and the Kurdish region inside out.

This knowledge has led Iranian officials to retain great pragmatism, perhaps also guided by the experiences of its neighbor Turkey, which has for decades been mired in armed conflict with the Kurdistan Workers Party and more recently the latter's affiliates in northern Syria. The impact of this pragmatism has been compounded by consistent acts of solidarity, although oftentimes motivated by Iran's own interests.

In the summer of 1988, under the regime of Saddam Hussein, Iraqi Kurdistan was devastated by chemical weapons and the murder of 182,000 civilians. While the Persian Gulf states funded Saddam, and the West, including the United States, UK and France, armed his regime to the teeth, Iran welcomed thousands of fleeing Kurds into its territory. During the 1991 uprising in the aftermath of the Gulf War, Iran again opened its borders and allowed Iraqi Kurds to find shelter on its soil, while Turkey closed



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (L) speaks during a news conference with Iraqi Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan, Aug. 26, 2014. REUTERS/Azad Lashkari

its borders. In August 2014, when the Islamic State (IS) invaded Iraqi Kurdistan, the Iranians were again the first to assist the Kurds. "I think all Kurds should always be grateful to the Iranians, even though they had their own interests too," a peshmerga captain who dealt with the Iranians at the time near Erbil told Al-Monitor. In this vein, apart from security considerations, it should be noted that Iran's annual trade with Iraqi Kurdistan is almost \$8 billion.

Thus, given Iran's relationship with its own Kurdish community as well as its long history of assistance to Iraqi Kurds and their political parties, it is in a relatively strong position vis-a-vis Ankara and Baghdad.

With the crumbling of IS, the future looks even bleaker as new rivalries spring up. Turkey is at war with its Kurdish community and vehemently opposes the Kurdish administration in northern Syria. Syria remains mired in chaos, with the central government unable to control a large chunk of its territory — perhaps permanently. Meanwhile, Iran is relatively stable and has deployed thousands of troops to Syria and Iraq to fight jihadists and shore up the defenses of its allies in Damascus and Baghdad.

Iranian officials have repeatedly stated that if they do not fight jihadists in Aleppo and Anbar, they would have to fight them on their own soil. Given the Kurdish background of the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks in Tehran on June 7, it appears that the one area where the security of Iran could be most threatened is the Kurdish region.

Thus, given the complex and dangerous regional landscape, as well as Iran's domestic security situation, the referendum on an independent Kurdistan places the Islamic Republic at a crossroads. If the Kurds manage to iron out their internal differences and hold the vote and then declare independence, Iran will have to think hard before it makes its final decision about its posture toward a Kurdish state.

Tehran could support an independent Kurdistan that boosts economic and security cooperation while receiving guarantees that such an entity will not become a source of instability on its borders. Iran could also benefit from providing an alternative route for Kurdish oil to find its way to international markets.

Conversely, the Islamic Republic could oppose statehood for Iraqi Kurds by closing its airspace, imposing an economic blockade and using its Shiite proxies in Iraq to cause nuisances, but that could potentially open the gates to a Kurdish revolt on both sides of the border and invite possible foreign interference to its immediate west. Given that Saudi Arabia, the enemy of Iran, has given positive signals toward Iraqi Kurds — and Riyadh's alleged support for Iranian Kurdish militants based in Iraqi Kurdistan — a continued autonomous Kurdistan region supported by the Saudis could become a challenge perhaps greater than the threats posed by an independent Kurdish state. ♦

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Erdogan menace de riposter contre les Kurdes à Afrin en Syrie

ATS / 9 juillet 2017
<https://www.swissinfo.ch>

Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a menacé samedi de lancer une opération dans le canton kurde d'Afrin dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie. Une série d'accrochages a eu lieu à la frontière.

"Aussi longtemps que cette menace (kurde, ndlr) perdurera, nous activerons nos règles d'engagement et réagirons comme il convient à Afrin", a-t-il déclaré lors d'une conférence de presse à l'issue du sommet du G20 Hambourg en Allemagne.

Au cours des derniers jours, l'armée turque et les Unités de protection du peuple kurde (YPG) ont échangé des tirs à plusieurs reprises dans la zone frontalière.

Ankara considère les YPG comme une émanation du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), organisation séparatiste kurde classée "terroriste" par la Turquie et ses alliés occidentaux. En revanche, les Etats-Unis soutiennent ces milices kurdes qui, associées à des combattants arabes,

ont lancé une offensive pour reprendre la ville de Raqa, fief du groupe Etat islamique (EI) en Syrie.

PAS D'ETAT KURDE

La presse turque spéculé depuis plusieurs jours sur une possible opération terrestre de l'armée turque contre les YPG, la Russie assurant pour sa part une couverture aérienne.

De tels plans pourraient toutefois être contrariés par l'esquisse de rapprochement observée entre le président russe Vladimir Poutine et son homologue américain Donald Trump au sommet du G20 sur la question syrienne.

La Turquie "n'autorisera" jamais la création d'un Etat kurde dans le nord de la Syrie, a réitéré M. Erdogan. "Nous ne minimiserons jamais les menaces qui pèsent sur notre pays", a-t-il insisté.

Ankara a déjà lancé une offensive terrestre dans le nord de la Syrie en août 2016 afin de repousser l'EI de sa frontière et empêcher la jonction des différentes zones contrôlées par les YPG. ■



"Aussi longtemps que cette menace (kurde, ndlr) perdurera, nous activerons nos règles d'engagement et réagirons comme il convient à Afrin" dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie, a déclaré le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan lors d'une conférence de presse à l'issue du sommet du G20. KEYSTONE/EPA/CLEMENS BILAN (sda-ats)

Combats entre forces kurdes et rebelles en Syrie, quinze morts

Dans un communiqué, des rebelles combattant sous la bannière de "Ahl al-Diyar", indiquent avoir attaqué Aïn Daqna parce qu'ils considèrent les FDS comme des "occupants".

OLJ/AFP 18/07/2017
<https://www.lorientlejour.com>

Quinze rebelles ont été tués dans des combats avec des forces kurdes qui se poursuivaient mardi dans une zone du nord de la Syrie, un pays ravagé par une guerre complexe impliquant plusieurs protagonistes, selon une ONG.

Les combats ont éclaté lundi autour du village d'Aïn Daqna contrôlé par les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), dominées par les Kurdes, mais que des factions rebelles syriennes soutenues par la Turquie veulent prendre, a indiqué l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH).

"Depuis lundi, quinze rebelles ont été tués et quatre membres des FDS blessés", a précisé cette ONG qui s'appuie sur un vaste réseau de sources dans le pays en conflit depuis 2011.

Le village d'Aïn Daqna est depuis février aux mains des FDS, une alliance de combattants syriens kurdes et arabes qui lutte principalement contre le groupe jihadiste Etat islamique (EI) en Syrie avec l'appui de la coalition internationale dirigée par les Etats-Unis. Il est situé dans la province d'Alep dans une zone revendiquée par les deux protagonistes.

Dans un communiqué, des rebelles combattant sous la bannière de "Ahl al-Diyar", ont indiqué avoir attaqué Aïn Daqna parce qu'ils considèrent les FDS comme des "occupants". "Nous promettons à notre peuple davantage d'attaques éclair. On fera regretter (aux FDS) l'occupation de cette terre et le déplacement de milliers" de personnes, ont-ils ajouté.

Les affrontements sont sporadiques entre rebelles, qui combattent essentiellement le régime de Bachar



Un combattant des Forces démocratiques syriennes à l'ouest de Raqqa, en Syrie, le 17 juillet 2017. AFP/ BULENT KILIC conflit

el-Assad, et les FDS, fer de lance de la lutte antijihadistes.

Selon un responsable des Unités de protection du peuple kurde

(YPG), principale composante des FDS, neuf cadavres de rebelles ont été retirés de la zone des combats et seront remis au Croissant-Rouge -->

→ kurde pour qu'il les remette à son tour aux familles.

Déclenché par la répression de manifestations prodémocratie et opposant initialement armée et rebelles syriens, le conflit en Syrie s'est complexifié au fil des ans avec l'implication d'autres protagonistes, d'acteurs régionaux et internationaux et de groupes jihadistes, sur un territoire de plus en plus morcelé. Il a fait

plus de 330.000 morts et des millions de déplacés.

La Turquie voisine soutient des groupes rebelles dans le nord de la Syrie à la fois pour combattre l'EI mais aussi les YPG, qu'elle considère comme une extension du parti indépendantiste kurde de Turquie, le PKK, classé "organisation terroriste".

Ailleurs dans le pays, quatre per-

sonnes ont été tuées mardi avant l'aube dans une attaque suicide à la voiture piégée contre un point de contrôle de la police kurde (Assayech) dans le nord-est syrien, selon l'OSDH. L'attaque a eu lieu dans la province de Hassaké, située à l'est de celle de Raqqa et contrôlée en majorité par les Kurdes. La télévision officielle syrienne a fait état de l'attentat et du même bilan.

Les zones sous contrôle kurde en Syrie sont régulièrement la cible d'attentats, souvent revendiqués par l'EI.

Les FDS tentent actuellement de chasser l'EI de Raqqa, son principal fief en Syrie. Elles y sont entrées début juin et contrôlent désormais 35% de la ville, selon l'OSDH. ♦

AFP

Syrie : un attentat-suicide contre des forces kurdes tue 4 personnes

Beyrouth, 18 juillet 2017 (AFP)

QUATRE personnes ont été tuées dans une attaque suicide à la voiture piégée contre un point de contrôle des forces kurdes dans le nord-est de la Syrie, a indiqué mardi l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH). Cette attaque survenue dans la nuit de lundi à mardi intervient alors que les Unités de protection du peuple kurde (YPG) sont le fer de lance d'une offensive visant à reprendre Raqa, bastion syrien du groupe Etat islamique (EI).

Selon l'OSDH, l'explosion a frappé un barrage géré par les Assayech (forces de sécurité kurdes) dans la province de Hassaké, située à l'est de celle de Raqa et contrôlée en majorité par les Kurdes.

Au moins deux des morts étaient des membres des Assayech, selon l'Observatoire, tandis que l'identité des deux autres victimes n'a pas encore été confirmée.

La télévision officielle syrienne a également rapporté l'explosion mardi et donné le même bilan.

Les zones sous contrôle kurde sont régulièrement la cible d'attentats, souvent revendiqués par l'EI. L'attaque de mardi n'a pas été revendiquée dans l'immédiat. Les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS) dominées par les YPG et soutenues par Washington sont entrées début juin à Raqa et contrôlent désormais 35% de la ville, selon l'OSDH.

Déclenché en mars 2011 par la répression de manifestations pro-démocratie, le conflit en Syrie s'est complexifié au fil des années avec l'implication de différents acteurs régionaux et internationaux ainsi que des groupes jihadistes sur un territoire morcelé.

Il a fait plus de 330.000 morts et des millions de déplacés. ●

The Washington Times July 24, 2017

Trent Franks warns Kurds against Iranian and Turkish influence in region

By Laura Kelly - The Washington Times - Monday, July 24, 2017
<http://www.washingtontimes.com>

Iranian and Turkish influence in northern Iraq could pose a threat to U.S. interests in the region and its relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government as Iraqi Kurds move forward with a controversial vote on independence in two months, a key House lawmaker warned Monday.

Rep. Trent Franks, Arizona Republican, told a Capitol Hill briefing that it is vital that the Kurdistan Regional Government address fears that it "would become a puppet of Istanbul or Tehran" as it seeks U.S. support for its independence push.

On Sept. 25, the Kurds will vote in a referendum on independence with the results — projected to be an overwhelming majority in favor of breaking with Iraq — used as leverage in negotiations between Erbil and Baghdad on key issues that include security, disputed territories, economics and international aid.

The Trump administration has stated that it doesn't support a referendum vote in September, fearing it could prove destabilizing and take focus away from the fight to oust Islamic State from Iraq.

Last year, Mr. Franks, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, proposed an amendment to a defense authorization bill to directly arm the Kurds, who have provided key military muscle in the fight against Islamic State in both Iraq and Syria. The amendment was stripped from the final version of the bill under pressure from the Obama Administration.

On Monday, Mr. Franks said that the Trump administration is ready to do more to help the Kurds — so long as they stand up to Turkey and Iran.

"I think it's incumbent upon the KRG to show through their actions that their key ally is the United States of America," he said. "Fortunately, now they have an administration which will respond appropriately at the end of the day — and that they're not an ally with the Islamist Sunni regime in Turkey nor ally of Islamist Shia regime in Iran."

Mr. Franks praised the Kurds and their fighting force, the peshmerga, for



Rep. Trent Franks, R-Ariz., takes questions during a TV interview on Capitol Hill in Washington, Friday, July 14, 2017. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite) ** FILE **

their key role in defeating ISIS and accepting over 2 million refugees and internally displaced peoples into the Kurdish region.

"I just thank God for the Kurds — for the way that they have welcomed so many people. ... God knows how much worse ISIS would have been and how much horror they would have hoisted upon the people of Iraq," the conservative lawmaker said.

The KRG has already expressed concern over the use of Iranian-backed Shiite militias operating not only in Iraq, but in the northern Kurdish regions as well. KRG Representative to the U.S. Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman reiterated the Kurdish people's concern over the continued presence of Iranian-backed militias in Kurdish territory and the threat they pose to stability in the area.

The Kurds have said that they will not abandon areas they liberate from Islamic State, and areas they've helped defend that are historically Kurdish and have a Kurdish majority should be part of an independent Kurdistan, such as Kirkuk.

Kurdish militia notably did not participate in the liberation of Mosul because they believe it the responsibility of the Iraq central government, but they did coordinate with Iraqi security forces to secure the area surrounding the city. ■

Ankara englué dans ses alliances contradictoires

Éclairage

Un an après la tentative de coup d'État, la fragilisation des liens entre la Turquie et les Occidentaux laisse entrevoir les limites de la politique étrangère menée par Erdogan.

Pierre GOULLENCOURT

OLJ - 8/07/2017

<https://www.lorientlejour.com>

« Avant tout, nous arracherons la tête des traîtres. » Un an après le coup d'État manqué du 15 juillet, le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan est toujours dans une optique de revanche, comme en témoignent ses propos tenus lors d'une cérémonie d'hommage aux victimes, qui se déroulait à Istanbul ce samedi.

L'homme fort de la Turquie n'est pas prêt de renoncer à sa politique répressive envers ceux qu'il accuse d'avoir participé à la tentative de putsch. Cela implique de poursuivre les purges qui, depuis une année, ont entraîné l'arrestation de 50 000 personnes et le limogeage de 100 000 autres, malgré les critiques émanant des pays occidentaux et des associations de défense des droits de l'homme. S'il a dénoncé samedi un « manque d'empathie » de l'Occident, en référence à ce qu'il considère comme un soutien insuffisant à son égard, cette joute verbale n'est qu'un énième reproche dans un dialogue qui paraît de plus en plus tendu.

Les relations entre l'Occident et la Turquie se sont largement détériorées au lendemain du coup d'État manqué, particulièrement avec les pays de l'Union européenne. Si un accord prévoyant le renvoi systématique de tous les migrants vers la Turquie a réussi à être conclu en mars 2016, Ankara menace régulièrement d'annuler ce pacte au gré de ses différends avec Bruxelles. Et alors que la Turquie est candidate à une entrée dans l'organisation depuis 2005, les négociations sont au point mort, notamment en raison des nombreuses critiques qui lui sont adressées en matière de libertés publiques. En outre, l'approbation par les Turcs de la réforme constitutionnelle en avril octroyant les pleins pouvoirs au chef de l'État a poussé l'UE à réagir à nouveau fermement. Comme en novembre 2016, le



Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan lors de la commémoration du premier anniversaire du coup d'État manqué, le 15 juillet 2017 à Istanbul. Source : service de presse de la présidence turque/AFP

Parlement européen s'est prononcé le 6 juillet en faveur de l'arrêt des négociations du processus d'adhésion, en raison de la révision de la Constitution turque, dont l'entrée en vigueur est prévue en 2019.

L'annulation en Allemagne au mois de mars de plusieurs meetings en faveur de cette réforme n'a fait que jeter un peu plus d'huile sur le feu. Lors de la dernière rencontre entre la chancelière allemande et le président turc en marge du G20, Angela Merkel a souligné les « profondes divergences » qui existaient entre leurs deux pays. Ces désaccords se sont renforcés à mesure que les chancelleries européennes ont critiqué les purges menées par le pouvoir turc, craignant qu'il ne profite de l'occasion pour faire taire toute opposition.

Les relations avec Washington sont tout aussi compliquées. Dès le lendemain du putsch manqué, des responsables turcs ont laissé entendre que les États-Unis avaient joué un rôle dans cette tentative, ces derniers se refusant depuis d'extrader Fethullah Gülen, l'homme désigné par Recep Tayyip Erdogan comme l'instigateur de toute l'opération. Le soutien américain aux Kurdes syriens du

PYD (Parti de l'Union démocratique), considéré comme un groupe terroriste par Ankara, n'a fait que renforcer les tensions entre les deux alliés. « Je vais être très franc, ce n'est pas facile, il s'agit de faire des choix difficiles », a indiqué Rex Tillerson lors de sa première visite à Ankara en mars dernier.

DÉPENDANCE

Se sentant abandonné par les Occidentaux, le président turc a cherché à développer les relations turco-russes. Alors que des tensions existaient entre Moscou et Ankara depuis la destruction en novembre 2015 d'un avion russe par l'armée turque, la mise en place d'accords bilatéraux sur la question syrienne entre les deux pays a marqué un rapprochement symbolique. De l'évacuation d'Alep en décembre 2016 aux pourparlers d'Astana lancés depuis janvier dernier qui se sont soldés par un accord sur des « zones de désescalade », la Russie et la Turquie semblent être en capacité de coopérer. Leur relation en matière de défense devrait même bientôt permettre à la Turquie d'acquiescer des armes russes pour un montant total de 2,5 milliards de dollars, en dépit de la désapprobation de l'OTAN. « S'il y a

une normalisation de la relation avec Moscou, le président turc Erdogan s'en sert comme d'un levier pour faire pression sur les Occidentaux, et Poutine a également parfaitement compris que lier des liens avec la Turquie pouvait déranger ces derniers », analyse Didier Billion, directeur adjoint de l'IRIS et spécialiste de la Turquie, interrogé par L'Orient-Le Jour. Malgré des relations établies entre Moscou et Ankara, des divergences profondes persistent et la Turquie reste dépendante des pays occidentaux.

CLARIFICATION

Effectivement, la Turquie ne peut définitivement pas tourner le dos à l'Occident. La forte dépendance à l'étranger de l'économie turque pour financer sa croissance confirme la nécessité de conserver des relations ne serait-ce que cordiales avec ses voisins de l'Ouest. « La capacité d'influence de la Turquie sur le Moyen-Orient dépend en bonne partie du maintien de relations de haut niveau avec les pays occidentaux, avec l'Union européenne, d'une part, et les États-Unis, de l'autre », affirme Didier Billion. Si Ankara a longtemps cherché à s'ériger en acteur régional majeur, la logique de blocs qui anime actuellement la scène moyen-orientale a entraîné une mouvance de la politique étrangère turque. « Le coup d'État turc n'est pas la cause de l'inflexion de la politique étrangère turque, mais une sorte d'accélérateur », ajoute le spécialiste.

La crise du Golfe dans laquelle le Qatar se retrouve isolé de ses voisins a de nouveau accentué ces fluctuations. Entre le camp associant l'Iran et Moscou opposé à celui composé de l'Arabie saoudite avec Washington, Ankara paraît essayer de jouer sur plusieurs tableaux.

« La Turquie est prise dans des contradictions d'alliance », explique Jean Marcou, directeur des relations internationales à Sciences Po Grenoble, contacté par L'Orient-Le Jour. Si le président Erdogan veut conserver une certaine légitimité sur la scène internationale, la stratégie adoptée par la Turquie semble être mise au défi de la clarification. « Aujourd'hui, elle cherche des alliés utiles, importants, mais on ne peut pas être à la fois membre de l'OTAN, et avoir de très bonnes relations avec la Russie, l'Iran, l'Arabie saoudite ou le Qatar », conclut M. Marcou. ♦

Mossoul libérée, la guerre contre Daech continue

Le premier ministre irakien, Haïdar al-Abadi, s'est rendu dimanche dans l'ex-capitale du « califat », où il a annoncé la « victoire » des forces gouvernementales sur les djihadistes de l'État islamique qui tenaient la ville depuis trois ans. PAGE 2

ADRIEN JAULMES @AdrienJaulmes
ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL À MOSSOUL

LA BATAILLE de Mossoul touchait à sa fin hier en fin d'après-midi. Les tirs d'armes automatiques et les explosions des bombes lancées par l'aviation occidentale retentissaient encore dans une rue le long du Tigre encore tenue par quelques centaines de combattants de Daech, alors que le premier ministre irakien, Haïdar al-Abadi, faisait une visite surprise du champ de bataille. Après neuf mois d'une bataille d'une échelle inédite, l'armée irakienne est à nouveau maîtresse de la grande ville du nord de l'Irak, mais le prix à payer a été lourd.

Pour Ali et ses camarades, la bataille de Mossoul s'est achevée dimanche en fin de matinée, quand leur escouade des forces antiterroristes irakiennes (ICTS) a atteint les rives du Tigre. « C'est moi qui ai planté le drapeau irakien sur le bord du fleuve », dit Ali. Dans la pénombre d'un magasin de fournitures électriques au rideau arraché, les soldats irakiens assis par terre mangent autour d'un grand plat de riz. « On est heureux, c'est presque la victoire, disent-ils. Pour nous, c'est terminé. Il y a encore des camarades qui finissent l'opération dans le quartier voisin. Mais on a fait notre part. »

Un peu plus loin, au-dessus des toits, des tirs nourris d'armes automatiques résonnent. De temps en temps, des bombes guidées lancées par les avions explosent en faisant trembler le sol. Quelques centaines de combattants de Daech et leurs familles, peut-être aussi des civils coincés avec eux, tiennent encore une rue, dans le quartier d'al-Maidan, le long du Tigre. « Ils n'en ont plus pour longtemps, ils ne peuvent plus manœuvrer, dit le capitaine Natiq, un

commandant d'unité du bataillon Najaf, l'une des unités des ICTS, aussi connus sous le surnom de Division d'or. Ils sont finis. »

Les hommes aux uniformes noirs des ICTS sont ceux qui ont porté le coup décisif à Daech. Dans les rues étroites du centre historique, les soldats ont dû conquérir la ville presque maison par maison, chargés de munitions et de milliers de bouteilles d'eau dans la chaleur écrasante de l'été irakien. « La vieille ville a été la partie la plus dure de toute la bataille, dit le capitaine Natiq. C'est là que les combats ont été les plus intenses. Daech s'était préparé depuis des mois à livrer son dernier combat ici. Ils avaient aménagé des pièges et des tunnels partout. On devait parfois les déloger à la grenade. »

Malgré la résistance féroce de Daech, les soldats de l'ICTS se sont enfoncés comme un coin dans les lignes de défense ennemies. « On les a fait danser, dit le capitaine. On a maintenu constamment la pression sur eux. Ils voulaient contre-attaquer mais ils n'ont pas pu. Ces derniers jours, ils étaient fatigués, ils n'avaient plus autant de munitions. Certains se faisaient sauter avec des ceintures d'explosifs. »

Le capitaine a participé depuis neuf mois à la reconquête de Mossoul. « Trois de mes soldats sont morts et j'ai de nombreux blessés. Mais aujourd'hui nous sommes arrivés au bout. »

« Trois de mes soldats sont morts et j'ai de nombreux blessés. Mais aujourd'hui nous sommes arrivés au bout »

LE CAPITAIN NATIQ, UN COMMANDANT D'UNITÉ DU BATAILLON NAJAF

L'état du centre historique de Mossoul résume assez bien le prix qui a été payé pour la reconquête de la ville. Autour de la mosquée al-Nouri et de son minaret penché, aujourd'hui réduits à un amas de gravats, s'étend un monde en noir et blanc. Les façades des maisons en ruines sont d'un gris pâle, et les tas énormes de décombres, carcasses calcinées de véhicules et morceaux de ferraille arrachée qui encombre les rues sont d'un gris sombre. Garés en lignes, les Humvees blindés irakiens de la Division d'or font des taches noires.

Ce monde a aussi une odeur particulière. Dans la chaleur écrasante du mois de juillet, trois parfums se mélangent : celui, sucré et écoeurant, des cadavres en décomposition enfouis sous les décombres ; celui, âcre, des excréments et des égouts crevés ; et enfin celui, piquant, de la poussière de pierre et de béton pulvérisés.

C'est aussi un monde désert. À part les soldats et leurs bulldozers qui commencent à déblayer les axes principaux, il n'y a plus âme qui vive dans les ruelles en perte et les venelles de cette très ancienne ville. Les chats ont été mangés par les habitants affamés. Les humains sont morts ensevelis ou ont pris la fuite à mesure de l'avancée des forces irakiennes. Certains sont restés jusqu'au bout, pris au piège de la bataille. Une dame de 67 ans, Haifa Younis, est restée ensevelie sous sa maison pendant les quatre derniers jours des combats dans le quartier d'al-Maidan. Elle est maigre, ses os sont saillants et sa peau est devenue presque translucide à cause de l'absence d'exposition à la lumière. « J'habite là-bas depuis soixante ans, dit-elle. Nous étions à la cave depuis des semaines. Puis une explosion a fait s'effondrer la maison au-dessus de

nous. Heureusement, il restait une ouverture par laquelle nous pouvions respirer et mon fils pouvait aller chercher un peu d'eau dans la rivière à la nuit tombée. On ne savait plus quoi faire, quand les soldats sont arrivés. »

Après neuf mois de combats acharnés, d'abord dans l'est puis, à partir de février, sur la rive occidentale du Tigre, la bataille de Mossoul a été une affaire d'endurance, mais aussi de méthode. Les forces irakiennes ont méthodiquement repoussé les djihadistes dans leurs dernières lignes de défense : le centre historique de Mossoul, autour de la mosquée où ils avaient proclamé voici trois ans leur califat. La situation semblait presque bloquée ces derniers jours, après la destruction de la mosquée. Les forces irakiennes semblaient hésiter à lancer le dernier assaut. Mais leur dispositif s'est lentement resserré autour du dernier réduit de Daech. Puis les événements se sont précipités dimanche. Le premier ministre irakien, Haïdar al-Abadi, qui avait annoncé la victoire par un communiqué en milieu de journée, est arrivé à Mossoul en fin d'après-midi. Son convoi a traversé la vieille ville et s'est arrêté devant les ruines de la mosquée al-Nouri. Le premier ministre a félicité les soldats et a repris son convoi pour traverser le Tigre sur un pont flottant devant les ruines de l'hôtel Ninive.

Les soldats commençaient à s'échanger les trophées ramassés sur le champ de bataille, les drapeaux noirs de l'État islamique étant les plus recherchés.

À la nuit tombée, des unités ont commencé à tirer de façon nourrie, mais cette fois en l'air pour célébrer la victoire. Les balles traçantes se sont mises à monter vers le ciel en pointillés orange au-dessus de Mossoul.



Deux soldats irakiens brandissent un drapeau noir de l'État islamique, dimanche, après la libération de Mossoul. LUCIEN LUNG / RIVA PRESS

LE TWEET Macron salue la libération de Mossoul

« Mossoul libérée de Daech : hommage de la France à tous ceux, avec nos troupes, qui ont contribué à cette victoire ».
@Emmanuel
Macron



Dans la maison qui abrite l'état-major de la Division d'or, à l'entrée de la vieille ville, les officiers supérieurs sont passés saluer les généraux devant la grande photo aérienne qui a servi de carte à l'offensive de ces dernières semaines. Sur la grande surface grise, les

traits au feutre bleu s'enfoncent dans l'entrelacs de ruelles. Il ne reste plus qu'un petit rectangle le long du fleuve, entouré de flèches. Le dernier territoire de Daech à Mossoul. ■



14 juillet 2017

Les forces turques pilonnent les positions des unités kurdes d'autodéfense

14.07.2017
<https://fr.sputniknews.com>

LES TROUPES turques ont pilonné vendredi les forces kurdes d'autodéfense depuis la frontière syrienne.

L'artillerie turque installée dans la province de Kilis, à la frontière avec la Syrie, a ouvert le feu contre les positions des forces d'autodéfense des Kurdes syriens en réponse aux tirs effectués par de ces dernières, a signalé vendredi l'agence DHA, citant des sources militaires.

Les tirs pourraient avoir été entendus jusque dans le centre de la province, dans la ville de Kilis, a-t-on précisé.

Intervention turque à Afrine: impossible «sans accord avec la Russie»

Le ministre turc de la Défense Fikri İsgik a annoncé la semaine dernière qu'Ankara n'excluait pas une opération militaire à Afrine en cas de menace pour sa sécurité nationale émanant de cette région.

Environ 20.000 membres de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) et des militaires turcs participeront à une nouvelle opération militaire antikurde dans la région de la ville d'Afrine, située au nord-ouest de la Syrie et actuellement contrôlée par les Unités de protection du peuple (YPG), d'après des médias turcs.



Miliciens kurdes à Afrine
© AFP 2017 George Ourfalian

Auparavant, un chef de l'Armée syrienne libre, qui a souhaité garder l'anonymat, a annoncé à Sputnik qu'après la fin du ramadan, conjointement avec les combattants de l'ASL, la Turquie envisageait de mener une opération aux abords de la ville de Tell Rifaat. Elle procède à ces fins à la répartition des militaires et des armes lourdes vers Azaz, qui se trouve à 6 km de Tell Rifaat. ●

Mossoul, année zéro

La seconde ville d'Irak « libérée » par le régime, tout reste à reconstruire, pour stabiliser la région et ramener la confiance entre communautés



Une Irakienne et son enfant dans les ruines de la vieille ville de Mossoul, le 5 juillet. Ahmad Al Rubaye/AFP

A Mossoul, les défis pour gagner la paix

— La proclamation, dimanche, par le premier ministre de la « libération » de la deuxième ville d'Irak fait naître de nombreuses questions sur l'avenir, pour stabiliser la région et ramener la confiance entre ses communautés.

— Quel est l'état de la ville ?

Le feu continuait à couvrir hier dans la partie ouest de Mossoul, alors que les forces irakiennes tentaient de venir à bout de l'ultime poche de résistance djihadiste. La veille, les images de la visite du premier ministre irakien avaient pourtant acté la reprise de la deuxième ville du pays. Haïdar Al Abadi pouvait féliciter ses troupes de la « victoire », trois ans et un mois après la débâcle de son armée devant Daech. Cette « victoire » est en réa-

lité le résultat d'une offensive de neuf mois, menée par une coalition internationale dirigée par Washington. Avant cette intervention, et par prévention, plus d'une dizaine de camps avaient été ouverts pour recevoir les déplacés de Mossoul. Au total, ce sont 927 000 personnes qui sont sorties des parties orientale puis occidentale de la ville depuis octobre.

Les deux côtés de la ville n'ont cependant pas connu le même sort. À l'est, la ville, plus moderne et aérée, a été moins détruite et reprise à Daech dès janvier. Les déplacés ont été moins nombreux qu'attendu. Aujourd'hui, « les 170 000 déplacés de cette partie sont en grande majorité revenus. L'eau et l'électricité, les commerces fonctionnent », constate Elisa Fourt, qui en revient pour Handicap International. « En revanche, à l'ouest, beaucoup plus densément peuplé, le niveau de destruction est extrême. Les petites rues de la

vieille ville ont été reprises rue par rue après de violents combats. » 750 000 personnes ont quitté les combats de cette partie de la ville, souvent au péril de leurs vies. Amnesty International a recueilli dans un rapport, publié aujourd'hui, les témoignages d'habitants de Mossoul-Ouest. L'organisation en conclut que les forces de la coalition, notamment, ont eu recours à « l'utilisation injustifiée d'armes puissantes » sans prendre « les précautions nécessaires pour éviter des pertes inutiles en vies humaines. »

— Quelle est la situation humanitaire des habitants ?

Les déplacés de Mossoul-Ouest ont salué dimanche la « victoire ». Mais ils savent qu'ils vont devoir attendre. « Ils sont impatients de rentrer chez eux. Beaucoup retournent pour la journée en taxi voir l'état de leur maison et de leurs biens », explique Mary Langam, qui s'occupe du camp d'Al Salamiyah pour Acted. 66 000 personnes, selon les chiffres publiés hier par le Haut-Commissariat aux réfugiés (HCR), sont déjà revenues à Mossoul-Ouest. « Mais, ce sera un long chemin pour arriver à retrouver une vie normale », poursuit Mary Langam.

Dans le camp d'Al Salamiyah, les déplacés peuvent sortir à condition d'être de retour pour 21 heures. Au début de l'offensive, en octobre, les autorités irakiennes orientaient les déplacés vers les camps, en priorité, afin de mieux contrôler ces nouveaux arrivants. 80 % des déplacés vivaient alors dans les camps. Leurs tentes n'accueillent désormais que la moitié des déplacés. La réglementation s'est assouplie, et les déplacés essaient d'éviter ces villages de tentes, alors que la température monte actuellement à plus de 45 °C et que l'électricité est souvent absente. « La première préoccupation des gens ici est la chaleur », confirme Mary Langam. Restera ensuite à vivre avec les traumatismes de la guerre et de l'occupation de la cité par Daech. Elisa Fourt témoigne : « La plupart des gens ne travaillaient plus. La télévision, le téléphone étaient interdits. Les gens vivaient reclus. Certains ont été témoins de scènes de torture de la part des djihadistes. »

— Daech reste-t-il menaçant ?

Défaite à Mossoul, en mauvaise posture à Rakka, son autre fief en Syrie, Daech n'a pas dit son dernier mot, et reste maître de larges portions de territoire en Syrie et en Irak, généralement peu peuplées. Une importante poche demeure au sud-est de Mossoul, autour de la localité de Hawidja, qui compte 100 000 habitants. Situé à moins de 20 kilomètres de Kirkouk, sous contrôle kurde, ce bastion présente un danger pour la stabilité de la région, qui fait régulièrement face aux incursions et attentats de Daech.

Le groupe djihadiste demeure aussi présent dans le nord-ouest du pays, dans l'enclave de Tal Afar, plus grande ville encore sous son contrôle total avec ses 150 000 à 200 000 habitants. Enfin, autour de la vallée de l'Euphrate, une large partie de la zone frontalière ●●●

●●● avec la Syrie reste des deux côtés sous contrôle de Daech, qui y a transféré ses nouveaux quartiers généraux, autour de Mayadin, côté syrien, et d'Al Qaïm, côté irakien. Régulièrement bombardée par les avions de la coalition, cette région désertique prendra un certain temps avant d'être totalement contrôlée, au vu de la faiblesse du régime syrien à l'ouest.

L'effondrement de Daech, qui passera également par des affrontements à Deir Ez-Zor, ne semble qu'une question de temps. « Le repli des combattants de Daech remet en question le projet d'un califat. L'idée selon laquelle Daech doit avoir un territoire n'est plus d'actualité », analyse Agnès Levallois, consultante spécialiste du Moyen-Orient. « Il faudrait voir, si Al-Baghdadi est encore vivant, quelle sera la stratégie de Daech pour exister. »

— Compte tenu de ses divergences internes, l'Irak peut-il se stabiliser ?

Majoritairement occupée par des populations sunnites, Mossoul a été libérée par les forces gouvernementales irakiennes, avec l'aide de la communauté internationale, mais aussi de milices kurdes, chiites et arabes sunnites. Pour Karim Pakzad, chercheur à l'Iris, spécialiste de l'Irak, la lutte contre Daech dans la bataille de Mossoul a fédéré les différentes communautés, mais pour un temps seulement. « Les Kurdes veulent avoir leur part dans la victoire à Mossoul. À court terme,

Les zones de contrôle en Syrie et en Irak



Massoud Barzani, le chef du parti démocrate du Kurdistan, pourrait faire entendre davantage sa volonté d'organiser un référendum pour l'indépendance du Kurdistan ». Si les Kurdes voient dans cette victoire l'occasion d'étendre leur territoire, le « problème kurde » en Irak pourrait, ces prochains mois, fédérer sunnites et chiïtes, estime le chercheur. Pour Myriam Benraad, maître de conférences à

« L'idée selon laquelle Daech doit avoir un territoire n'est plus d'actualité. »

l'Université de Limerick (Irlande) et chercheuse associée à l'Iremam (CNRS), les dissensions entre chiïtes et sunnites ont surtout été le fait de différentes factions armées: « Il faut distinguer les stratégies communautaires à portée politique du sentiment des populations civiles. On a beaucoup d'exemples de familles chiïtes qui ont aidé des sunnites. » Pour elle, l'État irakien est le seul à pouvoir commencer un vrai rapprochement. « À lui de remplir ses obligations par rapport à une population sunnite en demande. Certaines élites politiques n'ont rien fait pour leur population depuis quinze ans. »

Pierre Cochez, Noé Michalon et Salomé Parent



Après avoir libéré Mossoul de Daech, le gouvernement irakien doit inaugurer une ère nouvelle de gouvernance pour la deuxième ville du pays.

Retour des populations déplacées, poursuite des combats dans

les zones tenues par Daech, stabilisation de la région... Les défis sont nombreux.

S'y ajoutent de possibles mises en cause de soldats de l'armée irakienne, suspectés de crimes de guerre à l'encontre de combattants capturés et de civils.

repères

Neuf mois pour reprendre Mossoul

17 octobre 2016. Les forces irakiennes lancent l'opération de reconquête de la ville aux mains de Daech depuis juin 2014.

Début novembre. L'armée entre dans Mossoul par l'est. En décembre, de nombreux attentats-suicides des djihadistes obligent à temporiser deux semaines.

8 janvier 2017. Les forces d'élite atteignent le Tigre pour la première fois. Le 24, les forces irakiennes annoncent avoir « totalement libéré » Mossoul-Est.

19 février. Lancement des opérations pour reprendre la partie occidentale. Les forces irakiennes y pénètrent après la reprise de l'aéroport.

18 juin. Assaut lancé sur la vieille ville. Le 21, la mosquée Al-Nouri est détruite par Daech.

Juillet. Les djihadistes multiplient les attentats. Le 9, le premier ministre annonce que Mossoul est « libérée ».

À Raqqa, les hommes de Daech cernés de toutes parts

Les forces arabo-kurdes, soutenues par les Occidentaux, sont désormais dans la vieille ville et voient la fin du califat proche.

GUILLAUME PERRIER
RAQQA

SYRIE Accroupi sur un toit dans le quartier d'al-Sinaa, à l'est de Raqqa, Boran, 29 ans, un membre des YPG (Unités de protection populaire), la branche armée du PKK en Syrie (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), dessine d'un mouvement de la main l'avancée décisive de ses compagnons d'armes dans la nuit du 4 juillet. « Nos troupes sont entrées dans la vieille ville, par trois points différents sur le front est », raconte ce combattant à l'épaisse moustache, originaire de Haskonef, dans le sud-est de la Turquie.

Dans le salon de la maison, vidée à la hâte par ses propriétaires et occupée par une douzaine de guerriers kurdes, le commandant de ce poste avancé fait le bilan de l'offensive. « Notre moral est au zénith. Nous avançons, la fin du califat est une question de temps », affirme ce chef d'unité des YPG, dans son treillis couleur sable.

« Cette guerre est aussi une guerre technologique, montre-t-il sur sa tablette où apparaît une carte de la ville parsemée de points jaunes. Grâce à cela, toutes nos positions sont connectées et mises en réseau, ce qui nous permet d'avoir une idée précise de l'évolution des lignes de front. »

Les hauts murs de la médina de Raqqa n'ont pas résisté longtemps aux assauts de la coalition anti-Daech, les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS). L'avancée des combattants arabes et kurdes, unis pour reconquérir la « capitale » syrienne de l'État islamique a été décisive ces derniers jours. Mercredi, ils ont encore gagné 200 mètres à l'intérieur des vieux murs. La route stratégique qui traverse le centre-ville et mène à la vieille mosquée est désormais sous leur contrôle.

Cernés de toutes parts, retranchés dans la vieille ville de ce qui était leur fief syrien depuis 2014, les derniers djihadistes de Daech n'ont plus que l'énergie du désespoir à opposer aux assaillants, largement supérieurs en nombre et en puissance de feu. « Nous sommes en position de force et nous bénéficions des frappes aériennes de nos alliés. Alors Daech lance des attaques surprises avec



Des combattants des Forces démocratiques syriennes, jeudi dernier dans un quartier de l'est de Raqqa. VIDEO HAWAR NEWS AGENCY/AP



des drones, des voitures suicides ou en utilisant des tunnels pour passer sous la ligne de front », précise Metin, 22 ans, un Kurde syrien d'al-Qamichli.

C'est précisément après une attaque à la voiture piégée des djihadistes, dans la nuit du 4 juillet, que les FDS, coalition arabo-kurde soutenue par les pays occidentaux, ont contre-attaqué et

« Toutes nos positions sont connectées et mises en réseau, ce qui nous permet d'avoir une idée précise de l'évolution des lignes de front »

BORAN, CHEF D'UNITÉ DES YPG

réalisé une percée dans la vieille ville de Raqqa. « Nous avons franchi les murs de la médina et atteint le marché aux légumes. Maintenant il faut tout déminer », décrit un officier YPG qui a participé à l'opération.

Les mines artisanales disséminées dans la ville ralentissent la progression de la coalition anti-Daech, mais elles

n'ont pas sa détermination. Pour en finir avec leur cauchemar, les FDS et les brigades arabes qui leur sont associées ont déployé près de 10 000 com-

battants et combattantes, venus de tout le nord de la Syrie, mais aussi des régions kurdes de Turquie et d'Iran.

À la tête de ces troupes se trouve une femme kurde de 36 ans, Rojda Felat, consciente des responsabilités qui sont les siennes. « C'est un honneur. Mais le monde entier doit nous soutenir. Daech n'est pas un ennemi normal. Il est très organisé, avec une forte emprise idéologique. Après la libération des villes et des villages, nous devons affronter d'autres défis et notamment convaincre les populations », souligne-t-elle.

Les bataillons arabes et kurdes peuvent compter sur l'appui de leurs alliés occidentaux, à commencer par les États-Unis. Le matin du 4 juillet, jour de la fête nationale américaine, c'est un impressionnant convoi militaire qui est entré dans Raqqa, par le front ouest cette fois. Trois semi-remorques chargées d'obus de mortier de gros calibre, de caisses d'armes et de munitions, une dizaine de véhicules blindés SUV, des transporteurs de troupes...

Des dizaines de cortèges de ce type seraient entrés en Syrie depuis le début de l'opération « Colère de l'Euphrate », officiellement lancée par les FDS le 5 novembre. Fin juin, un avion-cargo acheminant de l'aide militaire a même atterri à Kobané, à trois heures de route du champ de bataille. Au moins 200 membres des forces spéciales américaines seraient déployés sur les points stratégiques de la bataille pour sécuriser des positions au fur et à mesure de l'avancée.

Dans le quartier d'al-Sinaa, on croise aussi des Français, beaucoup plus discrets mais en nombre. « Leur présence est décisive sur le terrain », juge un volontaire britannique engagé avec les forces kurdes YPG et présent en Syrie depuis un an. Jamais ces dernières n'ont bénéficié d'un tel soutien militaire, même au moment de la bataille de Kobané en 2014. Le rapport de force avec les djihadistes s'est totalement inversé. Rien ne semble pouvoir empêcher les Kurdes de prendre leur revanche. La reprise de Raqqa n'est plus qu'une question de temps. ■



From left, Iraq's Counterterrorism Service members passed bodies of Islamic State militants in Mosul's Old City on Sunday; Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi (center) walked alongside police and army officers upon his arrival in Mosul.

ISIS is routed as Iraqi forces reclaim Mosul

MOSUL, IRAQ

After a costly victory, humanitarian crisis is just one challenge ahead

BY TIM ARANGO
AND MICHAEL R. GORDON

Dressed in a military uniform, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has arrived here in Mosul to congratulate Iraq's armed forces for wresting the city from the Islamic State group. The victory marked the formal end of a bloody campaign that lasted nearly nine months, left much of Iraq's second-largest city in ruins, killed thousands of people and displaced nearly a million more.

While Iraqi troops were still mopping up the last pockets of resistance and could be facing guerrilla attacks for weeks, the military began to savor its triumph in the shattered alleyways of the old city, where the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, put up a fierce last stand.

Hanging over the declaration of victory on Sunday is the reality of the hard road ahead. The security forces in Mosul still face dangers, including Islamic State sleeper cells and suicide bombers. And they must clear houses rigged with explosive booby traps so civilians can return and services can be restored.

Mosul was the largest city in either Iraq or Syria held by the Islamic State, and its loss signifies the waning territorial claims of a terrorist group that had its beginnings in the aftermath of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. The group is also threatened with the loss of its de facto capital, the Syrian city of Raqqa, which is encircled by Arab and

Kurdish fighters supported by the United States.

But the end of the Islamic State's hold on Mosul does not mean peace is at hand. Other cities and towns in Iraq remain under the militants' control, and Iraqis expect an increase in terrorist attacks in urban centers, especially in the capital, Baghdad, as the group reverts to its insurgent roots.

"It's going to continue to be hard every day," said Col. Pat Work, the commanding officer of the Second Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division, which is carrying out the American advisory effort here.

"Iraqi security forces need to be on the top of their game, and we need to be over their shoulder helping them as they move through this transition to consolidate gains and really sink their hold in on the west side," Colonel Work said as he rolled through the streets of western Mosul recently in an armored vehicle. "ISIS will challenge this."

The victory could have been sweeter as the Iraqis were denied the symbolism of hanging the national flag from the Grand al-Nuri Mosque and its distinctive leaning minaret, which was wiped from the skyline in recent weeks as a final act of barbarity by Islamic State militants who packed it with explosives and brought it down as government troops approached.

It was at that mosque in June 2014 where Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi strode to the top of a pulpit and declared himself the leader of a caliphate straddling the borders of Iraq and Syria, a vast territory where for three years Islamist extremists have governed with a strict form of Islamic law, held women as sex slaves, carried out public beheadings and plotted terrorist attacks against the West.

This past week, as fighting raged nearby, Iraqi soldiers took selfies in

front of the stump of the minaret and posed at the spot where Mr. Baghdadi made his speech. Destruction surrounded them, as did the stench of decaying bodies of Islamic State fighters, left to rot in the blazing sun.

The battle for Mosul began in October, after months of planning between Iraqi and American advisers, and some Obama administration officials had hoped it would conclude before they left office, giving a boost to the departing president's efforts to defeat the Islamic State. Instead, it lasted until now, and it was far more brutal than many expected. With dense house-to-house fighting and a ceaseless barrage of snipers and suicide bombers, the fight for Mosul was some of the toughest urban warfare since World War II, American commanders have said. Iraqi officers, whose lives have been defined by ceaseless war, said the fighting was among the worst they had seen.

"I have been with the Iraqi Army for 40 years," said Maj. Gen. Sami al-Arabi, a commander of Iraq's special forces. "I have participated in all of the battles of Iraq, but I've never seen anything like the battle for the old city." He continued: "We have been fighting for each meter. And when I say we have been fighting for each meter, I mean it literally."

Even as Mr. Abadi arrived here outfitted in the black uniform of Iraq's elite Counterterrorism Service, Iraqi forces were pressing to erase a pocket of Islamic State resistance by the Tigris River. Speaking from his base in the old city, Lt. Gen. Abdul-Wahab al-Saadi, a senior commander in that service, said that the militants' enclave was about 200 yards long and 50 yards wide and that he expected it to be taken later in the day or on Monday.

After arriving here, Mr. Abadi met with the Federal Police, who have taken significant losses in the battle, and went to visit the joint command overseeing the operation. But in an acknowledgment that the victory he had come to proclaim was not completely sealed, Iraqi officials said the prime minister would not make a public statement until the last patch of Islamic State territory in Mosul was cleared.

Earlier in the day, a post on Mr.

Abadi's official Twitter account stated that he had come to Mosul "to announce its liberation and congratulate the armed forces and Iraqi people on this victory."

Some militants had sought to escape by swimming across the river, but General Saadi said his soldiers had shot them. The general said he had planted

"There is no such thing as the phase 'after ISIS.' ISIS is a mentality, and this mentality will not end with guns alone."

the Iraqi flag on the banks of the Tigris on Sunday morning — an act he described as a "special moment" in which he reflected on the many soldiers he had lost in the long battle.

The retaking of the city, by all accounts, came at a great cost. Sensitive to the mounting casualties, the Iraqi government does not disclose how many of its troops have been killed. But deaths among Iraqi security forces in the Mosul battle had reached 774 by the end of March, according to American officers, which suggests the toll is more than a thousand now.

Even more civilians are estimated to have been killed, many at the hands of the Islamic State and some inadvertently by American airstrikes. At least seven journalists were killed, including two French correspondents and their fixer, an Iraqi Kurdish journalist, in a mine explosion in recent weeks.

The Iraqis and their international partners will now be confronted by the immense challenge of restoring essential services like electricity and rebuilding destroyed hospitals, schools, homes and bridges, which were wrecked in the ground combat or by the airstrikes, artillery fire and Himars rocket attacks carried out by the American-led coalition to help Iraqi troops advance.

"When the fighting stops, the humanitarian crisis continues," said Lise Grande, the deputy special representative for Iraq for the United Nations secretary general.

Western Mosul, especially its old city, where the Islamic State made its last stand, was hit particularly hard, becoming a gray and decimated landscape. As the combat has drawn to a close, thousands of civilians have begun to return. But 676,000 of those who left the western half of the city have yet to come back, according to United Nations data.

It is not hard to see why. Of the 54 neighborhoods in western Mosul, 15 neighborhoods that include 32,000 houses were heavily damaged, according to data provided by Ms. Grande. An additional 23 neighborhoods are considered to be moderately damaged. The cost of the near-term repairs and the more substantial reconstruction that is needed in Mosul has been estimated by United Nations experts at more than \$700 million, she said.



FADEL SENNA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Iraqi woman, who fled the fighting in the Old City, waited on Saturday to be relocated.

In the heart of the old city, craters littered intersections and roadways, marking the places where bombs pummeled the ground, dropped from coalition warplanes. Street after street was covered in soaring piles of rubble, with rebar poking out of shattered masonry.

In a church used as a weapons-making factory by the Islamic State, mortars were lying on the ground next to a pink backpack decorated with a picture of a kitten. When troops unzipped the backpack, they found plastic sachets of a white explosive powder, which they identified as C4 used in militants' bombs.

The military victory in Mosul has come without a political agreement between Iraq's two largest communities, Sunni and Shiite Arabs, whose stark sectarian divisions led to the rise of the Islamic State. For many members of Iraq's minority Sunnis, the Islamic State was seen as a protector against abuses they had suffered under Iraq's Shiite-led government, especially under the former prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki.

After the Islamic State seized Mosul in 2014, many Sunnis welcomed them. Mr. Maliki was then removed from office, replaced by Mr. Abadi, a more moderate and less sectarian leader, but one widely viewed as weak. Under Mr. Abadi, there has been no meaningful reconciliation.

"I will leave Mosul because it has become a destroyed city," said Aisha Abdullah, a teacher who endured life under the Islamic State. "In every corner of it there is memory and blood."

And while the Islamic State, with its harsh rule, alienated many of the Sunni residents it sought to represent, residents said its ideology caught on among some of the population, particularly young men.

"There is no use in reconstructing the city if the people of Mosul don't change," Ms. Abdullah said. "There are still many

people who assist ISIS, and the acts of violence will never end."

Marwan Saeed, another Mosul resident, who lives in the city's east side, which was liberated in January and where life has largely been restored to normal, with schools and shops reopening and most civilians returning home, said he feared for the future, now more than ever.

"Frankly, I'm desperate over the future," he said. "ISIS destroyed the people's mentality, and the wars destroyed the infrastructure, and we paid the price. There is no such thing as the phase 'after ISIS.' ISIS is a mentality, and this mentality will not end with guns alone."

Iraqi forces still have to retake several Islamic State strongholds: Hawija and Tal Afar in northern Iraq and a series of towns in Iraq's Euphrates River valley, stretching from Anah to Qaim.

While this is happening, Syrian fighters backed by American firepower are to complete the taking of Raqqa before moving to surround and kill the militants in Euphrates River towns on the Syrian side of the border.

"Mosul and Raqqa is not the end of it by any stretch of the imagination," said Brig. Gen. Andrew A. Croft, a senior Air Force officer with the American-led task force that is fighting the Islamic State.

And there is the fear that many Islamic State fighters who were not captured or killed had simply put down their guns and blended in with civilians, to live to fight another day.

"Do you know that most of the ISIS fighters have shaved their beards and took off their clothes, and now they are free?" said Zuhair Hazim al-Jibouri, a member of Mosul's local council.

Reporting was contributed by Rukmini Callimachi and Falih Hassan from Mosul, Omar al-Jawoshy from Baghdad, and an employee of The New York Times from Erbil, Iraq.

The Islamic State is not dead yet

Antony J. Blinken

Contributing Writer

The liberation of Mosul — the Islamic State's de facto capital in Iraq — marks a turning point in the war against the world's most dangerous terrorist group. Daesh, as the Islamic State is known throughout the Middle East, no longer controls significant territory in Iraq where it can harbor foreign fighters or exploit resources, like oil.

And its core narrative — building an actual state — is in tatters. But while the Trump administration will be right to celebrate the end of the caliphate as we know it, it is far too soon to feel comfortable, especially in the absence of a strategy for the day after Daesh.

Fifteen years ago, at the start of President George W. Bush's run-up to the invasion of Iraq, then-Senators Joe Biden and Richard Lugar raised a prescient concern: "When Saddam Hussein is gone, what would be our responsibilities? This question has not been explored but may prove to be the most critical."

Substitute "Islamic State" for "Saddam Hussein" and the question they posed retains a fierce urgency today. Even when the Islamic State is defeated militarily, the political and economic conditions that facilitated its rise — unleashed in part by the 2003 invasion — will continue to fester. How, then, to ensure that Daesh stays defeated?

Most urgent is a fully resourced effort to stabilize, secure, govern and rebuild liberated cities so that displaced people can come home safely.

The good news is that a coalition of 68 countries led by the United States to fight the Islamic State has raised the necessary funds to start that process through the United Nations. A similar plan exists for Syria.

But the ongoing civil war there will make it challenging to implement, as evidenced by the slow process of bringing the city of Tabqa — liberated two months ago and a gateway to the Islamic State's Syrian capital in Raqqa — back to life.

Even more challenging is what comes next. Twenty-five million Sunni Muslims live between Baghdad and Damascus. They have been alienated from their governments.

Unless they can be convinced that their state will protect and not persecute them, an Islamic State 2.0 will find plenty of new recruits and supporters.

Iraq offers the best prospects for success. But left to their own devices,

The terrorist group may have been defeated in Mosul, but it will return if there is not a clear strategy for rebuilding Iraq.



its leaders are more likely to perpetuate the conditions that gave rise to violent extremism. And Iraq's neighbors will line up behind whichever sect they support, reinforcing a zero-sum mentality in Iraq itself.

That's where American diplomacy comes in. The United States can't dictate outcomes to a sovereign Iraq. But it can support, incentivize and mobilize those willing to move Iraq in the right direction.

This starts with backing what Iraq's prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, calls functioning federalism — giving Iraqis at the provincial level the responsibility and resources to provide for their own security, services and schools and to govern their day-to-day lives.

That's the best way to convince Sunnis that their future is within Iraq and not with a new Islamic State. Iraq's Sunnis used to oppose federalism in favor of a strong central government; increasingly, they embrace it.

Iraq's constitution provides for decentralization, but it has yet to be put into effect. Some within the Shia community, goaded on by Iran, will insist on retaining the spoils of majoritarian rule, preserving a dominant Baghdad to lord it over the Sunnis.

Bringing functioning federalism to life begins with effectively implementing a law that governs Iraq's militia, known as the Popular Mobilization Forces. Shiite P.M.F. units must be placed under state control, kept out of risks tearing Iraq apart.

Kurdish ambitions pose an equally volatile challenge to Iraq's stability. The Kurdish region's leader, Massoud Barzani, has called for a referendum on independence in September.

Meanwhile, the Kurds have taken

advantage of the fight against the Islamic State to seize control of 70 percent of the territories in northern Iraq that are in dispute between Arabs and Kurds, and which they won't be inclined to give up. Kurdish independence is a powerful dream and Mr. Barzani sees its realization as the heart of his legacy.

But moving too fast will incur the wrath of both Baghdad and the Sunnis, not to mention Turkey and Iran. If oil prices stay low, the Kurds will be hard pressed to become self-sufficient.

Here too, the United States should resume its role as an honest broker. There's a deal to be made that gives the Kurds greater control over the oil in their region, while keeping federal troops out and negotiating joint responsibility for the disputed and oil-rich city of Kirkuk. It won't happen by itself.

One final question: What, if any, United States military presence should remain in Iraq to help make sure the Islamic State does not rise again?

America's departure at the end of 2011 reflected the reality then, that most Iraqis simply wanted us gone. Now, as Iraq awakes from the Daesh nightmare, there may be greater appetite to keep some Americans around to train and enable Iraqi forces, and to provide intelligence and counterterrorism support — but not to engage in combat. How the Trump administration navigates this political minefield will be another crucial test of its strategy.

ANTONY J. BLINKEN, a managing director of the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, was a deputy secretary of state in the Obama administration.

Malgré le succès de la « marche pour la justice », l'opposition peine à défier Erdogan

Les Turcs victimes de la chasse aux sorcières lancée par le pouvoir attendent désormais un plan concret.

CAMILLE GUILLOT
ISTANBUL

TURQUIE « Droits, loi et justice. » Cet unique slogan a rythmé les 450 kilomètres de la marche, partie d'Ankara le 15 juin et dont la fin a rassemblé dimanche plusieurs centaines de milliers de personnes dans le quartier de Maltepe, sur la rive asiatique d'Istanbul. « Nous sommes très fiers d'avoir parcouru les 50 derniers kilomètres aux côtés de notre leader (Kemal Kılıçdaroglu, chef du principal parti d'opposition, NDLR), explique Ipek, habillée d'un voile rouge et d'un ensemble blanc, en référence aux couleurs du drapeau turc. Nous avons marché en famille car trop de personnes dans notre entourage ont été licenciées. Cette situation ne peut plus continuer. »

Depuis la tentative de coup d'État de l'été dernier et l'instauration de l'état d'urgence, en vigueur depuis le 20 juillet 2016, le gouvernement s'est lancé dans une chasse aux sorcières sans précédent aux quatre coins de la Turquie. Près de 50 000 personnes ont été arrêtées et plus de 100 000 suspendues ou limogées dans le pays. Deux enseignants ont entamé une grève de la faim depuis quatre mois pour dénoncer ces purges massives. Une résistance qu'ils poursuivent aujourd'hui en prison.

Kemal Kılıçdaroglu, le leader du principal parti d'opposition, le CHP (parti républicain du peuple), a été à l'origine de la « marche pour la justice ». « Nous avons marché pour le droit des opprimés [...] pour les journalistes incarcérés, pour les universitaires limogés », a-t-il déclaré. L'initiative de l'opposant, surnommé « Gandhi Kemal » du fait de sa ressemblance physique avec le guide spirituel indien, n'est pas sans rappeler « la marche du Sel » entamée 80 ans plus tôt par le leader du mouvement d'indépendance. « L'arrestation de notre député, Enis Berberoğlu, accusé d'avoir délivré des informations confidentielles au quotidien Cumhuriyet et injustement condamné à 25 ans de prison, a été la goutte d'eau qui a fait déborder le vase », explique-t-il.

« Mur de la peur »

C'est la première fois qu'un député de cette formation politique historique est arrêté pendant l'exercice de son mandat. Point d'apogée, s'il en est, de la volonté du gouvernement de réduire au silence toute forme d'opposition. Neufs députés du HDP, le parti démocratique des peu-



Plusieurs centaines de milliers de personnes étaient réunies dimanche sur la rive asiatique d'Istanbul pour la fin de la « marche pour la justice ». STRINGER/REUTERS

ples, troisième formation représentée au Parlement, attendent toujours d'être jugés depuis leurs cellules. Même sentence pour le coprésident de ce parti prokurde, Selahattin Demirtas. Accusé de liens avec le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), considéré comme organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les États-Unis et l'Union européenne, il risque jusqu'à 142 ans d'emprisonnement.

« Nous avons vécu deux coups d'État : un coup militaire le 15 juillet et un coup civil cinq jours plus tard avec l'instauration de l'état d'urgence. Nous briserons ce mur de la peur », a déclaré le leader du CHP. Souvent critiqué pour son inefficacité à imposer son parti comme une alternative - tout du moins une véritable opposition au gouvernement -, Kemal Kılıçdaroglu a réussi l'exploit de réunir à nouveau une partie de l'opposition dans la rue.

Mais l'ombre de Recep Tayyip Erdogan a plané au-dessus de la marche, pourtant tolérée par les autorités et encadrée par des milliers de policiers pendant 25 jours. Le président turc a, à plusieurs reprises, montré des signes d'impatience face à l'ampleur des événements. Accusant le chef de l'opposition de se ranger « du côté des terroristes », il s'est fait menaçant : « Si les autorités judiciaires vous convoquent demain quelque part, ne soyez pas surpris. »

S'adressant aux centaines de milliers de manifestants, Kemal Kılıçdaroglu s'est écrié dimanche : « Vous avez marqué l'Histoire. Le 9 juillet est une nouvelle naissance. » Si les organisateurs veulent croire à une démarche citoyenne et sans



couleur politique, la foule attend, quant à elle, une union de toute l'opposition. Les membres du HDP ont soutenu l'action, mais n'ont pas marché aux côtés du chef du CHP. De trop lourds désaccords subsistent entre les deux partis. À commencer par la question kurde.

Par ailleurs, personne n'a oublié que Kemal Kılıçdaroglu ne s'est pas opposé à la levée de l'immunité parlementaire des députés en mai 2016. Une position qui aurait peut-être évité les poursuites à l'encontre de 138 députés. Le leader du parti fondé par Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, le père fondateur de la Turquie, peut-il à lui seul incarner l'opposition ? « Non, tranche Ihsan Eliaçık, le leader du groupe des Musulmans anticapitalistes. Nous sommes ici car nous devons rassembler nos forces, sinon ça ne fonctionnera jamais. » Et déjà les déceptions pointent. Malgré les 10 principes énoncés dans son manifeste et les promesses que cette marche « ne sera pas la dernière », son leader n'a énoncé aucun plan concret sur la manière dont il compte obtenir « justice ». Les participants sont remotivés, mais pas dupes, la route est encore longue. ■

Les dernières heures de la bataille de Mossoul

Les luttes de pouvoir et d'influence ont commencé

Bagdad n'a pas encore arrêté de plan pour l'après-EI

MOSSOUL (IRAK) - envoyée spéciale

En avril, depuis le toit d'une luxueuse villa à flanc de colline, dans le quartier Al-Malahim, dans le nord-est de Mossoul, le major général Najim Al-Joubouri scrutait de ses petits yeux verts perçants les quartiers libérés de l'est de la grande ville du nord de l'Irak. A 60 ans, droit dans son uniforme, le chef du commandement des opérations de Ninive savourait le prestige de ce poste-clé; il lui a été confié en 2015, tant en raison de la carrière militaire qu'il a effectuée depuis l'ère du dictateur Saddam Hussein que du fait qu'il soit originaire d'Al-Qayyarah, une ville située à soixante kilomètres au sud de Mossoul.

Le militaire ne cache pas ses ambitions. « Je veux être le gouverneur militaire de Mossoul. Je peux faire beaucoup pour reconstruire la ville et donner du travail aux gens. Je ne gaspillerai pas une partie de l'argent en pots-de-vin comme le font les politiciens », dit-il dans un anglais hérité de neuf ans passés en Virginie, aux Etats-Unis. Najim Al-Joubouri ne ménage aucune critique contre les responsables politiques « qui attisent le confessionnalisme pour remporter les élections ». Il assure travailler à rétablir des bonnes relations entre la population et les forces de sécurité – elles étaient désastreuses avant 2014.

Face à des autorités locales condamnées à l'impuissance, il invoque son expérience comme maire de Tal Afar de 2005 à 2008, un bastion djihadiste à 80 km à l'ouest de Mossoul qu'il se targue d'avoir nettoyé d'Al-Qaida, et reconstruit avec le soutien des Américains. « Je ne craignais personne. On ne pouvait pas me virer ! » Désespérés par l'absence de services publics et l'insécurité qui règne encore dans les quartiers libérés de Mossoul, certains habitants plébiscitent la nomination d'un gouverneur militaire de transition. Mais les noms qu'ils évoquent pour le poste sont plutôt ceux des généraux des forces antiterroristes Abdelwahab Al-Saedi ou Abdelghani Al-Assadi.

Cette option a aussi les faveurs des acteurs civils qui ont participé à des discussions sur la future gouvernance de Mossoul sous l'égide des Nations unies (ONU). En novembre 2016, le Royaume-Uni a défendu l'idée devant les autres membres de la coalition internationale de lutte contre

l'organisation Etat islamique (EI). Sans succès. Les responsables politiques de la province s'y opposent farouchement. Et Bagdad a balayé d'un revers de main la proposition britannique.

Le gouvernement irakien n'a pas arrêté de plan pour l'après-EI à Mossoul. Les partis chiïtes au pouvoir ne veulent pas entendre parler de l'autonomie

que réclament des responsables locaux de cette province riche en ressources naturelles et qui est composée d'une mosaïque de groupes ethniques et religieux. Son avenir ne pourra se décider sans un accord politique avec le gouvernement régional du Kurdistan irakien, qui affiche ses ambitions d'annexer les territoires disputés de Sinjar à Kirkouk et de cogérer Mossoul.

A défaut de plan, le cadre institutionnel reste pour l'heure inchangé. Les élections pour le conseil provincial, dont sera issu le prochain gouverneur civil, et qui devraient vraisemblablement être repoussées à 2018, aiguissent les appétits. Différentes forces et partis politiques maillent le terrain et courtisent les élites locales avec de l'argent et des promesses de sièges. « Le sort de Mossoul et de la province va être décidé par la Turquie, l'Iran, le Kurdistan irakien, et les personnalités locales qui représentent leurs intérêts. Les Américains et les Occidentaux vont devoir intervenir pour réduire les conflits, car quand l'EI aura été bouté hors de Mossoul, une guerre de renseignement, de chantages et de kidnappings va débiter. Ce que certains n'arriveront pas à obtenir sur le terrain politique, ils le prendront par la force », prédit ainsi Abdelaziz Al-Jarba, de l'organisation indépendante de médiation Al-Tahrir.

Kidnappings et rackets

La situation sécuritaire dans les zones libérées inquiète déjà. L'armée, la police locale et des combattants tribaux ont été déployés. « Il n'y a pas de juridiction claire sur qui est chargé de traquer les cellules dormantes. Il y a des incidents où des forces et des gangs en uniforme kidnappent des gens et prennent leur argent. On a plus d'une dizaine de forces tribales qui ne répondent qu'à leur propre chef, leur propre feuille de route. Si on continue comme cela, on va avoir une guerre entre ces groupes pour le pouvoir et l'influence », dit Zahed Al-Khatoumi, un député et membre du gouvernorat allié au gouverneur actuel, Nawfal Hamadi Al-Sultan.



A Mossoul, les 9 et 10 juillet. Des soldats des forces antiterroristes irakiennes cherchent à reprendre les derniers quartiers aux djihadistes, parfois séparés d'eux par un simple mur, tandis que des familles franchissent la ligne de front. LAURENT VAN DER STOCKT POUR - LE MONDE.

Le responsable sunnite estime les forces de police insuffisantes – soit 7000 pour toute la province contre 30000 en 2013 – pour contrôler ces forces tribales. Ce que réfute le général Al-Joubouri, qui évoque « une douzaine de kidnappings et de rackets perpétrés par des mafias et des voleurs ».

Bagdad a interdit aux gardes de Ninive – une force de 4000 hommes créée par l'ancien gouverneur de Mossoul (2009-2015) avec le soutien de la Turquie et du Kurdistan irakien –, en partie intégrés aux unités gouvernementales de la Mobilisation populaire (MP), de se déployer dans Mossoul.

Issu d'une riche famille de la ville, mais sous le coup d'un mandat d'arrêt, Atheel Al-Noujaïfi ne peut plus y mettre un pied. Depuis sa villa rococo d'Erbil, le responsable sunnite de 59 ans déplore « une décision politique ». « Ils veulent nous tenir hors de la ville pour pouvoir mettre des forces qui sont sous l'influence politique des chiïtes et créer un fait accompli. Si on était dans Mossoul, ces forces n'auraient aucune chance, les gens seraient avec nous », ajoute-t-il. L'homme, qui affiche sa proximité avec Erbil et la Turquie, est dans le collimateur des partis chiïtes de Bagdad. Le parti Asaïb Ahl Al-Haq, dont la milice a intégré la MP, prétexte les « liens forts » recréés entre les communautés d'Irak pour justifier l'ouverture de bureaux dans la métropole sunnite.

Les menaces adressées par son chef, Qaïs Al-Khazali, au président du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, et aux troupes turques qui stationnent dans le nord de la province de Ninive, révèlent d'autres enjeux. « A chaque fois qu'elles libèrent un territoire, les forces de Barzani le gardent et ne laissent pas les civils revenir dans leur vil-

lage », justifie Laïth Al-Adhari, un membre de son bureau politique.

Les relations étroites que M. Noujaïfi entretient avec la Turquie déplaisent même aux habitants de Mossoul, qui refusent cette ingérence étrangère. « Si l'Iran ne jouait pas de son influence, on n'aurait pas à se tourner vers les pays étrangers en soutien alternatif, se défend le responsable politique. Oui, la Turquie est un pays étranger, mais sunnite comme la population de Mossoul, donc elle est plus proche de nous que de l'Iran chiïte. »

Favorable à une autonomie de la province de Ninive, qui conserverait dans ses frontières les territoires disputés entre Bagdad et Erbil, il plaide pour une solution qui « assure au gouvernement régional du Kurdistan irakien que ses intérêts seront préservés sur Mossoul et Ninive ». Atheel Al-Noujaïfi se défend de convoiter de nouveau le poste de gouverneur, mais il entend peser sur l'avenir de la province, avec son parti Mouttahidoun (« Unis »). « Je suis certain, ajoute-t-il, que le gouvernement comprendra qu'il doit donner le pouvoir aux gens de Mossoul et compter sur nos forces armées et politiques. »

Ses détracteurs et opposants espèrent que M. Noujaïfi sera tenu à l'écart. « Atheel Al-Noujaïfi a gouverné la province pendant six ans. L'arrivée de Daech est en partie de sa faute : il était toujours en bisbille avec Bagdad et le commandement militaire », estime le député Zahed Al-Khatoumi. Avec son frère Oussama, vice-président de l'Irak, il serait pourtant déjà à la manœuvre pour reprendre l'ascendant sur Mossoul et sa province, selon les observateurs. ■

HÉ. S.

LES TURCS FACE À L'ARBITRAIRE

Après le putsch raté il y a un an, la démocratie turque est à l'agonie. Le président Erdogan a verrouillé le pays et réprime tous azimuts

Il y a un an, au soir du 15 juillet 2016, des militaires factieux descendaient dans la rue pour prendre le contrôle des ponts sur le Bosphore. D'autres s'envolaient à bord de leurs chasseurs-bombardiers pour attaquer le Parlement turc et intercepter le président Erdogan. Leur tentative de putsch a échoué et la Turquie s'est réveillée, le lendemain, meurtrie mais fière d'avoir mis en échec cet énième coup de force de l'armée.

Les militaires avaient dicté leur loi, d'une manière ou d'une autre, en 1960, 1971, 1980 et 1997. Mais plus en 2016. La démocratie était enfin durablement et solidement installée dans la République turque. Pendant les jours qui ont suivi le putsch manqué, une forme d'union nationale – dont le Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP, prokurde) a été d'emblée écarté – a régné autour de Recep Tayyip Erdogan, malgré les réserves et les controverses l'entourant. Il incarnait une Turquie civile, sortie des urnes et non des casernes. Une démocratie certes imparfaite mais réelle et vivace.

Coup d'Etat, civil celui-ci

Un an plus tard, le putsch a réussi et la démocratie turque n'est plus que l'ombre d'elle-même. Pourtant, les factieux du 15 juillet sont sous les verrous ou en fuite. C'est le président Erdogan, miraculé du 15 juillet, qui a ramassé la mise en menant son propre coup d'Etat, civil celui-ci.

En deux temps, d'abord avec l'instauration, pendant l'été, de l'état d'urgence, qui a ouvert la porte à des arrestations massives (de 40 000 à 50 000 personnes) et à des purges monstres (150 000 fonctionnaires), sans compter les innombrables mesures attentatoires aux libertés (privations de passeport, saisies de biens et de comptes, fermetures d'entreprises et d'établissements d'enseignement, etc.) qui ont visé les membres de la confrérie de l'imam Fethullah Gülen, accusée par le pouvoir d'avoir ourdi la tentative de coup d'Etat, mais aussi l'ensemble des opposants au régime, militants de la cause kurde, gauche laïque, etc.

Les milieux islamistes et même toute déviance au sein de l'AKP, le parti islamoc conservateur au pouvoir, sont aussi dans le collimateur. La délation et l'arbitraire sont devenus la règle. La justice, engorgée par les procédures, juge en masse à partir de dossiers bâclés et toute la lumière sur les sombres heures du 15 juillet est loin d'avoir été faite.

Le deuxième temps de l'instauration d'une autocratie légale en Turquie a été l'adoption, par référendum le 16 avril, d'une réforme de la Constitution donnant au président turc des pouvoirs encore renforcés. Le oui est passé de justesse avec 51,41 % des voix, révélant une société plus divisée que jamais, mais aussi de forts soupçons de fraude. Un tabou a été brisé avec la remise en cause

de l'honnêteté du processus électoral.

« Pas besoin de l'UE »

Jusqu'à-là, la société et les partis avaient subi, groggy, cette avalanche de coups et de mauvaises nouvelles. Mais un fait récent et majeur redonne un peu espoir. Des centaines de milliers de Turcs ont suivi la « marche pour la justice », entre Ankara et Istanbul, à l'initiative du CHP, le parti d'opposition de la gauche kémaliste. C'est un réveil. Il ne suffira pas à lui tout seul. Les Turcs ont besoin d'aide et de soutien.

Les sociétés européennes doivent soutenir la Turquie face au défi qui lui est lancé, parce qu'elle est proche, parce qu'elle a manifesté, de longue date, son désir d'intégrer l'Union européenne. Dans une interview, mercredi 12 juillet, à la BBC, le président Erdogan a expliqué que son pays n'avait « pas besoin de l'UE » et que la Turquie serait « soulagée » d'un rejet de sa candidature. Une nouvelle provocation qui montre combien ce dernier cherche à se débarrasser de ce qu'il voit comme une entrave à son désir illimité d'arbitraire.

Parce que la presse est le meilleur baromètre de la liberté d'expression, *Le Monde* et Reporters sans frontières ont donc décidé de s'associer pour lancer un appel à libérer les dizaines de journalistes emprisonnés en Turquie – Recep Tayyip Erdogan n'en reconnaît que... deux – et à rouvrir les quelque 150 médias fermés en un an. La défense de la démocratie en Turquie est une garantie de paix pour les Européens. ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD

La couronne qu'Erdogan s'est offerte

est en toc Le président s'est octroyé les pleins pouvoirs par la fraude, mais le peuple refuse de se soumettre, analyse le journaliste Can Dündar



Can Dündar est un journaliste, exilé en Allemagne. Directeur de la rédaction du quotidien Cumhuriyet, il a été emprisonné en 2015 pour avoir révélé que les services secrets turcs effectuaient des livraisons d'armes à des groupes islamistes rebelles en Syrie. Libéré puis condamné à cinq ans et dix mois de prison pour « tentative de renversement du gouvernement » en 2016, il a quitté la Turquie.



Par CAN DÜNDAR

Dans la nuit du 15 juillet, alors que les chasseurs turcs bombardaient le palais présidentiel, je savais que nous serions les vaincus quel que

soit le vainqueur. Deux options, l'une encore pire que l'autre, nous attendaient. Si les putschistes réussissaient, nous nous serions retrouvés avec un gouvernement militaire. Et s'ils perdaient, un Etat policier...

Il n'y avait pas de doute que, si Erdogan était renversé, les militaires qui lui auraient succédé auraient instauré une nouvelle dictature. Nous ne pouvions tout de même pas attendre la démocratie d'une mentalité qui tolérerait le pilonnage de l'Assemblée nationale!

D'un autre côté, si Erdogan échappait à ce coup d'Etat, il renforcerait ses pouvoirs et lancerait une chasse aux sorcières en repro-

chant à tous ses opposants d'être des putschistes.

C'est effectivement ce qu'il s'est passé. Grâce à la sournoiserie politique qu'il a mûrie au fil des ans, Erdogan a transformé le putsch qui prévoyait de le renverser en un contre-coup d'Etat dont l'objectif était de le maintenir au pouvoir à jamais. Il a écrasé le putsch en appelant ses partisans à descendre dans les rues. Et il a réussi à tourner à son avantage ce climat d'« union nationale » qui s'est créé là en faveur de la démocratie. Il a proclamé « putschiste », « traître » et « terroriste » tous ceux qui s'y sont opposés. Il a instrumentalisé cette mobilisation dans le cadre du

référendum constitutionnel pour mener campagne en faveur du oui. Au final, il s'est offert une position qui lui permettait de régner sur le gouvernement, le Parlement, la justice, la bureaucratie, les médias, les universités, l'armée, la police, bref, sur toutes les institutions étatiques.

Aucun dirigeant n'a disposé d'un tel privilège dans l'histoire de la Turquie, pas même Atatürk... C'est un acte de despotisme que l'on peut rencontrer dans les dictatures. C'est un pas constitutionnel qui a été franchi vers un régime dirigé par un seul homme, une seule idéologie et un seul parti.

Or, la vérité est que la couronne qu'Erdogan s'est offerte est en toc. Car – il est le premier à le savoir – il a perdu le référendum. Et pour pouvoir changer ce résultat, il s'est vu obligé de recourir à la fraude électorale, chose que personne n'avait osé faire en Turquie depuis 1946, et à intervenir dans les urnes au dernier moment.

Lorsque le front du non, celui qui se verrait plus tard dérober sa victoire au référendum, est descendu dans les rues, Erdogan a proclamé l'état d'urgence le 20 juillet. Ça, c'était son coup d'Etat à lui! En écartant le Parlement et l'appareil judiciaire, il pouvait désormais arrêter n'importe qui, interdire toute fâcheuse manifestation ou encore n'importe quel journal.

LA FORCE DE L'ÉPÉE

Il a réussi à utiliser le chaos du 15 juillet pour organiser son propre coup d'Etat du 20 juillet. Fatalement, il est facile d'accéder au pouvoir par la force de l'épée, mais pas de s'asseoir dessus. Cela a été difficile pour Erdogan aussi. Parce qu'il

a découvert qu'au moins la moitié du peuple lui était opposé. Il a même été battu à Istanbul qu'il avait remportée en 1996 et qu'il n'avait plus jamais perdue. Toutes les grandes villes, la frange la plus éduquée de la société, les villes industrielles les plus exportatrices, et la jeunesse turque ont dit non. Alors que dire non était quasiment considéré comme un crime, que les médias ne pouvaient évoquer que le oui et en dépit d'une campagne électorale sous pression...

Dans ces conditions, il n'avait que deux possibilités: tenter de jouer le rôle de « président de tous » sur le trône présidentiel auquel il avait accédé en trichant; ou accroître les pressions et punir ceux qui avaient dit non...

Ceux qui connaissaient Erdogan étaient sûrs qu'il allait choisir la deuxième option. Car, comme le montre l'exemple de plusieurs dictateurs dont nous avons lu les biographies, il a écarté tous ses compagnons de route qui auraient pu lui proposer des solutions raisonnables, il n'a plus toléré que des médias qui acclamaient tout ce qu'il entreprenait, et il est arrivé à un stade où, de peur d'être jugé, il ne supporte pas la moindre opposition.

Il a transformé l'état d'urgence en un régime visant à protéger son palais. Il a muselé le Parlement. Il a chargé les médias qui étaient à sa botte d'attaquer ses concurrents. En limogeant les magistrats, il a fait classer les enquêtes qui le mettaient en cause et a proclamé coupables ses opposants. En essayant de faire oublier qu'il était, depuis des années, le complice de l'imam Fethullah Gülen qu'il accuse d'être derrière le coup d'Etat, il a repro-

ché à tous ses opposants d'être des « gülenistes ».

Un an après, voici un aperçu de la situation:

Les prisons étant pleines, les détenus sont obligés de dormir à tour de rôle dans les lits qui se trouvent dans les dortoirs. La Turquie conserve le titre de « plus grande prison de journalistes au monde ». Les deux coprésidents et dix députés du Parti démocratique des peu-

AUCUN DIRIGEANT N'A DISPOSÉ D'UN TEL PRIVILÈGE DANS L'HISTOIRE DE LA TURQUIE, PAS MÊME ATATÜRK...

ples (HDP, prokurde), le troisième grand parti d'opposition, sont maintenus en détention. Depuis le contre-coup d'Etat du 20 juillet, on estime le nombre de personnes limogées de leurs fonctions à 150 000, dont 50 000 enseignants, et près de 50 000 personnes seraient en détention.

Le véritable impact durable est ce nuage de peur qui pèse sur la société. L'arrestation d'un seul journaliste suffit à faire taire des dizaines d'autres.

Mais en vain... Car, dans le lot, il y en a qui écrivent, parlent et protestent, malgré tout, au péril de leur vie. De plus en plus isolé du monde, Erdogan est contraint d'amplifier la répression et de faire construire de nouvelles prisons...

Le mois dernier, lorsqu'il a fait incarcérer Enis Berberoğlu [condamné le 14 juin à vingt-cinq ans de prison pour « espionnage »], le vice-président du Parti républicain du peuple (CHP, kémaliste), le princi-

pal parti d'opposition, Erdogan a été confronté à une réaction à laquelle il ne s'attendait pas. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, le principal leader de l'opposition, accusé jusqu'à maintenant de s'être tu face à la répression et d'avoir abandonné la grogne qui montait de la rue, a – enfin – dit « assez! », et est lui-même descendu dans la rue pour entamer « la grande marche pour la justice » entre Ankara et Istanbul [son arrivée, dimanche 9 juillet à Istanbul, a donné lieu à une manifestation géante]. Les sociaux-démocrates qui, par stratégie politique, essayaient jusqu'à présent de se rapprocher des partis du centre-droit, sont descendus dans la rue pour la première fois. Les autres mouvements de gauche n'ont pas tardé à rejoindre la marche.

Nous pouvons effectivement parler d'un front démocratique qui s'est formé de manière spontanée sur la route d'Istanbul. Le mot d'ordre de cette marche, « justice », reflète un besoin si fort qu'il suffit à rassembler tout le monde sous sa bannière. Et il revêt une importance cruciale car il montre qu'en dépit de toutes les pressions, la société refuse de se soumettre.

Le destin de la Turquie et d'Erdogan sera scellé par cette contestation qui viendra de la rue. Et non par la crainte d'un nouveau putsch, ni par les spéculations sur l'état de santé d'Erdogan, ni même par la peur de complots internationaux...

Il est inutile d'être pessimiste. Mais il est encore tôt pour être optimiste... ■

(Traduit du turc par Antoni Yalap.)

Emmanuel Macron visionne La Bataille de Mossoul à l'Elysée

Par L'EXPRESS.fr, le 19/07/2017

[INFO L'EXPRESS] Emmanuel Macron s'est fait projeter mardi soir, à l'Elysée, le film de Bernard-Henri Lévy. Des combattants et quelques VIP l'accompagnaient.

En pleine crise d'autorité avec le chef d'état major des armées, Emmanuel Macron était accompagné de son chef de cabinet militaire, l'amiral Bernard Rogel, pour assister à la projection privée, mardi soir à l'Elysée, de La Bataille de Mossoul, un documentaire signé Bernard-Henri Lévy et diffusé en mars sur Arte.

Étaient présents autour du chef de l'Etat l'auteur, ainsi qu'une délégation de combattants kurdes emmenés par Sirwan Barzani, général de brigade peshmerga et neveu de Massoud Barzani, le président du Kurdistan irakien.



Un extrait de La Bataille de Mossoul, le film de BHL projeté mardi soir à l'Elysée, devant Emmanuel Macron et son chef de cabinet militaire, l'amiral Rogel. Arte

D'autres membres du cabinet d'Emmanuel Macron avaient également fait le déplacement, aux côtés de personnalités comme les écrivaines Christine Angot et Fred Vargas ou l'architecte Jean Nouvel. ■

'Justice for all' in Turkey must include Kurds

The Turkish opposition's Justice March reveals that the president's exhausting hate rhetoric is wearing thin in Turkey and for much of the world.



Pinar Tremblay
July 12, 2017
<http://www.al-monitor.com>

Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu walks on the final stage of his 25-day protest, dubbed the "Justice March," against the detention of the party's lawmaker Enis Berberoglu, in Istanbul, Turkey, July 9, 2017.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the leader of Turkey's main opposition party, wrapped up his 25-day, 270-mile Justice March from Ankara to Istanbul last week and was greeted at a rally attended by more than a million people. Does the enormous support for the anti-authoritarian campaign indicate a turning tide in Turkish politics?

The 25-day period was chosen deliberately to symbolize the prosecutors' demand for a 25-year prison term for Enis Berberoglu, one of Kilicdaroglu's fellow members of the Republican People's Party (CHP).

Throughout the march, the most controversial issue was the reaction of members of two other opposition parties. One is the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), ultranationalists who have long operated in unison with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Several prominent Gray Wolves — as party members are known by the public — have distanced themselves from the MHP and have been operating as part of the opposition.

The other opposition group is the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), whose co-chairs and several members are currently in jail.

Ironically, what led to the arrest of CHP lawmaker Berberoglu was the vote his own party approved in May 2016 allowing parliamentarians to be stripped of their legal immunity. At the time, Kilicdaroglu and other CHP members explained that they had to vote "yes" to keep from being labeled terrorists alongside the HDP. However, last month several CHP lawmakers publicly acknowledged their mistake. On July 9 at the Justice Rally, without making references to Kurds, Kilicdaroglu said the march helped opposition members cast aside their fears. Is that really the case?

It is crucial to see the complicated interaction of the CHP with Kurdish and ultranationalist factions of the political opposition. The HDP announced its support for the march. On the 19th day of the march, HDP leadership briefly joined the walk and was photographed with Kilicdaroglu under the banner "Justice for all."

Reactions to this brief photo op were immense, reflecting the opposition's complex divisions. For example, Sinan Ogan, a former member of the ultranationalist MHP and now an independent member of the opposition, posted a much-debated tweet. Ogan said, "Was not Ahmet Turk [an elder HDP member who was let out of prison at the request of MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli] released from prison due to his [deteriorating] 'health'? If he is well enough to march, why [did Bahçeli] act as a liaison for his release?"

Thousands commented. Most were critical of Ogan's words and labeled his rhetoric as anti-Kurdish, even racist. Yet, Ogan's real jab was at Bahçeli, who had asked for Turk to be released. Ogan had criticized Bahçeli for encouraging Gray Wolves to attack him and others who were campaigning against the constitutional reforms. In addition, he was perplexed to see Bahçeli extending his get-well wishes to Turk but not the Gray Wolves. This tweet should also be seen as a continuation of the internal battle of the ultranationalist movement in Turkey, which is gradually being absorbed into the ranks of Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP).

Still, it is also crucial to see that Ogan's tweet encouraged pro-government voices against the march. The hashtag #AdaletDedilerPKKCikti means, "They said justice, but it turned out to be the PKK [Kurdistan Workers Party]." The AKP's virtual troll army used this comment and the photo of Kilicdaroglu



with Kurdish leaders to brand the march as corrupted by terrorists. Since the 2013 Gezi Park protests, Erdogan has successfully and meticulously branded all opposing figures as traitors, spies and terrorists.

Dogu Perincek, chairman of the marginal but ultranationalist Patriotic Party, who is known for his denial of the Armenian genocide, harshly criticized Kilicdaroglu for accepting HDP members to the march. Perincek said this alliance is a US scheme and likened it to the addictive and deadly bonzai drug. Alp Altinors, an HDP council member, did not mince words regarding Ogan or Perincek. He told Al-Monitor, "For them, the best Kurd is either a dead or enslaved one. But we focus on the march. The quest for justice is a public demand. It cannot be limited to any political party. That is how we approach the matter. We do not dwell on the CHP's past mistakes, and [we] seek justice for all." Altinors added that those who oppose the justice march are aiding Erdogan's regime and emphasized that without Kurds, the opposition cannot succeed anytime soon.

Yet this effort to discredit the opposition — an effort that has grown in frequency and ferocity during the past five years — has almost run its course. The march only got stronger after the participation of HDP members. There were parents of military cadets who are still in jail a year after the July 15 coup attempt and family members of those who died. In addition to Islamist groups such as Anti-Capitalist Muslims, even AKP founding members such as Fatma Bostan Unsal participated in the march and supported Kilicdaroglu's quest for justice. Families of Gezi protest victims and the 2011 Roboski massacre were also present.

Though Ogan was critical of HDP's Turk marching along with Kilicdaroglu, another former key MHP member, Meral Aksener, publicly announced her support for the Justice March early on. She explained to her followers on Twitter that if the leader of the main opposition party is obliged to march with a sign that reads "justice," then everyone needs to pause and think. At the end of the march, Aksener congratulated Kilicdaroglu and reminded the public that Mahatma Gandhi's Salt March led to Indian independence.

Yet some senior AKP members crudely ridiculed Aksener's support for the march. Parliamentary Speaker Ismail Kahraman, who is known for his Islamist stance, referred to Aksener as "Meral Kilicdaroglu" at a Ramadan dinner, implying she has become a Kilicdaroglu concubine. (Kahraman's words once again remind us that independent-minded women in Turkish politics are no longer acceptable.) Aksener was furious and posted a searing open letter on her Twitter account. Aksener expressed disappointment in her colleague with strong words, saying Kahraman has learned little of Islamic education and values in his 77 years.

The Justice March has made clearer a few observations about Turkish politics.

First, Kurdish support is essential for the opposition to have any realistic chance of standing up against Erdogan and continuing within the legitimate political domain.

Second, younger generations of Kurds and Turks, along with members of various political parties, are becoming disillusioned with the stalled peaceful political process. But the AKP's obsessive political control only allows their voices to be heard when they are fighting against each other.

Third, Kurds, women and other political minorities are viewed as passive, disposable figures whose opposition cannot be tolerated in politics. All of these are worrisome indications of Turkey's potential slide into total dictatorship.

AKP-controlled media outlets ignored the march for as long as they could, then mentioned it only in passing as the "so-called justice march." Erdogan, during the recent G-20 meetings in Germany, called HDP Chairman Selahattin Demirtas — sometimes fondly referred to as the "Kurdish

⇒ Obama" — a "terrorist." Erdogan's words received little to no attention in respected international media outlets, unlike the imprisoned Demirtas' response. It seems the majority of Turks and much of the world are disillusioned by Erdogan's gimmick of branding everyone who opposes him terrorists, spies and traitors. ♦

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FRONTPAGEMAG.COM July 19, 2017

Red Lines in Syria

Will Turkey's attacks on U.S. allies stir Washington to action?

Kenneth R. Timmerman / July 19, 2017
<http://www.frontpagemag.com>

Suleymania, Iraq - With Saturday's bombing of Afrin, a town controlled by America's Kurdish allies in northern Syria, Turkey appears to have crossed a line.

Turkish artillery pounded the Ashrafiyeh neighborhood near the city center as well as surrounding villages. Reports from the region said the Turkish attack killed five civilians, including an entire family that was buried alive in their own home, and damaged dozens of homes.

"This is considered the first targeting of the city since the start of Turkish preparations" to expand military operations in Northwest Syria last month, according to the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The Turkish attacks were not directed against ISIS or against any other Islamist group. The Turks targeted Afrin because it has become a key political hub for the Democratic Union Party of Syria, the YPD, which Turkey accuses of being part of the PKK.

I spoke with Asya Abdallah Osman, the co-president of the YPD, on the sidelines of a conference both of us were attending in Iraqi Kurdistan. She was visibly shaken when she called home and learned details about the civilian casualties in Afrin.

"We have been fighting [ISIS] because we as women do not want to be subjected to their inhumanity. But we need your help," she said, meaning the United States. "We need no other. This is war and people are dying. It won't be resolved by politics, only by hard power."

She swept aside the Turkish allegations that the regional government of the YPD, and its associated militia, known as the People's Protection Units (YPG), were controlled by the PKK, or that the PKK was using YPD territory to launch attacks into Turkey.

"We are an independent political party that belongs to Syria and to the Kurds. If the PKK has come to Syria, it's because Turkey has forced them to come," she said.

Turkey has long accused the Kurdish Workers Party, or PKK, of fighting a terrorist war against it, but also has been willing to negotiate with PKK leaders when it felt it could reach a deal to curtail the violence.

After Turkey violated a 2013 truce negotiated in Oslo that called for the PKK to remove its fighters from Turkey into northern Iraq, the PKK relocated remaining fighters into the Kurdish areas in Syria, known as Rojava.

Like most Kurds, Ms. Osman believes Turkey and its allies in the region do not want to see a successful democratic self-governing region in northern Syria, because it would encourage their own Kurds to seek greater autonomy.

"They accuse us of not being democratic, but we have allowed all political and ethnic groups to have representatives in the regional government. Our project is for all of Syria, not just Kurds," she told me.

Ms. Osman traveled to Northern Iraq in a group of 65 Syrian Kurdish activists, representing nearly twenty political groups.

Normally, they would have entered Iraq via a pontoon bridge over the Tigris River at Semalka, in an area that has escaped the current fighting.

But the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq closed the border recently, forcing the Syrian pro-democracy delegates to make a dangerous 16-hour trek by foot across the only other border crossing into Iraq near Mount Sinjar, which is controlled by Iranian-backed Shiite militias.

"There is no Kurdish Regional Government," Ms. Osman said dismissively. "There is only the KDP," the Kurdish Democratic Party, dominated by President Massoud Barzani and his family. She and other Kurdish activists at the weekend conference believe that Turkey pressured the Barzanis to close the Semalka border crossing in order to further isolate them. "Semulka is our only gate to the outside world," she said. "When it is shut, we are closed off."

She attributed claims that the YPD and its militia were controlled by the PKK to Turkish propaganda. "Of course, we have dialogue with other Kurdish parties, including the PKK. So do most Kurdish groups in the region. But we run our party and our administration ourselves. We elect our own officials and they take orders from no one."

Indeed, I only learned after the conference that a member of the PKK central committee had attended the weekend event, sponsored by the Kurdistan National Congress, where three hundred delegates from Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey strategized over a future Kurdish state or confed-



eration.

There were few references to the PKK by the speakers, and the PKK central committeeman himself never spoke. The final declaration of the conference makes no mention of the PKK.

Both President Trump and Secretary of Defense Mattis have warned Turkey not to attack America's Kurdish allies in Syria. Turkey has blithely ignored those admonishments until now.

Less than a month after President Trump at the White House personally rejected Erdogan's demand that the U.S. drop support for the Syrian Kurds, Turkey began moving troops to encircle Afrin, the political capital of the Syrian Kurdish region, and other Kurdish controlled areas.

After Turkey started to attack YPG positions in late June, Secretary of Defense James Mattis upped the ante by declaring that the United States might allow the Kurdish group to keep U.S. supplied weapons after the battle for Raqqa to smash ISIS was over.

Some of Erdogan's erstwhile political allies believe he Erdogan is playing a dangerous game.

Even before the Turkish attacks on civilians over the weekend, former Turkish Foreign Minister Yasar Yakis, who helped found Erdogan's ruling AKP party, counseled against attacking the Syrian Kurds.

"The best course would be to negotiate a deal with the Syrian Kurds, persuade them not to attempt to change the ethnic composition of the region, and establish — preferably in cooperation with the Syrian government — a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional democratic administration," Yakis wrote in a column for Arab News.

That is precisely the project Ms. Osman and the YPD have been proposing.

Erdogan showed his arrogance in Washington when he calmly observed his bodyguards cross a Capitol Police barrier in May to viciously bludgeon opposition protestors with truncheons.

But by putting his forces in a position where they could potentially clash with U.S. military units assisting the YPG and the Syrian Democratic Forces, Erdogan has shown a reckless side as well.

Turkey has been warned twice. Will Afrin prove to be the third strike for Erdogan in Syria? ●

Iraqi victory in Mosul conceals deeper risk

MOSUL, IRAQ

Conflicts on the margins threaten to unravel the multisectarian country

BY TIM ARANGO

The fighting is all but over in Mosul, and the billboards are already up: hastily raised signs in which the government urged the Iraqi city's Sunni residents to "turn the page" from the terrorists of the Islamic State.

As Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi visited Mosul to declare victory and call for unity, civilians on the longer-secured east side of the city danced and waved Iraqi flags. Some called for brotherhood between Sunnis and Shiites, or chanted, "By our souls and blood, we sacrifice for you, Iraq!"

It is a moment for Iraqis to celebrate after nearly nine months of bloody warfare against the Sunni extremists of the Islamic State. But despite the flaring of hope for a new national unity, the government's costly victory in Mosul and the questions hanging over its aftermath feel more like the next chapter in the long story of Iraq's unraveling.

Most pressing is the need to bring back hundreds of thousands of displaced Sunni civilians. But Iraq has failed to rebuild and resettle some other communities freed from the Islamic State as tensions between the Sunni minority and the majority Shiites still undermine efforts to reunite the country.

Reports of past abuses by the Shiite-

controlled government and its security forces and militia allies against Sunni families have kept sectarian divisions fresh. And with no sectarian reconciliation process to speak of, any setback in the resettling of Mosul could dangerously add to the list of grievances.

For the mostly Sunni residents of Mosul, there are the devastating aftereffects of living under the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh. And there is deep doubt and fear over what will happen to them next.

"The people of Mosul need to be psychologically treated and rehabilitated through long-term programs," said Intisar al-Jibouri, a member of Parliament from Mosul. "They have lost family members, been tortured, beaten for silly reasons by ISIS."

Concerns are growing that Shiite militias that mobilized in other parts of the country to fight the Islamic State

could turn their guns on one another in a scramble for power. And the thoughts of many in Iraq's Sunni community have stayed fixed on revenge against their neighbors who supported the Islamic State, with increasing reports of violent reprisals.

The Kurds, who have operated an autonomous enclave in the north since the 1990s, are moving quickly to hold a referendum on independence in September, despite pleas from American diplomats to hold off.

So, the end of the Mosul battle, even with the Islamic State still in control of other areas of the country, brings forth a vital question that has been asked ever since the multisectarian state of Iraq was created from the ashes of World War I: Can the country hold together?

At great cost in lives and property, Iraqis have shown that they can defeat the Islamic State militarily. But whether



Clockwise from top: Iraqi soldiers walking through the old city part of Mosul, where security forces rescued two more girls from the Yazidi religious minority who had been held as sex slaves; a bridge destroyed in the fighting; federal police officers waving the Iraqi flag as they celebrated the city's liberation. As part of the celebration, the Iraqi prime minister declared victory in Mosul, saying, "Iraq is now more united than ever."

they are up to the political challenges to bring the country together again — or even get the lights turned on in Mosul, or bring the displaced back home, for that matter — is another question entirely.

“Right now we are only fighting Daesh militarily,” said Jabar Yawar, the secretary general of the pesh merga, the Kurdish security forces in northern Iraq.

As for politics and governance, Mr. Yawar, whose men participated in the early phases of the Mosul battle last fall, said: “There is nothing, no plan. We are fighting, and that’s it.”

Hoshyar Zebari, Iraq’s former foreign minister, a Kurd originally from Mosul, said, “Everyone is in a hurry to achieve

“Even the Arabs in Iraq are not united.”

a military victory, without regard for the destruction or the day after.”

Mr. Zebari is now working to support the Kurdish referendum, which is likely to go forward despite objections from the United States, Turkey and Iran. Most expect a resounding “yes” vote, given the depth of feeling among Kurds to have their own state.

“Forget Kurdistan,” said Masrour Barzani, the chancellor of the Kurdistan

Region Security Council and the area’s top intelligence official. “Is the rest of Iraq united? Even the Arabs in Iraq are not united.”

He continued: “We are not the reason Iraq is falling apart. I think Iraq is a fabricated state. It was built on the wrong foundations.”

And then there is Syria. The civil war across the border, as much as the sectarian policies of the former prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, helped the Islamic State regenerate in Iraq after its predecessor, Al Qaeda in Iraq, was largely eradicated. The group was able to expand into Syria before sweeping across the border in 2014 and taking Mosul.

Without peace in Syria, officials say, there is little chance for peace and stability in Iraq.

“Syria and Iraq are closely connected,” Mr. Maliki said in an interview this year. “If the situation in Syria is unstable, Iraq will be unstable.”

When asked about the future of Iraq after the Islamic State, Mr. Maliki said: “The state cannot control the situation. The coming phase will be bad.”

With the larger questions hanging over the country, the immediate challenge of stabilizing Mosul is monumental, especially in the city’s west side. The fight has essentially turned the city into two, divided by the Tigris River. The west is a gray, dusty wasteland of flat-

tened buildings and upturned, charred trucks; even the windows of the cars civilians are driving have been blown out. Cross the bridge, though, and suddenly the world emerges in light and color, with shops and restaurants open, and loud traffic jams.

Fighting continued on Monday in a small patch of the old city, and security forces there rescued two more girls from Iraq’s Yazidi religious minority who had been held as sex slaves.

All day long on Monday, Iraqi state television played patriotic songs in honor of the security forces, and later in the evening, a news flash alerted that Mr. Abadi would make a “historic” speech, surrounded by soldiers. The prime minister, once again, declared victory in Mosul, saying, “Iraq is now more united than ever,” and he declared Tuesday a national holiday of celebration.

In the skies over Mosul, Iraqi airplanes dropped three million leaflets on a city where many of the residents are no longer there.

Each leaflet showed a map of Mosul in the colors of the Iraqi flag — red, white and black — with the message: “Mosul has been returned to the bosom of Iraq.”

Falih Hassan contributed reporting.



JULY 7, 2017

PYD says Kurds determined to expel Turkish forces from northern Syria

July 7, 2017 Kurdish Region, Syria
<http://aranews.net>

THE KURDISH DEMOCRATIC UNION PARTY IN SYRIA (PYD) said they will expel the Turkish military and Turkey-backed groups from northern Syria. This comes after Turkey threatened to attack The Kurdish district of Afrin (Efrin) northwest of Aleppo.

“We at the general council of the PYD condemn and denounce the bombing of the Turkish occupation and its mercenary forces to the areas of Afrin and al-Shahba [northern Aleppo] and consider this an attack on the entire Kurdish people and Syrian people as a whole,” the PYD said.

“We assure our people in Rojava and northern Syria that will not spare any effort until the Turkish occupation failed and its even expelled from all the areas it’s occupied,” the Kurdish party said in a statement on Thursday.

The PYD called on all Syrian parties, including the Kurdish National Council (KNC), to unite and oppose the Turkish intervention, accusing the KNC of ‘treachery’. The PYD said that one of their main goals is to unite the Kurdish parties.

“At the same time, everyone is witnessing an intensive diplomatic move by the KNK [Kurdistan National Congress] to prepare for a national consultative meeting to be held in Sulaymaniyah this mid-month, and also advised by the friends of the people of Kurdistan to the necessity of achieving national unity in the Kurdish society and support the national gains and democracy and completion of the Kurdish national agenda which would ensure a democratic and stable Middle East,” the PYD said.



PYD leader Salih Muslim (c) speaking to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Kobane. Photo: ARA News

The Barzani-backed Kurdish National Council in Syria (KNC) on Tuesday condemned the Turkish threat to Afrin district in northwestern Aleppo, and called on the Kurdish government in Iraq to stop the Turkish attack on Afrin.

“We at the Kurdish National Council (KNC), while we support any effort to combat extremism and terrorism in all its forms and names, we believe that such actions will not serve international efforts to combat it and will hinder efforts to eliminate terrorism,” the KNC said, calling for dialogue.

On Tuesday, Abdulkarim Omer, who administers Cezire’s foreign relations, led a delegation from the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK) to the KNC to invite them for a consultative meeting in Slemani.

However, the KNC told the delegation that they will not participate, unless KNC members are released from Rojava prisons and KNC offices reopened. ■

Was Turkey's Coup For Real?

The truth will come out.



David L. Phillips,
Jul 18, 2017
www.huffingtonpost.com

Much speculation exists about the coup in Turkey on July 15, 2016. Some even call it a "false-coup," which President Recep Tayyip Erdogan organized in order to justify a crack-down against oppositionists. There are many other instances when a military tried to remove the civilian head of government. Case studies suggest a pattern, which can be used to evaluate the events in Turkey one year ago.

When conducting a coup, the first action involves capturing or killing the head of government, in this instance Erdogan.

In parallel to killing or capturing the head of government, loyal military and security units must be immobilized to prevent them from obstructing the coup.

Public information is critical. The putschists typically seize control of media so they can manage the flow of information to the public. Traditional media outlets involve radio and television, both public and private. New media include social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

A head of the putsch presents himself so the public can attach a face to the events and find reassurance. If the public protests the coup, mutinous soldiers use all necessary measures to preserve order.

The following occurred in Turkey.

Erdogan was vacationing in Marmaris on July 15. When mutinous soldiers arrived at his hotel to arrest him, Erdogan had checked out and was on his way to Dalaman airport.

The first inkling of the coup occurred in the early evening when mechanized units used tanks to block the Bosphorus Bridge and the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge, crossing from the Asian side to the European side of Istanbul. Land forces on the bridge were joined by the gendarmerie.

Prominent members of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) were arrested. Chairman of the General Staff General Hulusi Akar, and Deputy Chief of Staff Yasar Guler were imprisoned at the Akincilar air base on the outskirts of Ankara. Commander of the Land Forces General Salih Zeki Colak, Gendarmerie Commander Galip Mendi, Commander of the Air Force General Abidin Unal, and Commander of the Turkish Naval Forces Bulent Bostanoglu were also taken into custody. Hakan Fidan, head of the National Intelligence Agency, was rushed to a secure location.

TRT, Turkey's public television, was taken off the air. Soldiers also seized control of CNN Turk, interrupting a live broadcast. No private television channels were affected.

Erdogan disappeared during the coup. In the early hours of the morning, he surfaced to address the nation using FaceTime. He called on followers to take to the streets in defense of Turkey's democracy.

Imams echoed Erdogan's appeal. The chant "Allahu akbar" – God is great – reverberated from the muezzins of mosques. Many thousands of supporters went to Ataturk Airport and Taksim Square in Istanbul. They also gathered outside the presidential palace in Ankara.

F-16s controlled by the putschists allegedly bombed the army headquarters and the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA).

Though Turkey's military has a reputation for efficiency, its actions were poorly considered and badly executed. The coup fell far short of best practices for military takeovers.

How could mutinous soldiers have been unaware of Erdogan's plans to leave the hotel? Failing to find him was a major gaff that undermined the coup from the outset.

Why wasn't Erdogan apprehended on his way to the airport before his presidential plane took off? The coup plotters possessed F-16 fighter jets. Why didn't they intercept or shoot down Erdogan's plane?

Members of the Turkish General Staff representing major branches of the Turkish armed forces were detained. Was their arrest part of the coup design or was it intended to prevent them from joining the ranks of mutineers?

MIT's Hakan Fidan, was not apprehended. Of all the members of Turkey's national security establishment, Fidan is closest to Erdogan and best positioned to protect the president. Erdogan once called him his "sır küpü," which means 'jar of secrets'.

The putschists never presented themselves to the public, explaining events and offering reassurance.

Why did the coup plotters fail to take over major private networks that most Turks actually watch? Both TRT and CNN Turk have relatively small viewing audiences.

And why did the coup plotters allow social media to function? They could have jammed coverage, but didn't. It is ironic that Erdogan addressed the nation using FaceTime, a form of social media he vowed to eliminate.

While imams called Erdogan's supporters to the streets, the putschists issued instructions for people to stay indoors. Allowing Erdogan supporters free reign allowed a groundswell of popular support for the president.

Damage to the TGNA was minimal. Crater analysis suggested that explosives inside the building were used, rather than high impact ordinance of fighter jets.



According to US Secretary of State John Kerry, "It does not appear to be a very brilliantly planned or executed event." Kerry has a knack for understatement. It was a botched coup that showed all the hallmarks of incompetence.

Would Erdogan be so reckless to stage an event that endangered Turkish citizens, killing 265 people? Another theory exists about Erdogan's complicity.

Rather than organize the coup, Erdogan was either tipped off by members of the putsch or by the intelligence agency of a foreign government. Instead of preventing the coup, Erdogan allowed events to progress just far enough so claims of a coup were credible but not so far as to present any real risk.

In his first public remarks during the early morning of July 16, Erdogan issued a chilling threat: "This latest action is an act of treason. This attempt, this move, is a great gift from God for us. Why? Because the move will allow us to clean up the armed forces, which needs to be completely cleaned." In a rush to judgement, he vowed to purge all state institutions of "the virus" spread by supporters of Fethullah Gulen.

The Turkish government had already prepared lists of oppositionists. The authorities moved immediately to arrest them. To date, about 50,000 security officers and civil servants have been arrested and another 150,000 dismissed from their jobs. Approximately 150 journalists are in jail. Members of parliament, judges, and educators have also been dismissed or arrested. Instead of reconciliation, Erdogan arrested another 7,000 people on the one-year anniversary. Erdogan vows to approve a bill reinstating the death penalty if parliament proposed it.

Some say Erdogan is paranoid. But even paranoid people have enemies.

Erdogan was profoundly aware of potential challenges from the TSK. Turkey has a history of military coups in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997. Erdogan was directly affected by the coup of 1997, which outlawed the Refah Party to which he belonged.

To pre-empt challenges, Erdogan pushed through constitutional reforms affecting the Kemalist judiciary. Pro-government prosecutors conjured fantastical plots, Ergenekon and Operation Sledgehammer, which were used to crack-down on retired and current military officers. Arrests sent shock waves through Turkey's security establishment.

Events in Egypt further exacerbated Erdogan's concerns. Erdogan identified closely with Egypt's President Mohamed Morsi as a kindred spirit and fraternal political ally. Morsi was a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood and a known Islamist. When Morsi was overthrown >

► by General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in 2013, Erdogan feared something similar. He accused the West of masterminding Morsi's removal.

Erdogan was pro-active to prevent a similar fate. Erdogan's purge is called a "civilian coup" or a "controlled coup," because it pervasively eliminated opposition and generated widespread fear in society and professional ranks. An open-ended state of emergency has been used by Erdogan to eliminate the rule of law and system-

atize repression.

Secrets are hard to keep. Repression is difficult to maintain. Close to two million people rallied in the Maltepe district of Istanbul on July 8. They demand "adalet" – justice and the rule of law. They want answers.

When Erdogan eventually leaves power, Turks and the world will learn what really happened. The truth will come out. ●

*Mr. Phillips is Director of the Program on Peace-building and Rights at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights. He worked on Turkish issues as a senior adviser and foreign affairs expert to the U.S. State Department's Bureau of European Affairs under President Clinton and Bush. His recent book is titled *An Uncertain Ally: Turkey Under Erdogan's Dictatorship*.*

FP Foreign Policy July 18, 2017

Iraqi Kurds Want America as Their Divorce Lawyer

Kurdish leaders are trying to persuade the United States to broker a potentially explosive split between Erbil and Baghdad.

By Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian
July 18, 2017 -
<http://foreignpolicy.com/>

Iraqi Kurds are mounting a campaign in Washington this week to rally U.S. government support for an independence bid before a referendum in September. But Baghdad opposes talk of secession, and with the United States committed to a one-Iraq policy, it's going to be an uphill fight.

Falah Mustafa Bakir, the head of the Kurdistan Regional Government's Department of Foreign Relations, told Foreign Policy during a visit to Washington that the message he hoped to convey to his American counterparts was that "an independent Kurdistan is a solution and not a problem."

"The United States can play a very important role," Bakir told FP. "It has leverage, and it has tools, in order to be the broker ... in bringing Erbil and Baghdad to this process of negotiation."

Iraqi Kurds, who are concentrated in the country's autonomous northern region, have long chafed under centralized rule. In the 1990s under Saddam Hussein, they were the targets of a genocidal campaign that forced hundreds of thousands of Kurds to flee into the mountains for safety.

The 2005 Iraqi Constitution established the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government, or KRG, which gained international acclaim for the role of its Peshmerga militias in the fight against the Islamic State.

But many Kurds believe Baghdad has failed to respect their rights. Under the constitution, the Kurdish region is guaranteed a 17 percent cut of the national budget. But in 2014, following a dispute over oil sales, then-Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki refused to send the requisite payment, sparking a financial crisis.

In June, Kurdish President Masoud Barzani announced that the region would hold a referendum on Sept. 25 in which Iraqi Kurdistan's approximately 5 million residents would answer "yes" or "no" to the question, "Do you want an independent Kurdistan?"

It's not the first time that Barzani has called for a referendum, but this time is different. The Kurds are now well-known and well-liked state-side. And unlike the informal referendum held in



January 2005, in which Kurds voted overwhelmingly for independence, this referendum is officially sponsored by the regional government.

"Whoever sits in Baghdad wants to grab all the power and control everything," said Bakir, adding that the Kurds were never treated like genuine partners. But the United States has developed what to Erbil feels like an equitable relationship, and Bakir hopes to draw on that relationship during his visit this week.

"The United States has found out that Kurds are their best friends and allies – in building democracy, in fighting terrorism, in caring for the displaced communities and standing for the minorities," he said.

So far, Bakir has met with National Security Council Middle East director Derek Harvey; Stuart Jones, the acting assistant secretary at the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs; Brett McGurk, the special U.S. envoy for the coalition to defeat the Islamic State; and members of House Foreign Affairs Committee,

"The Americans do not want this additional source of pressure," said Randa Slim

among others.

Still, the United States is unlikely to take the KRG's side. U.S. officials often argue that a strong, stable, unified Iraq is the region's best bet to fight terrorism and prevent the return of the Islamic State or similar extremists. And

Washington also worries about the reaction of neighboring countries such as Turkey and Iran, which view the creation of a Kurdish state as an existential threat.

"The Americans do not want this additional source of pressure," said Randa Slim, the director of the Track II Dialogues initiative at the non-partisan Middle East Institute, adding that even a strong "yes" outcome is unlikely to change minds in Washington.

"After the referendum, the position of the Americans is going to be what you see now – it's not good, it's not the right time, it's better for the region to be whole, to be not divided," Slim told FP.

Barzani isn't necessarily hoping to make an immediate declaration of independence, however, and his willingness to play the long game increases his options. The 2005 referendum, even though it carried no legal weight, nevertheless increased the Kurds' bargaining power during the debate over Iraq's new constitution, which enshrined Iraqi Kurdistan's status as the country's only autonomous region.

A "yes" vote for the 2017 referendum could do much the same, both for direct negotiations between Erbil and Baghdad and in the run-up to the Iraqi national elections in April 2018.

Barzani wants to "slow walk" toward independence, said Nicholas Heras, a fellow at the Center for a New American Security. "Barzani can use a resounding 'yes' on the referendum. This will give him political leverage."

For the time being, the potential powder keg of Kurdish independence remains unlit, and cooler heads are prevailing. "All sides are coming at it from a nonconfrontational approach," Slim said. "They are both, and especially the Kurds, calling on the Americans to a trilateral dialogue process on the terms of the divorce between Baghdad and Kurdistan."

Foreign Minister Bakir believes that the close partnership that Erbil and Washington have developed over the past several years, and their shared values, means that that partnership should continue as Iraqi Kurdistan pursues independence.

"The people of Kurdistan do hope that the United States would stand by the values, the principles, and also the friendship that we have developed," Bakir said. ■

Le Monde 19 JUILLET 2017

L'amertume des habitants de Mossoul-Ouest

Cinq mois de combats contre l'EI ont provoqué la destruction de quartiers entiers de la ville irakienne

MOSSOUL (IRAK) - envoyée spéciale

On est allé se coucher un soir avec le gouvernement. On s'est réveillé le lendemain avec [l'organisation] Etat islamique. L'EI nous a volé nos maisons et nos voitures. On a perdu plus encore avec la libération. Tout est détruit: nos maisons, notre patrimoine, nos mosquées, nos hôpitaux, notre université. On n'a plus de travail, plus d'avenir.» La voix chevrotante, Ali Nachwan ne peut pas contenir la colère qui le gagne à l'évocation de la désolation dans laquelle a été laissé l'ouest de Mossoul après cinq mois de combats entre les forces irakiennes et les combattants de l'EI.

Autour de lui, dans l'assistance réunie comme chaque matin dans l'échoppe de thé d'Abou Hammoudi, sur la grande avenue de Bagdad, dans le quartier de Mossoul Al-Djadida, les hommes ne trouvent rien à y redire. Le conducteur de camions de 25 ans montre le canapé de l'autre côté de la rue sur lequel il dit dormir tous les soirs. «*Toute ma famille a été tuée dans une frappe aérienne sur notre maison*», explique-t-il, incapable de se souvenir de la date. «*C'était le 17 mars*», répondent en chœur les autres hommes.

«*La maison d'Ali et la nôtre ont été touchées dans une frappe. Tout le pâté de maisons a été détruit. Quatorze immeubles d'un coup. Trois cent cinquante personnes sont mortes alors qu'il n'y avait pas plus de dix combattants*», précise Raad, un ouvrier de 48 ans, sauvé des décombres avec sa femme et ses sept enfants.

Contrairement à l'est de Mossoul, largement épargné par les

combats qui y ont fait rage d'octobre 2016 à janvier, certains quartiers sur l'autre rive du Tigre ont été presque entièrement détruits dans la bataille engagée depuis le 19 février.

«Un désastre humain»

Face à la résistance de plus en plus acharnée des djihadistes, retranchés parmi les habitants utilisés comme boucliers humains, les frappes aériennes de la coalition internationale et les tirs d'artillerie des forces irakiennes se sont faits plus intenses. La vieille ville, devenue la forteresse de l'EI, a été détruite à plus d'un tiers – soit près de 5 000 habitations – dans les combats entre mi-juin et mi-juillet, selon les observations réalisées par images satellite par l'UN Habitat. Dans le reste de la ville, 10 000 autres habitations ont été détruites, surtout à l'Ouest.

«*C'est une destruction massive. Un désastre humain. Cela va prendre du temps de faire le décompte de toutes les victimes. Il y a encore beaucoup de corps sous les ruines*», lâche Othman Hamed Latif, un marchand de boiseries de 60 ans et père de huit enfants, qui ne cache pas sa «*déprime*».

Selon les estimations de l'organisation non gouvernementale Airwars, basée à Londres, les frappes de la coalition auraient fait 5 805 morts parmi les civils entre le 19 février et le 19 juin. D'autres, dont le nombre est encore impossible à établir, ont été tués par les snipers, les obus et les pièges explosifs de l'EI. Le bilan des pertes humaines devrait être lourd dans la vieille ville, lieu des combats les plus violents, où les pompiers de la défense civile ont entamé l'extraction des corps des décombres.

«*Il n'y avait pas d'autre moyen*



Dans un quartier détruit de Mossoul, le 29 juin.

LAURENT VAN DER STOCKT POUR «LE MONDE»

de procéder, assure le général Sami Al-Aridhi, des forces antiterroristes irakiennes. *Les Américains auraient dit: "On détruit tout et après, on se bat." Ce n'est pas ce que l'on a fait. Croyez-moi, si l'on avait utilisé toute notre force de frappe, ça aurait été totalement détruit.*» Les militaires évoquent les pertes de plus en plus sévères subies côté gouvernemental et la volonté d'avancer rapidement pour éviter les contre-attaques de l'EI et libérer les civils affamés par des mois de siège pour justifier le déluge de feu qui s'est abattu sur l'ouest de Mossoul. Mais, leurs explications ne satisfont pas les habitants.

«Rendre aux gens leur dignité»

«*La plupart des destructions ont été causées par les forces irakiennes. Pour elles, Mossoul n'était plus une ville, seulement une série de coordonnées GPS à transmettre aux avions de la coalition. Si j'avais su que ce serait cela, la prétendue libération, j'aurais préféré ne pas être libéré*», confie, amer, Qassem Al-Charifi, un fonctionnaire du ministère de l'électricité de 43 ans. Othman Hamed Latif abonde en son sens: «*Le gouvernement nous a injustement traités. Il nous a dit de rester chez nous, en nous faisant croire que ce serait une bataille rapide et facile. On aurait pu s'enfuir si on avait su avant qu'il en serait ainsi.*»

Le premier ministre, Haïder Al-Abadi, a promis que la reconstruction débiterait rapidement. «*Pour transformer les gains de la victoire militaire en stabilité, sécurité, justice et développement, le gouvernement devra tout faire pour rendre aux gens leurs vies dans la société et leur dignité*», lui a enjoint l'envoyé des Nations

unies pour l'Irak, Jan Kubis.

Plus de 800 000 personnes ont été déplacées par les combats à l'ouest, selon l'ONU. Alors que l'est de Mossoul bouillonne déjà d'activités et de commerces, la reconstruction de l'ouest, plus pauvre et davantage marqué par les années de défiance entre la population à majorité sunnite et les autorités chiïtes de Bagdad qui ont suivi l'invasion américaine de 2003, revêt un fort enjeu politique.

Dans les conversations, l'argument confessionnel ne tarde jamais à resurgir. «*Depuis le début, c'est le plan prévu par les Etats-Unis, Israël et l'Iran: éradiquer la communauté sunnite*», croit, comme beaucoup, Ali Nachwan. Qassem Al-Charifi n'est pas loin de penser la même chose: «*C'est comme les Américains, c'est ainsi que les politiciens chiïtes se vengent des sunnites. Maintenant, les forces de sécurité ont le dessus sur la population. Vous ne pouvez exprimer aucune critique, sinon ils vous disent que vous êtes avec l'EI.*» ■

HÉLÈNE SALLON

Turkey's state news agency exposes US positions in Syria

A Turkish state news agency revealed US troops' positions in Syria in what US officials see as further Turkish hostility over the US alliance with the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units.



Amberin Zaman
July 19, 2017
www.al-monitor.com

Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency has revealed what it claims to be the locations of 10 US military bases in the Kurdish-controlled areas of northern Syria, a move that will likely put a further dent in the rocky relationship between the two NATO allies. US officials told Al-Monitor that they had conveyed their concerns about the disclosure of sensitive information to Turkish authorities.

Anadolu dropped its bombshell complete with maps pinpointing the locations of US special forces in Kobani, Manbij and Rumeilan, among others, via its Turkish-language service this week. The story was picked up by local newspapers but generated remarkably little fuss considering the sensitive nature of its content. The report included the numbers of US troops in several locations and the presence of French forces as well who are working with the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) to combat the Islamic State.

Turkey is furious about the partnership, claiming that weapons provided to the YPG are winding up in the hands of the Kurdistan Workers Party, a Kurdish rebel faction that is waging war for self-rule inside Turkey. The claims were repeated at a meeting of the National Security Council on July 17, the day the Anadolu story first ran.

On July 18, Anadolu's English-language service ran a translation, which was swiftly picked up by the Daily Beast and carried to an international audience.

Roy Gutman, who penned the Daily Beast piece, revealed the anger felt by the Pentagon. A spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve, the US-led coalition fighting IS, asked Gutman not to share the information published by Anadolu, saying it would be "professionally irresponsible" and "put coalition lives in jeopardy." A spokesman for the Central Command requested the same.

As Gutman noted, however, the Anadolu stories were already out there and "Turkish security officials confirmed" their accuracy — unsurprising as Turkish security officials were probably the main sources for the triple-lined article.

US officials regard Anadolu's story as more churlishness from Turkey over the US-YPG alliance if not an outright hostile act. A spokesperson for Operation Inherent Resolve said that while they cannot independently verify the sources that contributed to the Anadolu story, "we would be very concerned if officials from a NATO ally would purposefully endanger our forces by releasing sensitive information."

"We have conveyed these concerns to the Government of Turkey," the spokesperson added.

To be sure, when paired with Turkey's ongoing attacks against YPG forces in Afrin and its refusal to allow any humanitarian aid, not even baby formula, destined for Kurdish-controlled areas in Syria to pass through its borders, the story fits the broader pattern of Turkish attempts to torpedo the Syrian Kurds' efforts to cement their newfound autonomy and any potential American support for it. The Anadolu story may well be intended as some kind of warning to the United States that it's watching its every move.

Ragip Soylu, the Washington correspondent for the pro-government Turkish daily Sabah, concurred in a (now deleted) tweet: "Exposing



Kurdish fighters from the People's Protection Units stand near US military vehicles in the town of Darbasiya next to the Turkish border, Syria, April 29, 2017. REUTERS/Rodi Said

'secret' US bases in Syria seems like a Turkish attempt to trouble the Pentagon for its cooperation with YPG that endangers Turkey."

In March, Turkey shuttered the Oregon-based Mercy Corps, which along with other Western humanitarian relief organizations delivering aid to Syria via Turkey became a target of a smear campaign by pro-government media outlets. The newspapers alleged that the outfits were staffed by spies and that their main beneficiaries were the YPG. As a result, all humanitarian relief supplies to Kurdish-controlled northern Syria are now being delivered via the Semelka border crossing in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq.

A Turkish official speaking on condition of strict anonymity told Al-Monitor that a renewed request in June by the United States to allow aid through, including supplies for an estimated 200,000 Sunni Arab civilians displaced by the fighting in and around Raqqa, had been denied.

Geolocation experts contacted by Al-Monitor said military surveillance drones could have obtained the data in Anadolu's story. Turkey is known to have many such drones flying over northern Syria. Some of the information could also be garnered through satellite imagery and even geolocation apps. The US government shares some coordinates with Turkey, if not at the level of specificity outlined by Anadolu, in order to deconflict their respective forces.

The need for deconfliction gained urgency after Turkish jets struck YPG targets in April near the northern Syrian town of Derik. US special forces were about 6 miles from the strikes and Turkey gave the United States less than an hour's notice before carrying them out. ♦

Editor's note: July 19, 2017. This article has been updated to include a response from Operation Inherent Resolve.

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Pour moderniser sa défense, la Turquie s'arme auprès de l'UE et de la Russie

Ankara achète un système antimissile à Moscou, au risque d'envenimer sa relation avec l'OTAN

ISTANBUL - *correspondante*

Vendredi 14 juillet, alors qu'un accord préliminaire venait tout juste d'être signé entre la Turquie et le consortium franco-italien Eurosam pour la production conjointe de systèmes de défense, Ankara a réitéré son intention d'acquérir les systèmes russes antimissiles S-400.

Les médias turcs n'ont de cesse d'en faire gorge chaude, assurant que les derniers détails techniques du contrat avec Moscou ont été finalisés. « Nous en sommes au stade de la signature », a assuré mardi le ministre de la défense, Fikri Isik.

Avant l'annonce de la coopération avec la France et l'Italie, le ministre avait confirmé l'importance des relations avec la Russie. « Nous allons répondre aux besoins immédiats en achetant les systèmes russes tout en développant nos propres systèmes nationaux de défense aérienne », avait-il déclaré le 4 juillet lors

d'une interview diffusée sur la chaîne publique TRT Haber.

Vladimir Kojine, le conseiller du président Vladimir Poutine pour la coopération militaire et technique, avait reconnu fin juin que les négociations concernant les détails techniques du contrat « étaient pratiquement terminées », seuls les aspects financiers restant à finaliser. L'octroi d'un prêt russe à Ankara pour l'achat des antimissiles serait en négociation.

Soucieux de développer l'industrie de défense de son pays, le président Erdogan mise sur des transferts de technologie. La Turquie tient à produire ses propres systèmes antiaériens, ce qui, selon les experts, sera un processus long et coûteux. « Si le contrat est signé, les S-400 ne seront pas livrés à la Turquie avant 2020 », assure l'expert militaire russe Vladimir Moukhine dans le quotidien *Nezavissimaïa Gazeta* du 17 juillet.

Le contrat prévoit la fourniture de quatre batteries de S-400 pour 2,5 à 3 milliards de dollars (2,1 à

2,6 milliards d'euros). Les deux premiers exemplaires seront fabriqués en Russie, les deux autres en Turquie.

Si elle se confirme, la vente de systèmes russes de défense antiaérienne à un pays membre de l'OTAN viendra tonifier l'alliance entre Moscou et Ankara. La réconciliation sera certes achevée après la grave crise survenue dans leurs relations en 2015, au moment de la destruction par l'aviation turque d'un bombardier russe survolant la frontière turco-syrienne, mais les relations de la Turquie avec l'Alliance atlantique risquent d'en souffrir.

« Manque d'empathie »

Pour Vladimir Poutine, s'engager avec la Turquie revient à affaiblir l'OTAN, perçu par lui comme une menace. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, lui, veut faire montre d'indépendance à l'égard de ses partenaires traditionnels, avec qui les relations sont au plus bas depuis le putsch raté du 15 juillet 2016. Pas étonnant que les rododontades

turques à propos des S-400 aient resurgi en ces jours de commémoration du putsch et alors que le président Erdogan a déploré une nouvelle fois le « manque d'empathie » de ses alliés occidentaux.

Les tensions empoisonnent les relations avec les États-Unis. Ankara ne cesse de réprover le soutien apporté par le Pentagone aux milices kurdes syriennes YPG, actives dans le nord de la Syrie, vues comme « terroristes » par Ankara.

Les tensions se sont accrues avec l'Allemagne depuis que les autorités turques ont refusé la semaine dernière à des députés du Bundestag l'accès de la base de Konya (centre de la Turquie), une base de l'OTAN où des soldats allemands sont stationnés. Un mois plus tôt, un refus similaire avait empêché une délégation parlementaire allemande de se rendre, au sud de la Turquie, sur la base d'Incirlik – qui n'est pas un site de l'OTAN –, poussant Berlin à décider le transfert en Jordanie de ses 280 soldats présents dans la base. ■

MARIE JÉGO

THE HUFFINGTON POST 20 juillet 2017

Une agence de presse turque a révélé la localisation de soldats français et américains en Syrie

Les États-Unis ont fait part de leur "inquiétude" pour leurs troupes, exposées à des "risques inutiles".

AFP - 20/07/2017
www.huffingtonpost.fr

INTERNATIONAL - L'agence de presse pro-gouvernementale turque Anadolu a révélé lundi 17 juillet la localisation de forces spéciales américaines et françaises au nord de la Syrie, provoquant ainsi la colère des États-Unis, qui craignent pour la sécurité de leurs soldats.

Anadolu a donné l'emplacement de 10 installations militaires américaines, allant même jusqu'à révéler parfois le nombre de soldats des forces spéciales s'y trouvant. Ainsi selon l'agence, 200 soldats américains et 75 soldats des forces spéciales françaises se trouveraient dans un avant-poste à une trentaine de kilomètres au nord de Raqa, capitale auto-proclamée de l'organisation jihadiste État Islamique (EI).

La divulgation de ces informations confidentielles expose les forces de la coalition à des "risques inutiles", selon le porte-parole du Pentagone, Adrian Rankine-Galloway. "Nous

serions très inquiets si des responsables d'un allié de l'Otan mettaient volontairement en danger nos troupes en divulguant des informations confidentielles", a-t-il déclaré.

"Nous avons fait part de nos inquiétudes au gouvernement turc", a-t-il ajouté, en refusant de commenter l'exactitude des localisations dévoilées par Anadolu.

UNE RELATION TENDUE ENTRE ÉTATS-UNIS ET TURQUIE

Ces 10 bases militaires (deux aérodromes et huit avant-postes) sont utilisées pour apporter un soutien au Parti de l'union démocratique kurde (PYD), et à sa branche armée, les Unités de protection du peuple kurde (YPG), qu'Ankara considère comme liée au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

La Turquie considère les séparatistes kurdes du PKK comme une organisation "terroriste", alors que le conflit kurde en Turquie a coûté la vie à plus de 40.000 personnes depuis son déclenchement en 1984.



Des forces spéciales françaises et américaines sont engagées dans la bataille de Raqa en Syrie aux côtés des combattants kurdes. Une décision qui ulcère la Turquie qui a décidé de révéler l'emplacement de ces soldats par la voix de son agence de presse.

La relation entre les États-Unis et la Turquie, pourtant alliés au sein de l'Otan, s'est refroidie depuis l'intervention en Syrie de la coalition mise en place par Washington pour défaire l'EI. Les États-Unis comptent en effet sur le YPG et d'autres groupes kurdes pour combattre l'EI au sol. Pour cela, ils ont envoyé des armes aux Kurdes, mais cela inquiète Ankara qui craint que ces armes finissent aux mains du PKK. ●

Iran holds sway in Iraq after U.S. opened door

BAGHDAD

Tehran fills power vacuum using military, political and economic influence

BY TIM ARANGO

Walk into almost any market in Iraq and the shelves are filled with goods from Iran — milk, yogurt, chicken. Turn on the television and channel after channel broadcasts programs sympathetic to Iran.

A new building goes up? It is likely that the cement and bricks came from Iran. And when bored young Iraqi men take pills to get high, the illicit drugs are likely to have been smuggled across the porous Iranian border.

And that's not even the half of it.

Across the country, Iranian-sponsored militias are hard at work establishing a corridor to move men and guns to proxy forces in Syria and Lebanon. And in the halls of power in Baghdad, even the most senior Iraqi cabinet officials have been blessed, or bounced out, by Iran's leadership.

When the United States invaded Iraq 14 years ago to topple Saddam Hussein, it saw Iraq as a potential cornerstone of a democratic and Western-facing Middle East, and vast amounts of blood and treasure — about 4,500 American lives lost, more than \$1 trillion spent — were poured into the cause.

From Day 1, Iran saw something else: a chance to make a client state of Iraq, a former enemy against which it fought a war in the 1980s so brutal, with chemical weapons and trench warfare, that historians look to World War I for analogies. If it succeeded, Iraq would never again pose a threat, and it could serve as a jumping-off point to spread Iranian influence around the region.

In that contest, Iran won, and the United States lost.

Over the past three years, Americans have focused on the battle against the Islamic State group in Iraq, returning more than 5,000 troops to the country and helping to force the militants out of Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul.

But Iran never lost sight of its mission: to dominate its neighbor so thoroughly that Iraq could never again endanger it militarily, and to use the country to effectively control a corridor from Tehran to the Mediterranean.

"Iranian influence is dominant," said Hoshyar Zebari, who was ousted last year as Iraq's finance minister because, he said, Iran distrusted his links to the United States. "It is paramount."



Workers unloading Iranian products at an Iraqi border crossing. The flow of goods between the two countries is one-sided, and the shelves of shops in Iraq are often full of Iranian goods.

The country's dominance over Iraq has heightened sectarian tensions around the region, with Sunni states, and American allies, like Saudi Arabia mobilizing to oppose Iranian expansionism. But Iraq is only part of Iran's expansion project; it has also used soft and hard power to extend its influence in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan, and throughout the region.

Iraq is a Shiite state, and Iraq, a Shiite majority country, was ruled by an elite Sunni minority before the American invasion. The roots of the schism between Sunnis and Shiites, going back almost 1,400 years, lie in differences over the rightful leaders of Islam after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. But these days, it is about geopolitics as much as religion, with the divide expressed by different states that are adversaries, led by Saudi Arabia on one side and Iran on the other.

Iran's influence in Iraq is not just ascendant, but diverse, projecting into military, political, economic and cultural affairs.

At some border posts in the south, Iraqi sovereignty is an afterthought. Busloads of young militia recruits cross into Iran without so much as a document check. They receive military training and are then flown to Syria, where they fight under the command of Iranian officers in defense of the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad.

Passing in the other direction, truck drivers pump Iranian products — food, household goods, illicit drugs — into what has become a vital and captive market.

Iran tips the scales to its favor in every area of commerce. In the city of Na-

jaf, it even picks up the trash, after the provincial council there awarded a municipal contract to a private Iranian company. One member of the council, Zuhair al-Jibouri, resorted to a now-common Iraqi aphorism: "We import apples from Iran so we can give them away to Iranian pilgrims."

Iraq has many political allies in Iraq's Parliament who can help secure its goals. And its influence over the choice of interior minister, through a militia and political group the Iranians built up in the 1980s to oppose Mr. Hussein, has given it substantial control over that ministry and the federal police.

Perhaps most crucial, Parliament passed a law last year that effectively made the constellation of Shiite militias a permanent fixture of Iraq's security forces. This ensures Iraqi funding for the groups while effectively maintaining Iran's control over some of the most powerful units.

Now, with new parliamentary elections on the horizon, Shiite militias have begun organizing themselves politically for a contest that could secure even more dominance for Iran over Iraq's political system.

To gain advantage on the airwaves, new television channels set up with Iranian money and linked to Shiite militias broadcast news coverage portraying Iran as Iraq's protector and the United States as a devious interloper.

Partly in an effort to contain Iran, the United States has indicated that it will keep troops behind in Iraq after the battle against the Islamic State. American diplomats have worked to emphasize the government security forces' role in the fighting, and to shore up a prime

minister, Haider al-Abadi, who has seemed more open to the United States than to Iran.

But after the United States' abrupt withdrawal of troops in 2011, American constancy is still in question here — a broad failure of American foreign policy, with responsibility shared across three administrations.

Iran has been playing a deeper game, parlaying extensive religious ties with Iraq's Shiite majority and a much wider network of local allies, as it makes the case that it is Iraq's only reliable defender.

A ROAD TO THE SEA

Iran's great project in eastern Iraq may not look like much: a 15-mile stretch of dusty road, mostly gravel, through desert and scrub near the border in Diyala Province.

But it is an important new leg of Iran's path through Iraq to Syria, and what it carries — Shiite militiamen, Iranian delegations, trade goods and military supplies — is its most valuable feature.

It is a piece of what analysts and Iranian officials say is Iran's most pressing ambition: to exploit the chaos of the region to project influence across Iraq and beyond. Eventually, analysts say, Iran could use the corridor, established on the ground through militias under its control, to ship weapons and supplies to proxies in Syria, where Iran is an important backer of Mr. Assad, and to Lebanon and its ally Hezbollah.

After the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh, swept across Diyala and neighboring areas in 2014, Iran made clearing the province, a diverse area of Sunnis and Shiites, a priority.

It marshaled a huge force of Shiite militias, many trained in Iran and advised on the ground by Iranian officials. After a quick victory, Iranians and their militia allies set about securing their next interests here: marginalizing the province's Sunni minority and securing a path to Syria. Iran has fought aggressively to keep its ally Mr. Assad in power in order to retain land access to its most important spinoff in the region, Hezbollah, the military and political force that dominates Lebanon and threatens Israel.

A word from Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani, Iran's powerful spymaster, sent an army of local Iraqi contractors scrambling, lining up trucks and bulldozers to help build the road, free of charge. Militiamen loyal to Iran were ordered to secure the site.

"Diyala is the passage to Syria and Lebanon, and this is very important to Iran," said Ali al-Daini, the Sunni chairman of the provincial council there.

Closer to Syria, Iranian-allied militias moved west of Mosul as the battle against the Islamic State unfolded there in recent months. The militias captured the town of Baaj, and then proceeded to the Syrian border, putting Iran on the cusp of completing its corridor.

Back east, in Diyala, Mr. Daini said he



Pilgrims waiting for food and water before evening prayer in Karbala, Iraq, a holy city for Shiites. Iranian-backed militias are the defenders of Shiite shrines in parts of Iraq.

had been powerless to halt what he described as Iran's dominance in the province.

When Mr. Daini goes to work, he said, he has to walk by posters of Iran's revolutionary founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah

"Iran is smarter than America. They achieved their goals on the ground. America didn't protect Iraq."

Khomeini, outside the council building.

Iran's militias in the province have been accused of widespread sectarian cleansing, pushing Sunnis from their homes to establish Shiite dominance and create a buffer zone on its border. The Islamic State was beaten in Diyala more than two years ago, but thousands of Sunni families still fill squalid camps, unable to return home.

Now, Diyala has become a showcase for how Iran views Shiite ascendancy as critical to its geopolitical goals.

"Iran is smarter than America," said Nijat al-Taie, a Sunni member of the provincial council and an outspoken critic of Iran, which she calls the instigator of several assassination attempts against her. "They achieved their goals on the ground. America didn't protect Iraq. They just toppled the regime and handed the country over to Iran."

THE BUSINESS OF INFLUENCE

The lives of General Suleimani and other senior leaders in Tehran were shaped by the prolonged war with Iraq in the 1980s. The conflict left hundreds of thousands dead on both sides, and General Suleimani spent much of the war at the front, swiftly rising in rank as so many officers were killed.

"The Iran-Iraq war was the formative experience for all of Iran's leaders," said Ali Vaez, an Iran analyst at the International Crisis Group, a conflict resolution organization. "From Suleimani all the way down. It was their 'never again' moment."

A border dispute over the Shatt al

Arab waterway that was a factor in the hostilities has still not been resolved, and the legacy of the war's brutality has influenced the Iranian government ever since, from its pursuit of nuclear weapons to its policy in Iraq.

"This is a permanent scar in their mind," said Mowaffak al-Rubaie, a lawmaker and former national security adviser. "They are obsessed with Baathism, Saddam and the Iran-Iraq war."

More than anything else, analysts say, it is the scarring legacy of that war that has driven Iranian ambitions to dominate Iraq.

Particularly in southern Iraq, where the population is mostly Shiite, signs of Iranian influence are everywhere.

Iranian-backed militias are the defenders of the Shiite shrines in the cities of Najaf and Karbala that drive trade and tourism. In local councils, Iranian-backed political parties have solid majorities, and campaign materials stress relationships with Shiite saints and Iranian clerics.

Iran's pre-eminence in the Iraqi south has not come without resentment. Iraqi Shiites share a faith with Iran, but they also hold close their other identities as Iraqis and Arabs.

"Iraq belongs to the Arab League, not to Iran," said Sheikh Fadhil al-Bidayri, a cleric at the religious seminary in Najaf. "Shiites are a majority in Iraq, but a minority in the world. As long as the Iranian government is controlling the Iraqi government, we don't have a chance."

In this region where the Islamic State's military threat has never encroached, Iran's security concerns are mostly being addressed by economic manipulation, Iraqi officials say. Trade in the south is often financed by Iran with credit, and incentives are offered to Iraqi traders to keep their cash in Iranian banks.

Baghdad's banks play a role, too, as the financial anchors for Iraqi front companies used by Iran to gain access to dollars that can then finance the country's broader geopolitical aims, said Entifadh Qanbar, a former aide to the Iraqi politician Ahmad Chalabi, who died in 2015.

"It's very important for the Iranians to maintain corruption in Iraq," he said.

THE MILITIAS' LONG ARM

For decades, Iran smuggled guns and bomb-making supplies through the vast swamps of southern Iraq. And young men were brought back and forth across the border, from one safe house to another — recruits going to Iran for training, and then back to Iraq to fight. At first the enemy was Mr. Hussein; later, it was the Americans.

Today, agents of Iran's Revolutionary Guards openly recruit fighters in the Shiite-majority cities of southern Iraq. Buses filled with recruits easily pass border posts that officials say are essentially controlled by Iran — through its proxies on the Iraqi side, and its own border guards on the other.

While Iran has built up militias to fight against the Islamic State in Iraq, it has also mobilized an army of disaffected young Shiite Iraqi men to fight on its behalf in Syria.

Mohammad Kadhim, 31, is one of those foot soldiers for Iran, having served three tours in Syria. The recruiting pitch, he said, is mostly based in faith, to defend Shiite shrines in Syria. But Mr. Kadhim said he and his friends signed up more out of a need for jobs.

"I was just looking for money," he said. "The majority of the youth I met fighting in Syria do it for the money."

He signed up with a Revolutionary Guards recruiter in Najaf, and then was bused through southern Iraq and into Iran, where he underwent military training near Tehran.

There, he said, Iranian officers delivered speeches invoking the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the revered seventh-century Shiite figure whose death at the hands of a powerful Sunni army became the event around which Shiite spirituality would revolve. The same enemies of the Shiites who killed the imam are now in Syria and Iraq, the officers told the men.

After traveling to Iran, Mr. Kadhim came home for a break and then was shipped to Syria, where Hezbollah operatives trained him in sniper tactics.

Iran's emphasis on defending the Shiite faith has led some here to conclude that its ultimate goal is to bring about an Iranian-style theocracy in Iraq. But there is a persistent sense that it just would not work in Iraq, which has a much larger native Sunni population and tradition, and Iraq's clerics in Najaf, including Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the world's pre-eminent Shiite spiritual leader, oppose the Iranian system.

But Iran is taking steps to translate militia power into political power, much as it did with Hezbollah in Lebanon, and militia leaders have begun political organizing before next year's parliamentary elections.

POLITICAL ASCENDANCY

When a group of Qatari falcon hunters, including members of the royal family, were kidnapped in 2015 while on safari in the southern deserts of Iraq, Qatar



Members of a mostly Shiite militia group at their post at Iraq's border with Syria. Iran has built up Iraqi militias to battle the Islamic State in Iraq and to fight on its behalf in Syria.

called Iran and its militia allies — not the central government in Baghdad.

For Mr. Abadi, the prime minister, the episode was an embarrassing demonstration of his government's weakness at the hands of Iran, whose proxy militia Kataib Hezbollah was believed to be behind the kidnapping.

So when the hostage negotiations were about to end, Mr. Abadi pushed back.

Around noon on a day in April, a government jet from Qatar landed in Baghdad, carrying a delegation of diplomats and 500 million euros stuffed into 23 black boxes.

The hunters were soon on their way home, but the ransom did not go to the Iranian-backed militiamen who had abducted the Qataris; the cash ended up in a central bank vault in Baghdad.

The seizure of the money had been ordered by Mr. Abadi, who was furious at the prospect of militias, and their Iranian and Hezbollah benefactors, being paid so richly right under the Iraqi government's nose.

"Hundreds of millions to armed groups?" Mr. Abadi said in a public rant. "Is this acceptable?"

In Iraq, the kidnapping episode was seen as a violation of the country's sovereignty and emblematic of Iran's suffocating power over the Iraqi state.

In a post on Twitter, Mr. Zebari, the former finance minister, who was previously foreign minister, called the episode a "travesty."

Mr. Zebari knows firsthand the power of Iran over the Iraqi state.

Last year, he said, he was ousted as finance minister because Iran perceived him as being too close to the United States. The account was verified by a member of Parliament who was involved in the removal of Mr. Zebari, and who spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid angering Iran.

Mr. Zebari, who recounted the events in an interview from his mountainside mansion in northern Iraq, said that when President Barack Obama met with Mr. Abadi last September at the United Nations, the American leader personally lobbied to save Mr. Zebari's job. Even that was not enough.

Mr. Abadi now finds himself in a difficult position. If he makes any move that can be seen as confrontational toward Iran, or as positioning himself closer to the United States, it could place a cloud over his political future.

"He had two options: to be with the Americans or with the Iranians," said Izzat al-Shahbandar, a prominent Iraqi Shiite leader who once lived in exile in Iran while Mr. Hussein was in power. "And he chose to be with the Americans."

Mr. Abadi, who took office in 2014 with the support of both the United States and Iran, has seemed more emboldened to push back against Iranian pressure since President Trump took office.

In addition to seizing the ransom money, he has promoted an ambitious project for an American company to secure the highway from Baghdad to Amman, Jordan, which Iran has opposed. He has also begun discussing with the United States the terms of a deal to keep American forces behind after the Islamic State is defeated.

Some are seeing an American troop commitment as a chance to revisit the 2011 withdrawal of United States forces that seemingly opened a door for Iran.

When American officials in Iraq began the slow wind-down of the military mission there, in 2009, some diplomats in Baghdad were cautiously celebrating one achievement: Iran seemed to be on its heels, its influence in the country waning.

"Over the last year, Iran has lost the strategic initiative in Iraq," one diplomat wrote in a cable, later released by WikiLeaks.

But other cables sent warnings back to Washington that were frequently voiced by Iraqi officials they spoke to: that if the Americans left, then Iran would fill the vacuum.

Ryan C. Crocker, the American ambassador in Iraq from 2007 to 2009, said that if the United States left again after the Islamic State was defeated, "it would be effectively just giving the Iranians a free rein."

But many Iraqis say the Iranians already have free rein. And while the Trump administration has indicated that it will pay closer attention to Iraq as a means to counter Iran, the question is whether it is too late.

"Iran is not going to sit silent and do nothing," said Sami al-Askari, a senior Shiite politician who has good relationships with both the Iranians and Americans. "They have many means. Frankly, the Americans can't do anything."

Falih Hassan and Omar al-Jawoshy contributed reporting from Baghdad, and employees of The New York Times from Diyala Province, Hilla and Najaf.



Une jeune militaire yazidie dans le quartier d'al-Sinaa, le 6 juillet. Environ 2 000 combattantes participent à la reconquête de Raqqa, en Syrie. MORUKC UMNABER/DPA PICTURE - ALLIANCE/AFP

Les yazidies à Raqqa pour libérer leurs sœurs esclaves de Daech

GUILLAUME PERRIER @Aufildubosphore
RAQQA

Sautant au bas de leurs pick-up d'un pas léger, une vingtaine de combattantes en treillis, foulards fleuris noués autour du cou ou de la tête, sacs sur le dos et kalachnikov en bandoulière, débarquent joyeusement dans la fournaise de Raqqa. Avec leurs stocks de munitions et de nourriture, elles s'installent dans une petite mosquée et dans la maison adjacente, abandonnée par son imam à cause des violents combats qui se sont déroulés les jours précédents dans les rues alentour. Ces jeunes guerrières âgées d'une vingtaine d'années et qui établissent leur camp de base à proximité de la ligne de front orientale de la ville de Raqqa, sont arrivées en renfort, début juillet, pour participer, aux côtés des Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), la coalition arabo-kurde soutenue par les Occidentaux, à la reconquête de la capitale syrienne de l'organisation État islamique.

Rien d'étonnant à voir des femmes prendre les armes avec autant d'enthousiasme. Les Kurdes proches de la mouvance du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) prônent la parité entre hommes et femmes dans toutes les institutions, y compris militaires, et leur branche féminine, les YPJ (Unités de protection des femmes), s'est rendue célèbre depuis le début de la guerre contre Daech en Syrie et en Irak. Environ 2 000 combattantes participent à la reconquête de Raqqa. Mais ce bataillon de jeunes femmes qui monte au front n'est pas un bataillon comme les autres. Ce sont des YJS, les Uni-



tés des femmes du Sinjar, constituées en 2014 au moment de l'invasion par Daech de la région du mont Sinjar dans l'ouest de l'Irak, le fief historique des Yazidis. Ces derniers sont une minorité religieuse de Mésopotamie. Le groupe qui pose le pied à Raqqa est entièrement constitué de résistantes yazidies, venues en Syrie pour venger leurs sœurs, martyrisées et réduites en esclavage par les militants du califat.

Une minorité persécutée

« Notre présence est symbolique en nombre, nous n'allons pas changer le cours de la bataille, mais ce n'est pas un détail non plus. Nous sommes ici pour l'histoire, pour que la tragédie vécue par le peuple yazidi ne soit pas oubliée », lance, sentencieuse, Deniz, 25 ans, la commandante du bataillon. Cette jeune guerrière a gagné ses

galons à Sinjar, Shengal en kurde, où elle a combattu pendant deux ans. Elle a hâte de retourner en découdre. « Lorsque Daech a attaqué la région des yazidis, ils ont enlevé des centaines de femmes et d'enfants. Les jeunes femmes ont été violées, emmenées de force pour être vendues sur le marché aux esclaves ou livrées aux combattants. C'est pour les libérer que nous sommes ici, maintenant que les opérations parviennent dans le centre-ville », précise la commandante. Elle ajoute qu'un grand nombre d'enfants ont également été arrachés à leurs familles et embrigadés parmi les « Ashbal al-Khilafat », les Lionceaux du Califat, une sorte d'école de l'horreur où les enfants sont rééduqués, convertis à l'idéologie et aux pratiques sanguinaires des djihadistes, dès l'âge de 4 ans. Les Yazidis, religion monothéiste antéislamique, sont

considérés comme des « infidèles » par les islamistes et sont régulièrement persécutés dans les pays musulmans où ils sont établis.

« Nous sommes venues jusqu'ici parce que Daech a commis un génocide contre les yazidis, et des centaines d'esclaves restent encore probablement entre leurs mains. Principalement à Raqqa, qui est la capitale de leur califat », justifie, elle aussi, Shengale, 24 ans, une grande brune souriante dont le visage exprime à la fois douceur et détermination.

« Seuls les yazidis peuvent savoir ce que cela représente. C'est le pire de tous les massacres que nous avons subis dans notre histoire et il y en a eu 74 ! Mon grand-père, quand j'étais petite, me racontait ces horreurs. Après les massacres de 2014, je ne pouvais pas faire autrement que de m'engager. »

Restées à l'écart, à l'ombre, dans la cour de la mosquée, deux jeunes femmes refusent d'être interviewées. Ces deux-là sont des rescapées, libérées par leurs camarades après avoir été em-

menées de force par les djihadistes de l'État islamique et vendues comme esclaves à des combattants étrangers. « De Sinjar, de Mossoul et d'autres villes... Beaucoup sont rentrées auprès de leurs familles, avec leurs traumatismes. Certaines se sont immédiatement engagées avec nous », confirme Deniz, la commandante du bataillon. Pour se venger. Pour laver leur honneur bafoué dans le sang. ■

LE FIGARO

21 juillet 2017

Washington arrête le programme de soutien aux rebelles syriens

Depuis 2013, la CIA entraînait certains insurgés et leur livrait des armes. Mais sans grand résultat sur le terrain.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT @Malbrunot

MOYEN-ORIENT C'est un nouveau coup dur pour les rebelles modérés syriens. Sur ordre de Donald Trump, la CIA a mis un terme au programme « Train and equip » au profit des insurgés qui luttent contre Bachar el-Assad. Cette décision ne peut que satisfaire la Russie, avec laquelle les États-Unis veulent travailler pour trouver une issue à six ans d'un conflit qui a coûté la vie à quelque 400 000 personnes.

Ce programme, entamé en 2013 par Barack Obama, n'a eu qu'un impact limité sur le conflit, ont reconnu plusieurs sources officielles américaines. Donald Trump a pris cette décision, il y a près d'un mois, après un entretien avec le patron de la CIA, Mike Pompeo, et le conseiller à la Sécurité nationale, le général H.R. McMaster, a rapporté le *Washington Post*, qui révèle l'affaire.

« C'est un signal adressé à Vladimir Poutine que l'Administration veut améliorer ses relations avec la Russie », affirme un autre officiel américain, cité par le journal britannique *The Guardian*. Moscou, avec lequel Washington vient de conclure un accord de cessez-le-feu dans le sud de la Syrie, réclamait, depuis longtemps, l'arrêt de « Train and equip ». Pour le *Washington Post*, il s'agit d'une « reconnaissance des limites de l'influence

de Washington et de la volonté de chasser Assad du pouvoir ».

Des milliers de combattants rebelles ont été formés et armés, le plus souvent en Jordanie, par la CIA. Mais à plusieurs reprises, des armes ainsi livrées à des actions, pourtant minutieusement contrôlées au préalable, ont fini entre les mains d'islamistes, voire de djihadistes. Ce qui a renforcé le scepticisme de tous ceux qui mettaient en garde contre ce genre de soutien logistique. L'intérêt pour ce programme s'est encore érodé l'année dernière avec la perte par les insurgés des quartiers d'Alep qu'ils contrôlaient, au profit du régime syrien et de son allié russe.

« Piège tendu par la Russie »

« C'est une victoire pour Assad, Poutine et l'Iran », estime Joshua Landis, spécialiste de la Syrie au centre des études moyen-orientales de l'université d'Oklahoma. Selon lui, « il était devenu évident que les rebelles ne parviendraient pas à renverser Assad et une bonne partie des armes livrées sont allées aux extrémistes », ajoute Joshua Landis, qui rappelle que Barack Obama était sur le point de prendre une décision semblable, avant de quitter la Maison-Blanche.

Pour d'autres, au contraire, cette décision est une grave erreur. « On tombe dans le piège tendu par la Russie, s'insurge Charles Lister, chercheur proche de l'in-

surrection au Middle East Institute. Ainsi nous allons rendre de plus en plus vulnérable la résistance modérée, nous les abandonnons. » Après l'accord de cessez-le-feu dans le Sud conclu le 7 juillet à l'issue

de la rencontre Poutine-Trump en marge du G20 à Hambourg, Russes et Américains cherchent à mettre en place quatre « zones de désescalade » de la violence à travers le territoire syrien : au sud, au centre près de Homs, dans la banlieue de Damas, et enfin au nord-ouest, dans la province d'Idleb, où depuis quelques jours des luttes fratricides opposent les djihadistes du Front Fatah al-Sham aux salafistes d'Ahrar el-Sham.

Après six ans d'une guerre civile qui a détruit le pays, Donald Trump semble faire une croix sur ce qu'il reste de l'insurrection dite modérée, marginalisée par Daech et la branche locale d'al-Qaïda. Même s'il a ordonné pour la première fois, en mai, des frappes en Syrie après des bombardements chimiques imputés à Damas, sa dernière décision montre que les États-Unis n'ont pas envie de s'impliquer plus avant dans le conflit. Certes, dans le nord-est du pays, Washington appuie les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), une alliance arabo-kurde qui veut expulser l'État islamique de son bastion de Raqqa. À eux aussi, des armes ont été livrées, et des conseillers militaires américains sont actuellement au côté des FDS à Raqqa contre Daech. Mais, là encore, rien ne dit que cet appui logistique se prolongera, une fois la « capitale » syrienne de Daech tombée. ■

L'agence turque révèle les positions de forces de l'Otan

La publication par l'agence de presse officielle turque Anatolie d'informations précisant la localisation de forces spéciales américaines et françaises met ces soldats en danger, a déploré mercredi le Pentagone. L'agence Anatolie a dévoilé mardi la présence d'une dizaine d'avant-postes américains et précisé dans certains cas le nombre de soldats américains et français qui les occupent. « La publication d'informations

militaires sensibles expose les forces de la coalition à des risques inutiles et pourrait mettre en péril des opérations visant à vaincre l'EIL », a déclaré un porte-parole du Pentagone, désignant le groupe État Islamique sous son ancien acronyme, l'État Islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIL). « Si nous ne sommes pas en mesure d'identifier les sources qui sont à l'origine de cette dépêche, nous serions très préoccupés

si elles provenaient d'un allié de l'Otan qui mettrait nos forces en danger en toute connaissance de cause », a-t-il ajouté. Comme les États-Unis et la France, la Turquie est membre de l'Otan. Mais Ankara ne cache pas son agacement devant le soutien apporté par les États-Unis aux milices kurdes YPG assimilées par la Turquie comme l'extension syrienne du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan qu'elle combat sur son propre sol. (AFP)

La vengeance d'Erdogan contre les Occidentaux

Le président turc est ulcéré par le soutien des Américains aux Kurdes de Syrie dans la bataille de Rakka

ISTANBUL - correspondante

La publication par Anadolu, l'agence de presse officielle turque, d'une carte détaillée, montrant les positions des forces américaines et françaises déployées dans le nord de la Syrie, pourrait bien constituer un point de non-retour dans la relation entre Ankara et ses alliés traditionnels.

Cette fuite expose les forces de la coalition à des « risques inutiles », selon Adrian Rankine-Galloway, le porte-parole du Pentagone. Elle est aussi un puissant indicateur de la volonté de revanche des autorités turques : pour Sinan Ülgen, le directeur du groupe de réflexion Edam, à Istanbul, « la fuite orchestrée par l'agence Anadolu doit être lue comme une réaction turque à la décision américaine de s'allier aux YPG [milices kurdes syriennes] pour le siège de Rakka », la « capitale » autoproclamée de l'organisation Etat islamique (EI) en Syrie.

Le président Erdogan a beau être un habitué des déclarations à l'emporte-pièce à l'égard de ses alliés occidentaux, c'est bien la première fois qu'un membre de l'Alliance fait courir des risques à ses partenaires en révélant les détails de leurs opérations sur un théâtre de guerre. Les autorités turques ont démenti toute implication. « Il n'est pas question ici d'une information donnée par notre gouvernement, ou d'une quelcon-

que forme d'aiguillage », a assuré Ibrahim Kalin, le porte-parole du président, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, lors d'un point de presse à Ankara, jeudi 20 juillet. « L'agence Anadolu a écrit cette information grâce à ses propres envoyés sur place, a-t-il précisé. Nous avons eu connaissance de cet article seulement après sa publication. »

Le moment choisi par l'agence n'était pas fortuit. La première dépêche sur le sujet est apparue lundi 17 juillet, juste après la réunion du Conseil national de sécurité turc, consacrée à la situation en Syrie ; la deuxième, rédigée en anglais, a été publiée le lendemain.

« Totale rupture »

Conduite par le président Erdogan, cette réunion était consacrée à la condamnation de l'aide américaine aux YPG. Le Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD) kurde syrien, dont les YPG sont le bras armé, est la « même organisation » que le PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), qualifié de « terroriste » et reparti en guerre depuis 2015 contre l'Etat turc, dans le sud-est du pays, a rappelé le Conseil. Ankara perçoit l'aide aux YPG comme une menace pour sa sécurité, craignant que l'expérience et le matériel reçus ne fassent que renforcer les rebelles du PKK dans leurs opérations en Turquie.

« Depuis le mois de mai, les Américains livrent des armes lourdes

aux YPG-PKK, et ils ne s'en cachent même pas », lisait-on, jeudi, dans le quotidien *Aydinlik*, scandalisé, qui citait également des chiffres : « 122 cargaisons d'armes en mai, 250 en juin, 379 début juillet. »

La Turquie pourrait-elle aller jusqu'à compromettre l'offensive sur Rakka ? « Elle pourrait lancer une campagne militaire visant l'enclave kurde syrienne d'Afrin, proche de la frontière turco-syrienne, ce qui ne manquerait pas d'être vu à Washington comme endommageant la capacité militaire des YPG en pleine offensive sur Rakka », estime Sinan Ülgen. Ces derniers temps, les YPG, qui contrôlent l'enclave d'Afrin, n'arrêtaient pas de subir les tirs d'artillerie de l'armée turque, ainsi que les attaques de ses alliés rebelles syriens.

L'annonce, jeudi, de l'arrêt de l'aide de la CIA aux rebelles opposés à Bachar Al-Assad et alliés de la Turquie est une autre source de mécontentement pour Ankara. Avec Washington, « le moment est venu d'une totale rupture », estimait, le même jour, Kiyimet Sezer, chroniqueur au quotidien progouvernemental *Yeni Safak*.

« Collusion »

Les points de vue exprimés par *Yeni Safak* reflètent peu ou prou ce qui se dit au palais présidentiel. Or, le chroniqueur préconise : « La Turquie est un pays important. Sans son aval et sans celui de l'Iran, personne ne peut faire un pas dans

« Sans l'aval de la Turquie et de l'Iran, personne ne peut faire un pas dans la région »

KIYMET SEZER

chroniqueur au quotidien pro-Erdogan « Yeni Safak »

la région. Les Etats-Unis ont besoin de la Turquie. Il y a aussi la base d'Incirlik, qui est la plus grande base américaine au Moyen-Orient. Reconstruire ce genre de base ailleurs ne sera pas facile, c'est pourquoi les Américains doivent bien réfléchir. »

La diplomatie turque est motivée par un mélange de chantage, de ressentiment et d'esprit de revanche, surtout depuis le coup d'Etat raté du 15 juillet 2016, dont M. Erdogan rend les Occidentaux responsables. Désormais, il ne se passe pas un jour sans qu'un officiel turc fustige les Américains ou les Européens, accusés de « collusion avec les terroristes » du PKK ou du mouvement du prédicateur Fethullah Gülen, tenu pour responsable du putsch qui a failli faire vaciller le pouvoir de M. Erdogan.

La vindicte anti-occidentale a marqué les commémorations du coup d'Etat raté, samedi 15 juillet. « Le coup nous a montré la nécessité d'être fort en tant qu'Etat et en tant que nation. Nous avons tellement d'ennemis qui cherchent à nous piéger et nous refusent le droit de vivre, même pour une journée ! Si nous devons les nommer un par un, il y aurait une crise internationale », avait déclaré Recep Tayyip Erdogan dans son adresse au Parlement. ■

MARIE JÉGO

francetvinfo 26 juillet 2017

Syrie : l'EI chassé de la moitié de Raqa (OSDH)

Récemment chassés de Mossoul, en Irak, les jihadistes s'en prennent aux civils pris au piège à Raqa et menacent ceux qui tentent de fuir la ville.

franceinfo avec AFP France Télévisions

Beyrouth, 26 juil 2017 (AFP) — LA BATAILLE DE RAQQA progresse rapidement. L'alliance de combattants kurdes et arabes, soutenue par la coalition internationale, a réussi à chasser les jihadistes du groupe Etat islamique de la moitié de leur bastion syrien, a annoncé l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH), mercredi 26 juillet 2017.

« Les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS) contrôlent maintenant 50% de la ville de Raqa malgré la farouche résistance de l'EI », a affirmé le directeur de l'ONG, Rami Abdel Rahmane. Récemment chassés de Mossoul, en Irak, les jihadistes s'en prennent désormais aux civils pris au piège à Raqa et menacent ceux qui tentent de fuir la ville.



Un véhicule blindé des Forces démocratiques syriennes, le 24 juillet 2017, à Raqa. (MORUKC UMNABER / AFP)

DES FRAPPES AÉRIENNES DE LA COALITION EN SOUTIEN

Depuis huit mois, les FDS mènent une offensive en vue de s'emparer de ce bastion syrien de l'EI. Elles sont entrées dans la ville le 6 juin et ont pris le contrôle de plusieurs quartiers, se rapprochant peu à peu du centre-ville. L'opération des FDS est appuyée par des frappes aériennes de la coalition internationale menée par les Etats-Unis. Des membres des forces spéciales américaines leur apportent aussi leur aide dans la ville. ■

Diplomatie. L'Iran déjà gagnant

La politique agressive de l'Arabie Saoudite vis-à-vis de ses voisins a divisé le camp arabe sunnite, affaibli sa notoriété régionale et renforcé l'Iran dans tout le Moyen-Orient.

Le différend entre l'Arabie Saoudite et le Qatar pourrait consolider l'axe Turquie-Iran.

propager à d'autres pays arabes comme la Jordanie ou le Liban sera grand, et plus le monde arabe menace d'être divisé, et plus l'Iran sera gagnant dans cette lutte pour le pouvoir régional.

À l'heure actuelle, ce qui couve en Syrie dans l'opposition sunnite [dont plusieurs représentants sont à la solde de différents pays arabes] au président Bachar El-Assad montre bien que les divisions entre les pays arabes constituent pour l'Arabie Saoudite une menace plus grave que l'Iran. Contrairement à la coalition chiite [Iran, Irak, régime syrien et Hezbollah libanais], très soudée et disciplinée, menée par l'Iran, l'opposition sunnite est particulièrement divisée. Des centaines de groupes syriens d'opposition, comprenant des salafistes non djihadistes et djihadistes, et même certaines des factions les plus fortes de l'Armée syrienne libre [milice non islamiste d'opposition], façonnent des portions du territoire syrien qui échappent encore au contrôle de Damas. Étant donné le soutien que l'Iran, la Russie et ses milices chiïtes apportent au gouvernement syrien, il est peu probable que ces groupes d'opposition sunnites représentent une grave menace pour Assad (ou l'Iran) à brève échéance. Résultat : ces groupes d'opposition pourraient en définitive jeter leur dévolu sur le monde arabe, et dès lors constituer une menace politique et en termes de sécurité pour l'Arabie Saoudite.

Guerre au Yémen. L'Arabie Saoudite a peut-être aggravé le risque d'un choc en retour de la Syrie en exploitant dangereusement les divisions au sein de la communauté sunnite arabe. De même [avec son opposition au Qatar], elle divise potentiellement le monde arabe entre d'une part Bahreïn, l'Égypte, l'Arabie Saoudite et les Émirats arabes

unis, et d'autre part le Koweït, Oman et le Qatar, ce qui affaiblit à terme la position saoudienne.

Tout en menant une politique étrangère indépendante, le Qatar a coopéré avec l'Arabie Saoudite sur de nombreuses initiatives, notamment la guerre au Yémen. Or Doha pourrait désormais devenir plus dépendant de la Turquie et de l'Iran, qui assurent son approvisionnement [en raison du blocus saoudien], et cette dépendance serait un sérieux revers pour Riyad. Si ce conflit se poursuit, le différend entre l'Arabie Saoudite et le Qatar pourrait consolider l'axe Turquie-Iran, déjà en cours de formation du fait de la menace commune incarnée par le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Que la Turquie soit une passerelle entre l'Arabie Saoudite et l'Iran, voilà qui ne pouvait qu'être salubre pour cette région troublée. Mais un rapprochement accru de Téhéran et d'Ankara n'est constructif ni pour la région ni pour l'Arabie Saoudite. Il y a aussi un risque que le Pakistan, qui était parvenu à rester neutre dans la querelle entre Riyad et Doha, soit obligé de choisir son camp et que son choix déplaise aux Saoudiens.

Certes, les Saoudiens n'ont pas tort de s'inquiéter de l'aventurisme iranien. Téhéran profite en effet du chaos qui règne en Irak, en Syrie et au Yémen. Qassem Soleimani, commandant de la force iranienne Al-Qods, donne à son pays une profondeur stratégique en exploitant les vides du pouvoir créés par les guerres civiles arabes. L'hostilité saoudienne devrait renforcer la position de ceux qui, comme Soleimani, prônent une attitude de confrontation envers l'Arabie Saoudite, étouffant d'autres voix iraniennes, notamment au ministère des Affaires étrangères et à la présidence, moins enclines à considérer la politique de la région comme un jeu à somme nulle.

Si l'Arabie Saoudite ne dévie pas de sa direction actuelle, elle devrait affaiblir sa position régionale et renforcer celle de l'Iran. C'est seulement en s'efforçant d'apaiser les tensions idéologiques, politiques et militaires parmi ses propres alliés arabes que le royaume wahhabite pourra occuper une position solide face à l'Iran.

— Ross Harrison
Publié le 6 juillet



— Foreign Policy (extraits)
Washington

Le président Donald Trump voit probablement en Mohammed ben Salman son alter ego au Moyen-Orient. En effet, le jeune prince héritier d'Arabie Saoudite, nommé à ce titre en juin, fait preuve d'une hostilité sans faille vis-à-vis de l'Iran et du Qatar, ce qui est dans le droit-fil de la nouvelle politique agressive de Trump envers l'Iran.

Les Saoudiens font un mauvais calcul s'ils se félicitent du soutien que Trump apporte à leurs politiques régionales. Force est de constater que l'Arabie Saoudite sape sa propre position en donnant dans la surenchère avec l'Iran et en s'employant à faire plier le Qatar. Comment ? Certes Riyad, par l'intermédiaire de son allié américain, bénéficie de nombreux avantages militaires par rapport à l'Iran, de même une bonne partie de l'influence politique du royaume

wahhabite dans la région lui vient de sa forte position au sein du monde arabe. Mais l'ordre arabe est devenu particulièrement fragile en raison du caractère nuisible des guerres civiles en Irak, en Libye, en Syrie et au Yémen. Même si Téhéran représente une menace pour les intérêts saoudiens, c'est la faiblesse de l'Arabie Saoudite et de ses alliés arabes, due aux effets des printemps arabes et des guerres civiles, qui pose le plus gros problème à Riyad et ouvre ainsi un boulevard à Téhéran.

Or faire monter l'hostilité envers l'Iran risque de prolonger ces guerres et, partant, d'affaiblir encore davantage le monde arabe, ce qui aura pour effet de compromettre la position de l'Arabie Saoudite vis-à-vis de l'Iran. Plus les affrontements par procuration entre l'Arabie Saoudite et l'Iran dans les guerres civiles de la région vont se prolonger, plus le risque de voir ces guerres se

AVOIDING WAR WITH IRAN

Once again, hawks are talking about regime change in Tehran and demanding action that could lead to disaster in the Middle East.

The last thing the United States needs is another war in the Middle East. Yet a drumbeat of provocative words, outright threats and actions — from President Trump and some of his top aides as well as Sunni Arab leaders and American activists — is raising tensions that could lead to armed conflict with Iran.

Tehran invites some of this hostility with moves like detaining Xiyue Wang, a Princeton scholar, and supporting the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad. And for many American politicians, Iran — estranged from the United States since 1979 — deserves only punishment and isolation. But Iran and the United States also share some interests, like fighting the Islamic State. So why not take advantage of all the diplomatic tools, including opening a dialogue, used before to manage difficult and even hostile governments?

It is useful to recall the lead-up to the 2003 Iraq War. In Washington the talk turned almost immediately to Iraq and the chance to overthrow Saddam Hussein, even though he had nothing to do with Sept. 11 and had no nuclear weapons, as President George W. Bush alleged. Mr. Bush decided to fight a preemptive war without a solid justification or strategy.

Such a stumble into war could happen again. Here are some reasons to be concerned:

■ President Trump campaigned on a pledge to tear up the 2015 seven-nation nuclear pact under which Iran rolled back its nuclear program in exchange for a lifting of sanctions. Although he twice certified to Congress, most recently on Monday, that Iran remains in compliance with the deal, he did so grudgingly and with the subsequent imposition of new sanctions related to Iran's ballistic missile tests. Instead of taking advantage of this diplomatic breakthrough, Mr. Trump seems intent on reversing it by provoking Iran to renege or reneging himself.

■ Top American officials have turned up their rhetoric and have hinted at support for regime change, despite the dismal record in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. Mr. Tillerson accused Iran of seeking regional hegemony at the expense of American allies like Saudi Arabia. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis recently called Iran “the most destabilizing influence in the Middle East.”

■ American leaders have periodically toyed with regime change. But some experts say this time is more serious, because Mr. Trump accepts the simplistic view of Sunni-led Saudi Arabia that Shiite-led Iran

is to blame for all that's wrong in the region, taking sides in the feud between two branches of Islam.

The Saudis, who were already facing off against Iran-backed rebels in Yemen, have taken an even harsher stance since their leadership change. This month, they created a crisis by mounting a regional boycott against Qatar, which has relations with Iran.

■ Anti-Iran voices outside government are trying to push Mr. Trump and Congress toward confrontation with Iran. The head of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a hawkish group that tried to block the Iran nuclear deal, urged Mr. Trump in a recent Wall Street Journal opinion article to “systemically dismantle Iranian power country by country in the Middle East” and to strengthen Iran's pro-democracy forces. Prominent Trump supporters like John Bolton, a former ambassador to the United Nations; Newt Gingrich, former House speaker; and Rudolph Giuliani, former New York mayor, are pressing Mr. Trump to abandon the deal and are speaking out on behalf of the Mujahedeen Khalq, exiled Iranian dissidents who back regime change.

Most Americans are aware of Iran's crimes against this country, including the 52 Americans taken hostage in 1979; the 241 Marines killed in the 1983 bombing of their barracks in Lebanon; and the 1996 bombing of the Air Force quarters in Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia. Perhaps less known are events that still anger Iranians — like the 1953 coup aided by the C.I.A. that ousted Iran's democratically elected leader, Mohammed Mossadegh, and America's intelligence support for Iraq in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

Iran's grievances do not make its recent behavior any less concerning. Tehran continues to fund Hezbollah and other extremists; detain Americans; and work to expand its reach, including in Iraq. Iran and the United States appear to be entering a particularly risky time. As the Islamic State gets pushed out of Iraq and Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia, along with their proxy forces, will be competing for control. Any attempt at regime change in Iran could destabilize the volatile Middle East in even more unpredictable ways.

Iran's government continues to be torn between anti-American hard-liners and moderates like President Hassan Rouhani who are willing to engage with America. Mr. Trump would make a grave mistake if instead of trying to work with those moderate forces he led the nation closer to war. ●

Kurdish official says US role essential in post-IS Syria

Sarah El Deeb,

July 25, 2017 Associated Press

KOBANI, Syria (AP) — The Kurdish-led effort to secure Raqqa once it is liberated from the Islamic State group will require long-term U.S. political and financial support for the battered city's governance and reconstruction, a senior Syrian Kurdish official said Tuesday.

In an interview with The Associated Press in the Kurdish-administered town of Kobani, Ilham Ahmed said the U.S. role in the fight against IS must not end with the liberation of the Raqqa but should continue as a guarantor of stability until a political future for the war-torn country is charted.

Ahmed is the co-president of the Syrian Democratic Council, the political wing of the U.S.-backed Kurdish-led force currently fighting to liberate the Islamic State group's self-proclaimed capital of Raqqa from the militants. She is also a senior politician in the increasingly powerful Kurdish group that declared areas of self-administration in northern Syria last year, sparking the ire of Turkey, another U.S. ally.

Ankara considers the People's Protection Units, or YPG, the Kurdish militia that forms the backbone of the Syrian Democratic Forces, as linked to the outlawed Kurdish insurgency in Turkey and fears their expansion along its borders.

"If the Americans want to protect the security of these areas and protect their (own) country from terrorism, they must continue until a democratic system is built in Syria," Ahmed said. She said the U.S. should recognize that the crisis in Syria is not only about defeating IS but also about building a democratic system that protects against radical groups taking over again.

Kurdish forces have gained confidence in light of open U.S. support to their forces, particularly as the battle for Raqqa took off. Despite

Turkish protests, the U.S. sent new weapons and vehicles to the YPG to enable it in the fight against IS.

The U.S. has up to 1,000 troops in Syria mostly involved in training and advising the local forces against IS. The U.S. administration has made clear it does not intend to be engaged in post-liberation governance or rebuilding. U.S. officials say once Raqqa is liberated, the SDF will hand over local governance to the Raqqa Civilian Council, a local group of primarily Arab locals who will govern and administer essential services.

"Raqqa has been subjected to destruction of its infrastructure," said Ahmed, highlighting the beating the city has taken in the effort to retake it from IS.

"There are no more institutions. (Raqqa) is destroyed. This council has to be supported to reconstruct and to secure the daily needs of its residents so they can remain in their homes without having to migrate."

When asked when US forces currently offering advice and training to the Kurdish-led troops in the battle will leave, Ahmed said she did not know, but added that they must continue to have a role until the contours of a future Syria take shape.

She said the Kurdish-led efforts to establish civil administrations in areas liberated from IS will offer "a model" for other areas in Syria, by allowing local groups to elect civil councils to administer themselves.

Raqqa, a predominantly Sunni Arab city, was the first city in Syria to be controlled by the IS militants, who declared it their de-facto capital in 2014. The Kurdish-led effort to form a new administration could inflame tribal and Arab sensitivities.

Ahmed said the current Raqqa council will be re-formulated once the city is liberated to include tribal notables not represented yet because they are still under IS control.



Ilham Ahmed, the co-president of the Syrian Democratic Council, the political wing of the Kurdish-led forces backed by the US in Raqqa, speaks during an interview with the Associated Press, in Kobani town, north Syria, Tuesday, July 25, 2017. Ahmed says the governing and securing of the Arab-majority city after the expulsion of IS militants will be a model for other areas in Syria and the future of governing the war-torn country. She says the Kurdish-led effort needs US political and financial support. (AP Photo/Hussein Malla)

Ahmed said her group's effort needs U.S. political and financial support for the reconstruction of Raqqa but also for the legitimacy of her group's effort in creating the new political structure.

Ahmed's group has been campaigning for a federal system in Syria, arguing it will ensure representation and autonomy for ethnic and religious groups. She said Syria's Kurds, long ostracized before the war, can no longer be ignored in any future serious negotiations over the country's future.

The campaign for Raqqa city began on June 6, with swift advances from the east and west. But two weeks later, the campaign stalled amid stiff resistance from IS militants. Ahmed said it is normal for the campaign to slow down "as the battle nears its end." ♦

REUTERS

Suicide bomb attack kills four in Kurdish-held Syrian northeast

July 19, 2017 BEIRUT (Reuters)

A SUICIDE CAR BOMB attack claimed by Islamic State killed four people at a checkpoint in a Kurdish-controlled area of northeastern Syria on Tuesday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

A Kurdish official confirmed an attack targeting a checkpoint operated by the Asayish Kurdish internal security force, but had no further details. The Asayish could not immediately be reached for comment.

Observatory Director Rami Abdulrahman said the attack took place near the

village of Tel Tamr, some 30 km (19 miles) from the Syrian-Turkish border. Syrian state TV also reported the deaths of four people in a car bomb attack in the area, but said it had taken place in the nearby town of Ras al-Ayn.

Islamic State later claimed the attack via its Amaq news agency, but said it had taken place the day before. It said two suicide bombers had carried it out.

The area is dominated by the Kurdish YPG militia, the main partner for the U.S.-led coalition in its campaign against Islamic State in Syria. The YPG is spearheading an assault to capture the city of Raqqa from Islamic State. ●



Turkey: 6 Kurdish militants killed in drone attack

July 20, 2017 ANKARA, Turkey (AP)

OFFICIALS say that Turkish security forces have used an armed drone to locate and kill six Kurdish militants who allegedly were responsible for kidnapping and killing a school teacher in southeast Turkey.

The governor's office for Tunceli province said Thursday the six were killed in an operation near the town of Nazimiye. Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said through Twitter: "our heroes have avenged our martyred teacher."

Teacher Necmettin Yilmaz was abducted and shot by suspected rebels of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, on June 16 while traveling from Tunceli to his hometown in northern Turkey. His body was discovered last week.

The PKK has waged a three-decade long insurgency in southeast Turkey. Violence flared again in 2015 after the collapse of a two-year peace process. ●

The Washington Times

July 24, 2017

The Kurdistan Region: Strategic U.S. Ally in a Tough Neighborhood is a Special Report prepared by The Washington Times Advocacy Department.

A strategic U.S. partner in Kurdistan

Kurds can be instrumental in helping mend fences across the region



By Dlawer Ala'Aldeen - Monday, July 24, 2017
<http://www.washingtontimes.com>

ANALYSIS/OPINION:

This year is the 25th anniversary of the election of the first Parliament and government of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Thanks to the safe haven that the United States and its European allies created in 1991 to protect the displaced Kurdish population from Baghdad's brutal attacks, the Kurds turned a crisis into an opportunity to build a forward-looking nation with democratic aspirations. The journey was a tough one, with many successes and failures, but U.S.-KRI relations grew stronger and developed into a mutually rewarding partnership.

The United States continued to protect the Iraqi Kurds from Saddam Hussein's regime in 1990s and ensured that they would have their fair share in the post-Saddam Iraq. The U.S. once again came to the rescue of the KRI in the face of the Islamic State (ISIS) onslaught in 2014 and continued its support to date. The Kurds have reciprocated with unreserved loyalty and solid support for U.S. policies in Iraq. Peshmerga forces became indispensable partners in the U.S.-led global coalition and instrumental in the ultimate military defeat of ISIS in Iraq.

Some consider this KRI-U.S. partnership a tactical and temporary one, not only because ISIS is being defeated, but also because the United States will ultimately stop relying on the Kurds due to their inability, like the rest of Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries, to promote the rule of law and good governance, and to control corruption, which runs unacceptably deep. However, the U.S. and the KRI can prove otherwise.

For a start, the United States continues to need strategic partners in the ever-changing Middle East, where its vital interests will remain at stake. In a region that is in turmoil and where terrorism is on the rise, the U.S. and Europe face much-reduced space, presence and leverage for driving and shaping events. Regional state and sub-state actors (like the KRI) have grown in influence across borders. A multitude of nonstate actors, legitimized or not, have become increasingly influential in driving events.

The KRI, lying in the heart of the Middle East, is just what the United States needs, where it is most needed. The Kurds have proven themselves skillful and dynamic survivors in a conflict zone that is overwhelmed by powerful rivals. They have strong, collaborative, love-hate relations with the Shia political elite of Iraq. They share a long border with the previously ISIS-occupied Sunni Arab territories, where the challenge of stabilization is greatest. They accommodated the majority of the displaced Sunni Arabs and other ethnic and religious minorities during the ISIS war.

Internationally, despite the complexity and sensitive nature of the Middle



East's politics, the political parties of the KRI have actively engaged and maintained relatively good neighborly relationships with both Iran and Turkey. Being a Muslim-majority country and having been part of Iraq, the KRI leaders have had unhindered access to most of the Arab countries.

On the issue of KRI's internal governance challenges, the United States can help a great deal via constructive engagement. The KRI, as a small, emerging nation, remains vulnerable in the world's toughest neighborhood. This gives the U.S. plenty of leverage that it has never used effectively. In fact, the U.S. has the same kind of leverage with all of its allies in the Middle East but was never willing to use it in fear of negative reactions. On the contrary, the previous U.S. administration chose to almost totally disengage with the region, particularly Iraq, and virtually abandoned its obligation to spread the values of liberty and the rule of law in the Middle East. The consequences were disastrous, forcing the U.S. to return and face a war against the most radical of terrorists.

It might be rare for politicians to request or accept conditional help, but the KRI leaders do when such requests come from trusted friends. They are, and have been, responsive to terms and conditions that are linked to good governance, designed to help their country become a better, stronger and more prosperous place. KRG leaders viewed these conditions as incentives and opportunities to reform. Many used them to convince their fellow leaders to endorse change. In short, tough love works with the Kurds and the United States should help the KRI become the partner it deserves, and the partner KRI deserves to be. ■

• Dlawer Ala'Aldeen is the founding president of the Middle East Research Institute and is a former human rights activist, professor of medicine and KRG minister of higher education and scientific research between 2009 and 2012.



INTERVIEW **Sergey Lavrov to Rudaw: Referendum is expression of Kurdish people's aspirations**



By Rudaw 24/7/2017
<http://www.rudaw.net>

In this exclusive interview with Rudaw, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov says that Russia and the Kurds of Iraq have strong historical ties that go back decades and that Moscow makes sure its ties with Iraqi Kurdistan do not have a negative impact on anyone else, particularly the Iraqi central government. Mr. Lavrov says that two major Russian firms, Gazprom and Rosneft, currently operate in the Kurdistan Region and they are the basis for strong economic and trade relations with Erbil, improved upon during the visit of KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani to Saint Petersburg in May.

The Russian Foreign Minister says that Kurds—like all other peoples in the world—have the right to express their aspirations and that the referendum they have decided to hold in September is the means to do so. Meanwhile, he suggests, that that process and its outcome must be implemented peacefully, adding that Moscow is willing to help both Baghdad and Erbil in a way that would respect both sides.

On the issue of Syria Mr. Lavrov says that the Astana talks that led to the creation of the first safe zone in southern Syria proved that cooperation between countries such as Turkey, Iran, Russia, US and Jordan could lead to actual peace in parts of the country which could be expanded to all other regions in Syria. He maintains that Russia believes that the best solution lies with the Syrian people themselves, especially between the government and opposition groups that are not listed as terrorist organizations.

The draft constitution for Syria proposed by Russia, he argues, guarantees all political, ethnic and religious groups, including the Kurds, their rights in the new Syria and it could be a basis for ending the war in Syria and creating a secular democratic country as stipulated by the UN Security Council.

Mr. Lavrov says that Russia and the United States must work together to solve the Syrian crisis and find a way to solve other conflicts around the world. For that, he says, the Americans must end their suspicions and phobia of Russia and instead engage in direct talks as proposed by President Donald Trump during his election campaign.

We support our relations with all the political movements of Iraqi Kurdistan and we do that in a way that will not negatively impact our relations with the Iraqi government. And we also promote human and educational ties.

Rudaw: Mr. Sergey Lavrov, I'd like to start this interview with a question about the visit of the prime minister of the Kurdistan Region Nechirvan Barzani to Saint Petersburg. In light of his meeting with you and with Mr. Vladimir Putin, how would you define the relations between Russia and Iraqi Kurdistan at this time?

Sergey Lavrov: We have with Kurds, with Kurds and Arabs, a historical and good relationship. That relationship has a long history. Just as how in the 40s and 50s of the last century the great son of the Kurds Mustafa Barzani was in our country, today too we have good relations with the Kurds of Iraq. We have had a consulate in Erbil since 2007 and in Moscow there is the representation

of the autonomous Kurdish region. We support our relations with all the political movements of Iraqi Kurdistan and we do that in a way that will not negatively impact our relations with the Iraqi government. And we also promote human and educational ties. Annually we give education scholarships to Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan has its own share in those scholarships. And for three and a half years our media groups, RT, is working in Erbil to convey information from there to our people and the people of other countries. In general, our relations are good and beneficial to both sides.

Rudaw: So we can say that the visit of Mr. Nechirvan Barzani was a step for a new relationship on a new level between Russia and Iraqi Kurdistan.

Sergey Lavrov: You know, I shouldn't say our relations are new and on a new level. I repeat that our relations are historic and we have been expanding them for years, especially with the head of the government and other officials of the autonomous Kurdish region. That is the continuation of the relationship, which as I said, is in the best interest of the Russian Federation and Iraqi Kurdistan. In that regard the role of the Kurds of the Soviet must also be taken into account who played an important role in building the good relations that we have with the Kurds within the frame of our relations with Iraq.

Rudaw: I have heard Mr. Putin mention the Kurds positively in several of his speeches. To what degree is Russia ready to help the Kurds solve their cause in the Middle East and help them achieve their rights?

Sergey Lavrov: We undoubtedly have very good relations with the Kurds and I stress that this is historical and we know each other well. It is important for us that the Kurds like all other people of the world achieve their ambitions and legal rights and political goals. If we look at the history of Iraq, especially when in 2003 an illegal war started, when under American leadership foreign forces destroyed that country, what is there now and what is happening will not be easily mended. That certainly did have an impact on Erbil-Baghdad

relations. We know that there are efforts now to solve many constitutional issues, especially those about land, budget distribution, resources and oil revenues. Erbil and Baghdad have always tried in various stages to solve those and other questions. They have held talks and reached agreements within political negotiations. I will say it again that the desires and legal goals of the Kurds must be fulfilled like that of all other peoples, and according to the right that they have within the international law and that is tied to the decision which we understand has been made in Erbil to hold a referendum.

Rudaw: What is Russia's view on Iraqi Kurdistan's referendum for independence?

Sergey Lavrov: As I said earlier, we see the referendum as the expression of the ambitions of the Kurdish people and as far as I know the majority of the population of the Kurdish autonomous region support this referendum. We see that after the final decision on that issue everything else will be considered in terms of the consequences of that move such as political, geopolitics, demography and the economy. Given the fact that the Kurdish question has gotten out of the boundaries of the new Iraq it will have an impact on its neighboring countries. We hope that the Kurdish people express their aspirations through a peaceful mechanism and the implementation of the goals of the referendum is also done peacefully in order to take into account those factors in the region. I've mentioned it earlier and it is taking into account the view of Iraq's neighbors.

As far as I am aware the presidency of the autonomous Kurdish region is in contact with the neighboring countries of Iraq in their own capitals. We are ready to help Baghdad and Erbil in a process that would respect both sides. As history has shown about the results of a vote, it never means all the problems and questions would be solved overnight. Once again I would say that that is a very important process and must be taken seriously and slowly within the scope that the Kurdish question is important for the whole region.

Rudaw: If after the referendum →

→ **Iraqi Kurdistan decided to become independent like South Ossetia and Abkhazia and other regions, will Russia still be willing to continue its relations with Iraqi Kurdistan?**

Sergey Lavrov: You know, I think it is better if we did not comment on hypothetical issues. As I said, we look at the situation inside Iraq and in particular the autonomous Kurdish region. We don't want to speculate and rather see what happens in practice. You know that in South Ossetia the problem was different. The regime of Saakashvili had completely invaded South Ossetia and there was reliable information that after Ossetia they would attack Abkhazia. So, here the question was about protecting people's lives and we had no other option.

Rudaw: How would you assess economic ties between Russia and Iraqi Kurdistan especially now that the number and type of deals and contracts between Russian companies and Iraqi Kurdistan have increased?

Sergey Lavrov: Yes, I'll remind you that we have mutual interests and we want economic, trade and investment ties between us to grow. We encourage that field, and by that I mean trade and investment with us will not have negative impact on any other party and will not harm our relations with the central government in Baghdad. One of our giant firms has been working for a long time in the economic sphere of Iraqi Kurdistan and that is Gazprom. I believe it is working in two oil fields with its partners. And in February another one of our giant companies, Rosneft signed a contract with its partners in Erbil and at the World Economic Forum in Saint Petersburg several documents were signed as completion of that agreement. In my opinion we are now in a mutual relationship with Iraqi Kurdistan which I believe to have beneficial results for all partners.

Rudaw: Let's now move to the question of Syria. The continuation of the crisis in Syria prolongs crisis in the Middle East. Russia has a vital role in the process to find a solution for Syria. In your view, what development is expected to happen with regards to Syria in a near future? What can Russia do to end the crisis in Syria and combat terrorism in the region?

Sergey Lavrov: First and foremost we should be talking about the fact that Syrian parties must and can decide for themselves because the solution of that crisis is in their hands and counts on them. It has been discussed and signed on at the Security Council that only the people of Syria

themselves can decide their own future. The international community, foreign players and neighboring countries must do all they can do to eliminate the threat of terrorism and create the best atmosphere in which Syrians themselves can reach an agreement on the negotiating table as to how they want to live. There is something that we cannot escape from and it is that we cannot avoid negotiations. In the documents of the Security Council it says that Syria must be a democratic secular country. That is very important as many of the opposition groups who have built themselves on a democratic basis reject that which is important for reassuring that the future Syrian state is a secular state and a kind of state in which all groups among them Islamic and all political groups are reassured of their rights and have their security guaranteed and that all will be able to participate in state institutions.

That is the general framework on which all have agreed and within that limited framework a solution could be found to the Syrian crisis. We are working with a number of countries so create that environment and that began with fighting ISIS, al-Nusra Front and their likes which are all known as terrorist organizations in the Security Council. And we also work to protect the ceasefire between the Syrian government and some of the opposition groups, those that have no terrorist characteristics. That is important to make sure any group that qualifies for the ceasefire also becomes a participant in the process.

Another one of our works is delivering humanitarian aid to people, people affected by the war and for that we have, with Iran and Turkey, created safe zones in the Astana talks. And in implementing the safe zones we brought the United States and Jordan into the agreement and on July 7, Russia, US and Jordan agreed to create the first safe zone south of the Syrian Arab Republic. In recent days and now the details of that safe zone are being discussed and analyzed, for example the organization that monitors the ceasefire, reassurance about the delivery of aid and about the borders of the safe zone in a way that people can enter and leave the safe zone.

That is a window for a solution which we agreed on in Astana, and it is being implemented now. In my opinion, apart from the safe zone of southern Syria, three other safe zones will be created. That window of solution will organize many things such as protecting the lives of people through the end of the armed conflict and delivery of aid to places that are most in need. Many admit that the Astana talks have been great help to the Geneva talks which had stagnat-

ed for nine months and were reactivated January this year.

We are ready and we work very actively with Staffan de Mistura and all other participants for a solution. We work with the representatives of the Syrian government and all governments that want to help find a solution. We work with European countries, the United States, all Muslim and regional countries.

Certainly, the best effort is for direct talks between Syrian government representatives and the opposition to take place. I mean those who have taken up arms against each other, opposition groups and the Syrian government, they are the most important players in this process and we agree for representatives of the political opposition parties to join the Geneva talks and among those who have migrated and become displaced can defend their country with arms on the condition that it is all within the boundaries of the Syrian state.

Rudaw: About the constitution project that Russia had proposed for Syria, what is the latest outcome of it?

Sergey Lavrov: The process is just starting, we published it at the time as a sample of the draft constitution, which was our point of view to what we were seeing not as what was being said outside the country or what was being imposed. It meant that if you want, go ahead and we have put together this, and at that time last year few people could talk about the constitution and they each had their own interests in mind if they came to power. Each one of them had their own purpose in finding a solution for the Syrian crisis.

That project is an example of a constitution in which everyone will have a role in society. Why is that important? Because some were saying that they will topple Bashar al-Assad then solve all the problems. Those people were not thinking about the country, and were only thinking about reaching power. Some were saying they were not ready to hold any political negotiations unless there was a ceasefire all across Syria. They said that but they were not correct because it was shown that that was not possible. They could at least have asked for a stop to the war on terror.

We could also say that for a long time our partners in America could not differentiate terrorists from the good opposition groups. Now we have been able to do just that in the safe zones and the results could be seen. And those who said that without complete victory over terrorism no solution could be found anywhere in Syria, did not do a good thing and

did not help with the Geneva talks.

We fully believe that that constitution project reassures everyone in Syria, the groups that I talked about, all religious, non-religious and political groups will feel reassured in the new law, in the important laws drafted for the Syrian government, and when those groups feel they have guarantees it will be, I believe, easier for them to reach an agreement on power-sharing. It will then be easier to make suggestions for government posts and will be easier to maintain the balance and preventing chaos.

We stand by the outcome of the latest round of Geneva talks and what de Mistura suggested in terms of four directions. First one is how would Syria be able to keep control in the current stage in a way that benefit could also be derived from the opposition. The second is how to prepare the constitution, third is how to lay the ground work for elections and the fourth is to make sure the war against terrorism continues.

I think that development in the Geneva talks is acceptable by all, except the extremist rebel groups. But they could be put outside the political process because they have proven that they are unable to reach agreements.

Rudaw: In this process, how does Russia see the rights and obligations of Syria's Kurds?

Sergey Lavrov: As part of and like all the other groups I mentioned we see the Syrian Kurds and that they must be part of the agreements and they must believe that their rights are protected within Syria.

Rudaw: There is dryness in communication between Russian and American foreign policies. Is there any hope that Russia and the US could find a way to cooperate on solving their disagreements through which they could also solve conflicts elsewhere in the world?

Sergey Lavrov: We must and it's important that we and America find a way to cooperate. If we really and seriously want to have a role on the world stage, I mean Russia and the US, to find a way to help each other to find solutions for all the troubles in different parts of the world, for the issue of preventing banned weapons, finding a solution to problems related to our strategies to create stability. We ourselves must have a role in solving the conflicts. What is happening now between us and America is certainly not good. We are left with many issues from the Obama administration. Those decisions that were made then are now before us like →

→ a fire. The Obama administration was in a shock on its way out due to the election results. They wanted to use the time they had left in the White House to do bad things and above all their goal was to deteriorate relations between America and Russia.

We understand how difficult it is when someone in Washington wants to think logically to get out of the disease they have contracted from their Russophobia. So many months have passed since the new administration and no one examined this issue, to show at least one proof that Russia had meddled in America's domestic affairs. Ordinary people is something else, but I never believed that American politicians would get the complex they now have against Russia. When I was working in New York I talked to many of them and I had understood them differently, so what I see now from the Americans is astonishing to me. I believe most of those who act this way towards Russia are acting unnaturally. American politicians themselves know what they do is not good and that somehow they must end this kind of thinking and behavior towards Russia.

Unfortunately they put themselves inside a fort which is difficult to get out

of later on. Anyway, I must say that that air comes from some people whom no one can help. They themselves must try to get out of it otherwise they will be exhausted from that ailment. Once again I say it that they have not been able to prove that Russia meddled in American internal affairs and there isn't a single reason for it. What is there in American newspapers and on TV stations is insulting. It is like our expression, excuse me if it is inappropriate, but we call that "finger sucking". The plan that President Donald Trump and his colleagues announced before the elections for making cooperation with the Russian Federation and our answer to them was the same way for getting cooperation with America. The first meeting between the presidents of both countries took place at the G20 summit in Hamburg on July 7 which came after three telephone calls between both presidents and in that meeting there was an agreement on creating safe zones in southern Syria.

That way we proved concretely that we could work together to find solutions and in a way that would be good for all regions and to solve problems around the world. We also agreed with America on finding a way to solve the crisis of Ukraine as had

been previously planned and the plan still has energy left in it and we work with it and we are working on forming a joint group to solve any problem that might come up in the field of cyber security. Some congressmen complained to Trump that such an agreement would be superficial and they said that Trump was sitting with the devil at the same table. I think that is a childish view if they are so hesitant about working with Russia and if they think what they do is illegal. I say that all good people must speak directly with the opposite side on any topic that is in doubt.

For many years we have been working at the UN for all countries to benefit from the cyber world and for that we have prepared many documents on cyber security. But they are suspicious and claim that we do not want to talk openly and directly on that issue. That's really difficult. But I hope the American society does not tie the hands of the current administration from talking to Russia.

Rudaw: What role is Russia playing in finding a solution for the crisis between Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and others?

Sergey Lavrov: We have spoken on that issue and we are in contact with

all the parties of that crisis. President Putin has spoken by phone with the King of Saudi Arabia and the presidents of Turkey and Egypt and with the Prince of United Arab Emirates and the Emir of Qatar. I have spoken with my counterparts of the Qatar foreign ministry and I have spoken by telephone with my other counterparts of the member states of the Arab-Russia cooperation council. We have spoken on a presidential level and openly. We want that problem solved on the basis of common good and the fact that solving it would be in the interest of all involved in the process. We support the efforts of the Emir of Kuwait. If within that effort or in any way Russia can offer something good we are ready to do so. We see that other countries too have efforts to solve this crisis. Rex Tillerson was in the region and he held a number of important meetings and I understand that France and the United Kingdom have also expressed readiness to help. We will help with anything that would prevent the situation from getting worse so that that important region of the world does not go towards a long-term turmoil. ■

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By David Tafuri - July 26, 2017
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Kurdistan referendum stands on 'solid legal footing'

Two hundred and forty-one years ago this month our Founding Fathers declared America's independence. When they debated the issue, they could not agree on whether the colonies were prepared to be self-sufficient, their internal differences could be resolved, or if they were even ready to withstand the challenges of foreign powers. But they knew they had a compelling legal and moral basis for separating from Great Britain. It was rooted in the principle that governments must derive "their just powers from the consent of the governed," as Thomas Jefferson wrote.

On June 7, Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced plans to hold a referendum on independence across the already semi-autonomous region. The referendum will be a milestone in the more than 100 year struggle of Kurds living in Iraq under governments they did not choose and which at times delivered such violence, oppression and indignity upon the Kurdish population that they make the American colonists' list of grievances against Great Britain seem trivial.

The referendum is merely a first step on the path to independence and, should it pass, will not automatically signify creation of a new state. It is, however, a momentous exercise of the universal right of self-determination — a right that flowered in the audacious actions of our Founding Fathers in 1776. The Kurds are on solid legal footing as they take this step.

The analysis of whether a territory such as the Kurdistan Region may seek independence must begin, but not end, with the law of the governing country. Iraq's 2005 Constitution explicitly recognizes the Kurdistan Region as a semi-autonomous region, but is silent on a process for secession. We must therefore look to international law. Self-determination — defined as the process by which a country determines its own statehood and forms its own allegiances and government — is enshrined as a fundamental right under international law by the United Nations Charter.

Article 1 of the Montevideo Convention sets out the most widely accepted formulation of the criteria for statehood under international law. It provides that states should possess the following characteristics: 1) a permanent population, 2) a defined territory, 3) a government, and 4) capacity to enter into relations with other states.

Because the Kurdistan Region has been functionally separate from the rest of Iraq since 1991 and legally recognized as a semi-autonomous region with its own government since at least the ratification of Iraq's 2005 Constitution, it had a head start on meeting each of these criteria. In many ways, it has already satisfied them.

It is worth reviewing each. Unlike some independence movements, the Kurds in Iraq have a permanent population that is demonstrably different from the rest of Iraq. They are a separate ethnicity with their own language and culture. This has made them a target for oppression, but the area they occupy in southwest Asia has been their home for more than 1,000 years. The territory is defined with reference to the three traditional Iraqi provinces that make up the region, Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah. There are also "disputed territories," on the boundary which include large parts of a fourth province, Kirkuk, whose status needs to be negotiated in the future. But as a base, there is a defined area where Kurds live and which is administered by the KRG. ■

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Des soldats des Forces démocratiques syriennes, à majorité kurdes, dans les faubourgs de Raqqa, en juillet 2017 - © MORUKC UMNABER / DPA / PICTURE-ALLIANCE / MAXPPP

Où en est-on dans la guerre en Syrie ? Questions à Fabrice Balanche

Louis Fraysse / 26 juillet 2017
<https://www.reforme.net>

Alors que le groupe État islamique (ÉI) marque un net recul territorial en Irak et en Syrie, le géographe Fabrice Balanche revient sur les récents développements de la guerre dans ces deux pays.

Spécialiste de la Syrie, FABRICE BALANCHE est chercheur invité au Washington Institute for Near East Policy, un cercle de réflexion américain sur le Proche-Orient. Depuis sa thèse, qui portait sur la minorité alaouite en Syrie, dont est issu Bachar el-Assad, il suit de près l'évolution de la situation d'un pays en guerre depuis maintenant plus de six ans.

En Irak, l'armée a repris Mossoul au groupe État islamique (ÉI) le 9 juillet dernier. En Syrie, les Forces démocratiques syriennes, à dominante kurde et soutenues par la coalition internationale, sont aux portes de Raqqa, la capitale syrienne de l'ÉI. Est-ce le début de la fin pour le groupe djihadiste ?

L'organisation territoriale de l'ÉI en Syrie-Irak

sera normalement détruite dans un an. Il est encore maître de près de 80 000 km² et d'environ 3 millions d'habitants. Soit le tiers des territoires et de la population qui étaient sous son contrôle en juin 2014, lorsqu'il s'est emparé du nord de l'Irak. La perte de Mossoul et de Raqqa réduit considérablement ses ressources et ses capacités offensives. Cependant, il n'est pas mort, comme le montre sa résistance acharnée à Raqqa et ses contre-offensives dans le désert syrien. Il sera de plus en plus difficile de l'extirper de ses derniers fiefs (Mayadin, Abou Kamal, Tel Afar, etc.) car les combattants les plus motivés s'y concentrent.

Ensuite, il faudra quadriller ces territoires pour neutraliser son action clandestine, démanteler les cellules dormantes et extirper son idéologie de la population. La reconquête de son territoire ne signifie donc pas son élimination. Il va de toute façon continuer à diffuser son message depuis le Sinaï égyptien, le Sud libyen, l'Afghanistan et les Philippines où il a fait des émules.

Quels sont maintenant les défis à relever pour le gouvernement irakien ?

Il doit s'efforcer de reconstruire un État digne de ce nom et intégrer la population arabe sunnite qui s'est jetée dans les bras de l'ÉI

en 2014. Mais, j'ai peur que cela reste un vœu pieux : l'Irak est dans un processus de construction nationale chiite, qui laisse peu de place aux Arabes sunnites. Quant aux Kurdes, ils s'éloignent de plus en plus de Bagdad avec leur projet d'indépendance.

La stratégie de contre-insurrection menée par le régime syrien depuis 2012 est-elle une réussite ? À quel prix ?

Cette stratégie consiste à séparer les civils des rebelles, pour ensuite éliminer ces derniers. Pour cela, le régime bombarde aveuglément les zones rebelles pour que les civils fuient. Les infrastructures sont les principales cibles afin qu'aucune administration parallèle ne puisse émerger. Il prouve ainsi que les rebelles sont incapables d'apporter la sécurité à la population pour qu'elle revienne dans son giron et que la lassitude lui fasse abandonner ses revendications politiques. Cela fonctionne mais la moitié de la population est déplacée et le coût des destructions se chiffre en plusieurs années de PIB.

La réussite est cependant partielle, car sans l'aide massive de la Russie et de l'Iran, la stratégie de contre-insurrection aurait échoué. La souveraineté de l'État syrien est aujourd'hui limitée et un « protoÉtat » ⇨

⇒ kurde s'impose sur le cinquième du territoire syrien.

Que devient Alep depuis sa reprise par l'armée syrienne en décembre 2016 ?

Alep demeure menacée par les rebelles qui sont toujours présents dans la périphérie ouest de la ville et l'attaquent régulièrement. Cependant, Alep est bien défendue et il y a peu de risques pour qu'elle soit investie de nouveau par la rébellion.

Au quotidien, le principal problème est le manque d'électricité qui ralentit la reconstruction, en particulier la réouverture des entreprises. La mise en service d'une nouvelle ligne à haute tension permettra d'améliorer la situation dans les prochains mois.

Vous avez travaillé sur la question du retour en Syrie des réfugiés et des déplacés internes syriens. Quelles sont les conclusions de votre étude ?

Le HCR, l'agence de l'ONU pour les réfugiés, révèle dans un sondage récent que seuls 6 % des réfugiés syriens souhaitent revenir dans leur pays dans un futur proche. Tant que l'insécurité régnera en Syrie, les réfugiés préféreront demeurer dans les pays d'accueil.

Les conditions de vie au Liban, en Jordanie ou en Turquie ne sont pas forcément bonnes mais acceptables en comparaison avec la Syrie. Par ailleurs, l'espoir d'obtenir un visa pour l'Europe, l'Australie ou l'Amérique du Nord contribue à les maintenir dans les pays voisins.

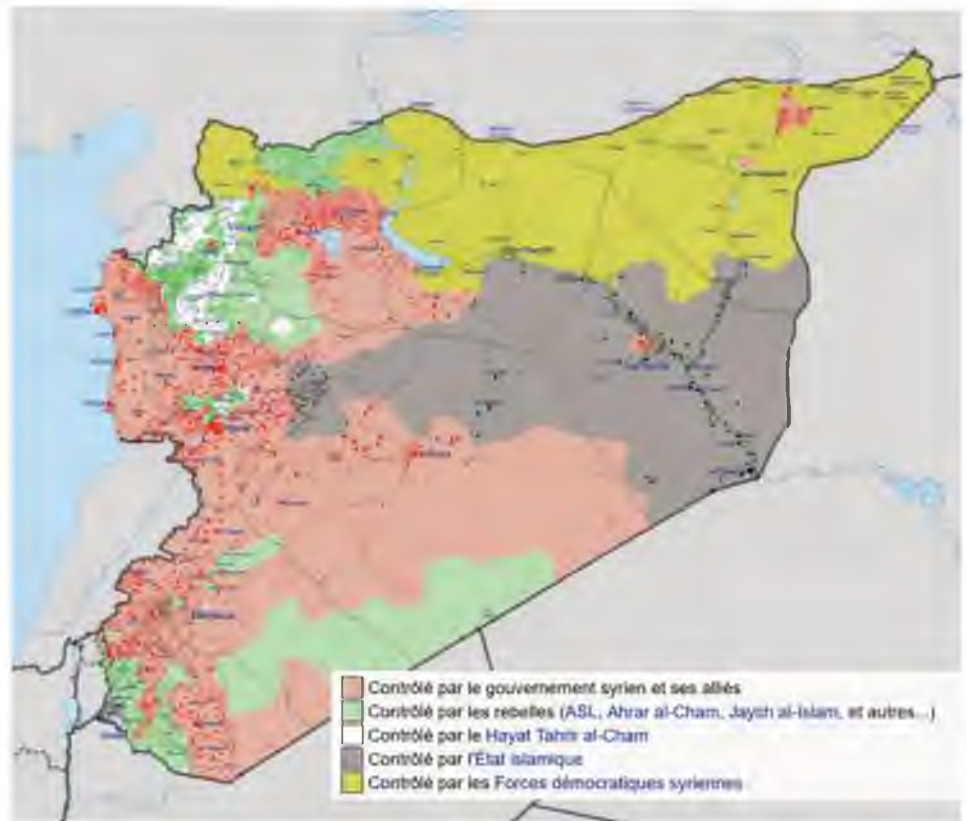
La situation des déplacés internes est différente. Ils sont souvent proches de leur domicile et n'attendent que la fin des combats pour revenir.

Néanmoins, ceux qui étaient minoritaires risquent de ne jamais retourner dans des environnements qu'ils jugent hostiles. C'est le cas des chrétiens dans les zones rurales sunnites, mais aussi des alaouites à Alep ou dans certaines banlieues de Damas.

Dans quel but le régime syrien a-t-il de nouveau utilisé l'arme chimique, le 4 avril dernier, contre la ville de Khan Cheikhoun ? La réaction américaine, une frappe de 59 missiles de croisière contre une base aérienne syrienne, le dissuadera-t-elle d'y recourir à l'avenir ?

Même si l'affaire de Khan Cheikhoun n'est pas totalement élucidée, il semble tout de même que cette attaque provienne bien du régime syrien. Toute la question est de savoir si elle a été décidée directement par Bachar el-Assad ou par un officier subalterne qui n'en a pas référé au commandement.

À l'époque, l'armée syrienne faisait face à une forte offensive de la rébellion menée par la branche syrienne d'al-Qaïda (Hayat Tahrir al-Cham) qui cherchait à s'emparer de



Hama. L'armée syrienne a alors utilisé des gaz de plus en plus puissants pour les repousser et détruire la base arrière de l'offensive, Khan Cheikhoun, causant une centaine de morts civils.

Vladimir Poutine fut furieux de cet incident, même s'il s'est empressé de défendre son allié syrien. Cette attaque chimique a remis en cause les efforts diplomatiques de la Russie pour trouver un accord avec les États-Unis sur la Syrie. Or Donald Trump venait de déclarer que la chute de Bachar el-Assad n'était plus l'objectif de Washington en Syrie.

Une des hypothèses est que les durs du régime à Damas s'inquiètent de la façon dont la Russie négocie avec les États-Unis. Ils auraient donc voulu donner une leçon aux Russes pour leur rappeler que la Syrie est un pays souverain. Selon eux, la solution n'est pas dans la négociation avec les États-Unis, mais dans l'élimination pure et simple des rebelles.

La récente mise au ban du Qatar par l'Arabie saoudite, les Émirats arabes unis et l'Égypte peut-elle changer la donne dans le soutien aux insurgés syriens ?

La rébellion syrienne voit ses principaux bailleurs de fonds s'affronter dans cette lutte. Le Qatar et la Turquie s'opposent à l'Arabie saoudite et aux Émirats arabes unis. Ils peuvent se faire la guerre en Syrie par groupes rebelles interposés.

Par ailleurs, les membres de la Coalition nationale syrienne [la CNS regroupe les opposants en exil à Bachar el-Assad, ndr] se retrouvent écartelés entre proqatariens et prosaoudiens.

Tout cela achève de discréditer cette opposition, déjà qualifiée par les Syriens eux-mêmes de « Coalition nationale Sheraton », une référence à la chaîne d'hôtels où elle se réunit régulièrement. Nombre de Syriens considèrent la CNS comme une bande de privilégiés très éloignés des préoccupations réelles du peuple.

Comment les Syriens tolèrent-ils la présence depuis plusieurs années sur leur sol de troupes russes et de milices chiites soutenues par l'Iran ?

Le régime syrien n'a guère le choix. Sans cet apport de soldats, il serait tombé ou réduit à une faible partie du pays. Les troupes russes ne sont pas très nombreuses, 5 000 hommes environ. Elles sont surtout employées dans la logistique pour l'aviation et l'artillerie. Les soldats russes sortent peu de leurs bases et ne sont pas exposés aux combats.

Dans la région de Lattaquié, où les alaouites et les chrétiens apprécient leur présence protectrice, ils sont très bien accueillis.

Les milices chiites comptent environ 50 000 hommes. Elles remplacent sur le front une armée syrienne épuisée par six années de conflit. Le Hezbollah est le fer de lance de cette armée chiite. Il a contribué à former les Irakiens, les Pakistanais et les Afghans.

Certains sont motivés par la défense du chiisme. D'autres, comme les Hazaras afghans, réfugiés en Iran, par la solde et l'obtention de la nationalité iranienne. Leur présence en Syrie est plus problématique vis-à-vis de la population que celle des Russes, notamment dans les zones ⇒

⇒ arabes sunnites.

Quels sont les principaux sujets d'inquiétude sur le Moyen-Orient de vos collègues américains ?

La montée de l'influence iranienne au Moyen-Orient est la principale préoccupation. Les gouvernements de Bagdad et de Damas sont sous son emprise. À travers le Hezbollah, l'Iran est devenu le maître du Liban. Dans le Sud de la Syrie, les gardiens de la révolution et le Hezbollah sont à proximité du Golan occupé par Israël. Au Yémen, les Houthis sont devenus un allié de l'Iran, ils menacent l'Arabie saoudite et le détroit de Bab-el-Mandeb grâce des missiles livrés par Téhéran. Enfin, l'Iran est soupçonné de ne pas respecter le traité sur le nucléaire, qui interdit à l'Iran de poursuivre la construction de sa bombe atomique en échange de la levée des sanctions économiques.

La lutte contre l'EI est devenue secondaire depuis que nous savons que ses jours sont comptés. On commence donc à Washington à s'intéresser fortement à al-Qaïda, qui espère profiter du vide laissé par l'EI. Mais si la lutte contre le terrorisme islamique demeure une préoccupation première, elle passe cependant chez certains derrière la lutte contre l'Iran. Ils considèrent qu'il ne faut pas que l'Iran profite de la défaite des réseaux terroristes islamistes, comme c'est le cas en Syrie en Irak.

Le retour de la Russie au Moyen-Orient, avec son intervention en Syrie en 2015, a pris de court les États-Unis. Visiblement, personne à Washington ne pensait que Poutine interviendrait directement. C'était assez surprenant, car la géopolitique a horreur du vide et, par conséquent, il était clair que si les États-Unis ne s'investissaient pas davantage en Syrie, un autre acteur allait occuper le terrain. Ce retour de la Russie est très mal vécu à Washington. Les think tanks ont largement critiqué Obama pour cela. Quant à Trump, il est suspecté d'avoir des liens cachés avec la Russie qui l'empêchent d'être plus agressif à son égard.

Les collègues américains sont préoccupés par le comportement imprévisible de Donald Trump. Ils s'inquiètent de la marginalisation du State Department (le ministère des Affaires étrangères), qui est leur principal relais d'influence au sein de l'administration américaine, mais dont le projet de budget a été amputé de 30 %. Globalement la politique de Donald Trump au Moyen-Orient est jugée brouillonne et en retrait vis-à-vis de la Russie. Le président américain a très mauvaise presse dans les milieux intellectuels de Washington. Il faut néanmoins souligner que la ville a voté à 95 % pour Hillary Clinton.

Que vous inspirent les premiers pas de la diplomatie Macron au Moyen-Orient ?

À l'égard de la Syrie, le nouveau président français développe un discours plus réaliste : « Cela fait près de sept ans que nous avons fermé notre ambassade à Damas, que nous

LE CASSE-TÊTE DES KURDES DE SYRIE

Fabrice Balanche s'est rendu en mars dernier dans le nord-est de la Syrie, aujourd'hui aux mains des Kurdes du Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), qui rêvent de la mise en place d'un État kurde en Syrie, le Rojava. En pointe dans la lutte contre l'EI, les Kurdes sont à la fois soutenus par la Russie et les États-Unis. Un équilibre fragile.

« La Turquie refuse de voir une région kurde autonome dirigée par le PYD, branche syrienne du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), à sa frontière sud. C'est pour cette raison qu'elle a envahi le nord-ouest de la Syrie, en août 2016, pour empêcher les Kurdes de réaliser leur unité territoriale. La lutte contre l'EI n'était pour les Turcs qu'un prétexte. La Turquie s'appropriait à recommencer dans le Nord-Est, mais les États-Unis s'y sont opposés. Dans ce contexte géopolitique, les Kurdes ont besoin d'une double protection contre la Turquie. À l'Ouest, ils se sont alliés au régime syrien contre les rebelles et ont contribué à la reprise d'Alep à l'automne 2016. À l'Est, ils travaillent avec la coalition internationale contre l'EI, ce qui leur permet d'obtenir un soutien militaire important. Mais ils savent que les Occidentaux sont moins déterminés que les Russes. Leur politique d'entre-deux est donc tenable tant que les Occidentaux ont besoin des Kurdes contre l'EI. Mais ensuite ?

Quant à son idéologie, le PYD a officiellement adopté le municipalisme libertaire inspiré par le théoricien socialiste américain Murray Bookchin. Dans la réalité, cela correspond plus au maoïsme de la révolution culturelle qu'au libéralisme. La population est regroupée au sein de communes d'un millier d'habitants avec, à leur tête, un comité populaire. Ce dernier est chargé de régler les problèmes locaux et surtout de contrôler les habitants. Car toute demande de permis de construire, de subvention alimentaire ou d'emploi dans l'administration ne peut se faire sans l'aval de la commune.

LA KURDIFICATION

Sur le plan économique, l'objectif final est de supprimer l'argent pour revenir au troc. Le PYD veut mettre en place des coopératives de production dans tous les secteurs pour obtenir l'autosuffisance dans la région qu'il contrôle. Mais jusqu'à présent, l'économie locale repose toujours sur des principes capitalistes, l'exploitation du pétrole et les aides de la diaspora kurde. Le niveau de vie est très bas, ce qui génère une forte émigration alors même que la région est sûre.

Sur le plan économique, l'objectif final est de supprimer l'argent pour revenir au troc. Le PYD veut mettre en place des coopératives de production dans tous les secteurs pour obtenir l'autosuffisance dans la région qu'il contrôle. Mais jusqu'à présent, l'économie locale repose toujours sur des principes capitalistes, l'exploitation du pétrole et les aides de la diaspora kurde. Le niveau de vie est très bas, ce qui génère une forte émigration alors même que la région est sûre.

Un autre aspect de la politique du PYD est la kurdification. Le kurde, l'arabe et le syriaque sont les trois langues officielles de la région. En fait, le kurde est imposé partout et notamment dans l'enseignement. Les écoles privées chrétiennes, nombreuses à Qameshli et Hassakeh, parviennent encore à enseigner en arabe, mais elles sont soumises à de fortes pressions des autorités kurdes. La kurdification est un excellent moyen pour provoquer l'exode des populations arabes et renforcer le poids des Kurdes dans la région, qui sont à peine majoritaires. On ne peut donc pas dire que les populations arabes acceptent de gaieté de cœur le PYD. Elles n'ont toutefois pas le choix. La branche armée du PYD, les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), est toute-puissante. » ♦

n'avons plus de contact avec Bachar el-Assad et que nous avons posé cette condition sans aucune efficacité », a-t-il déclaré le 13 juillet dernier. Il faut désormais que les actes suivent ces paroles, à moins que la France préfère rester spectatrice.

Au niveau régional, nous assistons à un léger rapprochement avec l'Iran, sans doute du fait de la signature d'un contrat de 4,5 milliards de dollars pour la vente d'Airbus.

Cela mécontente les Saoudiens, mais ces derniers n'ont guère tenu leurs engagements financiers à notre égard ces dernières années. Sur 50 milliards de promesses de contrats, seuls 20 % ont été réalisés.

C'est cela aussi le réalisme à l'égard du Moyen-Orient. ♦

Propos recueillis par Louis Fraysse

Syrie : un groupe de combattants LGBT se forme dans les rangs kurdes pour combattre Daech

Par Bruno Rieth le 26/07/2017
<https://www.marianne.net>

C'est une photographie qui résume à elle seule toute la singularité du combat mené par les Kurdes de Syrie. Un combat militaire, stricto sensu, pour reprendre aux forces de Daech des pans entiers de territoire. Un combat politique avec l'objectif de constituer le Rojava, une région autonome au nord de la Syrie réunissant les trois cantons kurdes d'Afrine, de Kobané et de la Djézireh. Un combat de société également, inspiré par le socialisme revendiqué du Parti de l'Union démocratique (PYD).

Ce lundi 24 juillet, sur Twitter, les Forces révolutionnaires internationales de guérilla (IRPG) ont publié une photographie d'individus en armes derrière une bannière où l'on peut lire "These Faggots Kill Fascists", que l'on peut traduire par "ces pédés (sic) tuent les fascistes". L'image étant accompagnée d'un texte proclamant que "le drapeau noir et rose et arc-en-ciel survole Raqqa. Les Queers fracassent le califat". Une photo retweetée depuis près de 4 000 fois. Peu de temps après, les IRPG, toujours via leur compte Twitter, ont annoncé la création d'un sous-groupe nommé "l'Armée de libération et d'insurrection Queer" (TQILA) composé de combattants LGBT. "Les membres de TQILA ont vu avec horreur les forces fascistes et extrémistes dans le monde entier attaquer et tuer à de nombreuses reprises des membres de la communauté LGBT (...). Nous

ne pouvions pas voir sans réagir ces images d'hommes homosexuels jetés des toits ou lapidés par Daech", proclame le texte fondateur. Des récits d'exécutions contre des personnes suspectées d'être homosexuelles qui, depuis 2014 et la proclamation de la création de l'Etat islamique par Abou Bakr al-Baghdadi, étaient devenus récurrents. Ces combattants LGBT déclarent ainsi vouloir lutter contre toutes les formes d'"autorité", de "patriarcat", "d'oppression des normes hétérosexuelles", d'"homophobie" et de "transphobie", étant renforcés dans leur combat, écrivent-ils, par les "avancées révolutionnaires obtenues par la lutte des femmes kurdes".

Les YPG avaient déjà comme particularité d'intégrer dans ses rangs, ainsi que dans la chaîne de commandement, des femmes kurdes. Les soldats de l'EI devront dorénavant composer face des soldats LGBT. Les brigades rouges et noir de Syrie

Les IRPG, qui se revendiquent ouvertement des thèses anarchistes, font partie de la "Brigade internationale de libération" - formée sur le modèle des Brigades internationales qui s'étaient battues avec les Républicains espagnols lors de la guerre civile en Espagne - qui regroupent de combattants étrangers se battant sous les drapeaux des Unités de protection du peuple (YPG), branche militaire du parti kurde de Syrie.



On y retrouve de nombreux sous-groupes qui ont en commun de se revendiquer de la gauche révolutionnaire dans toute sa diversité (anarchiste, marxiste-léniniste, maoïste...). Leurs actions, menées depuis la Syrie, peuvent parfois surprendre. L'un de ses groupes, la brigade Henri Krasucki (du nom de l'ancien secrétaire général de la CGT, résistant dans les FTP-MOI et déporté) s'était par exemple invité dans le procès des 15 salariés d'Air France, qui comparaissaient devant la justice dans l'affaire des "chemises arrachées", en publiant une photographie prise dans la ville de Manbij avec, écrit sur un mur "Liberté pour les 16 (sic) d'Air France ! Victoire pour la CGT !". La centrale syndicale, gêné par le soutien de ces hommes en armes, avait publié le 28 septembre un communiqué dans lequel elle précisait que "ces individus agissent en leur nom propre et sans aucun mandat d'une organisation de la CGT." ♦



July 29, 2017

Kurdish self-administration ratifies administrative division of northern Syria

Hisham Arafat | July 29-2017
<http://www.kurdistan24.net>

RMELAN, Syrian Kurdistan (Kurdistan 24) – Kurdish groups and their allies in northern Syria gathered on Thursday in the country's northwestern town of Rmelan and voted to divide the region into three federal administrative provinces.

The Council of Northern Syria Federal System, established last year, ratified the administrative division of the area after delineating new borders and giving new names to the three provinces.

In an online statement, the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), of which the Kurdish YPG forces form a key component, said the Federal region of northern Syria would include the provinces of Al-Jazira, Al-Furat, and Afrin.

Hasaka and Qamishlo districts are in the country's northeastern Al-Jazira province.

Al-Furat, the Arabic word for the Euphrates, is where Kobani and Gire Spi (Tal Abyad) are located, in the country's north.



Members of Council of Northern Syria Federal System vote on dividing the region into three federal administrative provinces, in Rmelan, Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan), Syria, July 27, 2017. (Photo: HAWAR/SDF)

Afrin province includes Afrin and Shahba in the country's northwest.

Additionally, the city of Raqqa, according to a senior Syrian Kurdish official, is expected to join the decentralized system of government being set up by Syrian Kurdish groups and their allies once it is freed from →

► Islamic State (IS).

"We expect (this) because our project is for all Syria ... and Raqqa can be part of it," Saleh Muslim, the co-chair of the Syrian Kurdish PYD party, told Reuters in an earlier interview.

Before voting on the federal system last year, the PYD party and the YPG forces established a self-administrated system of governance, which spanned over the three cantons of Al-Jazira, Kobani, and Afrin.

The federal system project has undergone some changes over the past year, starting with its name, the "Democratic Federal System for Rojava-Northern Syria" chosen in March 2016 and then switched to the name

"Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria" in December.

Removing the word Rojava, which stands for Western Kurdistan in Kurdish and refers to Syria's Kurdish-held areas, sparked a wave of anger among various Kurdish groups in the diaspora.

But the Kurdish-led administration in the region may have removed it to gain more international support, and perhaps in anticipation of joining the mainly Arab provinces of Raqqa and Deir al-Zor in northern Syria.

This move can be evidenced by the US military support for the YPG and their Arab allies in the SDF as they launched the offensive to retake Raqqa from IS roughly two months ago. ●

The Washington Times

July 26, 2017

'The Kurdish moment has come'



By Stephen Mansfield -
July 26, 2017
<http://www.washingtontimes.com>

It has been nearly 100 years since the world promised the Kurdish people a nation of their own. That promise came as World War I drew to an end. At a Paris peace conference, the victors in that great war signed the Treaty of Sevres, which guaranteed self-determination for the Kurds and named them specifically as overdue for nationhood.

Tragically, it was a promise that could not withstand the complexities of the Arab world and European dreams inflamed by oil. Instead of nationhood, the Kurds were bundled into a newly conceived entity called Iraq.

They would suffer much in the next 100 years as a result. Their own government in Baghdad would often treat them as enemies, the Western powers would alternatively ignore and betray them, and for decades Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime would seek to wipe them from the face of the earth.

Now, though, at long last, the Kurdish moment has come. On Sept. 25, the Kurdish Regional

Government in Northern Iraq will conduct a referendum on independence. If it passes, as it surely will, the Kurdish people will have made their intentions known to a watching world. We will be free. We will have a nation of our own. We will have a place among the nations of the earth.

When this moment comes, the United States and her allies ought to hasten to support Kurdish independence in every way possible and with every resource available.

This is certainly because a promise was made to the Kurdish people and its fulfillment is long overdue. Yet there is more.

The Kurds are the largest people group in the world — 35 million strong — who do not have a homeland of their own. Denying them a place among the nations any longer would make a mockery of Western declarations about human rights, ethnic self-determination and international justice.

The West should also support Kurdish independence because the Kurds represent what we hope for the future of the Middle East. They are fiercely pro-democracy, Western-friendly, and, surprisingly, positive toward Israel.

They are also intent upon a free-market society. In the days between Saddam Hussein's atrocities against them and the rise of ISIS, days in which the Iraqi Kurds could take their affairs into their own hands, they put out the welcome mat to foreign investment in a stunningly innovative 2006 investment law; connected the Erbil Stock Exchange to the NASDAQ; declared war on the vestiges of Baathist regime socialism; and began encouraging entrepreneurship on a vast scale.

The result? In 2013, the Kurds of Iraqi Kurdistan found themselves on the "must visit" lists of National Geographic, Conde Nast and The New York Times. This in a recent war zone. The transformation the Kurds effected was a miracle. Then, of course, ISIS struck. Other priorities rushed to the fore.

The Iraqi Kurds are also what the West should want the Middle East to be in matters of religion. Though the Kurds are 97 percent Muslim, they are moderate and open. There is a Christian department in the Kurdish Regional

Government (KRG). There is also a Yazidi department, that religious minority ISIS has so bloodily targeted in recent years. The senior mullah of Kurdistan has said, "I am a Kurd first, a Muslim second. I will not allow the radicalism of other Middle Eastern nations to torment us in Kurdistan."

This is all the democratic nations of the world might hope for. And the Kurds are leading the way.

A promise has been made, then. A people have prepared themselves. They have proven themselves ready. Their time has now come. We must stand with the Kurdish people as their moment in history dawns.

There will, of course, be birth pangs. Nearby nations will oppose Kurdish independence and blood will likely be shed. The Kurds themselves will understandably stumble along the way. No nation comes into the world fully formed. Yet come into the world as a free and independent nation they must.

Our destined role is to be vigilant midwives to this historic birth and to hope that one day we may say of Kurdistan, in the words of one of her poets, that

From this day on

She was a flute,

And the hand of the wind

Endowed her wounds with melodies,

She has been singing ever since for the world.

• Stephen Mansfield is a faith and culture commentator and best-selling author of over 20 books, including "The Miracle of the Kurds: A Remarkable Story of Hope Reborn in Northern Iraq" (Worthy Publishing, 2014). He is also founder of The Mansfield Group (StephenMansfield.TV), a media training firm based in Washington, D.C.

Syrie : en s'emparant de la ville d'Idlib, al-Qaïda menace la Turquie et l'Europe

Les djihadistes ont expulsé leurs rivaux de cette ville du Nord-Ouest syrien, proche de la frontière turque.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT  @Malbrunot

MOYEN-ORIENT Après des mois de combats fratricides, la branche syrienne d'al-Qaïda a pris le contrôle de la ville d'Idlib, dans le nord-ouest du pays, ainsi que de nombreux villages de la province éponyme, le long de la Turquie. Le 23 juillet, Tahrir el-Cham, une coalition de groupes armés dominée par l'ex-branche locale d'al-Qaïda, a expulsé d'Idlib ses rivaux salafistes d'Ahrar el-Cham, appuyés par la Turquie et le Qatar.

Les deux groupes avaient combattu ensemble pour chasser en 2015 les troupes gouvernementales d'Idlib et de sa province. Une lourde défaite pour Damas, surpris alors par la défection soudaine de nombreux policiers passés chez les rebelles.

Peuplée de 2 millions de personnes, dont 900 000 déplacés, la province est stratégique par sa proximité avec la Turquie, par où les insurgés se sont longtemps approvisionnés en armes et en combattants. Elle est également proche de Lattaquié, le fief des Assad. C'est à partir de cette province qu'en 2015 les rebelles avaient avancé vers les villages alaoûtés au-dessus de Lattaquié, menaçant le bastion des Assad et poussant la Russie à intervenir militairement pour sauver le régime. Mais rapidement, les tensions se sont exacerbées entre les ex-alliés. Elles ont encore grandi en mai lorsque les principaux acteurs du conflit (Russie, Turquie et Iran) ont décidé la mise en place de « zones de désescalade » de la violence, dont une à Idlib. Les djihadistes de Tahrir el-Cham y sont farouchement opposés, la création de telles zones impliquant la neutralisation des djihadistes liés à Daech ou à al-Qaïda. Dès lors, les armes ont parlé. Des affrontements ont éclaté dans plusieurs localités de la province. Les deux camps ont installé des barrages sur les routes. Dans certains secteurs, les habitants sont restés terrés chez eux, par peur des combats, à l'arme lourde parfois. Parallèlement aux violences, des manifestations avaient lieu dans plusieurs villes. Certaines demandaient l'arrêt des violences, d'autres le départ des djihadistes de Tahrir el-Cham, dont l'emprise sur la population n'a cessé de grandir. Mais ces derniers l'ont finalement emporté, réussissant même à expulser leurs rivaux du point de passage de Bab el-Awa avec la Turquie où Ahrar el-Cham pré-



Des soldats de la branche syrienne d'al-Qaïda (sur cette image tirée d'une vidéo de l'agence du groupe terroriste) ont arrêté des membres de l'État islamique dans le village de Sarmin dans le nord-ouest de la province d'Idlib, début juillet.



levait des taxes. Une importante victoire qui permet aux sicaires d'al-Qaïda de mettre la main sur une source de revenus. Depuis, Ankara a suspendu ses livraisons d'aide humanitaire.

Vers des frappes américaines

Ahrar el-Cham n'a toutefois pas dit son dernier mot dans cette guerre pour le contrôle de la dernière province à échapper au régime syrien, qui y a expulsé les rebelles et leurs familles, vaincus ces dernières années à Alep, Homs et dans les environs de Damas. Une tactique qui a permis à Bachar el-Assad de semer la zizanie chez ses ennemis. Une fois à Idlib, « les insurgés n'ont pas nécessairement accepté de suivre les chefs

d'Ahrar el-Cham ou de Tahrir el-Cham, écrit l'opposant Walid al-Bunni sur le site The Syrian Observer. Une bagarre s'est ensuivie pour attirer ces déplacés. »

La reconquête d'Idlib n'est la priorité, ni de Damas, ni de ses alliés russes, ni même des Américains. À court terme, tous privilégient la reprise plus à l'est de Raqqah et des autres villes encore tenues par Daech sur l'Euphrate. « On s'occupera d'Idlib à la fin », nous confiait récemment un proche de Bachar el-Assad à Damas. Pour Sam Heller, spécialiste de la Syrie à la Century Foundation, « le régime entend faire d'Idlib une question internationale, en insistant sur les dangers que tous ces radicaux feraient peser sur la sécurité de la Turquie, mais aussi de l'Europe ».

La semaine dernière, Ankara a dépêché des rebelles syriens, qui lui sont proches, afin de venir en aide aux insurgés d'Ahrar el-Cham. « La reculade du groupe inquiète Ankara et Washington », note Soufan Group, un think-tank basé à New York. Ahrar el-Cham est en effet la plus puissante faction rebelle non djihadiste.

La victoire des extrémistes d'al-Qaïda à Idlib « peut conduire à des frappes américaines », estime Soufan Group, « même si l'espace aérien environnant est beaucoup plus encombré qu'à Raqqah ». Dans le passé, les drones américains ont déjà éliminé dans la région d'Idlib plusieurs vétérans djihadistes.

Les spécialistes en sont en effet

convaincus qu'à terme la branche syrienne d'al-Qaida est plus dangereuse que Daech. Contrairement à celle-ci, Tahrir el-Cham est composé en

majorité de Syriens. Si les djihadistes étrangers de Daech quittent le Levant ou sont éliminés dans la guerre qui leur est menée à l'est du pays, les Syriens de

Tahrir el-Cham, eux, trouveront encore, à l'ouest, un terreau favorable à leur maintien. ■

LE FIGARO

27 juillet 2017

Le bras de fer se durcit entre Berlin et Ankara

Malgré les menaces de sanctions économiques brandies par l'Allemagne, la Turquie ne bouge pas d'un iota.

NATHALIE STEIWER  @natbxltec
BERLIN

DIPLOMATIE Rien ne semble préfigurer un apaisement des relations entre l'Allemagne et la Turquie, au contraire. Mardi encore, le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan a accusé Berlin d'envoyer des espions « s'ébattre dans ses hôtels et diviser le pays », lors d'une réunion de son parti l'AKP, à Ankara. Une pierre de plus dans la série d'échanges musclés entre les deux capitales. « Les tensions étaient dans l'air depuis la répression du coup d'État raté en Turquie en juillet 2016 », constate Kristian Brakel, spécialiste du Proche-Orient au DGAP, l'un des principaux instituts allemands de recherche sur les relations extérieures.

Elles sont montées d'un cran avec le référendum constitutionnel turc. Recep Tayyip Erdogan avait alors qualifié de « méthode nazie » l'interdiction de réunions politiques turques en Allemagne. Il avait interdit dans la foulée la visite de parlementaires allemands sur les bases de l'Otan en Turquie. Peu après, les Allemands découvraient avec consternation que des imams proches de l'AKP étaient chargés d'espionner les Turcs d'Allemagne.

L'arrestation, la semaine dernière, d'un militant allemand des droits de l'homme, Peter Steudtner, a été la goutte qui a fait déborder le vase. Désormais, neuf ressortissants allemands sont emprisonnés en Turquie, dont le journaliste du quotidien *Die Welt* Deniz Yücel, détenu depuis février.

Il n'est pas exclu que la Turquie ait voulu faire de ses prisonniers allemands une « monnaie d'échange » pour négocier l'extradition des opposants turcs réfugiés en Allemagne depuis l'échec du coup d'État, estime Kristian Brakel. Face à une telle manœuvre, « l'Allemagne a sans doute voulu réagir immédiatement ». « Notre

patience a des limites », a tonné Sigmar Gabriel, le ministre allemand des Affaires étrangères, vendredi devant la presse. L'Allemagne ne peut plus accepter la situation, « c'est une question d'amour-propre », a renchéri le président allemand, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, sur la chaîne publique ZDF dimanche.

Sigmar Gabriel a annoncé une série de mesures économiques que le pays serait prêt à prendre devant l'aggravation de la situation, dont la suspension du système de garantie pour les entreprises allemandes en Turquie et le gel des aides.

Le ministre a également prévenu les touristes allemands du « risque » qu'ils prennent en partant en Turquie. L'alerte n'est pas bénigne : les Allemands y représentent 15 % du tourisme. Déjà, 85 % d'entre eux n'envisagent plus d'y passer leurs vacances, indique un sondage YouGov diffusé mercredi.

Lettre ouverte aux 3 millions de Turcs d'Allemagne

Le président turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a pourtant balayé la menace en sommant l'Allemagne de ne « pas se mêler des affaires intérieures ». Son ministre des Affaires étrangères, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, a remis de l'huile sur le feu à l'issue de la rencontre entre l'Union européenne et la Turquie mardi à Bruxelles. « Personne ne peut nier que la Turquie est une démocratie », a-t-il commenté en jetant la pierre aux « faux journalistes » qui soutiennent « des organisations terroristes comme le PKK ».

À Bruxelles, la réplique européenne reste très mesurée. « La Turquie reste un pays candidat à l'adhésion à l'Union européenne » et « le dialogue doit continuer », a expliqué la représentante de l'Union européenne pour les relations extérieures, Federica Mogherini.

Malgré ses protestations rhétoriques, le gouvernement allemand reste

lui aussi modéré. Mais les « avertissements » allemands ne sont pas pris à la légère par Ankara, dont Berlin est le premier partenaire commercial. Quelque 6 000 entreprises allemandes sont présentes en Turquie, indique Volker Treier, président de la Chambre de commerce et d'industrie allemande. Elles ne se retirent pas encore du pays, « mais elles n'augmentent pas non plus leurs investissements », précise-t-il. L'Allemagne peut aussi difficilement claquer la porte d'un pays où travaillent beaucoup des sous-traitants de son industrie automobile.

De son côté, « la Turquie n'a pas beaucoup de marge de manœuvre parce qu'elle n'a pas de marché alternatif dans la région », remarque Kristian Brakel du DGAP. L'Allemagne est son premier exportateur et deuxième importateur.

Pour Berlin, il s'agit aussi d'une affaire intérieure : plus de 3 millions de Turcs vivent sur son sol. Sigmar Gabriel leur a adressé dimanche une « lettre ouverte » pour tenter de calmer le jeu et faire la distinction entre le gouvernement Erdogan et son peuple. Selon le sondage YouGov diffusé mercredi, huit Allemands sur dix souhaitent que le gouvernement garde une « attitude ferme » à l'égard d'Ankara. ■

Freed from ISIS, but in shock

SHARIYA CAMP, IRAQ

Sexually enslaved girls return, but they often are barely conscious

BY RUKMINI CALLIMACHI

The 16-year-old lies on her side on a mattress on the floor, unable to hold up her head. Her uncle props her up to drink water, but she can barely swallow. Her voice is so weak, he places his ear directly over her mouth to hear her.

The girl, Souhayla, walked out of the most destroyed section of Mosul this month, freed after three years of captivity and serial rape when her Islamic State captor was killed in an airstrike. Her uncle described her condition as "shock." He had invited reporters to Souhayla's bedside so they could document what the terror group's system of sexual abuse had done to his niece.

"This is what they have done to our people," said Khalid Taalo, her uncle.

Since the operation to take back Mosul began last year, approximately 180 women, girls and children from the Yazidi ethnic minority who were captured in 2014 by the Islamic State, or ISIS, have been liberated, according to Iraq's Bureau for the Rescue of Abductees.

Women rescued in the first two years after ISIS overran their ancestral homeland came home with infections, broken limbs and suicidal thoughts. But now, after three years of captivity, women like Souhayla and two others seen last week by reporters, are far more damaged, displaying extraordinary signs of psychological injury.

"Very tired," "unconscious" and "in severe shock and psychological upset" were the descriptions used by Dr. Nagham Nawzat Hasan, a Yazidi gynecologist who has treated over 1,000 of the rape victims.

"We thought the first cases were difficult," Dr. Hasan said. "But those after the liberation of Mosul, they are very difficult."

The shock expresses itself in women and girls who sleep for days on end, seemingly unable to wake up, said Hussein Qaidi, the director of the abductee rescue bureau. "Ninety percent of the women coming out are like this," he said, for at least part of the time after their return.

Both Souhayla and her family asked that she be identified as well as photographed, in an effort to shed light on their community's suffering. Her uncle

posted her image on Facebook immediately after her release with a description of what ISIS had done to her.

For over a year, Mr. Taalo said, he had known his niece's location, as well as the name of the Islamic State fighter holding her. He enlisted the help of a smuggler who at great risk photographed Souhayla through the window of the house where she was being held and sent the images to her family.

But it was too perilous to try a rescue.

Souhayla escaped on July 9, two days after an airstrike collapsed a wall in the building where she was being held, burying another Yazidi girl who had been held alongside her and killing the captor who had abused them, her uncle said.

At that point, she was strong enough to clamber through the rubble and make her way to the first Iraqi checkpoint.

When her family drove to pick her up, she ran to embrace them.

"I ran to her and she ran to me and we started crying and then we started laughing as well," said Mr. Taalo, the brother of Souhayla's father, who remains missing after the Islamic State took over their hometown. "We stayed like that holding each other, and we kept crying and laughing, until we fell to the ground."

But within hours, she stopped speaking, he said.

By the time they reached the camp where her mother and extended family had found refuge after the Islamic State overran their village, Souhayla slipped into what appeared to be unconsciousness. The doctors who examined her have prescribed antibiotics for a urinary tract infection.

She also shows signs of malnutrition.

Neither explains her extreme symptoms, said her family and one of the doctors who examined her.

"I'm happy to be home," she whispered with difficulty into her uncle's ear, in response to a reporter's question, "but I'm sick."

The Islamic State had been ruling Mosul for two months in 2014 when the group's leaders set their sights on Sinjar, a 60-mile-long, yellow massif to the north.

Its foothills and mountain villages have long been the bedrock of life for the Yazidi, a tiny minority who account for less than 2 percent of Iraq's population of 38 million.

The centuries-old religion of the Yazidi revolves around worship of a single God, who in turn created seven sacred angels. These beliefs led the Islamic State to label the Yazidi as polytheists, a perilous category in the terrorist group's nomenclature.

Relying on a little-known and mostly



Souhayla, a 16-year-old Yazidi girl who escaped Islamic State captivity after three years, outside her uncle's home in Shariya Camp, Iraq. She had been raped repeatedly.



Souhayla eating dinner in her uncle's home. She escaped her Islamic State captor after an airstrike collapsed a wall in the building where she was being held, killing him.

defunct corpus of Islamic law, the Islamic State argued that the minority's religious standing rendered them eligible for enslavement.

On Aug. 3, 2014, convoys of fighters sped up the escarpment, fanning out across the adjoining valleys. Among the first towns they passed on their way up the mountain was Til Qasab, with its low-slung concrete buildings surrounded by plains of blond grass.

That's where Souhayla, then 13, lived.

A total of 6,470 Yazidis on the mountain were abducted, according to Iraqi officials, including Souhayla. Three years later, 3,410 remain in captivity or unaccounted for, Mr. Qaidi of the abductee rescue bureau said.

For the first two years of her captivity, Souhayla made her way through the Islamic State's system of sexual slavery,

raped by a total of seven men, she and her uncle said.

When the push for Mosul began, she was moved progressively deeper into the area hardest hit by the conflict, as security forces squeezed the terrorist group into a sliver of land near the Tigris River. The area was pummeled by artillery, airstrikes and car bombs, and strafed by helicopter-gunship fire.

As the Islamic State began losing its grip on the city, Souhayla's captor cut her hair short, like a boy's. She understood he was planning to try to slip past Iraqi security forces, disguised as a refugee, and take her with him, her uncle said.

Mr. Taalo now spends his days nursing his niece back to health. To sit up, she grasped one of the metal ribs holding up her family's tent and pulled herself into a sitting position, as her uncle pushed from behind. But soon her strength was sapped, and she flopped back down.

He used a washcloth to dab her forehead, as she lay in his lap. Her mouth fell open and her eyes rolled back.

After her escape, almost two weeks passed before she was able to stand

"I'm happy to be home," she whispered with difficulty into her uncle's ear, in response to a reporter's question, "but I'm sick."

for more than a few minutes, her legs unsteady.

Officials say recent escapees are also showing an unusual degree of indoctrination.

Two Yazidi sisters, ages 20 and 26, arrived at the Hamam Ali 1 refugee camp, where they drew the attention of camp officials because they wore face-covering niqabs and refused to take them off, despite the fact that Yazidi women do not cover their faces.

They described the Islamic State fighters who raped them as their "husbands" and as "martyrs," said Muntajab Ibraheem, a camp official and director of the Iraqi Salvation Humanitarian Organization.

In their arms were the three toddlers they had given birth to in captivity, the children of their rapists. But they refused to nurse them, said the

smuggler sent by their family to fetch them. He and camp officials filled out paperwork so that the children could be given to the state, he said.

A video recorded on the smuggler's phone shows what happened when the sisters saw their family for the first time after their return. Their relatives rushed to embrace the gaunt women. They cried.

Their mother, distraught, stepped behind the tent, trying to steady herself.

A day after the video was taken, reporters went to see the women, and they could no longer stand. They lay on mattresses inside the plastic walls of their tent.

Despite the loud voices around them and the flow of visitors, despite their mother's wail, they did not budge.

Cars pulled up outside, bringing relatives carrying pallets of orange soda. They left the tent, hands over their mouths, trying to hold back sobs.

Family members said that except for a few brief moments, the women have not awakened since then, over a week ago. ●

International New York Times JULY 26, 2017

Turkish minority fears further marginalization

OSMANCIK, TURKEY

Alevi say government is reinforcing Sunni Islam as the state religion

BY PATRICK KINGSLEY

In the hills of northern Anatolia, next to a shrine to a medieval Muslim mystic, there stands a modest building that illustrates the fears and frustrations of Turkey's Alevi minority.

For years this small stone hall was a place of worship for local Alevi, heterodox Muslims who are estimated to form between a tenth and a fifth of the Turkish population. But one day in 2015, Ali Gormez, a local Alevi spiritual leader, arrived to find government officials had repurposed it as a mosque for the country's Sunni Muslim majority.

Given that there was already a Sunni mosque a few hundred yards away, Mr. Gormez suspected the reasons for the conversion were not entirely benign. "The purpose was not to find another Sunni place of worship but to prevent the Alevi from worshipping as they like," Mr. Gormez said during a recent interview beside the shrine.

"It's a policy," he added, "of denying the existence of Alevi."

The political trajectory of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Sunni conservative whose Justice and Development Party, or A.K.P., has governed Turkey since 2002, is often judged through the prism of his increasing authoritarianism or by the challenges he is perceived to pose to Turkey's secular traditions.

Viewing Mr. Erdogan through the eyes of the Alevi, however, highlights the complexities and paradoxes of both themes.

Wary of Sunni dominance of public life, Alevi are key stakeholders in the secular Turkish state, and yet have suffered under staunchly secular governments, too. They exemplify the parts of Turkey that feel most threatened by Mr. Erdogan — secularists and minorities like the Kurds and Alevi — while highlighting both the authoritarianism and religious nationalism that predated him, as well as the disparate nature of the co-



Under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Alevi sense being pushed "to the edge,"

alition that opposes him.

"Secularists talk about Erdogan as an Islamist, whereas Alevi often look at him as explicitly Sunni," said Howard Eissenstat, a Turkey expert at St. Lawrence University and nonresident senior fellow at the Project on Middle East Democracy, a think tank in Washington.

Under Mr. Erdogan, Mr. Eissenstat said, average Alevi feel "they're being pushed further to the edge." And yet throughout Ottoman and Turkish history, "there has never been a moment when they felt utterly secure," Mr. Eissenstat added.

Incorporating Shiite, Sufi, Sunni and local traditions, Alevism is a strain of Islam that emerged in the medieval period. Contrary to common perceptions, Alevism is distinct from the Alawite faith followed by Syrians like President Bashar al-Assad.

For some members, Alevism is simply a cultural identity, rather than a form of worship.

Practicing Alevi read from the same Islamic texts as mainstream Muslims but worship in a cemevi, or prayer hall, rather than a mosque. Men and women pray alongside one another, and — unlike observant Sunnis — are not expected to pray five times a day.

By some metrics, the Alevi are safer now than at many points in their history. For centuries they have been the victims of pogroms, both during Ottoman times and under the secular Turkish republic. Hundreds of Alevi were murdered in sectarian violence in the years that preceded Turkey's 1980 coup, and dozens were killed during the 1990s.

Under Mr. Erdogan, however, there has been no mass sectarian violence

against Alevi. In fact, Alevi were among the minorities whose rights Mr. Erdogan initially promised to strengthen. In 2007, for instance, he began what was termed an "Alevi opening," a year-long effort to discuss the improvement of Alevi rights.

Some even viewed the "opening" as part of a broader attempt to challenge the monocultural and monoethnic national identity promoted by the country's founders.

"We are all citizens of the Turkish republic," Mr. Erdogan said to a group of Alevi in January 2008. "We are all hosts of this country, siblings without discrimination between you and us."

Nearly a decade later, sitting in the hills outside Osmancik, Mr. Gormez and his Alevi friends complained about the Sunni takeover of Osmancik's cemevi. But they also conceded that in terms of pure security, the overall situation has improved in the years since the pogroms of the 1970s, when Alevi villagers built barricades outside their homes to defend themselves.

"Now," said Servet Unal, a retired civil servant sitting beside Mr. Gormez, "we are comfortable."

But beyond the matter of their physical safety, the plight of Alevi in Mr. Erdogan's Turkey is more complex, as the participants at a recent Alevi rally in the city of Sivas showed.

Twenty-four years ago, Sivas was the site of a brutal massacre of Alevi by a mob of Sunni fundamentalists who burned down their hotel. The police did not intervene.

On a recent Sunday in July, thousands of Alevi completed an annual march through Sivas in remembrance of the dead. In that sense, things have changed: The police here lined the streets to protect the marchers. But in their chants and interviews, many marchers said that they felt under as much social pressure as they have felt in decades past.

"The government still doesn't accept Alevism as a legitimate belief," said Turgut Oker, the head of the European Alevi Federation, and an organizer of the march. "Erdogan is completely trying to make Turkey more Sunni."

Take the cemevi, Mr. Oker said. The number of these Alevi prayer centers has increased under Erdogan — from under 300 in 2000 to over 900 in 2013. But their construction owes more to Alevi activism than to government acquiescence.

Despite repeated censure from the European Court of Human Rights, the Erdogan government still refuses to classify cemevis as official places of worship. That makes them ineligible for the money provided to the Directorate of Religious Affairs for the construction and maintenance of Sunni mosques. The directorate's budget was an estimated \$1.8 billion in 2016 — more than most ministries.

And where Alevi have managed to build cemevis, the state has often constructed mosques nearby (or in Osmancik, installed a mosque in the cemevi itself). The implication is that while the state may tolerate Alevism as a cultural

identity, it recognizes only the Sunni mosque as a place of Islamic worship.

"A cemevi is not a place of worship, it is a center for cultural activities," Mr. Erdogan argued in 2012. "Muslims should only have one place of worship."

Then there is the gradual "Sunnification" of the education system. Over the past 15 years, Mr. Erdogan has increased the number of religious schools that emphasize the teaching of Sunni doctrine. In some places parents no longer have the option of sending their children to secular schools.

Alevi have also reported discrimination in the workplace, particularly within state institutions. Few Alevi currently fill key roles in the state apparatus, such as governors or police chiefs. And although there is no concrete evidence of an official policy of bias, Alevi in low-level positions in the civil service regularly claim that the system is gamed against them, said Aziz Yagan, an academic.

Yunus Laco, an Alevi who applied this year for a state position, received some oddly sectarian questions in his oral examinations.

"They asked me: 'Are you an Alevi?'" Mr. Laco said. "Is there anyone in your family who prays five times a day?"

Mr. Laco did not get the job.

"The case of the Alevi suggests that the A.K.P. always lacked the imagination to account for Turkey's real diversity," said Mr. Eissenstat, of St. Lawrence University. "It has embraced the idea that there is really only one true way to be part of the Turkish nation." ♦



JULY 22, 2017

Kurdish officials discuss election law, administrative divisions in Rojava-Northern Syria

July 22, 2017 Kurdish Region, Syria
<http://aranews.net>

THE EXECUTIVE BOARD of the Constituent Council of the Democratic Federal System in Rojava-Northern Syria met with members of the Council and representatives of the Electoral Commission on Thursday to discuss the election law and the administrative divisions of the regions of Rojava and Northern Syria.

A broad meeting was held at the headquarters of the Constituent Council of the Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria to discuss the draft electoral law and administrative divisions in the regions of Rojava and northern Syria.

According to the local Kurdish news agency ANHA, the meeting was attended by the Co-Chairs of the Executive Council of the Democratic Federalist System of Northern Syria Fawza Yousef and Sanharib Barsoum and the Co-Chairmen of the Constituent council of the Democratic Federalist System of Northern Syria Hediya Youssef and Mansour Salloum, as well as members of the executive board of the three provinces of Kobani, Jazirah and Afrin and representatives of the Shahba region (Northern Aleppo).

The participants reportedly discussed the items of the draft election law, and proposed amendments to its provisions.

Sources within the meeting confirmed to ARA News that the participants also discussed the administrative divisions of the regions of Rojava



From the ceremonies of the declaration of federalism in Rojava, Rumelan, northeastern Syria. File photo: ARA New

and northern Syria. The sources suggested that the draft law on elections and administrative divisions of the Council of the Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria will be submitted for approval at a later meeting. ♦

Arab Sunni areas of Iraq see demands to join Kurdistan Region

The secessionist wing in Iraqi Kurdistan is working on using demands from some Sunni Arabs to join the region to support the upcoming referendum and independence.



Ali Mamouri
July 27, 2017
/www.al-monitor.com

As the Islamic State's reign comes to an end in Iraq, the sectarian narrative of Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds — and the competition among them — is re-emerging. Political parties are mobilizing the three components to advocate a sectarian identity for each of them in post-IS Iraq.

In a series of posts on his official Facebook page, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi warned against "attempts by some to market sectarianism" after the liberation of Mosul from IS. "After liberating Mosul, new faces left their hideouts and appeared to speak in the name of the people of Mosul and Anbar," Abadi said in a post.

Abadi's remarks refer to certain demands that have been posed in the name of Sunnis in the liberated territories to divide the country along sectarian lines. The demands include calls for including Sunni territories in Iraqi Kurdistan on the premise that Sunni Arabs and Kurds both share the Sunni doctrine. This could mean dividing Iraq into Shiite and Sunni camps.

Arab villages in the north of Ninevah province witnessed demonstrations demanding the integration of their territories into Iraqi Kurdistan. Hundreds affiliated with Ninevah's Arab tribes from Zummar and Rabiah west of the Tigris River took to the streets July 18 to demand integrating their territories into Iraqi Kurdistan. Zummar and Rabiah, which are among the territories that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) aspires to integrate, are referred to in speeches by the regional government's officials as "Kurdish areas outside the administration of the Kurdistan Region."

Demonstrators also demanded that they be granted the right to vote in Iraqi Kurdistan's independence referendum, which is scheduled to take place Sept. 25. Tribal leaders on the outskirts of Mosul demanded on June 22 to integrate their territories into Iraqi Kurdistan and hold a referendum to decide the fate of their territories.

In Kirkuk, where the regional government also intends to hold the referendum despite the fact that it is not within the region's actual borders, Arab tribes, including the Abada tribe, supported holding a referendum over the independence of the region. Tribe leader Sheikh Khalaf al-Abadi told Kurdistan 24 on July 6, "We support the Iraqi Kurdistan referendum because the peshmerga forces protect all the components without discrimination based on religion or ethnicity and we stand with the side that protects us."

Prominent Iraqi Sunni cleric Ahmad al-Qabisi predicted in an interview with Samarra Channel on July 20 that Iraq would be divided, that the Sunni territory in Iraq would be in Kurdistan and that Iraqi Kurdistan will not only be for Kurds, as Sunni Arabs will join it since they sincerely want to be under its umbrella.

The sectarian competition in Iraq shows that there are two clear mainstream discourses. Shiite parties want to have the upper hand in the state through their political representation and by keeping their military factions within the Popular Mobilization Units, which was destined by the Popular Mobilization Law to work outside — but parallel to — the structure of the Iraqi army. There is also the secessionist discourse by Kurdish parties, especially the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which represents a majority in both the KRG parliament and the government.

Sunni Arab parties in Iraq are still unable to formalize the demands of their voters because they are not designed to support a united Iraq within a comprehensive national rhetoric that brings together other groups.



A peshmerga fighter stands next to graffiti of the Islamic State flag on a wall in Zummar, in the northern Iraqi governorate of Ninevah, Dec. 18, 2014. SAFIN HAMED/AFP/Getty Images

Meanwhile, they are also unable to establish their own platform of administering Sunni-majority territories in post-IS Iraq, which sometimes makes them vulnerable to exploitation by Shiite and Kurdish parties according to their own political agendas.

In the past, Shiite and Sunni parties negotiated several compromises to support a platform by a Shiite party in exchange for the Sunni side receiving certain political seats. Now, there are obvious Kurdish attempts to exploit Sunni Arabs for the interest of the KDP's secessionist platform.

One example was when KRG President Massoud Barzani met with a group of Arab tribal leaders from the disputed territories in Ninevah July 22. In a statement, the spokesman for Ninevah's Arab tribes Muzahim al-Howeit said, "Sheikhs of tribes have expressed their desire to integrate their territories into Iraqi Kurdistan and also to include it in the fate-deciding referendum scheduled to take place Sept. 25."

Howeit called for "nominating Arab nationalists to become members of the Kurdistan parliament" in the future.

At the same time, Barzani is mobilizing Sunni Arab countries to receive their support for Kurdistan's independence. On July 4, Barzani met with consuls from seven Sunni Arab entities — Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Palestine, Kuwait and Sudan. Barzani gave the Sunni Arab diplomats his views about a post-IS Iraq and the reasons for holding a secession referendum in September.

Therefore, it appears that the Sunni Arab community is going to be used as leverage against Baghdad in the hands of the secessionist wing in Iraqi Kurdistan, while the Shiite political authority in Baghdad will continue to fail to embrace the Sunni community or help it formalize a nationalist platform that may help promote a national identity for a united Iraq. What's going to be lost in the middle is the interests of the Sunni community, which has long been suffering destruction at the hands of terrorist groups, and, on the other hand, has been neglected by the central Shiite-led government in Baghdad. ♦

Ali Mamouri is Al-Monitor's Iraq Pulse Editor and a researcher and writer who specializes in religion. He is a former teacher in Iranian universities and seminaries in Iran and Iraq. He has published several articles related to religious affairs in the two countries and societal transformations and sectarianism in the Middle East.



Prime Minister Barzani congratulates Gorran's new leader

Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq (cabinet.gov.krd) -

In a congratulatory message, Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani congratulated Omer Said Ali on his election as the General Coordinator of the Change Movement (Gorran).

He also extended his congratulations to the members of the Executive body and new leadership of the Change Movement.

In his message, Prime Minister Barzani stated, "By assuming the highest position of

an important political force in the Kurdistan Region, you will bear new responsibilities and duties. You also start a new chapter in your eventful life as a Peshmerga, who fought for so many years, defending the rights of Kurdistan."

"We view your election with optimism. We are hopeful that the common objectives of all the parties in Kurdistan to fulfil the legitimate rights of our people, will bring us closer, with you and the Gorran Movement and all the other parties and settle the current issues."

He stated, "We have to take advantage of



the opportunity that exists today for the people of Kurdistan, in the best way possible for the interests of Kurdistan and the rights of our people, as we have been fighting for them for centuries." ♦

5 reasons for U.S. to support an independent Kurdistan

By Brig. Gen. Ernie Audino
July 26, 2017
<http://www.washingtontimes.com>

Post-Mosul Iraq is no place for negotiators wearing loafers and pin-striped suits. It's a place of dusty boots and bare-knuckle competition, where results on the ground are a function of muscle and not of eloquence. It's a place where Tehran applauds Washington's polite adherence to a One-Iraq policy, even while substantial Iranian combat power flows insidiously into Iraq to effect a functional annexation of the lion's share of Iraqi terrain. While Washington urges everyone in Iraq to just get along, they don't, and they never have. Continued American supplication is pointless.

Here's the practical reality: Baghdad has become Tehran West. It's the capital of a regime whose ministries are overwhelmingly headed by Shia interests aligned with their co-religionists in Tehran, and it is supported by an Iraqi Army that is 75 percent Shia and augmented by Iran's proxy force of 110,000 Shia militiamen inside Iraq. Tehran dominates over 60 percent of Iraq. It's in Tehran's interest to next dominate Iraq's Kurdish region. It's in our interest to prevent it.

Here's why we must: A strong Kurdistan, independent of Baghdad's chronic dysfunction and Tehran's malevolent influence, materially advances five important American interests.

The destruction of ISIS — will not happen without the Kurds. Their leading role in the destruction of ISIS as an organization cannot be reasonably disputed. The Kurds stopped, held and rolled back ISIS, and then waited two years while the Iraqi Army re-cocked after running away in 2014. Kurdish forces then isolated Mosul as the necessary precondition to its recent liberation by a revitalized Iraqi Army, albeit one infused with Iranian muscle. Meanwhile, Syrian Kurds



lead the operation to seize Raqqa, the ISIS capital. ISIS simply will not be destroyed and kept that way without the Kurds.

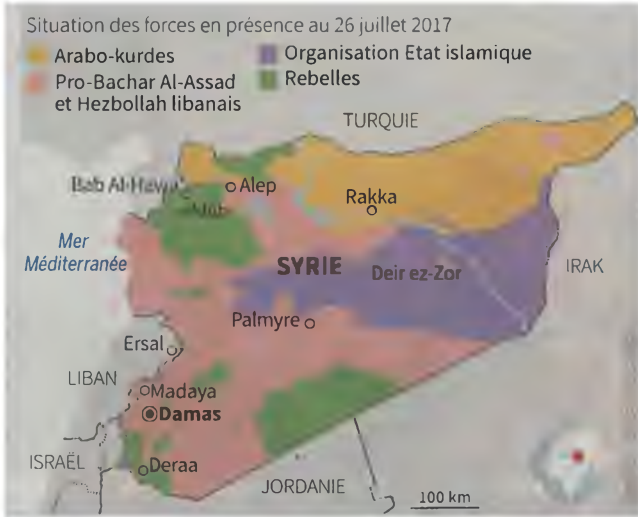
The defeat of the jihadi ideology of ISIS — will not happen without moderate Sunni voices. Destruction of a jihadi army is one thing, and the defeat of jihadi ideology is another. The two are related, of course, but the first is a relatively short-term kinetic effort, and the second is not. Victory against both is in U.S. interest, but the U.S. will not have a leading role in the second. That is the province for moderate Sunni voices, among those the Kurds. The Kurdish persistent resistance to extreme Islam is well-known and has been since the first outside Islamists groups began concerted proselytizing into portions of Kurdistan as early as 1952. Sixty-five years later and the black flag of ISIS still doesn't fly over Kurdish soil.

Re-establishing a balance of power in the Gulf — means checking Iranian power, not accommodating it. The recent liberation of Mosul is an important victory, but we must also be honest about a resulting condition — Iran used its sizable proxy participation in that operation to add terrain to the dominant position it gained in the Gulf after the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq in 2012. Iran now strives to control Kurdish soil between Mosul and the Syrian border to enable a physical link from Tehran to Syria's Mediterranean shoreline and to Tehran's Hezbollah allies in Lebanon. While Western eyes shift to Raqqa, Tehran maintains 15,000 Shia militiamen near Tal Afar to the west of Mosul, expands a new nearby airstrip, endeavors to co-opt the Yezidis in Sinjar on the Syrian border, and prepares to use the upcoming battle for Hawija, a remaining ISIS snakepit in Iraq, to insert Iranian proxies south of Kurdish-administered Kirkuk. Tehran also plans to spend \$4 billion on intelligence activities inside the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The result: Iran is consolidating on three sides of the KRI and will be in position to compel our Kurdish ally's behavior in the future. ■

Brigadier General Ernest C. Audino currently serves as the Deputy Director of Operations, Readiness and Mobilization, Headquarters Department of the Army, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff G-3/5/7.

Following that assignment he deployed to Iraq where he commanded a team of combat advisors embedded in 3rd Infantry Brigade, 4th Division Iraqi Army, an assignment he considers among the most rewarding in his military career. His brigade was formed entirely from Kurdish peshmerga (guerilla units) re-missioned to conduct counterinsurgency operations in Balad, Kirkuk, and along the Iranian border.

La rébellion syrienne en perdition



« NOUS AVONS TANT ESPÉRÉ AVEC LA RÉVOLUTION, ET NOUS NOUS RETROUVONS AVEC LE FRONT AL-NOSRA ICI. AL-NOSRA ET ASSAD SONT LES DEUX FACETTES DE LA MÊME MÉDAILLE »

HOUSSAM
un déplacé arrivé à Idlib



Un combattant de l'Armée syrienne libre, à Deraa, le 14 juillet.

ALAA AL-FAQIR/REUTERS

Partout, elle recule. Divisée, concurrencée par les djihadistes, fragilisée par le jeu des grandes puissances, la rébellion syrienne anti-Assad est en perdition. Dans la région de Damas, l'Armée de l'islam a été acculée au cessez-le-feu, épuisée par quatre années de siège et de bombardements. Dans le Sud, les modérés de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), bien qu'en position de force, sont lâchés par les États-Unis. Dans la province d'Idlib, au Nord, les djihadistes de l'ex-Front Al-Nosra, lié à Al-Qaïda, sont en train de faire place nette. Mais l'effondrement de la rébellion anti-Assad risque de faire le jeu des extrémistes djihadistes...

Ghouta-Est : Moscou

à la manœuvre

Un cessez-le-feu durable va-t-il s'installer dans la Ghouta-Est, cette vaste région agricole aux portes de Damas, contrôlée par l'opposition armée et assiégée par les forces pro-régime ? Moscou a rendu public, samedi 22 juillet, un accord négocié au Caire avec des représentants de l'opposition, sur une « dé-escalade » dans la Ghouta-Est. Selon l'état-major, des policiers russes ont déjà été déployés. Le but affiché : faire taire les armes et permettre l'entrée de l'aide humanitaire dans cette zone verrouillée par l'armée depuis 2013. Selon des sources jointes en Syrie, les détails concernant l'acheminement de l'aide sont « encore flous ». Jusqu'ici, des convois humanitaires ont rejoint, de façon irrégulière, certaines localités de la Ghouta-Est. C'est surtout à travers des tunnels reliant

cette zone à des quartiers périphériques de Damas tenus par l'opposition que nourriture et armes sont entrées jusqu'à présent. Mais plusieurs de ces faubourgs ont été repris, en mai, par l'armée.

Selon Monzer Akbik, porte-parole de La Syrie de demain, le mouvement dirigé par Ahmad Jarba a joué un rôle de « médiateur » dans la mise au point de cet accord sur la Ghouta-Est, qui a été « signé par les Russes et par l'Armée de l'islam ». Cette dernière, d'inspiration salafiste, est la faction armée de l'opposition la plus puissante dans la région de Damas. M. Akbik affirme que cette entente est « indépendante du processus d'Astana », qui rassemble Moscou, Téhéran et Ankara.

Ce cessez-le-feu dans la Ghouta-Est risque de relancer les combats entre factions anti-Assad car il ne concerne pas les djihadistes de l'ex-Front Al-Nosra (devenu Tahrir Al-Cham et qui prétend avoir formellement rompu ses liens avec Al-Qaïda), peu nombreux mais présents dans la région. Les autres formations, dont Faylaq Al-Rahmane, qui n'ont pas pris part aux négociations, sont appelées à chasser les hommes de Nosra. L'accord du Caire « doit permettre à l'Armée de l'islam d'éviter une reddition et une évacuation forcée vers la province d'Idlib », décrypte Nawar Oliver, chercheur au centre d'études stratégiques Omran, en Turquie. Le régime en tirera avantage si les groupes armés de l'opposition sont poussés à se battre entre eux.

L'annonce de cet accord a été suivie, quelques heures plus tard, par un cessez-le-feu décrété par l'armée syrienne. Mais des bombardements aériens ont eu lieu depuis, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme. Dans la nuit de lundi à mardi, huit civils ont été tués dans un raid gouvernemental. Peu après, selon des habitants, des roquettes étaient lancées depuis le fief rebelle en direction de l'ambassade russe à Damas.

Idlib : le piège djihadiste

Au terme de trois jours de combat qui ont fait plus d'une centaine de morts, Tahrir Al-Cham a peut-être pris définitivement le dessus sur son rival salafiste d'Ahrar Al-Cham, dans la province d'Idlib, la seule province syrienne encore entièrement aux mains de la rébellion. Soutenu par la Turquie, Ahrar Al-Cham a également perdu le contrôle du précieux poste-frontière de Bab Al-Hawa, par où transitait l'aide humanitaire. Ankara a, depuis, décidé de suspendre toutes ses aides. Une mauvaise nouvelle pour les 2 millions d'habitants que compte la province d'Idlib, dont plus de 900 000 déplacés d'autres régions.

Cette « prise d'Idlib » vient couronner quatre ans d'efforts de Tahrir Al-Cham, qui a patiemment affaibli ou éliminé les autres groupes de l'opposition armée en profitant de leurs défaites militaires et de leurs divisions : des modérés de l'Armée syrienne libre aux radicaux d'Ahrar Al-Cham. Son objectif : « Construire une autorité politique, religieuse et militaire unique dans la province. » Soit une forme d'« émirat » entièrement à la botte du groupe. La situa-

tion ne manque pas d'ironie au moment où le « califat » de l'organisation Etat islamique (EI) s'effondre sous les coups de boutoir de ses innombrables ennemis.

« Le régime a rassemblé ici ses adversaires, en y conduisant tous ceux, rebelles ou activistes, qui ont été déplacés de force [après la reprise de fiefs de l'opposition à Damas ou à d'Alep]. Il savait que cela favoriserait les affrontements internes », résume Houssam, un déplacé originaire de Madaya, près de Damas, arrivé à Idlib en avril. « Nous avons tant espéré avec la révolution, et nous nous retrouvons avec le Front Al-Nosra ici. Al-Nosra et Assad sont les deux facettes de la même médaille », conclut-il, amer. En évinçant leurs rivaux, les djihadistes compliquent également une possible intervention de la Turquie, qui a besoin d'alliés sur le terrain pour déployer des troupes d'interposition prévues dans le cadre des négociations d'Astana avec la Russie et l'Iran.

Deraa : l'ASL lâchée par les Américains

A la fin du mois de février 2011 à Deraa, capitale provinciale du sud-ouest de la Syrie, une quinzaine de gamins et d'adolescents avaient inscrit un slogan anti-Bachar Al-Assad sur un mur de la ville. Leur arrestation par les services de sécurité du régime et les tortures qu'ils subirent allaient déclencher le soulèvement syrien. Six ans plus tard, c'est dans cette même région que risque de s'évanouir le rêve des rebelles de renverser le régime syrien, alors que les Occidentaux, France et Etats-Unis en tête, ne font plus du départ d'Al-Assad un objectif de la sortie de crise. A la différence des autres régions du pays, où l'opposition armée a été atomisée par les défaites militaires, la montée en puis-

sance des djihadistes et les interminables querelles intestines, les groupes rebelles de la région de Deraa rassemblés sous la bannière de l'Armée syrienne libre présentent un ensemble plutôt homogène. Les radicaux y sont minoritaires.

Depuis le 9 juillet, une trêve négociée entre Vladimir Poutine et Donald Trump est en vigueur dans la région. Elle pourrait servir de base à une entente durable entre Moscou et Washington susceptible de déboucher sur un règlement du conflit, assure-t-on côté russe. Pour l'opposition armée, on craint a contrario que de tels accords conduisent à une division de fait de la Syrie entre un « pays utile » sous contrôle gouvernemental et quelques enclaves rebelles sous l'influence de puissances régionales.

La décision prise par Washington de suspendre son programme de soutien à l'opposition armée antirégime – qui concerne particulièrement la coalition dite du Front sud, active à Deraa – renforce les craintes rebelles de voir Washington laisser définitivement la main à Moscou. « Avant l'intervention de [nos] forces armées, les troupes gouvernementales contrôlaient un peu moins de 12 000 km² en Syrie. Elles contrôlent aujourd'hui 74 200 km². Les soldats russes, conjointement avec les forces syriennes, font leur maximum pour rétablir le plus rapidement la paix en Syrie », a rappelé, vendredi 21 juillet, le porte-parole du ministère de la défense russe.

A la frontière Liban-Syrie : la fin de l'enclave djihadiste ?

Depuis le 21 juillet, date du lancement de la bataille, les journaux, télévisés à Beyrouth égrenent les noms des collines et des combes prises par le Hezbollah à la frontière liba-

no-syrienne, dans une zone montagneuse au-dessus de la localité d'Ersal. De 1500 à 1800 combattants syriens, dont la plupart appartiennent à des groupes djihadistes (l'ex-Front Al-Nosra et l'EI), sont retranchés dans ce no man's land depuis plusieurs années. Des rebelles non djihadistes sont aussi présents. Le Hezbollah a jusqu'ici concentré l'essentiel de son offensive en territoire libanais, contre les positions d'Al-Nosra, tandis que l'armée syrienne mène des frappes aériennes sur la zone montagneuse.

Du point de vue de la puissante milice chiite libanaise, cette offensive doit permettre d'écarter la menace djihadiste au Liban. Des attentats commandités, selon les services de sécurité, depuis le maquis frontalier ont eu lieu par le passé dans la banlieue de Beyrouth, et des combats avaient opposé en 2014, dans la ville d'Ersal, militaires libanais et djihadistes. La bataille devrait aussi permettre au Hezbollah et à Damas de sécuriser leurs gains dans les monts du Qalamoun syrien, à l'ouest de Damas.

Dans la ville d'Ersal, qui compte près de 60 000 réfugiés syriens, les habitants vivent au son des bombardements. L'armée libanaise, soutenue par Washington, n'a pas annoncé officiellement prendre part à la bataille, mais elle a tiré à plusieurs reprises contre des positions djihadistes et ferme, côté ouest, la nasse destinée à empêcher les djihadistes de fuir vers Ersal.

Des médias du Hezbollah ont affirmé, lundi 24 juillet, que la fin de la bataille contre l'ex-Front Al-Nosra était proche. Cela ne signifie pas que l'offensive est terminée : de nombreux combattants ont fui dans les poches sous contrôle de l'EI, où les opérations vont se poursuivre. ■

LAURE STEPHAN

ET MADJID ZERROUKY (À PARIS)

REUTERS

Turquie: Deux autres députés pro-kurdes privés de leur statut

27 juillet 2017 – ANKARA (Reuters)

DEUX députés du parti pro-kurde HDP se sont vu à leur tour retirer leur statut parlementaire jeudi par le Parlement turc, ce qui porte à quatre le nombre de parlementaires HDP destitués.

Le gouvernement turc accuse le Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP), deuxième parti d'opposition à la Grande assemblée nationale, le Parlement monocaméral turc, d'être affilié au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui mène une insurrection séparatiste dans le Sud-Est turc à majorité kurde depuis plus de 30 ans. Le HDP dément des accusations.

Les deux députés, Tugba Hezer et Faysal Sariyildiz, ont été officiellement écartés pour "absentéisme". Le HDP, qui avait 59 élus aux élections législatives de novembre 2015, n'en a plus que 55. La Grande assemblée compte 550 sièges.

En février, le Parlement avait destitué Figen Yuksekdog, co-présidente du HDP et mis en prison son co-président Selahattin Demirtas.

La députée HDP Nursel Aydogan, accusée d'appartenance à une organisation terroriste, a perdu son statut en mai.

Le HDP a lancé mardi un mouvement de protestation contre l'emprisonnement d'un grand nombre de ses élus.

De nombreux observateurs estiment que le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan se sert de la répression engagée contre les personnes qui sont soupçonnées d'avoir soutenu le coup d'Etat manqué de juillet 2016 pour museler toute opposition.



Des membres de l'opposition pro-kurde HDP manifestent contre la répression étatique à Diyarbakir en Turquie. Deux députés du parti pro-kurde se sont vu à leur tour retirer leur statut parlementaire jeudi par le Parlement turc, ce qui porte à quatre le nombre de parlementaires HDP destitués. /Photo prise le 26 juillet 2017/REUTERS/Sertac Kayar

Depuis un an, quelque 50.000 personnes ont été arrêtées et plus de 150 fonctionnaires, militaires et personnes travaillant dans le secteur privé ont été renvoyées ou suspendues de leur fonction. ●

Will the Kurds Get Their Independence Referendum?

The Kurdish region faces a multiplicity of hurdles as it prepares for the "yes to independence" referendum.

Seth J. Frantzman / July 27, 2017
<http://nationalinterest.org>

Kurdistan Regional Government president Masoud Barzani announced on June 7 that the region had set September 25 as the date for a referendum on independence. He was joined by members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Kurdistan Islamic Union, Kurdistan Islamic Movement and other small parties, including those representing Assyrian and Turkmen minorities. New signs on billboards throughout the KRG capital of Erbil tout "yes to independence."

The Kurdish region faces a multiplicity of hurdles as it prepares for the referendum. The top among them are internal issues, such as demands on July 12 by the Change Movement (Gorran) and Kurdistan Islamic Union that elections for the regional parliament be held before—or during—the referendum and that the parliament be reconvened. External actors also pose challenges. Moktada al-Sadr, the powerful Shia leader in Baghdad has called on Masoud to postpone the referendum, according to a July 5 report by Asharq al-Awsat.

"The time has come for our own people to determine their future," Falah Mustafa Bakir, the head of the department of foreign relations for the KRG, said in an interview. Fourteen years after the U.S.-led 2003 invasion and the problems between Baghdad and the Kurds have not been resolved by decentralization, autonomy and federalism, he said. "To have a democratic environment we need democratic practice and democratic culture," Bakir said. The Iraqi government has breached the constitution, not distributed the federal budget correctly, and a referendum will bring about "stability and security." It will also be a mandate for the Kurdish leadership to negotiate with Baghdad, Bakir said. "We can be good partners as two good neighbors," he said. "This is a turning point in our history."

Bakir said that they are aware securing independence will not be easy. Gathering the support for thirty-four local political parties for the referendum has been a challenge, as well as explaining to Baghdad that the region does not want a new round of conflict. In contrast to claims that Kurdish independence would make the area unstable, the last hundred years had "not seen stability and prosperity" in the region, he said. He pointed to the suffering of Kurds under Saddam Hussein when 182,000 people were killed during the Anfal campaign, and he also noted that under the current system, Baghdad does not share wealth and power with the north. "We assure our neighbors that this step will not go against the interest of these nations . . . we are for building bridges and we can assure them that the future independent Kurdistan would be a partner and ally." Towards that end, the KRG is



reaching out to its partners abroad. Bakir referenced the United States, the U.S.-led coalition, the UN and the EU. "First they can support dialogue between Erbil and Baghdad," he said. "Second, the democratic values in the process of referendum need to be respected."

The referendum doesn't come in a vacuum but was scheduled to coincide with the winding down of the war against ISIS in Iraq. The Iraqi security forces liberated Mosul in early July after grueling battles in the Old City that saw ISIS blow up the famed Great Mosque of al-Nuri, which is where Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared the "caliphate" in 2014. To the west the Popular Mobilization Units, a group of mostly Shia militias that are an official paramilitary force of Baghdad, have successfully cleared a large area of ISIS. But the jihadists still have pockets in Tal Afar, Hawija and parts of Anbar province and they are not as defeated as it seems. Seventeen Islamic State members were ambushed near Rabia, near the Syrian border, by members of the Rojava Peshmerga on July 12, and ISIS members raided a village near Qayarah, killing two Iraqi journalists in an area that was supposed to be free of the extremists.

The Kurdish region's leaders argue that the Peshmerga, the armed forces of the KRG, proved themselves in battle with ISIS over the last two years. In meetings with European Union officials in Brussels on July 12, President Masoud said that 1,745 Peshmerga had been killed in battle with the extremists and more than ten thousand had been injured. The Peshmerga liberated thirty thousand square kilometers. Masoud reminded the EU that the Kurdish region was hosting 1.4 million Iraqi internally displaced persons and 233,000 Syrian refugees according to a report at the Kurdish media outlet Rudaw.

To shore up the region, the Kurdish leadership

also wants to push through a series of reforms during the period leading up to the referendum. In May, Kurdistan Regional Government prime minister Nechirvan Barzani and Kurdistan Regional Government deputy prime minister Qubad Talabani met with a delegation of representatives from the United States, Germany and the UK. According to reports, Prime Minister Barzani told the UK's Defense Ministry Senior Advisor for the Middle East that the government and the Ministry of Peshmerga were pushing further reforms for the Kurdish forces.

Bakhtiyar Mohammed, an advisor at the Peshmerga Ministry, said the reforms cover thirty-five different articles relating to issues as disparate as arming, training, logistics and upgrading barracks and living facilities for Kurdish soldiers. Reforms also seek standardization of salaries. Due to the Iraqi constitution, the KRG is not permitted to have an air force, but the Peshmerga want to expand their helicopter arm. This issue is still awaiting the approval of the president's office, according to sources in the KRG.

The region wants to continue reducing the role of political parties in the Peshmerga. Prior to the war on ISIS, one of the issues the Peshmerga faced was that the majority of their forces came under the command of two units called seventy and eighty, which were affiliated with the PUK and KDP respectively. If you went to sectors of the frontline during the war it was relatively common to see political banners either at nearby, indicating which sector was run by which Peshmerga and whose umbrella party the men came from. This is a holdover from the days before 2003 during the struggle against Saddam Hussein and the 1990s when the Kurdish parties fought a civil war. The reforms since have tried to reduce the role of parties and professionalize the entire system under the Ministry

► of Peshmerga Affairs.

To sustain the process of creating a professional military, Kurdish commanders like General Najat Ali say the international community should continue to support the Peshmerga, thousands of whom were trained during the war on ISIS through the Kurdistan Training Coordination Center. "The international community should understand and respect the decision and help us, we are allied with the United States and we proved to the whole world we could fight ISIS," said Ali in an interview. Samuel Helfont wrote in a May 2017 paper at the Foreign Policy Research Institute and the American University of Iraq Sulaimani that "helping the Kurds reform their military forces by building capacity of forces under control of the nonpolitical Ministry of Peshmerga is vital to achieving these goals."

The Kurds are trying to mollify concerns in the United States and EU about indepen-

dence. Barzani has said that there is no going back on the referendum and in Brussels he asked EU officials that if they could not support the right of Kurds to vote, then to at least stay neutral. U.S. State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert has called the referendum an "internal matter," which implies the United States may not interfere.

During the war on ISIS many EU states and the United States formed a unique close relationship with the Kurdish region that included not only arms shipments and training, but also targeting funding for various programs. However with the referendum coming up there will be tensions over voting in areas considered disputed territory between the central government and the Kurdish autonomous region. This includes territories around Kirkuk, Khanaqin, Sinjar and Makhmur. The governor of Kirkuk, Najmaldin Karim, is a major supporter of independence, and in March the provincial council voted to raise the Kurdish flag at local Kirkuk

government buildings. Iraq opposed the decision, and Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson Bahram Qassemi said the flag would "increase tensions." This is a sign of worse to come. While foreign powers may have sympathy for Kurdish rights to have a vote, if Iraq vehemently opposes electioneering in the disputed areas things will be different. Some of the borders of these areas were drawn during the recent conflict, with Peshmerga frontlines and those of Shia militias abutting one another. Kurdistan also faces hurdles with Iran and Turkey on its borders. Dealing with those two countries, and other Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, will likely be next on President Barzani's list. ♦

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The Washington Times

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The Kurdistan Region: Strategic U.S. Ally in a Tough Neighborhood is a Special Report prepared by The Washington Times Advocacy Department.

Self-determination will lead to prosperity, stability

By Masrour Barzani - -
Wednesday, July 26, 2017
<http://www.washingtontimes.com>

This is a year of regeneration for Iraqi Kurdistan, a time when its people will shed the crippling burden of war and uncertainty and start to shape their future — on our own terms.

Iraqi Kurdistan can no longer mark time. We must all take a stake in our future and redefine the nature of a relationship with Iraq that will confine repeated mistakes of the past to history. That is why Iraqi Kurdistan will take the historic step of holding a referendum on independence later this year.

Iraq was, and is, a forced coexistence of peoples whose identities remain unreconciled a century after the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire, which spawned the modern state. This reality is apparent more than ever: From Basra to Tikrit, from Diyala to Anbar, a Sunni-Shia conflict has edged the country and its peoples towards the abyss. We, as leaders whose ultimate responsibility is the welfare of our people, need to acknowledge that the model is not working.

The upcoming Sept. 25 vote aims to clearly stake out the political terms on which we, the people of Iraqi Kurdistan, would best play a role in the future of the region. If, as expected, a vote for independence passes, the government will move to implement the decision in consultation with Baghdad.

If we stay as we are, muddled together through hope and delusion, we do precisely the opposite — bequeathing danger and dysfunction to future generations who need and deserve far better.



The Kurds of Iraq have endured a long and bitter journey rooted in the pursuit of self-determination — a dignity essential to all communities. It has at times led to mass deportation, war and genocide. Self-determination would have changed the course of the war with ISIS. If Iraq's Kurds were recognized as a sovereign force and empowered as such, we would have concluded this campaign long ago. Forced unity with Baghdad instead denied us the weapons we needed, which needlessly prolonged suffering and exposed to everyone the folly of pretending that the status quo works.

This historic process will start with an honest dialogue with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. And on this score, we have been encouraged by our discussions with national leaders. The recapture of Mosul gives both Erbil and Baghdad a strong platform to address a question that has lingered since the turn of the century. We hope and expect that the world will get behind us. We strongly believe that self-determination for Iraq's Kurds will provide certainty in Iraq and beyond.

This referendum will, therefore, give us a mandate to reach a principle agreement with Mr. al-

Abadi. It would also start the process that would create the political space for both parties to advance causes of common interest. This issue can no longer be confined to the "too hard basket"; the dangers of defaulting to a broken model are enormous. We have much to gain through peace and understanding, through a common recognition of each other's place in two newly defined nations.

This move will not alter borders of neighboring states. It will instead formalize the obvious makeup of the Iraqi state today. The Kurds have paid a heavy price for the international community's failed one-Iraq policy. Instead, global partners should now publicly support a dialogue between Erbil and Baghdad to shape bilateral relations on new and binding terms.

We will allow the people in contested areas to determine their own future. In negotiations with Baghdad, Kurdistan plans to include areas only with people who overwhelmingly want to be part the new state. We will remain a refuge for groups fleeing violence and persecution; Christians, Turkmen, Shabaks, Yazidis and other groups have as much to look forward to as fellow Kurds. They will continue to enjoy the same rights in a shared home.

Two independent states living alongside each other as peaceful neighbors will usher unprecedented strategic alliances in trade, energy and security. It will secure a prosperous footing for both communities, Arabs and Kurds, and allow us to determine the best governance for our peoples. ■

• Masrour Barzani is the Chancellor of the Kurdistan Region Security Council.

Disputed territories pose major challenge to Kurdish referendum

The upcoming Iraqi Kurdistan's referendum will include the disputed territories, but given the practical and technical challenges, holding the referendum on Sept. 25 will be highly unlikely.



Nahwi Saeed
July 30, 2017
www.al-monitor.com

In a July 19 statement, Kurdistan Regional Government President Massoud Barzani said that holding a referendum is a natural right of the people of Kurdistan that they will not back down from. According to the spokesperson for the Independent High Electoral and Referendum Commission (IHERC) in Kurdistan, around 6 million people in the Kurdistan Region and the disputed territories such as the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, Sinjar, Makhmour and Khanaqin have the right to vote in the referendum. Forty-eight percent of the Kurdistan Region's land is still disputed between Baghdad and Erbil and some 2.7 million people live in the disputed territories.

According to Article 140 of the constitution, the territorial disputes between Baghdad and Erbil was set to be settled by the end of 2007, but the Iraqi government never implemented this article. For Barzani, the nonimplementation of the Iraqi Constitution is one of the main reasons he wants to hold a referendum Sept. 25 in the Kurdistan Region and the contested areas. However, there are many challenges that may eventually keep the referendum from happening on the scheduled date, especially in the disputed territories.

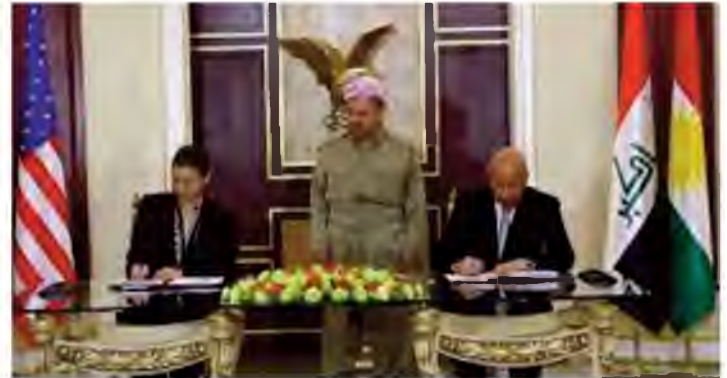
Barzani's referendum decision was preceded by a vote of the Kirkuk Provincial Council (KPC) April 4 to hold a referendum to decide the future administration of the province. However, many of the Arab and Turkmen members of the KPC boycotted the vote altogether. The KPC's vote came after a call March 14 by Kirkuk Gov. Najmaddin Karim to raise the Kurdistan flag over the government buildings in Kirkuk province. But the Iraqi Turkmen Front opposed this move and filed a case against the acting head of the KPC, Rebwar Talabani, in Baghdad. By the same token, the Arabs and Turkmens of the disputed territories are expected to boycott the upcoming referendum and ask Iraq's supreme court to declare that holding a unilateral referendum in the disputed territories is illegal. If these measures fail, they may eventually resort to violence. Nationally, Baghdad is not happy about the planned referendum either.

Apart from Baghdad's discontent and the opposition of the local Arabs and Turkmens to the planned referendum, there are regional and international challenges. Regionally, the influence of neighboring powers such as Turkey and Iran can affect the trend of the referendum. Iran can influence the Kurdistan Region not only because it is bordering the region, but also through its allies from the central government and the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU). The PMU contains different groups, but the most powerful factions are those that maintain strong links with Tehran.

In April 2016, the PMU clashed with the peshmerga in Tuz Khormato. If the PMU and local Sunni fighters agree only on one thing, it is against the presence of the peshmerga in the disputed territories. Moreover, in a move that coincided with preparing for the referendum, Iran cut water flow from the Little Zab River to Kurdistan. Iranian officials have recently told a high-ranking Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) delegation, "If you hold a referendum, do not expect anything good from us." More recently, the Iranian defense minister has threatened that the separatist movements in Iraq will not be tolerated. In short, Iran is unequivocally against the Kurdish referendum and will try to prevent it from taking place.

Turkey has also been an influential actor that has presented itself as a guardian of the Turkmen community in Kirkuk and other disputed territories. Turkish influence comes from the country's strategic position for the Kurdish oil and gas and as a kin-state for the Turkmens in Iraq. Like Iran, Turkey did not mince words when it came to the referendum issue. It has already warned that holding a referendum by Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan Region would be a "grave mistake." Despite the thaw in relations between Iraqi Kurds and Turkey for the last decade, Kirkuk is where the Kurdish aspiration for independence and Turkish support for Turkmen collide.

As the referendum in the disputed territories has the potential for further instability, it attracted international objections as well. For example, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq already released a statement in which it explained that "it has no intention to be engaged in any way or form as con-



Iraqi Kurdistan Region's President Massoud Barzani (C) stands next to Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government Karim Sinjari (R) and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Elissa Slotkin (L) as they sign documents in Erbil, Iraq, July 12, 2016 .REUTERS/Azad Lashkari

cerns the referendum, to be held on 25 September." The United States and most of the Western countries oppose the referendum, too. US State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert already told reporters that the United States supports "a unified, stable, democratic and a federal Iraq."

The Kurdish internal discord cannot be overlooked either. The rivalry between the PUK that has dominated Kirkuk — the epicenter of the disputed territories — politically and the KDP that has controlled a lot of Kirkuk's oil infrastructure can affect the timing and the possibility of holding a referendum in general and in those areas in particular.

Despite the above internal and external challenges, there are also technical obstacles over the vote. For example, the head of the Kirkuk commission has already said that "no preparations have been made for the referendum as there were no instructions from Baghdad to do so." In other words, instead of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHERC), IHERC in Kurdistan will oversee and conduct the referendum, including voter registration. Unlike the Kurdistan Region, where data from previous elections is available, there is no reliable data on the disputed areas that IHERC can readily rely on for the voter registration. Therefore, given the time constraint and the difficulty of determining voter eligibility, it is unlikely that IHERC will be able to hold a referendum Sept. 25 in the disputed territories.

In the past, due to the difficulty of determining who will be eligible to vote, neither census nor referendum (two crucial stages of Article 140) was implemented. In other words, due to the history of forced displacement from Kirkuk under the Arabization process and returning a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) since 2003, defining a voter registry was particularly challenging. Further complicating the matter, since the emergence of the Islamic State in the last three years, a new group of IDPs has emerged in Kirkuk province. Not only because IHERC doesn't have enough time to figure out this complex matter, but also the commission is sharply divided over Barzani's call for the referendum. One of the nine members of IHERC resigned on July 24, claiming that there is no serious intent by the commission to hold parliamentary and presidential elections in the Kurdistan Region as well as the upcoming referendum.

Amid all of these practical and technical challenges, holding a referendum on Sept. 25 will be difficult — if not impossible. These challenges can prevent the referendum from taking place in the first place or they might oblige Barzani to postpone the referendum, particularly in the disputed territories.

Nahwi Saeed is an independent researcher who specializes in democracy in divided societies, coexistence between ethnic groups in post-conflict situations, power-sharing and the prevention of ethnic conflict in post-conflict societies with the focus on Iraq and the Kurdistan region. He has written several articles for Kurdish, English and Arabic media outlets

Kurdistan referendum is legitimate



By Dr. Walid Phares - - July 26, 2017
<http://www.washingtontimes.com>

Since the Kurdish Regional Government of Northern Iraq, backed by its local legislative assembly, decided to organize a referendum on self-determination, both positive and negative reactions were fielded in Iraq, the Middle East and internationally. Baghdad and the two main neighbors of Iraq — Iran and Turkey — expressed opposition to the Kurdish popular consultation, each one for different political reasons. Beyond the region, Western European governments expressed concerns yet not irreversible opposition. Europe's major powers have at the same time opposed separatism within their own borders (as in Northern Ireland, Basque and Corsica) yet have supported it in the former Yugoslavia twice.

In the United States, many members of Congress support the Kurdish referendum and a few openly support the rise of a separate Kurdish state in northern Iraq for historic reasons. As during the presidential campaign, the Trump administration continues to commit to solidarity with the Kurds fighting ISIS, but has not yet developed a direct policy regarding the referendum or separation.

The most recent polls do show that a majority of Kurdish political parties in northern Iraq support the move while non-Kurdish communities are divided on the issue. These are the present geopolitical realities engulfing the projected vote in September. Such complex positioning is not unique. In every similar past ethnic territorial crises, all parties involved reacted to self-determination requests based on their own interests, the geopolitical context and negotiating abilities. And each case dealt with its own particular conditions within the country and region.

The right for self-determination has been consecrated in the founding charter of the United Nations, and since its founding in 1945, via several General Assembly resolutions recognizing that right for nations to decide their future. However, international law during the Cold War narrowed self-determination to decolonization for realpolitik reasons. Separatism, especially violent separatism, was not encouraged. Hence, long or catastrophic civil wars, such as seen in South Sudan, Nigeria, Eritrea or Kashmir — or

even in the case of the Kurdish uprising in Iraq — never ended happily with an emergence of a new state.

With the end of the Cold War, however, international relations allowed for wider acceptance of the principle of separatism, as long as they were peaceful or presented as a solution to human tragedies. Czechoslovakia split smoothly into two republics, both welcomed by the U.N., and later into NATO and the European Union. The disbanding of Yugoslavia into several independent countries was endorsed by the West, though criticized by Russia. South Sudan got its own state in 2011, and around the globe a number of national and ethnic communities have been striving to achieve statehood. Sovereign statehood is not illegal. Many countries we know, including ours in America, somehow separated from another power in order to exist. But in other cases, instead of separation, nations like Germany reconstituted their national identity by reuniting in 1989. Most countries want to maintain intact borders, and very understandably. Reconstructing frontiers is dangerous and could trigger chaos if not well organized and accepted by all parties concerned.

Separatism has traditionally been seen as a last resort, and thus the world has always demanded justification. The party seeking separation has always been asked to demonstrate that it is indeed different and seeking an identity of its own and that it is suppressed or has experienced tragic and cataclysmic events. But what has become a relatively new accepted procedure, a sine qua non condition, is the necessity of holding a referendum. Regardless of the outcome, a referendum is a license to claim statehood. The international community must see the will of the people before recognizing any outcome. Hence we've seen many referendums taking place and not always leading to new borders: Quebec in Canada, Scotland in the United Kingdom, East Timor, Southern Sudan — and requests for such exercises in other countries such as Belgium. In short, referendums are a form of a democratic expression. They are legal, legitimate, and a peaceful tool to help a people move forward or affirm the status quo.

Iraqi Kurdistan has long presented many conditions justifying its right to hold a referendum, even if the results may not automatically lead to a state. The painful history of oppression under Saddam, and the most recent bloody campaign by ISIS against the Kurds and other minorities in northern Iraq since 2014, constitute the tragic elements of the equation. The Kurds of Iraq have already obtained, from their own co-citizens, Arab Sunnis and Shia, a right to form a federative entity in the north, demonstrating the country's recognition of local self-determination for the Kurds. Iraqis have agreed that they are diverse in their constitution, and referendum is not an alien concept to them. In short, the Kurds have a perfect right to organize a referendum to consult their own population regarding their future. But that right is not

theirs alone. The new norm of acceptance is to then engage in negotiations with Baghdad after the vote. Scotland and Quebec, for example, were ready for that international norm and prepared to negotiate with their central governments.

The U.S. and the international community know all too well that the Kurds have suffered and that they wish to move forward with their destiny. But four conditions should be met in order for the referendum to be accepted by the outside world:

- (1) It must be peaceful and transparent.
- (2) Non-Kurdish communities, such as Assyrians, Yazidis, Chaldeans, Syriacs, Turkomen, Shabak and Mandaeans, should be granted full minorities rights within Iraqi Kurdistan.
- (3) Should the outcome lead to full separation, the new entity should vow not to serve as a springboard for destabilizing neighboring countries by supporting guerillas in these countries, including (primarily) Turkey.
- (4) Representatives of the northern

Iraqi entity should be prepared to engage in full-scale negotiations with the Iraqi government regarding what comes next. Any negotiated and agreed upon settlement between the two parties will be the real guarantee for future stability.

The results of this referendum could simply maintain the status quo, set up a modified and more advanced federal system in Iraq, develop a confederal system of two states within one Iraqi country, or may lead to a Czechoslovak-like peaceful model. What is important for the populations of Iraq and for the Kurds and other minorities is that any move be peaceful, democratic and civilized. After ISIS, Iraq needs calm and stability, secured against a new ISIS, and freed from Iranian domination. The referendum in northern Iraq will be one benchmark in Iraq's evolution. It will demonstrate a political maturity in which ethnic communities can exercise their fundamental right to express themselves without endangering their partners in the state, the minorities among them, or their neighbors in the region. The Kurds of Iraq will exercise that right and the world will watch them move forward into a more tolerant 21st century.

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Confronting the current Middle East alignment



By Adm. James A. Lyons - July 26, 2017
<http://www.washingtontimes.com>

With the imminent defeat of the Islamic State in Mosul, Iraq and in Raqqa, its declared capital in Syria, one of the Trump administration's key objectives is about to be achieved.

With the collapse of the Islamic State as a functioning entity, however, there are clearly new dynamics coming into play which will complicate the post-Islamic State period. What is actually taking place is a realignment of the regional balance of power between Shiite and Sunni power brokers. How it eventually evolves will have a major impact on U.S. security interests, and those of our allies, Israel in particular. The problem is that we have no clear strategy to deal with the evolving dynamic situation or its long-term impact.

Clearly, an immediate problem is that Iran, backed by Russia, seeks to further expand its influence by solidifying a land bridge from Iran through Iraq and Syria to the eastern Mediterranean. Such a move would put a jihadi Shiite regime on the southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Iran's domination of regimes in Baghdad, Beirut and Damascus, along with its play for Yemen, puts it in position to surround the Arabian Peninsula and threaten strategic waterways, including the Strait of

Hormuz and the Bab al-Mandab. Backed by Iran and Russia, Bashar Assad's control of Aleppo and the anticipated fall of Raqqa will likely embolden him to retake eastern Syria, too.

Preventing expansion of the Shiite Crescent must be a top U.S. objective, fundamental to restoring not only credibility with our key allies, but critical to restoring stability to the region as well. Key to achieving this objective without a massive influx of U.S. ground forces is maintaining the viability of pro-Western Kurdish and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). It is also possible that elements of the Syrian Free Army (SFA) can be reconstituted.

The recent downing by a U.S. Navy F-18 fighter aircraft of a Syrian bomber that had been attacking a pro-Western Kurdish force and an SDF unit highlighted Mr. Assad's recognition of the importance of these forces in preventing reassertion of his control in eastern Syria. Perhaps just as important was Russian President Vladimir Putin likely using Syrian resources to test the Trump administration to see if it would support our allies on the ground if attacked. Fortunately, we did, which sent a clear message to both Russia and Syria as well as our allies that there are lines that cannot be crossed. The "strong horse" is back.

The Russian threat to target with surface-to-air missiles any U.S. aircraft flying west of the Euphrates is a further test of the Trump administration. While both Russia and the U.S. want to avoid a direct confrontation, we need to make it very clear we will not be intimidated.

Developing a strategy to address the current regional realignment should be based on U.S. core vital strategic interests. Further, the strategy should be based on the underlying principle that it makes no sense for the United States to inject itself into a 1,300+-year old Shi'ite-Sunni sectarian war. It is actually what the current realignment is all about.

The al Qaeda/Muslim Brotherhood militias rose

up against Syria's Bashar Assad, who was then defended by Iran, Hezbollah plus assorted Shiite militias and now Russia. Turkey is also an increasing problem: President Erdogan and his AK Party are jihadis trying to reestablish some form of the power and glory of the old Ottoman Empire. Dead set against any sort of autonomous Kurdish entity, they are aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood/Hamas — and now also with Iran and Qatar. At this point, Turkey must be viewed as a questionable Western ally.

Fundamental U.S. strategy must be based on preventing Iran from establishing a Shiite land bridge from Tehran to Lebanon. Therefore, a key element of our strategy should be to support the binding independence referendum for Iraqi Kurdistan to be held on Sept. 25, 2017. U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson officially opposes it because of a misguided objective to keep Iraq intact. But Iraq is already fractured, as is Syria, and neither one will be reconstituted in its pre-WWI artificial geographic boundaries. Clearly, the 1916 Sykes-Picot nation-state arrangement has collapsed.

Our strategy should also support Syrian Kurds carving out their own sphere of influence (Rojava), which could eventually unite with Iraqi Kurdistan. Control of the vast Syrian Sunni interior that spans the border into the former Iraq remains unresolved. Damascus cannot control a federalized Syria, even with Iranian and Russian support. Therefore, our strategic plan must back Sunni forces that have shown themselves to be both anti-Damascus and non-jihadist. The only group that falls into that category is the Free Syrian Army, which will need to be reinforced. U.S. policy should concede that Damascus will hold the Alawite heartland that includes the Russian bases at Latakia and Tartus.

With the eight years the Obama administration squandered, plus the transfer of over \$100 billion to Iran (which it is now using to finance Shiite militias fighting to secure a land bridge across the Iraq-Syria border), we must shift from a reactive defensive strategy to a proactive one.

Accordingly, the Trump team must first define a national security strategy for the region. Such a strategy must be predicated on reconstitution of U.S. military capability and demonstration of the will to project power and influence, specifically by supporting Kurdish-FSA-SDF forces and, together with our allies, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the GCC, block further Iranian expansionism. Elimination of Iran's nuclear infrastructure will also be an imperative at some point.

Bottom line: there is no substitute for American leadership.

- Retired U.S. Navy Adm. James A. Lyons was commander in chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet and senior U.S. military representative to the United Nations. This article first appeared in *The Washington Times* Commentary section on July 2, 2017.



Illustration on a coming Middle East alignment by Linas Garsys/The Washington Times

The threatened future of Christianity in Iraq

By Archbishop Bashar Warda and C.Ss.R.
July 26, 2017

<http://www.washingtontimes.com>



I write on behalf of the remaining Christians of Northern Iraq, a threatened and persecuted population, which looks warily to the coming years.

In the three years since the onset of the crisis, when over 100,000 displaced Christians fled Nineveh with death at their heels and arrived at our doors in Erbil, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, our Archdiocese has played the lead role in providing care and hope for the vast majority of these people. In this ongoing crisis, we remain always grateful for the solidarity with our friends worldwide, whose generosity has kept us in a position of viability, albeit a tenuous one.

How important has this solidarity been to us during this time? In brief, it has been everything. For without the solidarity of humanitarian outreach from our friends in private, faith-based organizations around the world, we would not have survived these past three years. While the established institutional aid structures ignored us, our friends from the private aid community, large and small, kept us in their hearts and took action to save us.

In looking back on this time, we must note as well the critical support of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in opening the borders to the displaced Christians during their flight, and for providing us with the space and security to house our people in safety over the past three years. We are grateful, as well, for the moral support that the leaders of the KRG have shown to us by publicly participating in the celebration of our most Holy days, and granting us the practical support necessary to open our medical clinics, schools, and our new university, the Catholic University in Erbil.

Overall we pray that this solidarity may continue, for we are in a time in which Christianity itself will continue to be threatened and persecuted throughout the Mideast — indeed, throughout much of the world — until the minds that have been taught violence and hate can come to see the greater truth of mercy and love, which is inherently common to us all.

In saying this, I wish that I could tell you that our crisis in Iraq has passed, that our people can safely return to their homes, and that our problems have now been resolved. But that is not the case. This coming year may yet prove to be the most dangerous for us since the beginning of the crisis.

While it is true that the Christian lands have been liberated from ISIS, what is left in the wake of the war presents us with still enormous problems to overcome. Our towns in many cases have been destroyed. This includes homes, and also the power and water systems. Many of those who wish to return have no houses left to return to. Those homes left standing were in most cases looted and stripped of even their wiring and plumbing.

Nineveh, our ancient Christian homeland, remains a disputed territory, caught between the governments in Erbil and Baghdad, along with all the other foreign powers who seek to intervene and control Iraq, whether directly or indirectly. Meanwhile, especially in the Iraqi-controlled sector, the security situation remains uncertain, with rival militias seeking power over each other, often acting as proxies from outside powers. If these powers enter into new conflict, we Christians know only one thing — that we will be the collateral damage once again.

What then can we, and those who support and value our continued existence in Iraq, do during this time of transition to take care of our people?

The immediate and greatest priority must be to return the displaced Christians to their homes wherever it is possible to do so. A world whose conscience feels for us at all must support these efforts and do so now, while the demographic future of Nineveh is so clearly at risk. We must be clear in this: The future of Nineveh will be decided by the action or inaction that is taken in these next few months. Absent support for the right and ability of Christians to return to their homes, the makeup of Nineveh — and with it, the plurality of Iraq — may be changed forever.

At the same time, we must not abandon those who cannot yet return to their homes. As much as we seek to encourage our displaced people and help them in returning, we must make sure they have a livable home to return to. It would be wrong for us, and the world, to force them now into a homeless situation, for these people will then decide to leave Iraq for good. As such, we will remain in a time of transition over the coming months, and in this we will continue to need support.

In terms of the threatened church, which is facing violent external, even existential threats,

how can we work towards a viable future? In the Middle East, we see a Christianity that faces ongoing violent persecution, even genocide. Very little of this persecution is now happening in secret. In this day of instant communications, this violence is shown to all of us almost immediately. And yet it seems so often that our governments and our institutions are unable, or refuse, to truly act.

In Iraq, we Christians faced a persecution that not only sought to destroy our church, but also to destroy us as a people by forcing us, under threat of death, from our historic homelands, after which they sought to remove all traces of our culture and heritage. Our present efforts and hopes to return to our homes have received sympathetic words from Western governments, but so far little else.

We learn now, with great sorrow and pain, that lawyers at the United States State Department have begun taking quiet moves, in the dark, so it would seem, to rescind the Genocide declaration made over one year ago by former Secretary of State John Kerry. Once again, the Christians of Iraq find themselves on the receiving end of yet another ruse. One can only wonder what those behind this effort contemplate in terms of the irreparable damage being done here to the diminishing credibility of their government's word.

As for our future, we look to rebuild where we can, and contribute as full citizens with equal rights under a legitimate sovereign government, as chosen freely by the people. We urge the governments of Kurdistan and Iraq to resolve the issue of the disputed territories of Nineveh now, and we implore the West to ensure that this takes place in a peaceful fashion.

Beyond all this, we ask those in power in the West to not turn their eyes from us. Iraq first embraced Christianity almost 2,000 years ago. Our population, 1.5 million in 2003, is perhaps less than 300,000 today. We are an ancient people on the verge of extinction, seeking only to live our lives in peace. Today we live our days in extremis. We did not arrive at this place on our own.

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Kurdistan Region: Untapped economic potential



By Dr. Sasha Toperich - July 26, 2017
<http://www.washingtontimes.com>

I have no doubt that the economy of the Kurdistan Region will experience significant growth as early as next year. There are several reasons why.

After ISIL overtook Mosul in August 2014, the Peshmerga, Kurdistan's defense forces, showed immense bravery in their fight, preventing the terrorists from taking Erbil and moving deeper into Iraqi Kurdistan territory. The news was all the more devastating considering that the U.S. and its allies had previously trained and equipped hundreds of thousands of Iraqi soldiers and policemen, who fled the 1,500 ISIL fighters, handing over expensive U.S. weaponry, while the Peshmerga defended the Kurdistan Region with decades-old rifles.

Before the emergence of ISIL, the Kurdistan region of Iraq experienced an economic "golden period," with investments pouring in from all sides. Erbil, Suleimania and Dohuk looked to diversify their local economies, investing in the cement industry, tourism and the real estate industry. The Kurdistan Regional Government-Iraq (KRG) was referred to as the "next Dubai." In 2011, FDI magazine ranked Erbil fifth in terms of opportunities for direct foreign investment and one of the most business-friendly cities in the entire Middle East.

The ISIL attack on Kurdistan coincided with a dramatic drop in oil prices, forcing a rebalancing of budgets in most of oil revenue-driven economies, including Kurdistan. To make matters worse, 1.8 million refugees, mostly from Iraq and Syria, looked for a safe haven in the Kurdistan Region. The Iraqi central government's payment of 17 percent of total revenues to the KRG, required by the Iraqi constitution, had not been honored by Baghdad due to internal political rifts. Moreover, the KRG struggled to meet its monthly obligations, which exceeded \$1 billion. During the golden period, the KRG hired one out of six Kurds to work for the government, creating a monthly payroll obligation of more than \$700 million.

Progressive investment laws

In the midst of it all, the KRG launched a comprehensive set of reforms to modernize its economy.

To bring transparency into its oil sector, the KRG hired Deloitte to audit its oil production, exports and revenues. In partnership with the World Bank, the KRG committed to reforms in the electricity sector, with a goal to privatize electric providers and reduce domestic production costs by 40 percent. It installed meters for electricity usage both to stabilize the system and collect revenue, as many people were exploiting Kurdistan's electric grid, adding to a significant deficit in the electricity balance sheet.

In an effort to curb corruption and enhance transparency, the KRG, again with the World Bank, introduced an electronic payment system to its employees, accounting for about 65 percent of the labor force in the Kurdistan Region. The process included the registering and issuing of biometric cards for government employees, including the Peshmerga forces. This task was completed recently, creating a fiscal order for about 1.4 million employees while also eliminating so-called "ghost employees" and those that were registered (and paid for) twice. The KRG also began to reduce salaries, remove subsidies on gasoline and eliminate various allowances that were draining the budget.

The investment law that the KRG launched in 2006 was one of the most progressive laws of its kind in the entire Middle East. The law treats foreign and local investors equally, allowing them to buy and own land for investment purposes, accommodating full ownership of capital, the ability to repatriate profits in full, and a 10-year non-custom tax break after the beginning of production, among numerous other incentives.

Abundant natural resources

The Kurdistan Region has been divided in to seven blocks for exploration and investment on the bases of suitable target areas: Blocks 1 and 2 in Duhok governorate; blocks 3 and 4 in Erbil governorate, and blocks 5,6 and 7 in Sulaymania Governorate.

Mineral exploration and development are investments. They hold forth the promise of rewards for private companies, governments and local communities. In June 2016, the Ministry of Natural Resources of the KRG invited expressions of interest from qualified international mining companies for the "Mineral Exploration & Investment in the Kurdistan Region-Iraq." More than 10 regional and international mineral companies showed their interest to submit a proposal to invest in the mining sector in Kurdistan Region.

Kurdistan's oil is sold to markets in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Last month, the KRG signed an agreement with Russian oil giant Rosneft to develop its exploitation and production. They agreed on the monetization of an export oil pipeline along with several production sharing agreements, as a result of Rosneft's direct purchase of Kurdistan's crude oil for its refineries in Germany. In 2016, pipeline oil exports from the KRG to Turkey reached 500,000 barrels per day, while truck exports of heavier crude oil to Turkey currently average around 38,000 barrels per day. Kurdistan has proven natural gas reserves of 703 bcm and an estimated 5.6 tcm of unproven reserves. The KRG-Turkey Gas Sales Agreement signed in 2013 foresees plateau export of 10 bcm annually by 2020, with the option of increasing export capacity to 20 bcm per year.

Baghdad's efforts to undermine Kurdistan's direct oil exports are proving to be ineffective. Every barrel of oil exported by the KRG has found a buyer. Actions to prevent the Kurdistan Region — which passed its own oil and gas law in 2007 — from selling its oil directly are of pure political nature. Article 115 of the new Iraqi constitution states that "all powers not stipulated in the exclusive powers of the federal government belong to the authorities of the regions and governorates that are not organized in a region. With regard to other powers shared between the federal government and the regional government, priority shall be given to the law of the regions and governorates not organized in a region in case of dispute."

In an ever-complex and changing Middle East, one thing is clear: nothing will remain the same after Sept. 25, when the Kurds are expected to vote overwhelmingly in favor of independence for the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Although the time of the actual proclamation of Kurdistan independence is not set yet, the referendum, in spite of internal political rifts, will strengthen KRG's position, and there is little doubt that investors will take notice. The road to recovery has begun, and with the ongoing reforms, there is a general feeling that Kurdistan has turned the tide.

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The Peshmerga: Fearsome, fearless fighters



By Michael Pregent - July 26, 2017
<http://www.washingtontimes.com>

My first deployment to Iraq was as an embedded adviser to a reflagged Kurdish Peshmerga battalion in Mosul in 2005. The 3rd Battalion of the 4th Brigade of the 2nd Iraqi Army Division was a Peshmerga unit from Duhok and would be responsible for conducting counterinsurgency operations in West Mosul at the height of the Sunni insurgency.

We were 10 American advisers embedded with a 500-man Kurdish force commanded by Col. Nooraldeen al-Herki in the heart of al Qaeda's stronghold in West Mosul. We were also the luckiest 10 Americans in Iraq — we had a pro-American force that made American partner units more effective in decimating al Qaeda.

We partnered with LTC Eric Kurilla's Deuce 4 (<https://www.michaelyon-online.com/gates-of-fire.htm>), a Stryker Battalion out of Fort Lewis, Washington. The Peshmerga unit I was with was his go-to partner unit for developing intelligence and conducting raids against al Qaeda High-Value-Targets — military for al Qaeda leadership. This U.S.-Peshmerga partnership was very successful against al Qaeda terrorists in Mosul and oversaw security for parliamentary elections in 2005.

In 2006, we pushed to the east side of Mosul or as the Kurds call it the "left-side" as they look south from Kurdistan. Security improved in Mosul due to the effectiveness of this Peshmerga unit to the point where President George W. Bush touted Mosul as an example of what an effective operation looks like.

Most of the unit was familiar with Mosul's neighborhoods and tribal leaders, and they spoke Mosul's dialect of Iraqi Arabic. They effectively helped U.S. forces protect the 2.2 million Sunnis, Kurds and Christians, and pushed al Qaeda out of Mosul — all without knocking down a single building in Iraq's second-largest city.

With security improving, this unit, along with its American partner unit, deployed to Baghdad to

take part in the operation that decimated al Qaeda — The Surge.

Most Iraqi units at the time were afraid to take on both al Qaeda and Iranian-backed Shia militias, but this unit did exactly that when it was deployed to one of the most dangerous parts of Baghdad. This Peshmerga unit was one of the first units capable of operating as a national force, meaning it could be effective in areas bordering Kurdish areas and as effective in areas where Shia militias and al Qaeda stoked sectarian flames.

The Peshmerga were the chosen force to fill the ranks of the Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF); they partnered with American Special Operators to conduct raids against key al Qaeda and Shia militia targets.

The Peshmerga were so effective that Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki saw them as a potential threat and brought the ISOF under his direct control — and purged the predominantly Kurdish force and replaced them with Shia Party loyalists. He took a counterterrorism strike force and made it a countercoup force — he politicized it and, as a result, made it ineffective.

Mr. Maliki didn't stop there: He purged effective Peshmerga and Sunni Arab Iraqi commanders, prompting my return to Mosul in 2008 to assess the situation on behalf of United States Forces-Iraq (USF-I) Commander Army Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond T. Odierno. Mr. Maliki brought false charges against effective Kurdish and Sunni commanders, only to drop the charges once they were removed from command. It was the easiest way to have them removed from their positions and filled with his cronies.

The 2nd and 3rd Iraqi Divisions that operated in Talafar and Mosul were now politicized to the point where they were ineffective in combat — the Peshmerga were no longer wearing the Iraqi Army uniform. Mr. Maliki had successfully purged competent Kurdish commanders and their troops from the two divisions that helped decimate al Qaeda during The Surge.

With the purge complete and Mr. Maliki's cronies in place, ISIS saw an opening. Two short years later — Mr. Maliki's politicized force abandoned the citizens of Talafar and Mosul and left U.S. tanks and Humvees to ISIS.

There is no doubt that if those effective Sunni and Peshmerga commanders had remained, ISIS would not have been able to roll into Mosul and Talafar — evidenced by the wall ISIS faced when it tried to push into Kurdish territory. The Peshmerga held their own, despite Baghdad's decision to push U.S. arms and equipment to

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-backed Shia militias, but deny them to the Peshmerga.

The Islamic State's first loss of territory was to a Peshmerga force with U.S. air support — the Mosul Dam, north of Mosul, Iraq. I later had a chance to brief Gen. John Allen upon his appointment by President Barack Obama as the ISIS czar (<http://www.businessinsider.com/john-allen-isis-war-obama-2015-9>) — I told him that ISIS cannot hold territory against a capable ground force with U.S. air support and cited the Peshmerga's role in retaking the Mosul Dam as an example. It was this example that was used as model for our U.S. strategy.

The Peshmerga stopped ISIS from spreading into Kurdish territory in Iraq, partnered with U.S. Special Operators to bring combat power to the Syrian Kurds fighting ISIS in the Syrian city of Kobane, and sealed off Mosul for two years while waiting for Baghdad to mobilize against ISIS and begin the Mosul offensive.

The U.S. relies on Kurdish intel and weighs it higher than what comes out of Baghdad's intel agencies; we rely on our trusted Kurdish allies and proven brothers in combat against al Qaeda and now in this fight against ISIS. The fight is not over and continued success against ISIS will remain dependent on our continued relationship with our Kurdish allies.

When Iraqis — all Iraqis — are worried about security, they go to Kurdistan. There will always be an answer to emerging terrorist threats in Iraq — and the answer will come from the north. From "those who face death" — the Peshmerga.

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Key factors beckon support for Iraqi Kurds



By Lt. Gen. Jay Garner - July 26, 2017
<http://www.washingtontimes.com>

Once the war with ISIS is concluded in Iraq, the Arabs — both Shia and Sunni — will demand our removal; only the Kurds will want us to remain. It is also certain that Iran will exert far more control over Baghdad than they have in the past.

Prior to the invasion by ISIS in 2014, the Iranians had loosely knitted a strong “Shia Arc” extending from Tehran through Baghdad, Damascus and Beirut. Today, with the strong alliance of the Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Russians and the expeditionary arm of the Hezbollah in Syria, and the presence of the Iranian-led Shia militants in Iraq, the arc is being consolidated into a “thoroughfare” that will control the Levant and significantly increase the horrible attacks on the Israeli population. In a recent op-ed, Charles Krauthammer said the Shiite Crescent is “stretching from Iran through Iraq, Syria and Lebanon to the Mediterranean. If consolidated, it gives the Persians a Mediterranean reach they have not had in 2,300 years.”

We have unwittingly accommodated the Iranians by maintaining our “One Iraq” policy, which guarantees that their proxy government in Baghdad will continue to marginalize the Kurds because it allows Bagdad to block aid, material and revenues for the Kurdish Regional Government and prevents direct assistance. If we continue to aid the Iranians with this senseless policy, no matter how much blood or money we waste, we will not be able to change the outcome.

Consequently, we should develop a strategy that will allow us to continue to have leverage in the region. This must start with the abandonment of the “One Iraq” policy, followed by strong support for the Iraqi Kurds and for their impending referendum. The referendum is not a declaration of independence; it is a proclamation of self-determination. This is the only win that we can achieve in the region ... but it is a strategic win.

Iraqi Kurdistan provides us with several strategic and economic options. There are significant factors that favor our support of the Iraqi Kurds:

- They are pro-United States and intensely loyal because Operation Provide Comfort in 1991 saved them from starvation and annihilation and Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 liberated them from Saddam Hussein.
- They have a freely elected democratic government that willingly receives and protects Christians — in fact, all faiths — throughout the region. (Pictured: Kurdish Peshmerga forces return the cross to a local church that was destroyed by ISIS).
- They occupy one of the most strategic locations in that part of the world: Our enemy Iran is to their east; their puppet Iraq is to their south; our enemy Syria is to their west; and Turkey, a NATO ally, is to their north, which would give us excellent lines of communication.
- They have abundant natural resources in oil and gas, which are among the largest remaining hydrocarbon reserves in the world.

Considering the above, we should, in conjunction with the Kurdistan Regional Government

(KRG), develop a policy that embodies support for KRG independence. For all practical purposes, the old boundaries of Iraq have been destroyed and will not return. The Kurds essentially have been semi-independent since 2003 and almost completely independent since 2014.

We should also establish a continuing U.S. military footprint with 90-day to 120-day training rotations through the deployment of an USAF Air Wing, an Army Brigade Combat Team or a USMC Marine Expeditionary Unit. The training rotation removes the specter of occupation. We should analyze the potential of deploying a Navy ground-based Aegis or Army THAAD System to engage Iranian ballistic missiles that would be launched toward Europe or the U.S. This would not only catch the Iranians off guard, it would also serve to counter the Russian footprint that is being established in the region. These rotations serve as a trigger for any incursions into the area. They provide a secure force projection platform that allows rapid deployment of forces into the area. They serve as a signal to both our allies and our enemies that the area is important to us and we will remain involved, and it would signal to our Sunni allies in the Middle East that we are challenging the Iranian domination of the region.

Iraqi Kurdistan not only has large oil reserves, but it also has immense gas reserves — projected to exceed 2 trillion cubic feet. We could, in partnership with the KRG, develop these reserves and pipe gas into Europe; this would, in the future, provide for us tremendous economic leverage to counter Vladimir Putin’s economy.

Finally, such a strategy provides the Kurds who, next to the Israelis, are our most loyal allies in the Middle East, with freedom from the Iranian puppet government in Baghdad and noticeably aligns them with us. It would establish a dominant U.S. military footprint that serves to notify the world that we remain committed to the region. Lastly, it provides hydrocarbon assets that can be used to reduce or eliminate Europe’s economic dependence on Russia ... another strategic win.

• *Retired Lt. Gen. Jay Garner, former Assistant Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, directed humanitarian efforts in the Kurdish Region after the 1991 Gulf War.*

Dans Raqqa, bastion assiégé de Daech

Ils sont kurdes, arabes, yézidis... Soldats de l'opération "Colère de l'Euphrate", ils se battent, au sein d'une coalition fragile, pour reprendre la capitale de l'Etat islamique. Reportage



De notre envoyé spécial **GUILLAUME PERRIER**

Dans le salon d'une maison vidée de ses habitants, les combattants ont installé un poste avancé à la hâte. Une théière fume, quelques paillasses sont étendues à même le sol. Des talkies-walkies grésillent sur le rebord d'une fenêtre et des kalachnikovs sont appuyées contre les murs. Calé dans un canapé branlant, au-dessus duquel est accroché un canevas représentant une scène bucolique de l'Angleterre du XIX^e siècle, le commandant du groupe a les yeux rivés sur une tablette. Sur l'écran, une photo satellite parsemée de points colorés. Jaunes pour les positions des combattants kurdes, les YPG (Unités de protection du Peuple), bleus pour leurs alliés, rouges pour les djihadistes de Daech. « *Tous les postes sont connectés en réseau, ce qui nous permet de suivre l'évolution en temps réel des lignes de front et les déplacements de forces. C'est une guerre technologique* », explique l'officier dans son uniforme couleur sable.

Sur la terrasse, qui offre une vue imprenable sur le quartier de Nassira et sur la vieille ville de Raqqa, un guetteur jette des coups d'œil par-dessus le parapet. Il est à portée de snipers, à 500 mètres à peine des lignes de Daech. D'un geste ample, Boran, un Kurde originaire de Hasankayf, en Turquie, décrit l'avancée décisive de ses compagnons, sur le front est, au cours de la nuit.

Le 4 juillet, les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), une coalition arabo-kurde, qui assiègent la capitale syrienne de l'organisation Etat islamique depuis deux mois, sont entrées dans la vieille ville de



Raqqa. Les hauts murs d'enceinte en forme de fer à cheval, construits au VIII^e siècle par les califes abbassides, ont été franchis. La route stratégique qui mène à la grande mosquée, un joyau architectural entièrement en brique édifié il y a douze siècles, est elle aussi sous le contrôle des FDS. « *Daech est mort, jubile Metin, un combattant kurde syrien de 22 ans. Ils n'ont pas les moyens de nous résister. Alors ils utilisent d'autres stratégies. Ils passent sous les lignes grâce à des tunnels, lancent des drones piégés ou des attaques-suicides.* »

Un tiers de la cité est désormais libéré du joug de Daech qui se recroqueville inexorablement dans le dédale de la médina, où les combats risquent de se durcir. Après Mossoul, fief irakien du califat repris il y a dix jours, la reconquête militaire de Raqqa est inéluctable. Ce n'est plus qu'une question de temps, de semaines, peut-être de mois. Mais depuis qu'a été lancée l'opération « Colère de l'Euphrate », en novembre 2016, toutes les parties le savent pertinemment :



comme à Mossoul, la vraie bataille, celle pour la stabilité et la sécurité de la région, ne fait, elle, que commencer.

Dans le petit poste avancé de Nassira, la majorité des combattants assis autour d'un plat de tomates et de viande séchée est originaire de Turquie. D'Izmir à Van, les Kurdes ont depuis 2012 rejoint en masse les YPG, la branche armée du PYD, le mouvement syrien issu du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan). Les ➤

➔ « *kadro* » les plus expérimentés de la guérilla marxiste, en lutte depuis 1984 contre l'Etat turc, sont omniprésents. Ils occupent les postes stratégiques, dirigent les opérations, noyautent les « médias militaires » officiels qui sont les seuls autorisés à couvrir au plus près les opérations.

Dans les rues des quartiers libérés de Raqqa, sur chaque position ou checkpoint, les Kurdes de Syrie sont majoritaires, mais ils sont suppléés par ceux originaires d'Iran ou de Turquie, venus libérer Raqqa et consolider les fondations de leur pays. Car le projet des YPG, derrière le paravent multiethnique des Forces démocratiques syriennes, est d'établir dans le nord de la Syrie un territoire autonome, tout le long de la frontière turque. Divisé en trois cantons, ce « proto-Etat » est une mise en pratique des théories élaborées par Abdullah Öcalan, le fondateur du PKK emprisonné en Turquie depuis 1999. Au cas où l'on en douterait, le portrait du « guide » Öcalan trône dans les lieux publics et dans toutes les institutions du « Rojava », le « Kurdistan occidental », que ses détracteurs préfèrent qualifier d'« Öcalanistan ». Washington, le principal parrain des Kurdes de Syrie, fait mine de ne pas le voir pour ne pas irriter son allié turc.

A Raqqa, les Kurdes sont aussi mus par un désir de vengeance, deux ans après le traumatisme de la bataille de Kobané. Parmi les slogans politiques qui recouvrent les murs de la ville, un message récurrent s'étale en lettres noires ou rouges : « *Nous n'oublions pas ce qui s'est passé à Kobané.* »

La commandante de l'opération « Colère de l'Euphrate », Rojda Felat, 36 ans, est un pur produit de cette école idéologique. Née à Qamichli, dans la région syrienne de la Djézireh, à majorité kurde, cette petite femme aux cheveux noirs comme la nuit et aux pommettes saillantes, a pris les armes en 2012 « *pour défendre la terre et le peuple kurdes* ». « *Cela fait des décennies que nous luttons pour nos droits. Face à la menace de Daech, nous avons été obligés de nous organiser et de nous défendre, c'était une question de survie* », assure-t-elle en sirotant un thé, assise en tailleur dans une base de Raqqa Ouest.

« *La population de Raqqa est en majorité arabe, reconnaît Rojda Felat. Mais un grand nombre de nos combattants le sont aussi, ce sont eux qui vont libérer la ville* », affirme-t-elle. Les FDS font en effet la part belle aux combattants non kurdes. Y compris au sein des bataillons d'appelés qui font leur

service obligatoire de neuf mois pour une paye mensuelle de 120 dollars. Pour légitimer la reconquête, la coalition a placé en première ligne, sur tous les fronts qui enserrant la ville, des brigades arabes plus expérimentées. Des *katiba* issues de ce qu'il reste de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) anti-Bachar al-Assad, qui ne se sont pas ralliées par adhésion idéologique mais qui ont opportunément choisi la force la plus à même de faire tomber Raqqa. « *Notre ennemi commun, ce sont les terroristes de Daech* », clame Aboubakir, 23 ans, qui combat avec 25 autres membres de Liwa al-Tahrir originaires de Deir ez-Zor. « *Ils ont tué plus de cent hommes de ma tribu, pendus ou exécutés, souffle-t-il. Le même sort m'attendait si je n'avais pas pris les armes.* » Son

“DAECH A PENDU OU EXÉCUTÉ PLUS DE CENT HOMMES DE MA TRIBU. LE MÊME SORT M'ATTENDAIT SI JE N'AVAIS PAS PRIS LES ARMES.”

ABOUBAKIR, 23 ANS

ami Abou al-Moughira, 22 ans, a lui aussi des comptes à régler avec Daech. « *L'été dernier, l'Etat islamique m'a emprisonné pour mes liens avec l'ASL. Mon père est venu me rendre visite, mais ils l'ont attrapé et enfermé à son tour. Il a été torturé pendant trois jours. Il en est mort peu après* », raconte le jeune homme, longiligne, un keffieh noir enroulé autour de la tête. « *Je savais que j'allais être de nouveau arrêté, alors je suis parti combattre Daech à Azaz, près de la Turquie, puis à Al-Bab et enfin à Raqqa. En arrivant, j'ai failli finir sur une mine* », explique-t-il en relevant son pantalon et en découvrant sa jambe blessée.

A côté d'eux, Salman, 20 ans, est venu laver l'honneur de son frère, tué par Daech en 2015. Quant à Houd, il veut en découdre avec ceux qui lui ont volé deux voitures et de l'argent, dans son village près de

Deir ez-Zor... Le seul projet politique de ces jeunes combattants est la vengeance. La haine de l'Etat islamique est le seul ciment qui unit toutes ces brigades. « *Nous espérons un avenir plus heureux* », lâche Salman.

Pour faire tomber la capitale de l'Etat islamique, Rojda Felat peut compter sur une armée mixte de 10 000 hommes et femmes, où se mêlent toutes les composantes ethniques et religieuses de la région. Kurdes, Arabes, mais aussi Arméniens, yézidis, Tcherkesses... Un attelage hétéroclite, souvent bancal, toujours dominé politiquement par les Kurdes de Turquie. Des bataillons de volontaires étrangers parcourent aussi les lignes de front, avec des motivations diverses. Des staliniens turcs, des zapatistes latino-américains, des etarras basques, des évangéliques américains en croisade, des militants de l'Armée rouge japonaise, des espions et des aventuriers en mal de sensations fortes...

Robert Grodt, un Américain de 28 ans, figure du mouvement Occupy Wall Street en 2011, était l'un d'eux; sa mort sur le front de Raqqa a été annoncée lundi 10 juillet. Dans un bel uniforme frappé du blason des YPG, Michael Enright, un Britannique de 53 ans à l'éphémère carrière d'acteur à Hollywood – il a joué un second rôle dans « *Pirates des Caraïbes* »! –, s'est engagé en 2015 avec les Kurdes. Il combat avec eux près de Raqqa depuis plus d'un an. « *J'ai voulu m'engager après le 11 septembre 2001, mais j'étais trop âgé pour entrer dans l'armée* », raconte cet homme aux cheveux grisonnants, avec le débit d'une arme automatique. Ce chrétien « *en quête spirituelle* » a été marqué par la figure de Jihadi John, le jihadiste britannique le plus célèbre, le mal absolu, selon lui, ainsi que par les attentats récents commis à Londres. Il a voulu apporter sa contribution à la « *guerre contre le terrorisme* ».

A cette coalition de bric et de broc s'ajoutent les parrains étrangers, dont la présence est de plus en plus visible dans les quartiers libérés de Raqqa. Les Américains ont déployé plusieurs centaines de marines lourdement armés et équipés. Leur artillerie pilonne la ville, chaque nuit, malgré la présence estimée d'au moins 50 000 civils. Ces frappes ont déjà fait plusieurs dizaines de morts, des milliers de réfugiés, des destructions irréparables. Comme à Mossoul, la méthode employée crée un profond ressentiment au sein de la population, ce qui aura des conséquences une fois Raqqa reprise. Devant ➔

► leurs véhicules blindés Humvees, les soldats américains tiennent les carrefours stratégiques à proximité des lignes de front, buste droit et regard haut derrière leurs Ray-Ban. Ils interviennent en appui des combattants kurdes et arabes, qui eux sont armés de vieilles kalachnikovs, partent au front en chantant, claquettes aux pieds et sans gilets pare-balles.

Le 4 juillet, date de l'entrée dans la vieille ville et jour de la fête nationale américaine, un impressionnant convoi militaire envoyé par Washington est arrivé aux portes de Raqqa, par l'ouest. Quelques jours plus

tôt, la chaîne américaine CBS avait pu filmer l'atterrissage d'un avion-cargo sur la piste de Kobané, à trois heures de route. Des dizaines de blindés, surmontés de tourelles, des transports de troupes, quatre semi-remorques chargés de caisses d'armes, de missiles et d'obus de mortier de gros calibre sont entrés en fanfare dans Raqqa. Une démonstration de force. La présence des Français est en revanche plus discrète. Les forces spéciales sont installées dans une maison avec piscine à proximité du front est. Le but principal de tout ce petit monde est de capturer ou d'éliminer les

djihadistes étrangers, afin d'éviter qu'ils ne ressortent vivants de Syrie...

Une seule chose semble faire le lien entre les différentes composantes de la coalition. La haine de Daech. Mais une fois les djihadistes éliminés, évincés de leur

“DAECH A DÉTRUIT TOUTE LA SOCIÉTÉ. POUR LES CONTRER, IL FAUT RÉTABLIR L'ACTIVITÉ ÉCONOMIQUE.”

ADIL AL-ALI, MEMBRE DU CONSEIL CIVIL PROVISOIRE DE RAQQA



▲ Metin, 22 ans, des Forces démocratiques syriennes, est l'un des premiers soldats à être entrés début juillet dans la vieille ville de Raqqa.

bastion, cette fragile alliance risque de voler en éclats. « Nous sommes confrontés à un défi de taille, reconnaît Rojda Felat, dans la base des combattants kurdes. Persuader les habitants de Raqqa que le modèle de l'Etat islamique n'est pas islamique. » Les Kurdes aussi vont devoir convaincre de la sincérité de leur projet, présenté comme démocratique, égalitaire et libertaire. Sur le terrain, les tendances hégémoniques et autoritaires de leur mouvement font craindre un réveil brutal. Les discriminations envers les civils arabes, les humiliations aux checkpoints, les petits trafics, la corruption leur attirent de virulentes critiques et le ressentiment des minorités.

Pour administrer la ville de Raqqa, les FDS ont mis en place un conseil civil, une sorte de municipalité autonome. Une fois la victoire militaire assurée, le pouvoir lui sera transmis. « Nous essayons de traiter tous les problèmes : l'eau, l'électricité, la reconstruction des canalisations, le redémarrage d'une boulangerie... Daech a détruit toute la société. Pour les contrer, il faut rétablir l'activité économique », souligne Adil al-Ali, membre de ce conseil provisoirement installé à Aïn Issa, à 50 kilomètres de Raqqa. Ce modèle a déjà été testé dans d'autres villes reprises à Daech et notamment dans des villes à majorité arabe, comme Manbij, libérée le 12 août 2016. Depuis, cette ville de



▲ Un combattant arabe des YPG, farve armée de la branche syrienne du PKK, en contact par talkie-walkie avec son unité

50 000 habitants, située à l'ouest de l'Euphrate sur la route d'Alep, reprend vie.

Vêtu d'un costume noir, d'un keffieh immaculé et de chaussures vernies impeccablement lustrées, le cheikh Farouk al-Machi, 49 ans, préside le conseil civil installé par les FDS et approuvé par le conseil des chefs des 64 tribus locales. « Après trois années de crimes de Daech, tout était détruit mais nous avons rouvert les écoles qui avaient été minées, reconstruit six hôpitaux, les gens l'ont bien vu », plaide-t-il. « Au sein du conseil, 70% des membres sont arabes, le reste est issu des minorités de la ville dont les Kurdes, insiste le cheikh. Ce sont les habitants qui décident. »

Dans la ville, les avis sont partagés. Pour des questions de sécurité et de stabilité, une bonne partie de la population semble se ranger derrière les nouveaux maîtres des lieux que beaucoup persistent à appeler « les Kurdes » ou « les camarades » – heval, un terme par lequel s'identifient les sympathisants du PKK. « Il n'y a pas une seule maison en Syrie qui ne soit pas divisée », tempère Mustafa Droubi. Ce sexagénaire qui a été emprisonné un mois et torturé pour avoir allumé une cigarette à la sortie de la mosquée devant un chef de guerre tchétchène de Daech bénit la présence des FDS.

Mais les menaces qui planent sur Manbij sont celles qui s'annoncent pour Raqqa. Le soutien occidental se limite au militaire. Et les Forces démocratiques syriennes sont considérées par le voisin turc comme des groupes terroristes, au même titre que Daech. Un mur a été édifié tout le long de la frontière, et l'eau de l'Euphrate est retenue en amont, ce qui cause d'importantes pénuries. Le président turc a menacé à plusieurs reprises d'aller « libérer Manbij ». « Nous sommes libres de choisir le drapeau de notre administration, tempête le cheikh Farouk. A Azaz ou Jarablous, c'est le drapeau turc qui flotte, c'est une occupation. »

Depuis 2015, Ankara a tout fait pour dissuader Washington de soutenir les forces du Rojava. En vain. Ces dernières se sont imposées comme l'option la plus réaliste pour débarrasser la Syrie de Daech. La suite est une autre histoire. Après Raqqa, les FDS pousseront-elles jusqu'à Deir ez-Zor pour nettoyer les dernières poches djihadistes? Les alliés occidentaux trahiront-ils les Kurdes, une fois le fief du califat anéanti? La question brûle toutes les lèvres. La commandante Rojda Felat esquisse un sourire quand on la lui pose: « Notre peuple n'a toujours pu compter que sur lui-même. » ■



▲ Un jeune Kurde, avec un drapeau représentant le leader Öcalan, manifeste.



▲ Les officiers suivent en direct l'évolution de la bataille sur leurs tablettes.



▲ Funérailles de soldats tombés pour la libération de Raqqa.