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KIRKOUK : REPORT PROBABLE DES ELECTIONS PROVINCIALES

La crise provoquée par le vote, en juillet dernier, d'une loi électorale dénoncée par les Kurdes concernant le statut de Kirkouk, loi à laquelle le Conseil de présidence irakien a finalement mis son veto, ne s'est pas apaisée avec les vacances parlementaires. Le ton a non seulement monté d'un cran entre Bagdad, Erbil et Kirkouk, mais les tensions qui jusque là s'étaient concentrées sur un seul des territoires kurdes détachées par l'ancien régime, se

sont étendues à Diyala, avec la décision du gouvernement central de remplacer les Peshmerga qui y assuraient la sécurité, par des troupes irakiennes.

Dès le début du mois, juste après l'annonce des 26 membres kurdes du Conseil provincial de Kirkouk (sur un total de 41 sièges), réclamant le rattachement de la province à la Région du Kurdistan, Ali al-Dabbagh, le porte-parole du gouvernement irakien, a fait

savoir son opposition à « tout geste unilatéral » visant à changer le statut de la région : « Le gouvernement irakien appelle au calme tous les groupes et parties de la province de Kirkouk et à ce qu'ils s'abstiennent de toutes mesures menant à une escalade qui nuirait à l'unité nationale. Le gouvernement irakien refuse catégoriquement toute mesure unilatérale pour changer le statut de Kirkouk. » Ali Al-Dabbagh a ajouté que son gouvernement répondrait avec fermeté à « tout abus ou menace sécuritaire de la part d'un quelconque groupe armé ».

Dans le même temps, le parlement irakien tenait une session extraordinaire pour résoudre enfin le casse-tête que cette loi électorale représente à Kirkouk, puisque devant décider, avant même le scrutin, d'un partage ethnique du pouvoir entre les Kurdes, les Turcs et les Arabes, sans tenir compte de la démographie réelle de la province. Ce conflit bloque en fait la tenue des élections provinciales dans tout l'Irak, et il semble de moins en moins certain, malgré l'insistance des Etats-Unis, que ces élections auront lieu en octobre prochain, tandis que la querelle se propage dans tout le pays.

Cependant, dès le 4 août, Mahmoud Othman, un député influent de l'Alliance kurde au parlement irakien, annonçait que les partis politiques irakiens et kurdes étaient sur le point de trouver un accord sur la loi électorale, alors que le président de la Région du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, venait de rencontrer à Bagdad les principaux leaders politiques arabes, en présence de Staffan de Mistura, le représentant de l'ONU en Irak, auteur d'un rapport très controversé lui aussi sur la question des territoires revendiqués par les Kurdes, et l'ambassadeur américain, Ryan Crocker. Dans une déclaration à l'AFP, Mahmoud Othman a notamment indiqué que des modifications seraient faites à l'article 24 initialement adopté en juillet dernier, et que les élections à Kirkouk pourraient être ajournées de 6 mois. En attendant, une commission parlementaire pourrait être créée pour se prononcer spécialement sur le statut de la province, commission qui devrait soumettre ses rapports à la fois au gouvernement central et à celui d'Erbil, ainsi qu'aux deux parlements.

L'accord envisagé n'a pas empêché le président kurde Massoud Barzani, de fustiger, lors d'une conférence de presse donnée le 5 août, le projet de loi avorté, en le qualifiant même de « conspiration » : « Pour nous, il est clair que ce qui s'est passé le 22 juillet était une grande conspiration et représentait un grand danger pour le processus démocratique et constitutionnel en Irak, et particulièrement pour les Kurdes ». Massoud Barzani a également réitéré la position kurde sur le partage des pouvoirs à Kirkouk, à savoir qu'il devait se décider en fonction des résultats électoraux obtenus, et non par un partage en trois parts égales, des membres kurdes, turkmènes et arabes, qui ne correspond pas au poids démographique de chacune des communautés.

Les accusations de Massoud Barzani, sur la « conspiration » que représenterait cette loi, ont été reprises et précisées par Mahmoud Othman, qui a accusé ouvertement la Turquie de chercher à réduire l'influence politique des Kurdes en Irak, et en la présentant comme l'instigatrice principale du premier vote de la loi : « La Turquie a manœuvré pour faire adopter une loi anti-kurde au Parlement. Elle est derrière l'adoption de l'article 24 de la loi électorale car elle essaie par tous les moyens de réduire les acquis obtenus par les Kurdes après la chute de Saddam Hussein. » Le député kurde critique aussi le « rôle négatif » des USA, qui, selon lui, auraient laissé faire la Turquie dans cette affaire de l'article 24. Il a aussi fait part de pressions de la part du gouvernement britannique pour que les Kurdes se plient aux exigences arabes et turkmènes.

Finalement, ce n'est pas un délai de six mois que les Nations

Unies ont proposé, pour l'ajournement du scrutin, mais d'une année entière, comme l'a annoncé Mahmoud Othman, s'exprimant une fois encore au nom de l'Alliance kurde : « Nous avons accepté le projet en cinq points de l'ONU qui consiste (notamment) à repousser les élections à Kirkouk au plus tard jusqu'à décembre 2009 et de laisser la discussion se poursuivre durant un an pour régler la question de cette province ». Le député a indiqué aussi que l'ONU souhaitait, en attendant, le maintien du Conseil provincial de Kirkouk en l'état, avec, donc, une majorité kurde, et de « faire une étude sur la démographie de cette province », ce qui reviendrait, si cela était réellement mis en place, à remplir partiellement le programme prévu par l'article 140 de la constitution, lequel prévoyait un recensement de la population de Kirkouk, avant la tenue d'un référendum.

Selon Khaled Al-Attiya, vice-président du Parlement irakien, se sont montrés favorables aux propositions des Nations Unies les chiites du Conseil suprême islamique en Irak (CSII), ceux du parti al-Dawa, les sunnites du Parti islamique et du Front de la Concorde. Les chiites partisans de Moqtada as-Sadr, des sunnites du Front irakien pour le dialogue national s'y sont opposés, ainsi que des députés turkmènes qui souhaitaient, eux, que les élections soient repoussées en 2009. Cette opposition a réussi à faire capoter, une fois de plus, le vote de la loi, malgré l'insistance du porte-parole Khalid al-Attiya, à ce qu'un accord soit trouvé et que les élections puissent avoir lieu cette année, dans le reste du pays. Mais Fawzi Akram, un député turkmène partisan d'As-Sadr, a parlé de « ligne rouge »

au sujet de la province disputée, en refusant tout ajournement des élections) Kirkouk.

Mais au-delà de la question électorale, l'ONU et son représentant en Irak travaillent toujours à élaborer une solution pour toutes les régions disputées en Irak, et non pas seulement Kirkouk : « Nous allons proposer entre septembre et octobre des options pour un accord global sur les régions disputées, dont bien sûr Kirkouk, qui est le problème le plus chaud actuellement en Irak », a déclaré à la presse Staffan de Mistura. « J'espère que vers octobre, les options que nous allons proposer seront prises en considération et de manière constructive par toutes les parties et qu'une formule de compromis sera trouvée afin d'apporter une solution pacifique et juste à Kirkouk. ».

Lors de la publication de son premier rapport et des solutions qu'il proposait, les Kurdes avaient vivement dénoncé l'impasse que le représentant de l'ONU faisait sur l'article 140 et le référendum prévu. Cette fois-ci, Staffan de Mistura semble vouloir parer par avance les critiques kurdes, en avançant que cela n'excluait pas la tenue d'une telle consultation populaire, faisant suite au plan qu'il doit proposer : « Cette formule pourra éventuellement ensuite être confirmée par un referendum. » Les propositions

des Nations Unies porteront sur 30 à 40 régions de l'Irak, bien que, selon De Mistura, seules 12 districts posent vraiment problème. Le rapport qu'il avait délivré en juin concernait les régions d'Akre, Hamdaniya et Mahmoud (province de Ninive) et Mandali (Diyala). Dès l'automne, le représentant de l'ONU a assuré que ses propositions pour Sindjar, Tell Afar, Toulkay et Shaikhan (province de Ninive), Kifri (province de Suleïmanieh), Khanaqin (Diyala) et Tuz (Salaheddin) seront soumises au Conseil de présidence de l'Irak.

Pendant ce temps, le président de la Région du Kurdistan se rendait pour la première fois depuis son élection à Kirkouk, où, dans un discours, il réaffirmait le « caractère kurde » de la ville, tout en voulant « transmettre un message de paix à Kirkouk qui est à la fois une ville du Kurdistan et d'Irak ». Cette visite a été boycottée par les représentants du Front turkmène (parti soutenu par Ankara) et ceux du Bloc arabe uni. Mais Massoud Barzani a contesté à ces deux groupes politiques le droit de s'exprimer au nom de tous les Arabes et Turmènes de Kirkouk : « J'ai invité à cette réunion des personnalités qui ne sont pas d'accord avec nous mais elles ne sont pas venues. En tout cas, ils ne représentent pas tous les Arabes et les Turcomans de la ville et quand ils seront prêts au

dialogue nous le serons aussi. »

Sur la question du référendum, lui aussi repoussé *sine die* depuis décembre 2007, il a réitéré son attachement au respect de l'article 140, seule solution viable, selon lui : « Toutes les composantes de cette ville doivent vivre ensemble car est fini le temps où le fort pouvait dévorer le faible. Je suis venu ici pour dissiper la peur et assainir l'atmosphère entre les différentes composantes. ». Le président a ajouté que le fait d'affirmer que Kirkouk était une partie du Kurdistan, ne signifiait pas que ce n'était pas une région irakienne, niant ainsi avoir des visées séparatistes, ce dont l'accusent fréquemment des politiciens arabes, tout aussi bien que le gouvernement d'Ankara.

Mais il est d'ores et déjà assuré que les élections ne pourront avoir lieu en octobre, comme prévu initialement. Selon le chef de la commission électorale, la mi-septembre, dernier délai possible, selon le chef de la commission électorale, Faradj al-Hadjdari, un vote de la dernière chance pourrait faire adopter la loi pas plus tard que la mi-septembre : « Si la loi est adoptée le 9 ou le 10 septembre, les élections pourront avoir lieu le 22 décembre », a-t-il expliqué à l'agence de presse Reuters. Si c'est plus tard, nous pourrions essayer pour le 31 décembre. »

IRAN : L'UNION EUROPÉENNE « PREOCCUPEE » PAR LE SORT DES KURDES

Leinab Bayzeydi, une militante féministe kurde, déjà condamnée à quatre ans de prison a vu cette peine confirmée en appel, de même que « l'exil intérieur » qui l'oblige à purger

sa peine hors de sa province, l'Azerbaïdjan occidental.

Cette militante kurde avait participé à la campagne « Un million de signatures », lancée en juin 2006, réclamant l'abrogation

des textes législatifs discriminatoires envers les femmes et l'égalité des droits sur les questions familiales, tels que le mariage, le divorce, l'héritage et la garde des enfants.

Arrêtées en même temps que Zeynab Bayzedi, Hana Abdi avait été condamnée à cinq ans de

prison en juin et la troisième, Ronak Safazadeh, attend encore d'être jugée. La présidence française de l'Union européenne a condamné, au début du mois, leur arrestation et leur détention.

La pression judiciaire ne se relâche pas en Iran contre les militants des droits de l'homme, les journalistes, les syndicalistes kurdes. Le 25, ce sont deux étudiants qui ont été condamnés à deux ans de prison ferme pour « propagande contre le pouvoir islamique et participation à des rassemblements illégaux ». Sabah Nasri et Hedayat Ghazali, qui étudiaient à Téhéran, sont détenus depuis quatorze mois et cette période de détention sera, selon la loi iranienne, retranchée de la durée de leur peine. Leur avocat, Saleh Nikbakht, a déclaré au journal Kargozaran qu'il allait faire appel du verdict.

Les syndicalistes sont aussi la cible des autorités et l'Alliance internationale de soutien aux travailleurs d'Iran (IASWII) a publié une liste de militants pour les droits du travail et de syndicalistes, emprisonnés ou condamnés récemment pour leurs activités, parmi lesquels plusieurs Kurdes de Sanandaj, la capitale provinciale du Kurdistan d'Iran, condamnés à des peines de prison et de fouet pour avoir participé aux manifestations du 1^{er} Mai organisées dans cette ville. Pour Sousan Razani, 36 ans, 9 mois de prison et 70 coups de fouet ; pour Shiva Kheirabadi, 25 ans, 4 mois de prisons et 15 coups de fouet ; pour Seyed Qaleb Hosseini, 46 ans, 6 mois de prison et 50 coups de fouet ; pour Abdullah Khani, 49 ans, 91 jours de prison et 30 coups de fouet, avec un sursis de 2 ans. Tous ont été condamnés sous les chefs d'accusation de « trouble à l'ordre public et rassemblement illégal devant un bâtiment de la Sécurité sociale.

Le mois dernier, Amnesty International, avait, dans son

rapport, critiqué sévèrement les discriminations et la répression subis plus particulièrement par les Kurdes d'Iran. Ce mois-ci, c'est l'Union européenne qui a publié un communiqué en faveur de ces Kurdes, et surtout des cinq condamnés à mort en attente de l'exécution de leur sentence. La présidence française de l'Union européenne s'est dit « vivement préoccupée par les atteintes portées par les autorités iraniennes aux droits de certains de leurs ressortissants de la province

iranienne du Kurdistan. C'est avec une grande inquiétude que l'Union européenne a appris la condamnation à mort de MM. Farzad Kamangar, Farhad Vakili, Ali Heidarian, Hivar Botimar et Anvar Hosein Panohi, membres de la société civile iranienne appartenant à la minorité kurde. L'Union européenne exhorte de nouveau les autorités iraniennes à mettre un terme aux condamnations à la peine de mort et aux exécutions, le cas échéant en commuant les peines. »

KHANAQIN :

BRAS DE FER ENTRE KURDES ET IRAKIENS

A lors que la crise parlementaire autour de la question des futures élections irakienne, battait son plein, c'est un autre conflit qui a opposé, dans un même temps, les gouvernements d'Erbil et de Baghdad, cette fois dans le domaine de la sécurité intérieure.

En effet, le 10 août, les Peshmerga qui assuraient jusqu'ici le contrôle au nord de la province de Diyala du district de Khanaqin, se sont vus intimer l'ordre par le ministère de la Défense irakien et le commandant en chef des forces terrestres irakiennes, Ali Ghidane, de se retirer au profit de troupes de l'armée irakienne. Mais les forces kurdes ont refusé d'obtempérer sans un ordre du gouvernement d'Erbil, comme l'a expliqué à la presse leur général Nazem Kirkouki, qui commande cette brigade de Peshmerga, forte de 4 000 combattants : « Nous ne recevons nos ordres que de la présidence de la région autonome du Kurdistan. Nous avons une brigade déployée dans les localités de Saadiya, Qara Tapa, Jalawla (dans le nord de Diyala) et nous ne bougerons

pas car nous n'avons pas reçu jusqu'à présent d'ordre de la présidence de nous retirer. Nous sommes venus pour participer au rétablissement de la sécurité dans la région et depuis lors nous avons pris part avec les forces américaines et irakiennes à de nombreuses opérations. »

C'est effectivement à la demande des Etats-Unis et de l'Irak que ces Peshmergas assurent depuis deux ans le contrôle de cette province, qui était alors en proie aux actions terroristes d'Al-Qaïda. Depuis, l'action des troupes kurdes ont notablement augmenté sa sécurité. Les districts de Diyala peuplés de Kurdes sont réclamés par le Gouvernement kurde et font partie des régions qui doivent être soumises au référendum prévu par l'article 140. Ils relevaient auparavant de la province de Suleïmanieh.

Depuis le 29 juillet, une opération conjointe de l'armée irakienne et de forces américaines, a envoyé 40 000 soldats dans la province de Diyala, afin de la purger des réseaux terroristes d'Al-Qaïda. Mais les Kurdes objectent que les régions de la Diyala qu'ils contrôlent ne sont plus tenues

par les terroristes, comme l'explique le général kurde Jabar Yawar : « La zone où nous nous trouvons est sécurisée et n'a pas besoin d'opérations militaires ni d'un déploiement de l'armée irakienne. Nous avons donné notre sang pour y maintenir la paix. »

Le porte-parole du ministre irakien de la Défense, le général Mohammed al-Askari, ne dément pas que c'est à la demande du gouvernement de Bagdad que les Peshmergas se sont déployés au nord de Diyala, mais estime qu'à présent, leur mission est terminée : « La brigade des Peshmergas était venue du Kurdistan pour prendre position dans la vallée de Khamrine quand l'armée et la police irakiennes étaient occupées ailleurs. L'accord stipulait leur retrait quand l'armée irakienne serait prête. Aujourd'hui nous sommes venus leur dire que nous n'avions plus besoin d'eux. »

Mais la décision soudaine des Irakiens de réinvestir toute la Diyala n'est peut-être pas qu'un hasard de calendrier, alors que dans le même temps, les députés kurdes et arabes, ainsi que les différentes factions de Kirkouk, se disputent au sujet du partage des pouvoirs dans cette province. Alors que militairement parlant, les Peshmergas et les Asayish (forces de sécurité) tiennent Kirkouk relativement bien en main, les Kurdes craignent ouvertement qu'en cédant la place à Khanaqin, non seulement ils pourraient perdre tout espoir de voir le rattachement de cette région au Kurdistan, mais qu'en plus, le déploiement de l'armée irakienne ne s'étende à toutes les régions revendiquées, comme l'a confié sous couvert d'anonymat à l'AFP une responsable kurde de Souleimaniyeh : « Nos

dirigeants ont peur que si l'armée irakienne réussit à se déployer dans la province de Diyala, elle veuille le faire aussi dans les régions de Kirkouk et de Mossoul où sont présentes nos forces. ».

Malgré cela, le ton du gouvernement kurde a commencé par se montrer conciliant. Jafar Moustafa, secrétaire d'Etat du gouvernement autonome kurde pour les Affaires des peshmergas, a affirmé que des réunions se tenaient entre son gouvernement et le ministre de la défense irakien « pour trouver une solution ». Mais sur place, les commentaires étaient beaucoup alarmistes. Le maire du district de Djalawla, une banlieue de Khanaqin, a déclaré sur les ondes d'Aswat al-Iraq, que la situation était explosive et pouvait empirer à tout moment : « La présence des troupes irakiennes crée des tensions avec les forces des Peshmergas, durant ces derniers jours. Des deux côtés, la situation peut exploser, à chaque minute. » Le maire a expliqué que les Peshmergas craignaient d'être cernés et isolés dans la zone de Khanaqin par les Irakiens et que les tribus arabes travaillaient avec les forces irakiennes pour former des conseils locaux, d'où les Kurdes craignent d'être marginalisés, voire exclus. « Le commandement de la police de Diyala a décidé une police pour le district de Djalawla, et n'a recruté que des hommes arabes pour cela. C'est une violation de la loi. »

Le 15 août, cependant, Jafar Moustafa annonçait que les Peshmergas se retireraient de Qara Tepe, la place qu'ils occupaient dans le district de Khanaqin, dans les dix jours à venir, après qu'un accord ait été passé avec le gouvernement de

Bagdad. Une rencontre avait eu lieu entre une délégation kurde, menée par le vice-président du GRK, Kosrat Rassoul et Fadel Mirani, secrétaire du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan, le parti de Massoud Barzani), et le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki. Mais dans les jours qui suivirent, l'arrivée des troupes irakiennes a créé très vite des tensions, non seulement avec les Peshmergas encore sur place, mais aussi au sein de la population kurde.

Le 23 août, des soldats irakiens ont investi, sans avertissement préalable, le quartier général des forces kurdes, raid qualifié de « boulette » par un responsable de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK), le parti de Jalal Talabani, président kurde de l'Irak. Mahmoud Sankawi a déclaré à la radio Aswat al-Iraq qu'ils avaient informé l'adjoint du Premier ministre, le Kurde Barham Salih, de cet incident, et soumis un memorandum à Nouri al-Maliki, dans lequel il était expliqué que « les Peshmergas ne sont pas l'armée du Mahdi », faisant allusion à la loi sur le démantèlement des milices armées, que certains groupes arabes auraient souhaité voir s'appliquer au cas des forces kurdes. Mahmoud Sankawi a indiqué que Barham Saleh s'était entretenu avec le ministre de la Défense, et avait obtenu que soit annulée l'évacuation des bâtiments gouvernementaux tenus par les Kurdes, sans que le gouvernement irakien ne confirme officiellement cet accord.

Trois jours plus tard, le 26 août, c'était au tour des habitants de Khanaqin de protester contre la présence de l'armée irakienne et l'instauration de checkpoint dans le district. Les manifestants, regroupés devant

les bâtiments de la mairie, ont eux aussi envoyé un memorandum pour demander le départ des soldats, en indiquant que la situation « stable » de Khanaqin ne nécessitait pas leur présence.

De son côté, le président de la Région du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, recevant le 28 août une délégation de hauts responsables de l'ambassade américaine, a exprimé sa « surprise » devant la décision irakienne d'investir les zones nord de la Diyala : « Khanaqin est une zone sûre et il est surprenant que l'armée irakienne y pénètre sous prétexte de combattre le terrorisme. » Massoud Barzani s'est également interrogé sur le manque total de coordination entre les décisions du gouvernement central et la Région kurde.

Alors que le 29 août, le général Muneim Ali, commandant la 4^{ème} brigade de la 5^{ème} armée irakienne, annonçait le lendemain que ses hommes contrôlaient « totalement les zones de Qara Tapa, Jalawla, et al-Saadiya, dans Khanaqin, le Premier ministre Al-Maliki menaçait, selon un député du principal bloc chiite au parlement de Bagdad, de se livrer à des « actions légales » contre les forces kurdes si elles

cherchaient à se déployer hors des zones qui leur étaient assignées, menace niée par Fouad Hussein, le directeur de cabinet de la présidence kurde, alors qu'une délégation de responsables kurdes se rendait à Bagdad pour discuter de la crise de Khanaqin avec les responsables irakiens. Finalement, les Peshmergas ont obtenu le droit de rester dans les bâtiments publics qu'ils occupent depuis 2003.

Dans une interview donnée à Asharq al-Awsat, le président kurde Massoud Barzani, expliquait les racines de la crise par la mauvaise volonté du gouvernement de Bagdad à considérer les Kurdes comme de véritables partenaires : « Nous sommes partenaires mais nous n'avons aucun rôle dans le gouvernement. Nous ne sommes pas partenaires sur les questions de sécurité, d'économie et les questions militaires, et nous ne sommes pas du tout informés sur ces institutions. Lors de ma récente visite, nous avons obtenu de bons accords et les moyens de les appliquer. Nous avons un programme dans lequel nous nous accordions avec le gouvernement de Bagdad. Mais lorsque nous sommes retournés dans la Région du Kurdistan, tout ce sur quoi nous nous sommes mis

d'accord a été ignoré et marginalisé. Cet état de chose ne sert pas ni notre coalition ni l'Irak ni le futur de l'Irak. Tout devrait être accompli sur les principes de l'entente et du partenariat. C'est le seul moyen de construire le nouvel Irak. Les conséquences d'une autorité de monopole sont bien connues. Cette situation ne peut amener aucun résultat bénéfique pour l'Irak. »

Massoud Barzani a qualifié la mainmise irakienne sur certains districts de Khanaqin d'« énorme erreur » en soulignant aussi que le comportement sur place des troupes irakiennes a considérablement contribué à aggraver la situation : « Quand le gouvernement a demandé aux forces kurdes de se retirer, elles se sont réellement retirées. Mais les forces militaires qui ont remplacé les Kurdes sont arrivées avec des slogans provoquants et ont agi exactement comme l'ancienne armée, celle qui a commis les crimes contre le peuple kurde dans le passé, notamment ceux durant l'opération Al-Anfal. Ainsi, ces forces sont arrivées avec les mêmes slogans, la même mentalité, et ont agi de la même manière. »

IRAK : LES CHRETIENS REFUGIES N'ESPERENT PLUS EN BAGDAD

Depuis le début de la guerre civile dans les régions arabes d'Irak, la communauté des chrétiens, particulièrement visée par les islamistes n'a eu d'autre choix que de fuir le pays ou de se réfugier dans la Région du Kurdistan ou dans les régions annexes dont la sécurité est

assurée par les Peshmergas, comme à Ninive. Un nombre croissant de ces chrétiens espèrent de moins en moins en une solution apportée par le gouvernement de Bagdad, comme le rapporte un reportage du Kurdish Globe. Ainsi le père Joseph Yohannes, prêtre dans un village chrétien de cette province, estime que sa

communauté est plus considérée comme une « minorité » allogène en Irak que comme des citoyens irakiens à part entière et pense que leur statut serait meilleur au sein du GRK : « Parfois, nous sentons que le gouvernement de Bagdad nous considère comme des réfugiés en Irak, comme si nous n'étions pas originaires de ce pays. Si nous rejoignons la Région du Kurdistan, la communauté chrétienne composera alors 15 à 20% de la population ; de cette

façon, nos droits seront mieux préservés. »

Malgré la rencontre récente du pape Benoît XVI et du Premier ministre irakien, le chiite Nouri Al-Maliki, le père Joseph ne se montre guère optimiste sur une amélioration du sort des chrétiens d'Irak, même si cette question a été centrale dans les entretiens entre le souverain pontife et le chef du gouvernement. En attendant dans la région de Ninive, las d'attendre une protection incertaine des autorités irakiennes, les chrétiens tendent plutôt à s'organiser en milices d'auto-défense, appelées « gardiens d'églises » car financés par des fonds religieux. A l'instar du système de sécurité établi dans la Région du Kurdistan, la circulation entre les différents villages est surveillée et filtrée par de nombreux check-point. Saleem Yusuf, qui commande une de ces gardes civiles dans le village de Kramalis, explique que le but de ces check-point est d'empêcher les voitures kamikaze d'entrer dans les villages pour y exploser, comme ce fut le cas en août 2007, cette fois contre deux villages yézidis, dont les victimes se sont comptées par centaines. Le seul village de Kramalis est ainsi protégé par 250 gardiens.

Autres menaces, en plus des attaques suicide, les enlèvements contre rançon qui touchent toutes les communautés irakiennes, ou les exécutions sommaires. La ville de Mossoul

est une des plus touchées par cette terreur. Ainsi, le père Joseph avoue n'être plus retourné à Mossoul depuis trois ans. En février dernier, le rapt, suivi de la mort de l'archevêque chaldéen de cette ville, monseigneur Paulos Faraj Rahho, qui était originaire de ce même village de Karamlis a profondément frappé les esprits.

Mais les chrétiens désireux de fuir, ou déjà réfugiés, doivent faire face à d'autres difficultés que sécuritaires. Le chômage et la perte de leurs ressources sont les problèmes majeurs de leur vie quotidienne. Parmi les chrétiens de Ninive, nombre d'entre eux, explique le père Joseph, travaillaient dans les usines ou avaient des postes administratifs. Ou bien, dans la capitale irakienne, ils possédaient des restaurants, des boutiques, qu'ils ont dû laisser derrière eux, sans grand espoir de retour.

Mais le sort des réfugiés irakiens dans les pays voisins, comme la Syrie ou la Jordanie est encore moins enviable. Ayant tout laissé derrière eux, ils ne bénéficient pas, comme dans la Région du Kurdistan, d'une aide à l'installation, d'un logement et d'une allocation mensuelle. Aussi, leurs revenus fondent vite, dans les villes arabes, pour trouver un logement et de quoi vivre, sans que là aussi, ils puissent espérer trouver rapidement un emploi. Des ONG sur place, font même état de discriminations envers les chrétiens, de la part même des

employés locaux du Haut-Commissariat aux réfugiés. « Ces chrétiens qui fuient la persécution en Irak nous racontent qu'ils sont discriminés par les institutions sensées leur venir en aide. Dans le contexte actuel où la guerre d'Irak attise la haine entre chrétiens et musulmans au Moyen-Orient, les responsables du HCR et des ambassades devraient s'assurer du traitement équitable de tous les réfugiés, quelle que soit leur croyance » accuse Michel Varton, directeur de Portes Ouvertes France, dans un communiqué diffusé en juillet dernier sur le site de l'association.

Les membres de l'ONG Portes Ouvertes présents sur place ont ainsi fait état de plaintes et de des témoignages émanant de ces réfugiés d'Irak : « J'ai vu que les formulaires des chrétiens sont systématiquement rejetés alors que ceux des musulmans sont immédiatement approuvés. Cela s'est vérifié des milliers de fois. Chaque famille peut vous raconter un exemple vécu », raconte ainsi l'un d'eux.

Cet état de choses est d'ailleurs confirmé par un responsable chrétien local : « Le problème vient du fait que la plupart des employés du HCR et des ambassades qui accueillent les réfugiés sont des musulmans. Ils ne veulent pas entendre que nous sommes persécutés par d'autres musulmans en Irak. C'est une situation que la plupart des hauts fonctionnaires ignorent. »

« SILENT CITY » : KAYHAN KALHUR DEDIE SON DERNIER ALBUM A HALABJA

Le dernier album du célèbre musicien Kayhan Kalhor, un Kurde d'Iran compositeur et virtuose du kementche (vièle iranienne), se veut une

commémoration, avec son morceau éponyme de 29 minutes, de la tragédie de Halabja, survenue 20 ans auparavant. Enregistré sous le label World Village, avec le

quatuor à cordes américain Brooklyn Rider, l'album Silent City, la « Ville silencieuse », a été plébiscitée par la critique internationale.

Né en 1963 à Téhéran, Kayhan Kalhor est originaire de la ville kurde de Kermansha.

Il étudie le kementché dès l'âge de 7 ans et se produit, à 13 ans, avec l'orchestre de la radio et de télévision nationale iranienne. Après la Révolution islamique, il quitte l'Iran pour étudier la composition musicale dans plusieurs pays occidentaux, notamment à l'université Carleton à Ottawa. Il a enregistré seul ou avec d'autres artistes de renommée mondiale, le Kurde Ali Akbar Moradi, le célèbre joueur indien Shujaat Hussein Khan ou le Turc Erdal Erzincan. Il a composé pour Mohammad Shajarian ou Shahram Nazeri, les deux grands maîtres de la musique iranienne. Il s'est produit avec le New York Philharmonic Orchestra, au Mostly Mozart Festival et à Carnegie Hall. Trois de ses albums ont été nominés aux GRAMMY® Awards

Sa rencontre avec les membres du Brooklyn Rider Quartet, - Colin Jacobsen et Jonathan Gandelman (violon), Nicholas Cords (alto) et Eric Jacobsen (violoncelle) - date de 2000, alors qu'ils participaient au projet Route de la Soie, lancé par le

violoncelliste Yo Yo Ma. « Silent City » est le résultat de 8 années d'apprentissage et d'expérimentation », explique Nicholas au New York Times. Les musiciens occidentaux ont par exemple dû travailler sur l'improvisation autour d'une mélodie, ou adapter leurs tonalités aux modes musicaux d'Iran. De son côté, Kayhan Kalhor, qui a étudié la musique classique occidentale, a intégré des techniques (comme les pizzicati) qui ne sont habituellement pas utilisées dans la musique traditionnelle iranienne.

Le premier morceau du CD, « Ascendant Bird », mêle une mélodie traditionnelle et des improvisations, autour d'un ancien conte zoroastrien relatant l'histoire d'un oiseau volant trop près du soleil, conte repris dans le morceau « Parvaz » une composition de Kayhan Kalhour qui joue à la fois du kementché et du setar.

« Bien-Aimée, ne me décourage pas », composé par Colin Jacobsen, emprunte son titre au

poète Fuzulî (16^{ème} siècle), relatant la célèbre légende de Majnoun et Layla.

Quant à la composition « Silent City », elle est jugée comme la plus prenante, se voulant une « calme, méditative déploration sur le destin de la ville kurde de Halabja » et ses milliers de victimes. La musique, qui laisse une grande place à l'improvisation, mêle des mélodies kurdes et turques dans un rythme élégiaque mais qui, selon Kayhan Kalhor, veut exprimer le triomphe final de la vie et de l'espoir sur l'obscurité et le désespoir. Pour Eliane Azoulay, du journal Télérama, la force du compositeur « est de cultiver une exaltation à fleur de peau puisée dans les traditions iraniennes du Khorasan et du Kurdistan, en intégrant les motifs plus terriens de ses compagnons américains. L'ensemble, instrumental, s'articule autour des images et des symboles : la destruction d'une ville, la légende de Majnoun et Layla, ou le mythe de l'oiseau qui veut atteindre le Soleil. »

AINSI QUE...

SYRIE : UN ECRIVAIN KURDE ENLEVE ET DETENU AU SECRET PAR LES AUTORITES

Un écrivain kurde de Syrie, Mashaal al-Tammu, a été arrêté le 15 août par les services secrets baathistes et mis au secret, a annoncé le 27 août l'Observatoire des droits de l'Homme en Syrie. Ses proches ne l'ont plus revu depuis ce jour, alors qu'il se rendait de la ville kurde de Koban pour Damas. Sa voiture a été retrouvée, fermée, près des bâtiments des services de sécurité d'Alep. Malgré cela, les autorités nient toute implication dans cette disparition. Cependant, des

témoins affirment l'avoir vu le 27 août, dans un tribunal de Damas, alors qu'il passait en audience préliminaire. Des avocats spécialistes de la question des droits de l'Homme en Syrie tentent de retrouver sa trace et surtout de déterminer si l'écrivain, militant actif pour les droits de l'Homme, doit passer devant une cour militaire ou civile.

Mashaal al-Tammu, âgé de 50 ans, est également le porte-parole du mouvement d'opposition politique « Avenir kurde ».

Dans les jours qui ont suivi

l'alerte donnée par l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme, les Etats-Unis ont réagi, par l'intermédiaire d'un porte-parole du département d'Etat, Robert Wood, qui, dans un communiqué, a réclamé « la libération immédiate et sans condition » du dissident : « Nous sommes inquiets pour l'activiste kurde syrien Machaal Tammo, dont l'interpellation inquiétante est la plus récente d'une série d'arrestation d'activistes de la société civile syrienne par les autorités. Nous condamnons la détention de M. Tammo et d'autres prisonniers de conscience syriens, nous appelons à leur libération

immédiate et inconditionnelle. » M. Wood a également appelé la communauté internationale à relayer cet appel, alors que le président français, Nicolas Sarkozy, doit se rendre dans la capitale syrienne, pour y rencontrer le président Bachar al-Assad les 3 et 4 septembre, après sa visite controversée à Paris au sommet inaugural de l'Union pour la Méditerranée. A cette occasion, la directrice de Human Rights Watch pour le Moyen-Orient, Sarah Lean, a estimé que « Nicolas Sarkozy devrait faire pression en faveur de l'ouverture du dialogue sur beaucoup de sujets, dont l'état d'urgence, l'arrestation de militants, les événements de la prison de Sidnaya et la répression de l'identité kurde ».

ERBIL : REFORME DE L'EDUCATION AU KURDISTAN D'IRAK

Pour l'année scolaire à venir, la Région du Kurdistan d'Irak s'est attelée à la réforme de son système éducatif, afin d'améliorer le niveau de son enseignement. Les programmes introduisent ainsi l'apprentissage de la langue anglaise dans les classes primaires et font une place plus grande aux activités d'éveil et de réflexion personnelle, alors que les pratiques scolaires, dans la plupart des pays du Moyen-Orient, sont essentiellement basées sur l'apprentissage par coeur, sans esprit critique.

Hero Talabani, l'épouse du président d'Irak, a expliqué que ce besoin de réforme dans l'enseignement se faisait sentir dans la Région du Kurdistan, comme pour le reste de l'Irak. Les problèmes majeurs dans ce domaine sont avant tout le manque d'écoles dans un pays

qui compte une population majoritairement en âge scolaire, ainsi que des programmes aux contenus obsolètes, qui ne répondent plus aux besoins éducatifs du 21^{ème} siècle.

Autre difficulté dans l'apprentissage des élèves, le système de rotation entre classes du matin et classe de l'après-midi, qui, selon elle, ne permet pas aux élèves d'assimiler assez de connaissances avec seulement trois heures et demi de cours réel dans une journée. Mais ces rotations permettent de pallier au nombre insuffisant d'établissements, bien que la Région kurde s'attache activement à combler ce retard. Ainsi, Hero Talabani explique que depuis 2003, soit depuis la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein, il s'est construit plus d'écoles au Kurdistan qu'entre 1958 et 2003 dans cette même région.

Le ministre de l'Education du GRK, le Dr. Dilshad Mohammad, est un actif partisan de ces réformes et a entrepris, à la fin du mois, une tournée dans divers pays européens, où il a rencontré des « experts » sur la question de l'enseignement, en Autriche, en Allemagne, et aussi auprès de l'ONU. Le Dr Abdulrahman a résumé ainsi ses impressions, après ces divers entretiens et consultations : « Nous avons beaucoup en commun avec les pays européens que nous avons visités, c'est une première chose. Cela inclut le défi lancé par les nouvelles technologies et leur implantation réussie dans les écoles, mais aussi un équilibre approprié entre un enseignement académique et professionnel, afin de créer une main d'oeuvre qualifiée. Mais beaucoup d'experts ont aussi

souligné le contraste offert par les défis et les opportunités au Kurdistan, qui a une si forte population scolaire, en comparaison avec le défi en Europe de faire face à une population de plus en plus vieillissante. »

A Genève, au bureau international de l'éducation de l'UNESCO, le ministre kurde a participé, avec des représentants du ministre irakien de l'Education et le directeur du bureau irakien de l'UNESCO, Mohammed Djelid, à une rencontre ayant pour objet un nouveau programme éducatif pour tout l'Irak et avec des aménagements spécifiques pour la Région du Kurdistan.

L'UNESCO est déjà impliqué en Irak, dans un projet de 5 millions de \$ US, pour une refonte générale des programmes scolaires irakiens, et encourage d'autres régions irakiennes à suivre l'exemple de la Région du Kurdistan en anticipant les réformes. En 2007, l'organisation a ouvert un bureau à Erbil, à la demande du gouvernement kurde. Les aides dispensées par l'UNESCO concernent aussi bien la formation des professeurs que des campagnes de prévention sanitaire et d'information, par exemple pour lutter contre les épidémies de choléra. C'est pourquoi l'UNICEF et l'Organisation mondiale de la santé sont aussi actifs dans le domaine de l'éducation, que ce soit dans les écoles primaires ou secondaires, avec un projet d'information et de prévention du choléra, lancé depuis octobre 2007 dans les villes du GRK, Erbil, Sulaimanieh, Dohuk, tout comme à Bagdad, Basra et d'autres gouvernorats irakiens.

En Turquie, l'AKP est sanctionné mais pas dissous

Accusé d'activités antilaïques, le parti islamo-conservateur, au pouvoir depuis 2002, a échappé, à une voix près, à la dissolution lors d'un vote à la Cour constitutionnelle

ISTANBUL
CORRESPONDANCE

La Cour constitutionnelle a rendu un verdict mitigé, mercredi 30 juillet, à Ankara. Sa décision rapide, prise après trois journées intenses de délibérations, a finalement ménagé aussi bien le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), qui était accusé de mener « des activités antilaïques », que l'opposition kémaliste, ce qui devrait réduire les risques d'une crise politique et économique sévère en Turquie.

L'AKP n'est pas dissous et ses 71 cadres qui étaient mis en cause échappent à toute peine. Mais il est tout de même reconnu coupable et se voit infliger des sanctions financières.

Dans son allocution, le président de la Cour constitutionnelle, Hasim Kiliç, a souligné la gravité du moment. « Aucun de nous n'est heureux à l'idée de fermer un parti. Cela ne va pas dans le sens de la démocratie », a-t-il dit. Il a précisé qu'il avait été le seul des onze juges à considérer l'AKP non coupable. Six de ses collègues ont voté pour son interdiction totale mais, selon la Constitution turque, une majorité de sept juges sur onze est nécessaire. Quatre autres ont voté pour une peine financière. Le verdict finalement retenu : l'AKP devra reverser à l'Etat la moitié de ses aides annuelles, soit environ 12,9 millions d'euros.

Acclamé par ses troupes, le premier ministre en sort provisoirement renforcé, mais devra très vite donner une nouvelle impulsion à sa seconde législature. « De graves troubles ont été évités. (...) L'AKP n'a jamais été un foyer d'activités antilaïques et continuera à défendre les valeurs de la République », a répondu Recep Tayyip

Erdogan à l'issue de la décision, assurant qu'il continuerait sur « le chemin de la modernisation qu'a indiqué Atatürk ».

Soulagée d'avoir été disculpée, la documentariste Ayşe Böhünler, l'une des fondatrices de l'AKP, estime qu'« il faudra désormais accorder plus d'attention à la partie laïque de la société » mais aussi que « la démocratisation et le processus d'adhésion à l'UE doivent s'accélérer ».

C'est le délicat équilibre que devra trouver le parti islamo-conservateur, au pouvoir depuis 2002 : rassurer la frange kémaliste de la société turque, hypersensible sur la question de la laïcité. Et ce, tout en accélérant les réformes proeuropéennes, pas toujours soutenues par cette même opposition.

Olli Rehn, le commissaire européen à l'élargissement, a appelé la Turquie à « des réformes durables fondées sur un consensus ». Mais à court terme, la Turquie a échappé à la crise profonde qui se dessinait en cas de dissolution de l'AKP. Un tel jugement, déjà prononcé par la Cour constitutionnelle à 24 reprises depuis 1962, mais jamais contre un parti au pouvoir, aurait eu un effet dévastateur sur l'économie et les négociations d'adhésion à l'Union, déjà fragilisées. Européens et Américains ont répété leur inquiétude dans les semaines qui ont précédé la décision de la Cour : des avertissements qui ont sans doute infléchi la position des juges, largement hostiles à l'AKP.

Pour la Tüsiad, le patronat laïque, « la démocratie turque a passé avec succès un test de maturité politi-

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que », en sortant de cette impasse sans fracas.

Une analyse optimiste que ne partage pas l'opposition parlementaire, menée par le parti kémaliste (CHP). « La crise n'est pas refermée, elle a juste été soulignée par la

Cour », a commenté le leader du parti, Deniz Baykal. Son vice-président, Onur Öymen, fait remarquer que « dix juges sur onze ont décidé que l'AKP avait violé la Constitution et qu'il était bien un foyer antilaïque. (...) Le gouvernement se trouve dans une situation intenable », explique le député.

Et les juges ont déjà annulé la réforme autorisant le voile à l'université, qui avait mis le feu aux poudres. Le camp kémaliste ne s'interdira pas, à la prochaine incartade du gouvernement, de provoquer un nouveau recours devant la Cour constitutionnelle. « L'AKP doit changer », selon M. Öymen. L'armée, elle, restera inflexible, comme l'a laissé entendre le général Yasar Büyükanit, chef d'état-major des armées : « La position des forces armées turques sur la laïcité ne change pas. Ni avant moi, ni avec moi, ni après moi. »

Le chroniqueur politique Rusen Cakır faisait remarquer, mercredi soir, sur la chaîne d'information NTV, que pour que les tensions qui agitent la société turque depuis deux ans s'estompent, « il faudrait qu'à la fois Erdogan et Baykal aient compris la leçon ». Le président de la Cour, Hasim Kiliç, a dit espérer que le parti « recevra le message ».

Mais lequel ? La réforme en profondeur de la Constitution et des institutions turques, issues pour la plupart du coup d'Etat militaire de 1980, est attendue par les Euro-

péens et par les laïques libéraux. Une nouvelle Constitution, réellement civile, permettrait notamment de limiter la possibilité de dissoudre des partis politiques.

Mais ce coup de règle sur les doigts de l'AKP pourrait aussi l'in-

citer à rentrer dans le rang et à éviter à tout prix toute tension avec l'establishment kémaliste, quitte à sombrer dans l'immobilisme.

C'est ce que craint le député d'Ankara, Ersönmez Yarbay, pessimiste sur l'évolution de son propre parti : « Je ne crois pas que nous pourrions réformer la Constitution, car l'AKP va désormais devenir plus étatiste et moins démocrate, prédit-il. Je n'attends rien de positif à ce sujet. Dans la direction du parti, les cadres importants ont une capacité à réaliser des réformes démocratiques assez limitées. » ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

CHRONOLOGIE

3 novembre 2002 : l'AKP remporte 34,2 % aux élections législatives et obtient la majorité absolue au Parlement.

3 octobre 2005 : ouverture des négociations d'adhésion à l'Union européenne.

27 avril 2007 : communiqué de l'état-major de l'armée qui dénonce les menaces islamistes.

1^{er} mai : la Cour constitutionnelle annule le premier tour de scrutin de l'élection présidentielle. Le candidat était le ministre des affaires étrangères, Abdullah Gül.

22 juillet : élections législatives anticipées. L'AKP remporte 46,6 % des suffrages.

28 août : Abdullah Gül est élu président de la République par le Parlement.

7 février 2008 : les députés adoptent deux amendements constitutionnels pour lever l'interdiction du foulard dans les universités. Annulés par la Cour constitutionnelle le 5 juin.

31 mars : la Cour constitutionnelle déclare recevable une plainte demandant la fermeture de l'AKP pour cause « d'activités antilaïques ».

Le Monde
1^{er} août 2008

IRAK OPÉRATION MILITAIRE DANS LA PROVINCE DE DIYALA

L'armée irakienne lance une vaste offensive sur Baqouba

LES FORCES irakiennes, soutenues par l'armée américaine, ont poursuivi, mercredi 30 juillet, une vaste opération militaire lancée la veille dans la province de Diyala (nord-est de Bagdad), considérée comme la plus dangereuse du pays et comme un bastion d'Al-Qaïda en Irak. Des raids ont été lancés dans plusieurs quartiers de Baqouba, la capitale de la région.

Cette offensive, qui mobilise environ 50 000 hommes, « vise les membres d'Al-Qaïda et les hors-la-loi. Le nom de l'opération est "Heureux présage" », a précisé Mohammed Al-Askari, porte-parole du ministère de la défense irakien.

« Le but de l'opération est de découvrir et de détruire les éléments criminels et les menaces terroristes à Diyala, et d'éliminer les réseaux de contrebande dans la région », notamment le trafic d'armes, précise un communiqué de la force multinationale en Irak.

Les forces de sécurité irakiennes, venues des différentes régions du pays, ont été mobilisées pour cette offensive qui devrait durer au moins deux semaines. Elle a également une forte portée symbolique. « Considérez Diyala comme un mini-Irak : il y a des sunnites, des chiites, des Kurdes, des chrétiens », expliquait récemment le colonel Ali Al-Karkhi, stationné dans la région. « Les autres provinces sont bien moins mélangées. C'est pour cela qu'il est si difficile de rétablir la paix ici », ajoutait l'officier.

Considérée comme la plus dangereuse d'Irak, la province de Diyala est régulièrement touchée par des attentats, résultat de la lutte meurtrière entre des affiliés d'Al-Qaïda et les « Sahwa » (« Réveil », en arabe), des comités d'anciens insurgés reconvertis dans la lutte contre le réseau extrémiste et payés par l'armée américaine. Les forces irakiennes se sont également déployées dans la région d'Imam Weiss, à 70 kilomètres à l'est de Baqouba, à proximité de la frontière iranienne. ■

– (AFP, AP, Reuters.)

LE FIGARO

1^{er} août 2008

Les Turcs appellent l'AKP à retrouver son souffle réformateur

TURQUIE

Le parti islamo-conservateur au pouvoir, qui a failli être interdit par la justice pour cause « d'activités antilaïques », devrait désormais adopter une ligne plus proeuropéenne.

Istanbul

DERRIÈRE le comptoir de sa boucherie ornée de portraits de Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Servet Yildirim est d'humeur morose. « J'aurais préféré que l'AKP soit fermé, grommelle ce commerçant stanbouliote, en débitant mécaniquement une pièce de bœuf. *Inch Allah*, ils reprendront peut-être les réformes européennes. » Son voisin, un mercier absorbé dans la lecture d'un livre religieux, se réjouit, lui, de la décision de la Cour constitutionnelle : « *Tayyip a compris la leçon, tous les Turcs vont en bénéficier.* » Hier, le quartier de Cihangir, sur la rive européenne d'Istanbul, s'est réveillé un peu groggy : avec le sentiment d'avoir échappé à une crise politique profonde et la crainte que la trêve ne pourrait être que de courte durée.

Mercredi, le Parti de la justice

et du développement (AKP, au pouvoir) a échappé de justesse à une interdiction. Il s'en est sorti avec une sanction financière : il devra rembourser la moitié des aides publiques reçues cette année. En condamnant la formation du premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan pour « activités antilaïques » sans prononcer sa dissolution, les juges lui ont adressé un sérieux avertissement, estimant la majorité des éditorialistes turcs. Ayse Böhürler, une des fondatrices de l'AKP, qui faisait partie des 71 membres du parti poursuivis, reconnaît que son parti a senti le vent du boulet : « À présent, une approche soucieuse d'éviter la polarisation de la société sera privilégiée, notamment sur la question sensible de la laïcité », assure-t-elle.

« Dialogue social »

Après un triomphe aux élections législatives l'an dernier avec 46,6 % des suffrages en leur faveur, les islamo-conservateurs ont privilégié leur électorat le plus conservateur. En février, le parlement a voté deux amendements constitutionnels pour lever l'interdiction du port du voile dans les universités. Déclenchant la plainte du procureur en chef de la Cour

de cassation contre l'AKP, accusé de chercher à islamiser la société.

Pour ne pas créer de nouvelles tensions, le premier ministre Erdogan doit désormais réussir un exercice ardu : ménager la susceptibilité du camp kémaliste tout en relançant le processus des réformes, attendu par la frange libérale de la population. « S'il veut s'en sortir, l'AKP n'a pas d'autre choix que celui de procéder aux change-

ments démocratiques demandés par l'Union européenne, est persuadé le député indépendant, Ufuk Uras. *Le gouvernement doit ouvrir un dialogue social qui permettra d'élaborer une constitution civile et de modifier la loi sur le fonctionnement des partis.* »

Au pouvoir depuis 2002, l'AKP avait pourtant mené à bien un premier mandat résolument tourné vers l'Union européenne : refonte du Code pénal, ouverture aux civils du Conseil de sécurité national – l'organe qui donnait les

pleins pouvoirs à l'armée –, droits culturels accordés aux Kurdes, soutien au plan de l'ONU pour la réunification de Chypre... En décembre 2004, les ex-islamistes obtenaient le feu vert de Bruxelles aux négociations d'adhésion de la Turquie à l'UE. Leurs difficultés avec les laïcs purs et durs, souvent opposés au processus européen, ont commencé lorsqu'ils ont « perdu leur souffle réformateur », estime Mehmet Altan, une des têtes de file du mouvement libéral qui a soutenu l'AKP.

« Le rempart de l'AKP contre l'armée est l'Union européenne, juge Volkan Aytar, responsable du programme de démocratisation de la Fondation des études sociales et économiques turques (TESEV). *Le parti a compris qu'une infrastructure démocratique était sa seule planche de salut pour ne pas risquer un autre procès.* » En revanche, cet analyste ne s'attend pas à des progrès importants sur les droits de l'homme et la question kurde : « *La loi antiterrorisme ne sera pas modifiée. Sur les questions sécuritaires, l'AKP s'entend avec l'establishment.* »

LAURE MARCHAND



Le premier ministre Erdogan doit désormais ménager la susceptibilité du camp kémaliste et relancer le processus des réformes, attendu par la frange libérale de la population. Reuters



Henry Jackson Society
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Don't Forget 'The Other Iraq:' Why the US and UK should do more to support Iraqi Kurdistan

By Julia Pettengill, 31st July 2008

Executive Summary:

1. Iraqi Kurdistan is the unheralded success of Iraq, and stands as a beacon of Iraq's democratic potential
2. Although it has made tremendous strides towards democratization and economic growth, Iraqi Kurdistan remains a transitional society in need of logistical and financial assistance from Coalition allies
3. Britain and the US should not treat Iraqi Kurdistan as the 'victim of its own success,' but should instead see the region as an integral part of a successful federal state and a potential model for political and economic progress elsewhere in Iraq. Investment conjoined with transparent governance are the critical components of a successful Iraqi state.
4. The US and UK should learn from their mistakes and eschew short-term fixes in favour of a long-term strategy of governmental cooperation, assistance and the promotion of Kurdistan's untapped investment opportunities.

It goes without saying that the media coverage of the Iraq War between 2004 up until the first signs of success in the 2007 'Surge' was almost entirely pessimistic. To a certain extent this was quite correct: pivotal errors in the plan to keep the peace had inadvertently enabled the worst elements of this traumatized society to come to the fore. In this dark time, even the most steadfast proponents of a stable, democratic Iraq were hard-pressed for encouraging news. Yet every so often a small news item would appear reporting on Iraqi Kurdistan, the fertile and picturesque Kurdish-majority region in Northern Iraq which, to this day, has not had a single Coalition soldier killed in its territory. Despite the presence of Sunni Arab, Shia, Turkmen and other minorities, the Kurdish region has not experienced sectarian violence and has endured very few terrorist attacks. Such a story would often appear as the interesting postscript to what was assumed to be an irretrievable catastrophe, and would leave one with the impression that Iraqi Kurdistan was an isolated curiosity with very little to do with Iraq's past, present and future. In fact, Iraqi Kurdistan's transition from a society decimated by autocracy and genocide to a self-administering democratic government is crucial to our understanding of the challenges and opportunities of Iraq as a whole. Since the imposition of the no-fly zone in 1991, Iraqi Kurdistan has been quietly building a democratic society of its own—electing its first National Assembly in 1992 and, in the aftermath of the 1995-96 civil war, working towards political

compromise and stability. Despite years of America's broken promises to the Iraqi Kurds, in 2003 the Kurdish peshmergas fought with Coalition troops to overthrow the Ba'athist regime, and have not altered their position of support for a united, federal Iraq.

Although peaceful and functional relative to the rest of Iraq, the fact remains that the Kurdish region remains in transition, a process that would benefit considerably from increased international recognition of its accomplishments and challenges. Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, the Kurdistan Regional Government's High Representative to the UK, is working to publicize the great progress made in Iraqi Kurdistan and the vital importance of British and international support to both the Kurdish region and Iraq as a whole.

People talk about the Iraq War as a mistake, but Iraq has had a bloody history from Day One,' Ms. Rahman explains. 'Coup after coup, revolution after revolution, violence against its own people and violence against its neighbours—this is our history. The difference is that with the liberation of Iraq, even with the mistakes that followed the liberation, we have an opportunity to build a democracy...and for all our difficulties, Kurdistan is progressing towards that.'

Ms. Rahman's historical assessment is curiously at odds with the conventional wisdom of most foreign policy circles. International relations experts of various stripes have argued that the 'artificiality' of Iraq's formation in 1918 precludes the development of a viable democratic state which can reconcile its multitude of competing religious, ethnic and political groups. The Kurds in particular have been singled out as the group most likely to initiate the breakup of Iraq: the underlying assumption is that their shared national identity, history of oppression by the Iraqi state, years of de facto autonomy, and the influx of revenue from oil contracts will leave Iraqi Kurds with little incentive to remain part of Iraq.

Yet as Ms. Rahman points out, independence is simply not a viable option for the Iraqi Kurds: 'Even though every Kurd in his heart wants an independent Kurdish state, the reality is that this could destabilize the region, and potentially lead to hostility with our neighbours. It's true, there is no single Iraqi identity, but this is exactly why it is federalism which will ensure stability and democracy...for example, there are already signs of compromise and political participation by the Sunni Arab community, who many people thought would never cooperate after losing their monopoly of power. By being part of Iraq, [Iraqi Kurds] can help the country to prosper and allow our people to recover from decades of war and genocide...it's the best option for securing our future.'

The Kurdish leadership is clearly committed to human rights and particularly to women's' rights, as evidenced in a provision requiring a minimum

25% female members of the Kurdish National Assembly. However, recent assessments by the Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) have noted deficiencies in the implementation of human rights measures, and even perceive a decline in women's rights on the ground. Rachel Bernu, Deputy Director of the KHRP, attributes this to a lack of 'the fundamental mechanisms to implement necessary reforms,' and worries that the region instead 'relies on a collection of more ad hoc measures and on the promise of progress through investment.' Ms. Bernu singles out the 'lack of public and professional education as well as implementing mechanisms as a central impediment to progress in the Kurdistan region, extending to the difficulties in implementing a coherent legal code.' For instance, in some areas of Kurdistan, Sharia law may be accepted as overriding the laws of the National Assembly, and can thus be used to justify practices such as honour killings that are inconsistent with the region's human rights laws.

Ms. Rahman accepts these criticisms as a crucial component of the 'positive role that NGOs are playing in the Kurdish region,' although she is keen to highlight the progress that has been made in these areas. The KRG has convened a commission to specifically address the problem of honour crimes, and has sought the advice of the British police in devising a strategy to counter crimes justified by tradition. 'You have to look at your neighbourhood,' Ms. Rahman reasons. 'The Middle East is not a great area for women's rights, and there's no reason to believe we'll be able to get rid of these attitudes immediately...but we have opened the debate, we are making a real effort, and over time I think we will develop a holistic approach to counter these problems.'

Has the international community—and the Anglo-American alliance in particular—done enough to assist Iraqi Kurdistan's democratization? 'No, and I would say that in this sense we have been a victim of our own success,' Ms. Rahman argues. Iraqi Kurdistan's allies would do well to remember that although the region had a 'head-start' in its political development, the sanctions imposed on Iraq during the Ba'athist regime affected the Kurdish region with twice as much force due to the embargo imposed on Kurdistan by Saddam Hussein. While the KRG considers Great Britain and the United States to be allies and liberators, 'very little money from international donor funds, from the US aid programmes, and from funds in the UK such as DFID, has been allotted to Iraqi Kurdistan. We have developed our own NGOs as much as we can, and we have paid for assistance when we've needed it—for example, the Kurdistan Regional Government has a contract with the British National School of Government to train our civil servants to the British standard.'

Yet given the challenges of nation-building, the Kurdistan Regional Government does not have unlimited resources with which to contract such

services. Ms. Bernu cites the need not simply for financial assistance, but for technical expertise to build a fully-functioning democratic legal system in Iraqi Kurdistan, and cites 'anxieties about offending Iraq's neighbours' as the main reason for the deficit in international assistance.

But surely this relative lack of financial aid is understandable given the dire circumstances of the rest of the country? Ms. Rahman agrees that central and southern Iraq lag behind Kurdistan in the pace of democratic development, but maintains that financial support has been withheld needlessly from Iraqi Kurdistan, that the US and UK could do more to promote investment opportunities in Kurdistan, and that these omissions are symptomatic of a general failure to embrace and promote the greatest success story of Iraq thus far: 'A group of British MPs visited Kurdistan in February and in their report to the UK parliament, they said the Kurdistan Region deserves a far higher degree of international attention and support. They pointed out that Kurdistan's success is in the interests of all those who want a peaceful and stable Middle East, and we hope these encouraging developments will help to publicize the opportunities in Iraqi Kurdistan.'

A journalist for seventeen years for newspapers including the Financial Times, Ms. Rahman has used her way with words and media savvy to raise awareness about the investment opportunities in the Kurdistan region. As the former Chairman of the Kurdistan Development Corporation, she was instrumental in the 'Kurdistan: the Other Iraq,' advertising campaign first launched in 2005 with the assistance of the public relations firm Russo, Marsh & Rogers. Despite the reported scepticism of the international community, Kurdistan has now begun to receive Western tourist groups, high level trade delegations from the US and the UK and other leading developed countries, and recently signed an investment deal with the UAE-based Damac Properties worth \$4.5 billion USD. There is reason to be encouraged that this is improving already—Foreign Secretary David Miliband has visited Iraqi Kurdistan twice in the past year, and trade and parliamentary delegations have made increasingly frequent visits. Despite the largely negative impression fostered by the Turkish incursions into Kurdistan against the PKK, Turkey is actually Iraqi Kurdistan's most active trading partner, with most trade entering through the Kurdish region. 'This is positive for Kurdistan, for Iraq, and for Turkey,' Ms. Rahman declares. 'After all, the world revolves around trade.'

The relative paucity to date of international assistance, both monetary and consultative, has increased the sense of urgency in developing Kurdistan's largely untapped oil industry. The paradox of course is that the oil revenues, which are essential to the Kurdish region's future economic security and political stability, requires a civil and legal infrastructure which may need more time to develop in the opinion of some human rights activists. An article by Greg Mutit in the KHRP's 2008 Legal Review of the Kurdish-majority territories suggests that the pace of oil

contracts awarded by the KRG may proceed more quickly than the current legal framework—still in its formative stage—can handle. The report singles out the 'stabilisation clauses' of the oil contracts awarded by the KRG in the autumn of 2007 as having a potentially chilling effect on further human rights legislation, as they require the KRG to compensate investors for any costs which may be incurred in future due to changes in human rights or environmental legislation.

Yet with a particularly acute history of suffering as a result of the Hussein regime's abuse of its oil wealth, Ms. Rahman contends that 'the KRG and the Kurdish leadership are committed to upholding and protecting human rights and to protecting and reviving the environment...The signing of oil or other investment contracts will not hinder or slow that commitment and companies that come to Kurdistan are well aware of that. In fact, the revenues from these investments will bring benefits to the people of Kurdistan and should improve their welfare.'

However this debate is settled, it is axiomatic that oil is central to Iraq's future prosperity and regional power. While due consideration must be given to strengthening the transparency and cohesiveness of the legal system if Iraq is to responsibly manage its oil wealth, accessing these resources has the potential to contribute enormously to the country's reconstruction, economic development and political reconciliation. Yet lingering cynicism over the US-UK and Coalition members' motives for the 2003 invasion seems to have extended to questioning the legality of the KRG's management of the region's all-important resources. Indeed, insinuations of Kurdistan's supposedly cosy relationship with the United States may have biased some media outlets against its oil and gas law as a whole. Since the first contracts were awarded by the KRG in 2007, leading publications have criticized them as being legally dubious, and have implied that the federal government and the KRG are in dispute over this issue.

Yet the present arrangements for oil and gas contracts in Iraq is mandated by a combination of regional, federal and constitutional rights, which lawmakers are attempting to balance in the best interests of political stability. To this point, Ms. Rahman argues that these criticisms either misunderstand or misrepresent the nature of Iraqi Kurdistan's oil and gas law: 'The law is quite clear. Under Article 108 of the Iraqi Constitution, the Kurdistan National Assembly has the power to pass its own laws and to sign contracts. We have therefore passed our own oil and gas law, while we wait for the federal hydrocarbons law to be finalised. Also, under the current political agreement between the KRG and Baghdad, the KRG receives 17 per cent of Iraq's budget. Therefore, only 17 per cent of the revenues from the oil contracts signed by the KRG will go to Kurdistan. We will ensure the remainder goes to the Federal coffers.' Moreover, 'two independent legal reviews [by Professor James Crawford and Dr. Pedro van Meurs] have confirmed the legality of the KRG's actions. As for a supposed conflict between the federal and regional governments,

it's important to note that accusations of illegal practices by the KRG have come from individuals within the federal government, but not from the federal government itself.'

The KRG has repeatedly expressed confidence that the Kurdistan region will stand as a beacon for the rest of Iraq, and for the Middle Eastern region. Certainly, it would be irresponsible to conflate the particular circumstances of the Kurdish region with that of the rest of Iraq, whose continued control by the Ba'athist regime until 2003 made its post-invasion breakdown far more prone to violence and social atomization. Yet the failure of the US and the UK to adequately publicize the success story that is Iraqi Kurdistan whether out of deference to war-weary electorates, or out of fear of harassment by regional powers with substantial Kurdish minorities—it is disservice to the efforts of NGOs, Iraqis and the Iraqi-Kurdish people, not to mention those of their own Armed Forces.

While central and southern Iraq's security situation continues to improve, it is arguably at least 10-to-20 years behind Iraqi Kurdistan's development of the legal and social infrastructure necessary for a stable civil society. Iraqi Kurdistan can provide a vital gateway to the international community and to the global market, and through increased trade links could increase Iraq's regional security and potentially neutralize the influence of regional neighbours such as Iran and Syria. With the 2003 liberation, Great Britain and the US have made this possible, but can and should do more by authorizing increased assistance via legal advisory commissions, by offering aid and exchange programmes in such fields as government and health services, and by encouraging the already promising influx of British and American investment in the region. The EU can be another powerful tool to assist Kurdistan both directly and indirectly—for instance, the 'carrot' of EU membership can be used to secure a more equitable financial and diplomatic relationship between Turkey and Iraq. The Federal Iraqi Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government should continue to work towards a political compromise on the federal hydrocarbons law, and continue to cooperate to ensure that the development of the oil industry is carried out with transparency and in accordance with the Constitution. The fact that the federal and regional governments are demonstrating the capacity for political compromise should be extremely encouraging to the US and UK, and should remind us of the importance of securing our alliance with and investment in a stable, democratic Iraq. In order to move Iraq forward, the Coalition Powers need to both rectify their mistakes and to understand and bring attention to their successes. It is time to spotlight 'The Other Iraq'—Iraqi Kurdistan—as a beacon of the entire country's promise, and to offer assistance in fulfilling that potential.

Julia Pettengill is a Research Assistant at the Henry Jackson Society

AFP

TURQUIE: CINQ KURDES PRO-GOUVERNEMENTAUX TUÉS PAR DES REBELLES KURDES (PRESSE)

ANKARA, 2 août 2008 (AFP) –

CINQ KURDES, membres d'une milice pro-gouvernementale, ont été tués par balles lors d'affrontements avec des séparatistes kurdes dans la nuit de vendredi à samedi dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a rapporté samedi l'agence Anadolu.

Les combats ont eu lieu dans la région montagneuse de Bestler, dans la province de Sirnak, près de la frontière avec l'Irak, lors d'une opération militaire contre le Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, séparatistes kurdes de Turquie), a précisé l'agence.

Les cinq hommes étaient membres d'une milice locale kurde, armée par le gouvernement pour venir en aide à l'armée turque dans sa lutte contre le PKK. Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les États-Unis et l'Union européenne, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait plus de 37.000 morts.

L'armée turque a renforcé depuis décembre sa répression contre l'organisation séparatiste, intensifiant les opérations dans le sud-est du pays, et menant des incursions aériennes contre des camps du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak.

AFP

LA TURQUIE IMPUTE L'ATTENTAT D'ISTANBUL AUX REBELLES KURDES

ANKARA, 2 août 2008 (AFP)

DES EXTREMISTES séparatistes kurdes sont derrière les deux attentats à la bombe qui ont fait 17 morts le dimanche 27 juillet à Istanbul, a déclaré samedi le ministre turc de l'Intérieur, Besir Atalay. "C'était un acte inhumain de la sanglante organisation séparatiste terroriste", a-t-il déclaré, utilisant la désignation habituelle des autorités turques pour le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). Néanmoins, les rebelles kurdes ont déjà démenti toute implication.

Selon ce dernier, la majorité de ceux qui étaient derrière les attentats ont été capturés, dont ceux "qui ont personnellement participé" à ces attaques. Le 30 juillet, la police turque

avait interpellé neuf personnes suspectées d'avoir posé les deux bombes. Le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan a déjà implicitement imputé la responsabilité de l'attentat au PKK, estimant que l'attaque était un "coût" à payer pour les opérations menées par l'armée turque contre les rebelles dans le sud-est anatolien et dans le nord de l'Irak. Devant son groupe parlementaire, il a aussi appelé à l'unité contre le terrorisme. Depuis le début des actions d'Ankara contre le PKK en Irak, les États-Unis, alliés de la Turquie au sein de l'Otan, assistent la Turquie en lui fournissant en temps réel des informations sur les mouvements des rebelles kurdes en territoire irakien. Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la

AFP

ATTENTATS D'ISTANBUL: LE SERVICE SECRET ALLEMAND DOUTE QUE CE SOIT LE PKK (PRESSE)

BERLIN, 3 août 2008 (AFP)

LE CHEF du service de renseignement allemand (BND) doute que les séparatistes kurdes soient à l'origine des attentats à la bombe qui ont fait 17 morts la semaine dernière à Istanbul, rapporte l'édition du quotidien Bild à paraître lundi.

Le double "attentat d'Istanbul ne colle pas vraiment avec le PKK", l'organisation séparatiste du Parti des Travailleurs Kurdes, interdit en Turquie comme dans le reste de l'Europe, et pourrait plutôt être le fait d'islamistes liés au groupe terroriste Al-Qaïda, a estimé Ernst Uhrlau.

"La technique employée dans l'attaque, le lieu, et le moment choisi rappellent plutôt un contexte islamiste ou turco-turque", selon M. Uhrlau.

Les déclarations de M. Uhrlau interviennent tout juste après que le ministre turc de l'Intérieur, Besir Atalay, ait affirmé que les deux attentats du 27 juillet

avaient été commis par des extrémistes séparatistes kurdes et que la police estimait avoir arrêté la plupart des coupables.

Selon le patron du BND, "on ne peut pas exclure" une implication d'Al-Qaïda.

"Nous savons que des terroristes islamistes sont également au travail en Turquie, où ils participent à un 'Jihad global'", selon M. Uhrlau.

Deux bombes posées dans des conteneurs à ordures avaient explosé dimanche 27 juillet à 10 minutes d'intervalle dans une rue piétonne très fréquentée du quartier populaire de Gungoren, dans la partie européenne d'Istanbul. Dix-sept personnes avaient été tuées, dont cinq enfants et une femme enceinte, et quelque 154 personnes blessées.

Toutes les victimes ont péri dans la seconde explosion, bien plus puissante que la première, après laquelle un grand nombre de personnes s'étaient masquées sur les lieux

AFP

TURQUIE: HUIT REBELLES KURDES TUÉS DANS LE SUD-EST DE LA TURQUIE (ARMÉE)

ANKARA, 3 août 2008 (AFP)

HUIT REBELLES kurdes ont été tués au cours d'affrontements avec les forces de sécurité dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a annoncé dimanche l'armée.

Ces membres du Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, séparatistes kurdes de Turquie) ont été tués samedi matin dans une région montagneuse de la province de Sirnak, près de la frontière avec l'Irak, précise un communiqué de l'armée.

Les combats sont survenus après le meurtre par balles de cinq Kurdes, membres d'une milice pro-gouvernementale, dans la même province la nuit précédente.

Les services de sécurité ont également découvert samedi une bombe composée de 15 kilos de produits chimiques et de diesel, dans une zone montagneuse de la province de Bingöl (est), selon le communiqué de l'armée.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les États-Unis et l'Union européenne, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait plus de 37.000 morts.

L'armée turque a renforcé depuis décembre sa répression contre l'organisation séparatiste, intensifiant les opérations dans le sud-est du pays, et menant des incursions aériennes contre des camps du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak.

AFP

MANIFESTATION À BAGDAD CONTRE LE RATTACHEMENT DE KIRKOUK AU KURDISTAN

BAGDAD, 4 août 2008 (AFP) –

PLUSIEURS centaines d'habitants du quartier sunnite d'Adhamiyah, à Bagdad, ont manifesté lundi soir contre le projet de rattachement de la ville pétrolière de Kirkouk à la région autonome du Kurdistan, a constaté un journaliste de l'AFP.

Ils ont défilé durant une heure en portant des drapeaux où étaient écrits : "Les

tribus d'Adhamiyah condamnent le rattachement de Kirkouk au Kurdistan", "Kirkouk restera le symbole de la fraternité nationale", "Non à l'éclatement de l'Irak".

Pourtant des drapeaux irakiens, ils ont scandé: "Non à la division de l'Irak", "Oui à l'unité du pays", "Nous donnerons notre sang et notre âme pour Kirkouk".

Cette manifestation, qui intervient deux jours après celle de Hawija (50 km à l'ouest de la ville de Kirkouk), a été motivée par le vote unanime du bloc kurde jeudi, lors d'une réunion extraordinaire du conseil de la province, pour demander le rattachement de Kirkouk à la région du Kurdistan.

La Constitution irakienne prévoit la tenue d'un référendum à Kirkouk par lequel les habitants doivent dire s'ils veulent être rattachés au Kurdistan irakien ou non.

Kirkouk avait été placée par l'ancien président Saddam Hussein hors du

Kurdistan irakien, une région indépendante de facto depuis 1991, et connaît depuis l'invasion menée par les forces américaines en 2003 des tensions entre les différentes communautés qui la peuplent.

Alors que les Kurdes ont aujourd'hui consolidé leur pouvoir au sein du nouvel Irak, ils exigent le rattachement de la ville à leur région autonome située à une cinquantaine de kilomètres plus au nord.

Les habitants arabes et turkmènes craignent eux d'être marginalisés si la gestion de la région passait aux mains des Kurdes.

REUTERS

Le Parlement irakien ne parvient pas à voter une loi électorale

3 août 2008 Par Walid Ibrahim

BAGDAD (Reuters) - LE PARLEMENT irakien n'a pas réussi à réunir le quorum nécessaire pour voter une loi électorale, ce qui laisse dans l'incertitude la date des élections provinciales et perpétue une crise politique qui attise les tensions ethniques.

Les parlementaires ont reporté sine die la session extraordinaire convoquée pour faire adopter le projet de loi à laquelle la minorité kurde est hostile.

Le report implique que les élections prévues le 1er octobre pourraient ne pas avoir lieu avant l'an prochain. Les autorités électorales ont indiqué qu'une fois la loi adoptée, il leur faudrait plusieurs mois pour organiser le scrutin.

Le principal enjeu du texte est le sort de Kirkouk, une ville du nord du pays que les Kurdes souhaitent inclure dans leur région autonome du Kurdistan.

Les députés ont adopté le texte le mois dernier, mais les députés kurdes ont boycotté la session, en partie parce que le projet de loi reportait les élections à Kirkouk.

Le président Jalal Talabani, lui-même kurde, a alors jugé la loi inconstitutionnelle et l'a renvoyée au Parlement. Toute loi doit être approuvée par les trois membres du Conseil de la présidence, dont fait partie Talabani.

Une grande partie des Arabes et des Turkmènes habitant Kirkouk souhaitent que la ville reste sous le contrôle du gouvernement central, mais les Kurdes la considèrent comme un lieu indissociable de leur histoire.

Les responsables politiques poursuivent leurs consultations afin de dégager un compromis.

Mahmoud Osman, un député kurde, a déclaré qu'un compromis était à portée de main et que le Parlement, actuellement en vacances d'été, tiendrait une nouvelle session extraordinaire lorsque les dirigeants de parti annonceraient un accord.

"Nous attendons la fumée blanche. Il y a de l'espoir et de nombreux sujets de litige ont été levés et il y a des garanties pour toutes les parties", a-t-il dit.

VOITURE PIÉGÉE

Le sort de Kirkouk a fait l'objet de manifestations ces derniers jours et, il y a près d'une semaine, un attentat suicide a fait une vingtaine de morts lors d'une de ces manifestations. La loi rejetée par Talabani reportait les élections provinciales à Kirkouk, y attribuait un nombre fixe de sièges par groupe ethnique et remplaçait les forces de sécurité ("peshmerga" kurdes) par des troupes issues d'autres régions d'Irak. Les parlementaires kurdes ont exprimé leur opposition à toutes ces mesures.

Parallèlement, les violences en Irak sont retombées à un niveau sans précédent depuis le début de 2004 et le gouvernement du Premier ministre Nouri al Maliki négocie avec

Washington un accord de sécurité qui fixerait une échéance pour le retrait des forces de combat américaines d'Irak.

Une voiture piégée a fait 12 morts et 22 blessés dimanche dans un quartier sunnite de Bagdad, a rapporté la police irakienne.

Les attentats à la voiture piégée sont devenus plus rares à Bagdad qui a retrouvé un semblant de calme, plus de cinq ans après l'invasion américaine de 2003 qui a renversé



Saddam Hussein.

Mais certains observateurs craignent que les tensions à Kirkouk compromettent ces acquis en matière de sécurité et soient le prélude à une plus grande instabilité politique. Les élections provinciales, qui désigneront les conseils à la tête de chacune des 18 provinces constitueront un test avant les élections législatives de 2009.

Les Etats-Unis espèrent que la loi électorale contribuera à la réconciliation en donnant à la minorité sunnite l'occasion de participer au scrutin alors qu'elle avait boycotté les dernières élections provinciales, en 2005. Il en résulte que les sunnites sont sous-représentés, même dans des régions où ils sont majoritaires.

AFP

LOI ÉLECTORALE EN IRAK: UNE "CONSPIRATION" POUR LE KURDE MASSOUD BARZANI

ERBIL (Irak), 5 août 2008 (AFP) –

LE PRESIDENT de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, a fustigé un projet de loi régissant d'importantes élections provinciales, qu'il a qualifié de "conspiration".

"Pour nous, c'est clair que ce qui s'est passé le 22 juillet était une grande conspiration et représentait un grand danger pour le processus démocratique et constitutionnel en Irak, et particulièrement pour les Kurdes", a affirmé lundi soir aux journalistes à Erbil M. Barzani.

Le projet de loi qui devait régir les scrutins provinciaux prévus le 1er octobre avait été approuvé le 22 juillet par le Parlement, dans un contexte tendu: seuls 140 députés sur 275 étaient présents au moment du vote, et de nombreux parlementaires avaient dénoncé des irrégularités dans la procédure du vote, boycotté par les 54 parlementaires kurdes et d'autres législateurs hostiles à la loi.

En réaction, le Conseil présidentiel, composé du chef de l'Etat Jalal Talabani et de ses deux adjoints, avait décidé d'opposer son veto au texte.

Les Kurdes, en particulier, s'opposent à la loi en raison d'un différend sur la répartition du pouvoir entre les différentes communautés de la région riche en pétrole de Kirkouk.

Située à 250 kilomètres au nord de Bagdad, Kirkouk avait été placée par l'an-



ancien président Saddam Hussein hors du Kurdistan irakien, une région indépendante de facto depuis 1991. Alors que les Kurdes ont aujourd'hui consolidé leur pouvoir au sein du nouvel Irak, ils exigent son rattachement à leur région autonome, située à une cinquantaine de km plus au nord.

Ce retard dans l'adoption de la loi représente un revers pour l'administration américaine de George W. Bush qui voit dans le scrutin d'octobre une étape cruciale vers la réconciliation en Irak.

Les Kurdes d'Erbil ont manifesté à plusieurs reprises contre ce projet de loi et les Arabes ont manifesté de leur côté dans la région de Kirkouk et à Bagdad contre les "prétentions" kurdes.

Le point le plus controversé concerne l'article 24 du projet de loi qui propose une répartition à part égale du pouvoir au conseil provincial de Kirkouk entre les trois communautés arabe, kurde et turcomane.

Les Kurdes, qui représentent la majorité dans cette région, y sont violemment opposés.

"Nous sommes pour la répartition du pouvoir à Kirkouk mais pas à parts égales. La répartition doit dépendre des résultats électoraux", a dit M. Barzani.

Récit de la première rencontre sur le nucléaire, à Genève, entre émissaires iranien et américain

« Le Monde » publie des extraits d'un compte rendu écrit de la réunion entre le négociateur iranien Saïd Jalili et des représentants des « Six », dont l'Américain William Burns

SUITE DE LA PREMIÈRE PAGE

Un compte rendu détaillé de cette réunion, que *Le Monde* s'est procuré, jette une lumière crue sur l'extrême difficulté de trouver le moyen de sortir de l'impasse diplomatique sur ce dossier, alors que le risque d'une action militaire israélienne contre des installations nucléaires iraniennes reste une réalité. Il ressort des propos tenus par M. Jalili que l'Iran se sent en position de force au Moyen-Orient, avec ses divers leviers dans les crises régionales (Irak, Liban, dossier palestinien) ainsi que sur des questions énergétiques, et qu'il ne voit pas l'urgence de céder quoi que ce soit pour faciliter un règlement négocié de l'imbroglio nucléaire.

En entrant dans la salle, à Genève, les représentants des « Six » avaient prévu une position de repli en cas d'échec : donner encore quinze jours aux Iraniens pour qu'ils apportent une proposition de « double gel » qui ouvrirait la voie à des négociations de fond : d'un côté, gel de l'accroissement des sanctions contre l'Iran à l'ONU, de l'autre, gel de l'installation de nouveaux équipements permettant d'enrichir l'uranium (une technologie rendant possible la fabrication de la matière fissile utilisable dans une bombe atomique).

C'est ce délai supplémentaire qui devait expirer, samedi 2 août, sans qu'il s'agisse pour autant d'un ultimatum ferme. La date butoir pourrait encore glisser de quelques jours. Au-delà, ont prévenu les Occidentaux, de nouvelles sanctions seront mises en chantier à l'ONU, après celles adoptées en mars.

Le 19 juillet, M. Solana ouvre la discussion en soulignant l'importance du format de la rencontre, sous-entendu en présence d'un diplomate américain de haut rang. Il rappelle la lettre adressée en juin par les ministres des affaires étrangères des « Six » à leur homologue iranien, Manouchehr Mottaki - lettre signée par la secrétaire d'Etat américaine Condoleezza Rice. Il presse l'Iranien de dire oui au double gel.

Saïd Jalili prend ensuite longuement la parole, s'exprimant par allusions. Il n'aborde pas la question du double gel, mais évoque « l'histoire qui peut éclairer

l'avenir », et parle des « capacités » de l'Iran « pour promouvoir la démocratie dans la région », ainsi que de son importance sur les questions de « sécurité, terrorisme, sécurité énergétique ». Il demande : « En quelle qualité abordons-nous ces négociations : partenaires, amis, concurrents, ou parties hostiles ? » Une coopération à visée « stratégique » entre l'Iran et ses interlocuteurs « pourrait mener à la résolution de difficultés qui sont devenues chroniques ». « Nous pourrions résoudre des questions qui existent depuis trente ans, oserais-je le dire, soixante ans », affirme-t-il en référence apparente aux relations avec les Etats-Unis puis à la création d'Israël. « Le choix est pour vous de savoir si les opportunités pèsent plus que les défis. »

M. Solana essaie de recadrer la discussion. « Nous parlons depuis plusieurs années déjà, dit-il. Nous sommes ici pour entendre votre réponse. » L'émissaire russe, Sergueï Kisliak, enchaîne : « Nous aimerions une réponse positive. »

William Burns s'adresse aux Iraniens, la seule fois où il parlera : « Je suis content d'être là pour transmettre un message simple : les Etats-Unis sont sérieux dans leur soutien à l'offre [de coopération] et au Way forward [un canevas proposé par les « Six » qui prévoit le double gel] ». « Nous sommes sérieux dans la recherche d'une solution diplomatique », poursuit-il. « Les relations entre nos deux pays ont été basées sur une profonde méfiance depuis trente ans. J'espère que ma présence aujourd'hui est un pas dans la bonne direction, et que vous saisissez cette opportunité. » Les représentants chinois, britannique, puis allemand, soulignent ensuite à quel point l'occasion est « précieuse »,

« après tous les hauts et les bas dans le passé ».

Saïd Jalili parle alors d'une contre-proposition iranienne au « Way forward ». Le document iranien de deux pages, rédigé en termes vagues, prévoit d'étirer des pourparlers dans le temps, entre émissaires puis au niveau des ministres, sans faire mention d'un gel des installations de centrifugeuses. M. Solana tente encore de recadrer : « Je ne comprends pas quel est le problème, dit-il. Pouvez-vous expliquer pourquoi il n'est pas possible de commencer [les prénégociations, avec un double gel préalable] ? » M. Jalili trans-

met son document. La séance est interrompue. MM. Solana et Jalili vont déjeuner en tête à tête dans un restaurant à côté de la mairie de Genève. Au retour, l'émissaire européen briefe les « Six » : les explications de Jalili ont été confuses, mais « la réponse à nos deux questions : acceptez-vous un double gel, et acceptez-

vous une période de six semaines [prévue pour les prénégociations] a été "No" », leur dit-il, selon ce compte rendu.

La discussion plénière reprend l'après-midi, sans percée, même si Sergueï Kisliak croit sentir à un moment une inflexion de l'Iranien, qui parle de « préserver le statu quo », ce qui pourrait faire croire à une ouverture vers un gel des travaux nucléaires iraniens. Mais Jalili indique qu'il n'en est rien.

Le représentant français, Gérard Araud, intervient : « Si vous n'êtes pas en mesure de répondre aujourd'hui, vous pouvez consulter Téhéran et donner votre réponse dans deux semaines à M. Solana. » Le Britannique souligne que, si la réponse est négative, les sanctions seront accrues. Jalili réplique en disant que « la position de l'Iran est forte ». Il cite le « Guide suprême » iranien, Ali Khameneï : « Dans un environnement de menace, nous ne parlerons pas ». « Quant aux sanctions, dit-il, nous les surmontons. »

Pour finir, M. Solana résume : « Nous attendons votre réponse d'ici deux semaines, sur votre souhait ou non de maintenir ce statu quo en ce qui concerne les centrifugeuses et les sanctions (...). J'espère que vous avez compris notre engagement fort. » Solana et Jalili conviennent qu'à la sortie ils décriront la réunion comme « constructive ».

Des proches du dossier, côté occidental, commentent aujourd'hui que la diplomatie a peu de chances de progresser avant l'élection présidentielle américaine. Certains estiment que les luttes politiques à Téhéran rendent impossible une concession diplomatique iranienne. Des discussions sont déjà en cours entre les « Six » sur la teneur de nouvelles sanctions à l'ONU, où le dossier pourrait être réactivé en septembre. ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

« En quelle qualité abordons-nous ces négociations : partenaires, amis, concurrents, ou parties hostiles ? »

Saïd Jalili
Négociateur iranien

Los Angeles Times

August 2, 2008

3 Iraqi soldiers killed in Kirkuk, where ethnic tensions remain high

Ned Parker, Saif Hameed, Los Angeles Times

Three Iraqi soldiers died in a roadside bombing Friday in the northern city of Kirkuk, where relations remain frayed among Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen after a suicide bombing and ethnic clashes earlier in the week.

The bomb targeted a convoy of Iraqi army vehicles, killing three soldiers and wounding two, the military said.

Iraq's government warned local factions that it will not allow any party to decide the region's future unilaterally, in reaction to a threat by Kurdish provincial council members to declare Kirkuk a part of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Such a move would force the Kurds, who dominate the current system, to split power with Arabs and Turkmen. The controversial version of the electoral law also calls for the removal of the current Iraqi security forces from Kirkuk, which Arabs and Turkmen say is controlled by Kurds.

"The Iraqi government is refusing any individual step to change the situation in Kirkuk, and it is considering it illegal and unconstitutional," government spokesman Ali Dabbagh said in a statement Friday.

Dabbagh warned that escalating tensions could be exploited by the country's enemies.

On Monday, a suicide bomber blew herself up at a Kurdish rally protesting lawmakers in the

national Parliament. The bombing sparked a rampage by Kurdish protesters who attacked the office of the local Turkmen party. Turkmen guards answered with gunfire.

The suicide attack and clashes left at least 25 people dead. Local security commanders blamed the explosion on al Qaeda in Iraq.

Kurds believe Kirkuk belongs to them and see claiming it as justice for their oppression under Saddam Hussein, who forcibly expelled them from the province and resettled Arabs in their place. Similar tensions abound across northern Iraq from the province of Nineveh to sections of Diyala that also witnessed Saddam's policy of uprooting Kurds and replacing them with Arabs.

The rift threatens to delay provincial elections across Iraq if Parliament cannot decide on Kirkuk's status. Kurdish lawmakers walked out of Parliament recently after they were surprised by a secret vote on Kirkuk written into the election law.

Neighboring Turkey opposes making Kirkuk part of Iraqi Kurdistan. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan told Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, on Thursday that he backs a quota system.

Also, the U.S. military announced that the Iraqi army had detained two suspected members of al Qaeda in Iraq believed to have been in-

involved in a June 26 suicide bombing by a police officer that killed three U.S. Marines and at least 20 Iraqis, including prominent tribal sheikhs, in Karma in western Anbar province.

An al Qaeda front organization, the Islamic State of Iraq, has claimed responsibility for the June 26 attack, which underscored the dangers facing Sunni tribal leaders who have turned against the terror movement and cooperated with U.S. and Iraqi authorities.

The Marines and Iraqis were killed when the suicide bomber detonated his explosives at a building in Karma as dozens of sheikhs were attending a meeting with U.S. officials.

The U.S. command said two interpreters for the Americans also were killed.

Anbar sheikhs spearheaded the Sunni revolt against al Qaeda, one of the key reasons behind the dramatic drop in both overall violence and American casualties since 2006.

The two suspected insurgents were captured in a July 18 raid near Tarmiya, north of Baghdad, the military said Friday. The statement said the suspects have been linked to various wings of al Qaeda in Iraq and were connected to the bombing.

The suspects also were believed to be associated with al Qaeda efforts to recruit young boys as suicide bombers, according to the military.

The Washington Post

August 4, 2008

ELECTIONS BILL IN IRAQ STALLS ON KIRKUK Dispute Persists Over Oil-Rich City in North

By Sudarsan Raghavan and Qais Mizher
Washington Post Foreign Service

Kurdish officials are worried that the national Parliament might approve an electoral procedural law that would delay local elections in Kirkuk and impose a quota system for the 40-seat provincial council. Parliament is scheduled to discuss the matter during an emergency session Sunday.

BAGHDAD, Aug. 3 — Iraqi lawmakers on Sunday failed to settle a dispute over the oil-rich city of Kirkuk and pass a provincial elections bill viewed as vital for national reconciliation, despite intense pressure from the United States and the United Nations.

The political stalemate came as a car exploded in a predominantly Sunni neighborhood of northern Baghdad, killing 12 and wounding 22, according to police. Later Sunday, a car bombing in front of a coffee shop in the southern city of Hilla killed one person and injured 12, police said.

The attacks underscored Iraq's fragile security, even as levels of violence across the country fall to four-year lows.

Iraq's parliament called a special session Sunday to vote for the second time on the elections bill, which must be approved before elections can be held in the country's 18 provinces. But the session never convened, because Kurdish, Arab and Turkmen lawmakers were unable to reach an agreement on Kirkuk, where their respective ethnic groups are locked in a struggle for land and resources.

Kurds want Kirkuk to become part of the semiautonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq, but Arabs and Turkmen want the city to remain under central government control.

The elections would give more power to regions as well as to Sunni Arabs, who boycotted the last provincial elections in 2005. The Bush administration views the vote as vital to bridging Iraq's political divide and cementing security gains.

But even before Sunday, Iraq's electoral commission had said the elections, originally scheduled for Oct. 1, could not take place until early next year.

On Sunday, President Bush telephoned Iraq's Shiite vice president, Adel Abdul Mahdi,



People attend a protest in the town of Hawija, Iraq, Saturday, Aug. 2, 2008. More than 1,000 Sunni Arabs and Turkomen staged a demonstration Saturday to protest calls by Kurds to annex the oil-rich city of Kirkuk to their autonomous region as Iraqi officials met in Baghdad to defuse tension over the disputed city. (AP Photo) (AP)

as well as the Sunni speaker of parliament, Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, according to statements from their offices. U.S. Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker and U.N. special representative Staffan de Mistura met late Sunday with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to find ways to dissolve the impasse.

"President Bush has been working with the Iraqis to encourage them to work out their differences and get the provincial elections law passed," White House press secretary Dana Perino told reporters in Washington.

Last month, Kurdish lawmakers boycotted the first vote, but parliament passed the bill in a secret ballot. President Jalal Talabani, an ethnic Kurd, vetoed the bill, sending it back to parliament for further discussion.

The Kurds rejected provisions in the bill that called for Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens to have an equal number of seats on the provincial council of Tamim province, of which Kirkuk is the capital.

Tensions have risen dramatically since then. Last week, a female suicide bomber detonated explosives in a crowd of Kurds protesting

the legislation, triggering ethnic clashes that pit Kurds against Turkmens and Arabs. The bombing and fighting killed 25 and injured 187, according to police and hospital officials in Kirkuk. Since then, more demonstrations against the elections bill have further stoked tensions.

Qasim Dawood, an independent Shi'ite lawmaker, said Kurds wanted the bill to include a reference to Kirkuk's constitutionally mandated referendum on Kirkuk's status but that Arab lawmakers rejected that. The Arab lawmakers accuse the Kurds of bringing more than 750,000 Kurds into Kirkuk to affect any vote.

"The elections can't be done in this year, and that will have a negative reflection on the security and political situation," Dawood said.

Several Iraqi lawmakers said U.S. pressure could throw Iraq into further political chaos.

"The Americans are pushing for the elections at any price, and that is incorrect," said Mahdi al-Hafidh, a Community Party lawmaker. "The country is not quiet, and there is not a good climate for this election."

"There's no way to find a solution to a 100-year-old problem in days," said Mahmoud Othman, an independent Kurdish legislator. "Mr. Bush is pressing the Iraqi politicians to make a fast deal, but this kind of pressure will have a negative result on Iraq's situation. We have to delay the election in Kirkuk to give the people on the ground more time to talk and the committees to discuss the situation and to build trust between the sects in Kirkuk."



Voices of Iraq
August 5, 2008

UN's new suggestions pave the ground for election bill – Kurdish politician

BAGHDAD, Aug. 5 (VOI) – THE SPOKESPERSON of the Kurdistan Alliance parliamentary bloc on Tuesday expressed his hopes that both the provincial election bill and 2008 complementary budget would be passed during Parliament's Wednesday session, as the United Nations (UN) submitted new suggestions regarding Kirkuk province that received wider acceptance from political blocs.

"There is greater opportunity to vote on the provincial election bill and complementary budget during Parliament's Wednesday session, compared with previous sessions," Fiyad Rawandozi told *Aswat al-Iraq - Voices of Iraq - (VOI)*. "The UN's new suggestions regarding item 24 of the provincial election bill and postponing elections in Kirkuk received wider acceptance from political blocs," he said. "The UN's new suggestions may pave the ground tomorrow for the provincial election bill and complementary budget to pass," he added. "Political blocs had a meeting on Tuesday," he added, hoping that the

other side "would make a decision within the coming few hours to attend tomorrow's session and to vote on these two pending issues," he added. "There are some problems concerning the UN's suggestions, as some blocs accepted them, but others, like the Iraqi Accordance Front (IAF – Sunni parliamentary bloc), have not yet reached a final combined decision about them," he noted. Regarding Masoud Barazani's (President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region) statements in which he talked about "The Alliance's mistakes" in passing the provincial election bill, Rawandozi said "We had a meeting with Barazani, and we explained the chaos that occurred inside the parliament's meeting room during the voting session, and the quick stances that put us in an incorrect situation," he explained. "We don't bear the responsibility of what happened in that session, but we are not innocent of some of the mistakes that took place," he noted.



Iraqi Parliament Puts Off Election Vote Again

August 6, 2008 Reuters BAGHDAD –

- **IRAQI** lawmakers postponed a vote on Tuesday on a law to allow provincial elections, the second time in three days that they failed to resolve a standoff over the oil-rich city of Kirkuk which has stoked ethnic tension.

Kurds welcomed a new U.N.-backed plan, unveiled in negotiations overnight, to resolve the deadlock over the election law by setting aside decisions on the fate of Kirkuk, a city Kurds regard as their ancestral capital.

The U.N. plan, seen by Reuters, would authorize elections to go ahead across the rest of the country but leave the future of Kirkuk for a separate law to be passed at a later date. Kurds want to fold Kirkuk into their semi-autonomous northern region, a plan opposed by the city's Arab and Turkmen residents and all of the major non-Kurdish parties in Iraq.

"It is for the benefit of all Iraq's people to hold the elections as soon as possible," Fouad Masoum, head of a Kurdish bloc in parliament, said after lawmakers failed to find enough consensus to hold a vote scheduled for Tuesday.

They rescheduled the session for Wednesday. An earlier session on Sunday was also scuppered when parties failed to reach agreement.

The provincial elections were originally scheduled for Oct. 1 and Washington is applying pressure on Iraqi leaders to resolve their differences quickly and avoid a long delay in a vote it regards as an important

test of Iraq's democracy. President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, vetoed a version of the election law last month. Kurds opposed it because it set ethnic quotas for Kirkuk's provincial council and would have replaced Kurdish troops there with forces from other parts of Iraq.

The U.N. proposal to defer the Kirkuk issue has won backing among some non-Kurdish groups pushing for compromise.

"Our request to our brothers is to join us, to accept this proposal and hold the elections this year," said Khalid al-Attiya, deputy speaker of parliament and a member of Iraq's largest Shi'ite bloc.

But others remain opposed.

"This is a red line," said Fawzi Akram, a Turkmen loyal to Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, who objected to postponing the vote in Kirkuk. The Kirkuk controversy has hurt efforts to reconcile rival political groups.

A suicide bomber attacked Kurds protesting in the city last week, killing more than 20 people. Parliamentarians say that if they fail to reach a deal in the next few days, the law could be postponed until after a summer recess, pushing the elections well into 2009.

Washington has pushed hard for a deal, with U.S. President George W. Bush phoning political leaders in recent days. The United States believes holding the elections is an important step to strengthen Iraq's democracy and give a voice to groups who refused to participate in the past.

Iraq has become far quieter over the past year, with violence falling to levels unseen since early 2004.

Agreement on Kirkuk could speed vote in Iraq

Reuters

BAGHDAD: Iraqi political leaders reached a compromise Monday that could resolve a stalemate over the fate of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk and allow local elections to go ahead, the deputy speaker of Parliament said.

Lawmakers rescheduled for Tuesday a vote on a provincial election law, which had been held up by wrangling over Kirkuk that has threatened to escalate into renewed ethnic strife.

Washington has been urging Iraqi leaders to resolve the stand-off before it jeopardizes the elections, originally scheduled for Oct. 1 and seen as vital to reconciling the country's factions and solidifying its fragile democracy.

"The new date has been set after fresh hope appeared of reaching an agreement," said Khalid al-Attiya, deputy speaker of Parliament and a member of Iraq's largest Shiite bloc.

A vote had been planned for Sunday but it was scrapped when lawmakers failed to agree on how the elections would affect Kirkuk, which Kurds want to make part of their semi-autonomous northern region.

Vice President Adel Abdul-Mahdi of Iraq, a member of the Shiite majority, gathered rival politicians at his home to broker an end to the stand-off over the elections, which the United States and United Nations are urging Iraq to hold this year.

Washington hopes the vote will ease sectarian strife by giving Sunni Arabs a greater political voice after they stayed away from the last local elections, in 2005. But wrangling over the law has exposed a rift with another minority, the Kurds.

An initial vote to approve the bill last month was marred by a walkout by Kurdish politicians, who oppose measures they see as robbing them of control of their ancestral capital.

The bill passed without Kurdish support, but President Jalal Talabani — himself a Kurd — vetoed it and sent it back to Parliament for a second vote.

If the vote on the bill is delayed until after Parliament's summer break, it could put the elections off until well into 2009. Lawmakers said the window for reaching an agreement was narrowing.

One of the most divisive issues is

Iraq's next political test: Kirkuk and its oil wealth

Since the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the oil-rich northern city of Kirkuk has been a political tinderbox-in-waiting that was largely ignored as war-fighting took precedence. Now that violence is way down, Iraqi leaders have no excuse not to peacefully decide the city's future. Their failure to do so has raised tensions and could further shred Iraq's fragile social fabric — and unleash more bloodshed.

Kurds who run the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan should not be allowed to unilaterally annex Kirkuk, which they regard as their ancient capital but is also home to Turkmen and Arabs. They were promised a referendum in the Iraqi Constitution, but no durable solution can result without the participation of all groups.

Overconfident Kurds and their American supporters have not been looking seriously for compromise.

The problem came to a head two weeks ago when Iraq's Parliament passed a law again postponing a referendum on Kirkuk (it was supposed to be held by the end of 2007). The law contained a measure diluting Kurdish power in the area's provincial council.

The Kurds believe the referendum will endorse making Kirkuk and surrounding areas part of Kurdistan — giving them more oil revenue and furthering their goal of independence — while Turkmen and Arab leaders want the city to stay under the central government.

Kurdish parliamentarians boycotted the session, resulting in the election law being declared unconstitutional. Another session on Sunday dissolved without reach-

ing a quorum.

The problem is not just with the Kirkuk referendum. If the Kurds continue to hold the election law hostage, provincial elections now expected in early 2009 will also be stymied. These elections are crucial to Iraq's political stability and reconciliation efforts because they will give minority Sunni Arabs a chance to be in government for the first time since they boycotted the 2005 elections.

Finding a solution to the country's deadlocked oil law is crucial to Iraq's future stability.

Sunnis who played a key role fighting with American forces against Iraqi insurgents are already embittered by the failure of Iraq's

Shiite-dominated government to hire enough of them for promised security jobs.

Compromises on Kirkuk are theoretically possible, but only the UN seems to be seriously trying to find one. That's baffling, since no one, other than the Iraqis, has more vested in keeping the lid on violence and on tension with Turkey and Iran than the United States.

Iraqis proved their post-Saddam political wheeling-and-dealing skills when they adopted budget, amnesty and provincial powers laws earlier this year. It's worth testing whether horse-trading on the crucial but deadlocked oil law and other issues like minority rights and redistribution of powers could produce a Kirkuk deal all ethnic communities could live with.

If Iraqi leaders cannot settle the matter, they might consider putting Kirkuk and its environs under UN administration as was done with Brcko after the Balkan wars. The imperative is to ensure that Kirkuk's future is not drawn in blood.

whether or not the provincial election law will include a reference to a referendum on whether Kirkuk will be included in the Kurdish autonomous region. The referendum is called for in the Constitution and Kurds believe it could tip the scales in their favor.

But Arab and Turkmen residents op-

pose making Kirkuk part of Kurdistan. Many Arabs moved to the city as part of Saddam Hussein's attempt to "Arabize" the area, and some now fear the Kurds want to drive them out. The city of about one million people sits atop oil fields that produce about a fifth of Iraq's export revenue.

Iran warns it could close Strait of Hormuz

New weapon is said to have long range

By Nazila Fathi

TEHRAN: Iran on Monday warned that it could close a waterway in the Gulf that is critical for oil shipments and announced that it was in possession of a new naval weapon that could sink enemy ships within a range of 300 kilometers.

It was unclear what had provoked the warnings, which were issued by the Revolutionary Guards. But the announcements came just after an informal deadline over the weekend, set by Western powers, for Iran to respond to incentives from world powers to curb its uranium-enrichment activities.

The United States, which has warships deployed in the Gulf, has said that new sanctions should be imposed on Iran for having failed to respond to the deadline.

The warning coincided with reports that the chief Iranian nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, had spoken by telephone Monday with the European Union's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana. Solana was expected to report back on the conversation to the representatives of the six countries — the United States, Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany — that are leading the demands that Iran stop enriching uranium, news agencies reported.

In comments carried by the semi-official Iranian news agency Fars, General Mohammad Ali Jafari, head of the Revolutionary Guards, said that Iran was capable of imposing "unlimited controls" at the Strait of Hormuz in the Gulf, an important international oil route.

"Closing the Strait of Hormuz for an unlimited period of time would be very easy," he was quoted as saying.

Jafari gave no details about the type of naval weapon involved in the recent test, but he said it was Iranian-built and "unique in the world."

Jafari said it would have the range to reach warships in the Gulf, an apparent reference to U.S. ships that have been conducting naval maneuvers.

"The Guards have recently tested a naval weapon, which I can say with certainty that the enemy's ships would not be safe within the range of 300 kilometers," or about 185 miles, Jafari was

A close call for democracy in Turkey

Turkey narrowly averted an incalculable disaster last week. The Constitutional Court turned back a state prosecutor's request to dissolve the governing Justice and Development Party and ban 71 of its leading figures from politics for five years, including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul.

The court ruling is a victory for Turkey, for democracy and for the politics of moderation in the volatile Near and Middle East. That makes it a victory for the United States as well.

Had it gone the other way, Turkey's chances of joining the European Union would have been demolished and the clearly expressed will of Turkish voters outrageously thwarted. Worst of all, an alarming message would have been sent to religious-minded voters throughout the Muslim world that scrupulous adherence to the ground rules of democratic politics was no guarantee of equal political rights and representation.

The margin by which these multiple catastrophes were averted could scarcely have been narrower. A majority of six of the 11 justices voted to ban the party. Fortunately, a super-majority of seven was required. Still, the party had half of its public financing cut for the next election and was warned

to steer away from policies the court considered too Islamic, like allowing women in head scarves to attend universities.

Those aspects of the ruling provided some consolation to Turkey's powerful military-secular establishment. But they are hardly consistent with democracy as it is practiced in the United States and the European Union. Nonetheless, Turkey's governing party would be wise to move slowly and carefully in its efforts to expand the civil rights of the religiously observant, and make greater efforts to cultivate understanding and support from its wary secular opponents.

Turkey has progressed a very long way from the not very long ago days when the secular establishment and its powerful military and judicial allies felt little inhibition about staging overt and covert coups of every variety against elected governments that did not do their political bidding. The last such event was in 1997.

Since then, the lure of European Union membership, shifts in the Turkish electorate and the generally responsible behavior of the Justice and Development Party in power have brought a healthy change in attitudes, as seen in the votes of the five justices who blocked the ban. Continued restraint by the governing party can help widen democracy's still perilously thin safety margin.

quoted as saying. "Without any doubt we will send them to the depths of the sea."

Iran has made similar claims about its military capabilities in the past, but analysts have treated them with some skepticism.

Early last month, Iran announced it had test-fired a number of missiles in war-game maneuvers, including at least one that the government in Tehran described as having the range to reach Israel and another that it said was a relatively new torpedo called a Hoot missile (the name means whale in Iranian).

But Western military analysts said those war games featured more bluff and exaggeration than displays of real

power and said the statements about the range of the largest missile were misleading.

The administration of President George W. Bush has refused to rule out a military option to tensions between Iran and the United States over Tehran's civilian nuclear program.

In June, the Israeli Air Force rehearsed what U.S. intelligence officials described as a possible strike on Iranian nuclear facilities.

Representatives of the six Western nations met with Iranian officials in Geneva on July 19, with a senior U.S. official taking part for the first time. The talks seemed to produce no progress on the chief demand — that Iran stop

uranium enrichment — but the six powers gave Tehran two weeks to respond to their latest proposal before it would be withdrawn.

Specifically, the world powers wanted Iran to accept a formula known as freeze-for-freeze. Under this plan, Iran would not expand its nuclear program, and the United States and other powers would not seek new international sanctions for six weeks to pave the way for formal negotiations.

The proposal, first offered last year, was intended to give Iran economic and political incentives to stop enriching uranium.

Iran dismissed the deadline and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad vowed Saturday that Iran would not budge on its nuclear rights, though he said that his country welcomed talks.

"We will take part in any negotiations and talk about any issue which consolidates our nuclear rights," Ahmadinejad said during a meeting with President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, according to the Iranian leader's Web site.

After Iran's failure to reply by the deadline over the weekend, the United States said Sunday that the United Nations Security Council now had no

choice but to expand sanctions. The Security Council has imposed three sets of sanctions since 2006.

"It is clear that the government of Iran has not complied with the international community's demand to stop enriching uranium and isn't even interested in trying," said Richard Grenell, a spokesman for the U.S. mission to the United Nations, Reuters reported.

"They leave the Security Council no choice but to increase the sanctions, as called for in the last resolution passed," he added.

Herald ^{INTERNATIONAL} Tribune August 6, 2008

Iran's response on atom work is assailed

From news reports

WASHINGTON: The Iranian response to an incentives package aimed at defusing a dispute over its nuclear program is unacceptable, U.S. officials said Tuesday, making the prospects of new sanctions against the country more likely.

The officials said that a brief one-page document Iran presented to the EU foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, was not, as had been sought, a definitive reply to the offer from major world powers to suspend uranium enrichment and reprocessing in exchange for economic and other benefits.

Instead, the officials said it was a re-statement of Tehran's earlier insistence on the right to conduct peaceful nuclear activities and essentially a transcription of portions of recent telephone conversations to that effect between Solana and the chief nuclear negotiator for Iran, Saeed Jalili.

One official familiar with the document described it as "more obfuscation

and delay" and not a "real response" to the package, which was presented this year by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany.

The U.S. officials spoke on condition of anonymity because Solana's office had not yet characterized the Iranian reply.

The officials said the lack of a clear response meant that discussion of new sanctions against Iran could begin as early as Wednesday, when senior diplomats from the six countries that made the offer were to speak in a conference call to discuss the way ahead.

The United States and others accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons under cover of a civilian atomic energy program. Iran denies the charge.

The six powers have said formal talks on the package of nuclear, trade and



Vahid Salemi/The Associated Press

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran speaking Tuesday in Tehran. A U.S. official called the Iranian response to an incentives proposal "more obfuscation and delay."

other incentives can start only once Iran suspends uranium enrichment, the part of the program that most worries the West because it has military and civilian uses.

Iran has repeatedly refused to halt its atomic work. The UN Security Council has imposed three rounds of penalties on Iran since 2006 in response.

In a letter to the Council, Britain, France and the United States, who have taken the toughest line with Tehran, said the Iranian central bank and other financial institutions were trying to dodge sanctions by covering their

tracks and must be carefully watched.

The governor of the Iranian central bank, Tahmasb Mazaheri, said in July that any move to impose sanctions on the bank could destabilize an already rattled world financial system.

UN and U.S. sanctions have already targeted some big Iranian commercial banks.

Separately, the International Atomic Energy Agency said Olli Heinonen, its deputy director overseeing inspections of the Iranian nuclear program, would go to Iran on Thursday. The UN nuclear watchdog agency declined to specify the purpose of the visit. (AP, Reuters)



5 août 2008

IRAK • Kirkouk, le compromis impossible

Le statut de la ville pétrolière de Kirkouk, dans le nord de l'Irak, reste indéterminé depuis 2003. Cette question menace à présent la stabilité de tout le pays : les Kurdes irakiens veulent l'annexer à leur région autonome et bloquent par conséquent l'adoption d'une nouvelle loi électorale.

DEPUIS l'invasion de l'Irak, en 2003, Kirkouk, la ville riche en pétrole située dans le nord du pays, est une bombe à retardement qui est passée largement inaperçue tant les combats étaient la priorité. Maintenant que la violence marque le pas, les dirigeants irakiens n'ont plus d'excuse pour tarder à décider pacifiquement de l'avenir de la ville. Leurs tergiversations ont déjà créé des tensions et risquent d'éroder un peu plus le fragile tissu social de l'Irak et de provoquer d'autres bains de sang. Il ne faut pas laisser les Kurdes qui administrent la région semi-autonome du Kurdistan annexer unilatéralement Kirkouk, qu'ils considèrent comme leur capitale historique mais où vivent également des Turkmènes et des Arabes. La Constitution irakienne leur garantit un référendum sur le sujet, mais aucune solution durable ne peut voir le jour sans la participation de toutes les communautés. Les Kurdes, qui pèchent par excès de confiance, et leurs protecteurs américains ne sont pas particulièrement enclins au compromis.



ville reste dans le giron du gouvernement central. Les 54 parlementaires kurdes [sur 275] ont boycotté cette séance [du 22 juillet] et ont ainsi invalidé l'adoption de la nouvelle loi électorale.

Le problème ne se limite pas au référendum sur Kirkouk. Si les Kurdes continuent de prendre en otage la loi électorale, les élections provinciales attendues pour le début de l'année prochaine seront également menacées. Ce scrutin est essentiel pour la stabilité politique du pays et les efforts de réconciliation parce qu'il donnera aux Arabes sunnites minoritaires une chance d'entrer pour la première fois au gouvernement depuis leur boycott des élections de 2005. Les

sunnites, qui ont joué un rôle essentiel aux côtés des forces américaines dans la répression des insurgés irakiens, sont déjà remplis d'amertume devant le peu d'empressement du gouvernement, à dominante chiite, à recruter nombre d'entre eux pour des emplois de sécurité, comme promis.

En théorie, un compromis sur Kirkouk reste possible, mais seule l'ONU semble s'efforcer d'en trouver un. Ce qui ne manquera pas de surprendre puisque personne, à part les Irakiens, n'a autant intérêt que les Etats-Unis à contenir la violence et à éviter les tensions avec la Turquie et l'Iran. Les Irakiens ont démontré leur habileté manœuvrière après la chute de Saddam Hussein, lorsqu'ils ont adopté, au début de l'année, le budget, la loi d'amnistie et le texte définissant les pouvoirs provinciaux. Il serait intéressant de voir si les tractations sur la loi pétrolière, capitale mais actuellement dans l'impasse, et sur d'autres dossiers litigieux comme les droits des minorités et la redistribution des pouvoirs aboutiraient à un accord sur Kirkouk acceptable pour toutes les communautés ethniques.

Si les dirigeants irakiens ne parviennent pas à régler la question, ils devraient sans doute envisager de placer Kirkouk et ses environs sous administration des Nations unies, comme cela a été le cas pour Brcko après les guerres dans les Balkans. Il est impératif de s'assurer que l'avenir de Kirkouk ne se décidera pas dans le sang.

Editorial [The New York Times](#)

AFP

L'ONU PROPOSE LE REPORT D'UN AN DES ÉLECTIONS À KIRKOUK, SELON DES DÉPUTÉS

BAGDAD, 5 août 2008 (AFP) –

- LES NATIONS unies ont proposé le report d'un an du scrutin controversé dans la région pétrolière irakienne de Kirkouk afin de sortir de l'impasse et permettre la tenue des élections provinciales le 1er octobre dans le reste de l'Irak, ont indiqué mardi des députés.

Le Parlement irakien, qui a tenu une nouvelle session mardi pour débattre du projet de la loi électorale controversé, doit poursuivre ses discussions mercredi.

"Nous avons accepté le projet en cinq points de l'ONU qui consiste (notamment) à repousser les élections à Kirkouk au plus tard jusqu'à décembre 2009 et de laisser la discussion se poursuivre durant un an pour régler la question de cette province", a déclaré à l'AFP le député kurde Mahmoud Othman.

Selon lui, l'ONU, qui doit superviser le scrutin, suggère aussi durant la période transitoire de maintenir en l'état le conseil provincial et de faire une étude sur la démographie à Kirkouk que les Kurdes souhaitent voir rattacher à leur province autonome du Kurdistan, à une cinquantaine de km plus au nord.

"Nous avons des réserves mais nous avons accepté ce projet dans un esprit de conciliation", a-t-il dit à l'AFP.

Selon des sources parlementaires, outre le bloc kurde, les chiites du du Conseil suprême islamique en Irak (CSII) et du Dawa, ainsi que les sunnites du Parti islamique et du Front de la Concorde ont accepté la proposition onusienne.

"Avec l'aide de l'ONU, nous avons abouti à une nouvelle formulation de l'article 24, qui a été accepté par les Kurdes et par d'autres députés", a dit à la presse Khaled Al-Attiya, vice-président du Parlement. "Nous avons été surpris par les objections d'autres députés", a ajouté ce député du CSII.

Selon lui, les opposants sont constitués des députés chiites favorables au chef radical Moqtada Sadr, des parlementaires sunnites du Front irakien pour le dialogue national et des Turcomans, qui ont proposé de repousser les élections jusqu'en 2009.

Le projet de loi qui devait régir les scrutins provinciaux d'octobre avait été approuvé le 22 juillet par le Parlement, dans un contexte tendu: seuls 140 députés sur 275 étaient présents au vote et de nombreux parlementaires avaient dénoncé des irrégularités dans la procédure du vote, boycotté par les 54 députés kurdes et d'autres législateurs hostiles à la loi.

En réaction, le Conseil présidentiel, composé du chef de l'Etat Jalal Talabani et de ses deux adjoints, avait décidé d'opposer son veto au texte.

Les Kurdes, en particulier, s'opposent à la loi en raison d'un différend sur la répartition du pouvoir entre les différentes communautés de la région riche en pétrole de Kirkouk.

Située à 250 kilomètres au nord de Bagdad, Kirkouk avait été placée par l'ancien président Saddam Hussein hors du Kurdistan irakien, une région indépendante de facto depuis 1991. Alors que les Kurdes ont aujourd'hui consolidé leur pouvoir au sein du nouvel Irak, ils exigent son rattachement à leur région autonome.

Lundi, le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, a fustigé ce projet de loi en soulignant: "Nous sommes pour la répartition du pouvoir à Kirkouk mais pas à parts égales. La répartition doit dépendre des résultats électoraux".

L'article 24 du projet de loi proposait une répartition à part égale du pouvoir au conseil provincial de Kirkouk entre les Arabes, Kurdes et Turcomans.



Le sort de Kirkouk retarde les élections provinciales

par Frédérique Misslin

La bataille pour le contrôle de la région de Kirkouk est tout à la fois culturelle, historique et économique. C'est là, au nord de l'Irak que se joue aujourd'hui l'avenir des institutions irakiennes puisque le sort de cette riche région pétrolière bloque la révision de la loi électorale et par voie de conséquence la tenue des élections provinciales initialement prévues en octobre 2008.

MOSAÏQUE, poudrière, objet de toutes les convoitises, la région de Kirkouk a connu en un siècle une succession de changements de majorité ethnique. Cette carte démographique bouleversée est aujourd'hui à l'origine de très fortes tensions communautaires et d'une crise politique majeure. Les Turkmènes revendiquent certains droits en se référant aux cartes ottomanes du XVIII^e siècle, les Arabes se prévalent des recensements effectués sous la dictature de Saddam Hussein, les Kurdes prônent eux la « kurdité » historique de la ville.

Kirkouk a en effet connu sous le régime bassiste une politique d'arabisation forcée qui a conduit à la déportation de milliers de kurdes. Bagdad proposait parallèlement à des familles arabes de s'installer dans le nord de l'Irak en échange d'un gros pécule et d'un logement gratuit. Selon l'organisation Human Right Watch, depuis les années soixante-dix, 250 000 Kurdes ont été expulsés de la région dont 120 000 à partir de 1991. L'invasion américaine en 2003 a déplacé pour la énième fois les lignes ethniques puisque les Kurdes ont immédiatement souhaité exercer leur droit au retour. Aujourd'hui 50% des Kurdes déplacés seraient revenus dans leur ville d'origine.

Les Kurdes : « Kirkouk est notre Jérusalem »

Le partage du pouvoir dans la région devient alors source de tension. La bataille est symbolique, la lutte historique mais pas seulement puisque la région regorge aussi d'or noir. 500 000 barils de pétrole sont chaque jour extraits des champs pétrolières de la région de Kirkouk, cela représente presque ¼ de la production nationale.

Les Kurdes n'ont pas caché leurs intentions : ils souhaitent rattacher Kirkouk au reste du Kurdistan, une région autonome depuis plus de 15 ans. Ils



proposent donc d'organiser sur cette question un référendum, persuadés que leur supériorité numérique leur apportera la victoire par les urnes.

Les Arabes et les Turkmènes récusent la voie référendaire et demandent que Kirkouk reste sous le contrôle du gouvernement central, arabe. La Turquie exerce de son côté une très forte pression sur les autorités de Bagdad en vue d'une part de protéger les intérêts turkmènes et d'autre part d'empêcher le PKK turc de bénéficier de l'influence renforcée des Kurdes d'Irak.

L'article 140 de la Constitution

En vertu de la Constitution de 2005, l'Irak se définit comme un Etat « multiethnique et multiconfessionnel », l'article 140 de la loi fondamentale penche en faveur des Kurdes puisqu'il prévoit la tenue d'un référendum à Kirkouk. Par ce vote les habitants diront s'ils veulent ou non être rattaché au Kurdistan, une région déjà dotée d'un Parlement et d'un gouvernement. « Non à l'annexion », répondent les Arabes et les Turkmènes. « Cette ville est un volcan », disent les observateurs. A tout instant celle que les Kurdes ont baptisé « la Jérusalem du nord » peut exploser. Depuis plusieurs semaines le sort de la ville fait l'objet de manifestations dans chacune des communautés. Kirkouk a aussi été la cible d'attentats meurtriers qui ne font que renforcer les tensions.

L'avenir de la région bloque surtout, depuis des mois, la révision de la loi électorale et par voie de conséquence les élections provinciales initialement prévues en octobre 2008. Si ce vote est considéré comme crucial c'est qu'il devrait permettre de réintégrer la communauté sunnite dans le jeu politique irakien dont elle était exclue depuis son boycott du scrutin de 2005. Le vote de l'automne doit désigner des Conseils à la tête de

chacune des 18 provinces irakiennes, il aura également valeur de test avant les législatives prévues en 2009.

Le 22 juillet dernier, la loi électorale a été approuvée par les députés dans des circonstances controversées : 140 parlementaires sur 275 étaient présents, la séance a été boycottée par le bloc kurde qui dénonce des irrégularités. Le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, parle même de « conspiration ». Le président Jalal Talabani et ses deux vice-présidents ont donc opposé leur veto à cette version du texte. Depuis, le projet de loi fait l'objet de nouvelles discussions au Parlement de Bagdad.

Le compromis de l'ONU

A l'origine de ce nouveau blocage : l'article 24 de la loi qui porte sur le statut de Kirkouk. Le texte proposait un report des élections provinciales dans la région et une répartition à part égale du pouvoir au sein du Conseil provincial par l'attribution d'un nombre fixe de sièges par groupe ethnique (Kurdes, Turkmènes et Arabes sunnites). Il prévoyait également de remplacer les forces de sécurité actuelles, les peshmergas kurdes, par des troupes venues d'autres régions d'Irak. Pour éviter la paralysie politique, l'ONU propose aujourd'hui une nouvelle formulation de l'article 24 qui a été soumise aux députés irakiens. Mais ces derniers sont partis en vacances d'été sans trouver d'accord.

Les Nations unies suggèrent un plan en 5 points pour sortir de l'impasse. Le projet consiste à repousser les élections à Kirkouk au plus tard jusqu'en décembre 2009 et à laisser le débat ouvert durant un an pour régler la question. Durant cette période transitoire, le Conseil provincial actuel sera maintenu et une étude démographique pourrait être réalisée. Steffan de Mistura, envoyé spécial de l'ONU pour l'Irak estime que « mieux vaut un référendum ultérieur, appelé à valider un accord négocié, qu'un vote conflictuel, rançon de la logique du fait accompli ».

Aux Etats-Unis la fameuse commission « Baker-Hamilton » s'était exprimé sur la question de Kirkouk, jugeant que la tenue d'un référendum en l'état actuel serait explosive. Le groupe d'études sur l'Irak estime par ailleurs que le dossier nécessitera sûrement un arbitrage international. Si les dirigeants irakiens ne parviennent pas à régler la question, Kirkouk et sa région pourraient être placés sous administration onusienne comme ce fut le cas pour Brcko en Bosnie Herzégovine.

Irak - L'ONU émet de sérieux doutes sur la tenue du scrutin cette année LES ÉLECTIONS PROVINCIALES DU 1ER OCTOBRE REPORTÉES, LE PARLEMENT TOUJOURS DIVISÉ SUR KIRKOUK

LES AUTORITES irakiennes ont annoncé hier le report des élections provinciales prévues le 1er octobre, et l'ONU a même émis de sérieux doutes sur la tenue cette année du scrutin considéré comme une étape cruciale dans le processus de réconciliation nationale.

« Je peux vous confirmer que nous avons déjà perdu

l'opportunité de tenir comme prévu les élections en octobre », a déclaré à l'AFP Kassem al-Aboudi, directeur administratif de la Commission électorale indépendante d'Irak (CEII). « Il n'y aura pas d'élections en octobre car nous avons besoin de trois mois après le vote de la loi pour organiser les élections », a précisé pour sa part à

l'AFP Hamdiya el-Husseini, membre du CEII, après une réunion avec des représentants de l'ONU, chargée de superviser le scrutin.

Adopté par le gouvernement en avril, le projet de loi électorale avait été approuvé, après de longues discussions, le 22 juillet par le Parlement dans un contexte tendu : seuls 140

députés sur 275 étaient présents et de nombreux parlementaires avaient dénoncé des irrégularités dans la procédure du vote, boycotté par les 54 députés kurdes et d'autres législateurs hostiles à la loi. En réaction, le Conseil présidentiel, composé du chef de l'Etat Jalal Talabani et de ses deux adjoints, avait décidé d'y opposer

son veto. La principale pomme de discorde reste Kirkouk, riche ville pétrolière au nord de Bagdad que les Kurdes veulent contrôler au dam des Arabes et des Turcomans. Ils s'opposent à l'article 24 de ce projet de loi qui propose une répartition à part égale du pouvoir au conseil provincial de Kirkouk entre les trois communautés arabe, kurde et turcomane. « Nous sommes pour la répartition du pouvoir à Kirkouk, mais pas à parts égales. La répartition doit dépendre des résultats électoraux », a souligné en début de semaine le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani.

Mercredi, le Parlement n'était pas parvenu à un accord sur une proposition de l'ONU suggérant le report d'un an du scrutin à Kirkouk afin de permettre la tenue des élections provinciales dans le reste de l'Irak. L'ONU, pour sa part, s'est montrée très sceptique sur la tenue en 2008 de ces premières élections provinciales depuis la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein en 2003, souhaitées par l'administration américaine de George W. Bush. « Nous savons depuis juillet qu'il sera impossible de les tenir comme prévu le 1er octobre. Si les députés n'arrivent pas à se mettre d'accord dans les prochains

jours, ce sera de plus en plus difficile de les tenir d'ici à la fin de l'année », a affirmé à l'AFP Saïd Arikat, porte-parole de la Mission d'assistance de l'ONU à l'Irak (Unami). Mais, a-t-il ajouté, « l'ONU ne ménagera aucun effort pour que le scrutin se tienne cette année ». Les députés irakiens sont partis mercredi en vacances jusqu'au 9 septembre, mais le président du Parlement, Mahmoud al-Machhadani, a affirmé que des députés continueraient à travailler durant ce mois sur le contenu du projet. « Nous avons décidé de créer un nouveau comité qui négociera un accord sur les élections sous la super-

vision de l'ONU », a déclaré M. Machhadani.

Le porte-parole de l'ONU a également noté que si les élections étaient repoussées à l'année prochaine, cela entraînerait des retards supplémentaires. « En Irak, le droit de vote est fixé à 18 ans. C'est l'année de naissance qui prévaut et non la date de naissance. Ce qui veut dire qu'il faudra enregistrer les nouveaux électeurs, et cela prendra bien sûr du temps », a-t-il souligné. Le responsable onusien a également noté que si ce scrutin est reporté à l'année prochaine, l'Irak connaîtra en 2009 deux élections : les provinciales et les législatives.

AFP

TURQUIE: LES SÉPARATISTES KURDES DISENT AVOIR SABOTÉ L'OLÉODUC BTC

ANKARA, 8 août 2008 (AFP) -

LES REBELLES séparatistes kurdes ont déclaré vendredi avoir saboté l'oléoduc Bakou-Tbilissi-Ceyhan (BTC), coupé mardi par une explosion dans la station de pompage de Refahiye (est de la Turquie), dans un communiqué publié sur le site de l'agence Firat, proche des rebelles.

Selon un communiqué du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), l'explosion intervenue dans la station de pompage de la province d'Erzincan est "un acte de sabotage" dont les détails seront révélés ultérieurement.

Un dirigeant du PKK a ensuite prévenu que son mouvement poursuivrait ce type d'action tant que l'Etat turc lui fera la guerre.

"Les attaques contre les intérêts économiques ont un effet de dissuasion (sur la Turquie) (...) Tant que l'Etat turc mettra l'accent sur la guerre, de telles actions seront naturellement poursuivies", a déclaré à l'agence Firat Bahoz Erdal, un commandant du PKK.

M. Erdal a affirmé que le sabotage de l'oléoduc et d'autres attentats commis par le PKK au cours des dernières semaines constituaient une riposte aux opérations militaires turques contre les rebelles aussi bien sur le territoire turc que dans le nord de l'Irak où sont retranchés des combattants séparatistes.

Les opérations militaires turques "nous ont incités à renforcer notre résistance par l'auto-défense", a-t-il déclaré à Firat.

Le PKK, considéré par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne comme une organisation terroriste, a déjà revendiqué par le passé des sabotages de gazoducs et d'oléoducs dans le cadre de sa lutte armée pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie peuplé en majorité par des Kurdes.

Un responsable de la compagnie d'Etat BOTAS, qui gère l'oléoduc, a déclaré à l'agence Anatolie qu'à ce jour il n'y avait pas d'indices permettant de conclure



à un sabotage, mais qu'on ne pourrait pas être fixé avant que l'incendie qui s'est déclaré à la suite de l'explosion n'ait été complètement éteint.

Le gouverneur adjoint de Refahiye avait écarté l'hypothèse d'un sabotage, affirmant qu'un défaut dans le système de pompage avait été détecté avant l'explosion.

L'agence Anatolie a cité des responsables qui ont estimé sous le couvert de l'anonymat que le PKK pourrait vouloir se faire de la publicité.

BOTAS a indiqué que l'acheminement du pétrole serait interrompu pendant une quinzaine de jours. L'annonce de cette interruption a poussé les prix à la hausse sur les marchés du pétrole.

Inauguré en 2006, long de 1.774 km, le BTC achemine le pétrole des champs pétrolières azérbaidjanais de la mer Caspienne vers le port turc de Ceyhan sur la Méditerranée. Il a une capacité de 1,2 million de barils/jour.

Selon les analystes, la fermeture pourrait être plus longue que ce qu'annoncent les autorités turques. Le géant BP (British Petroleum) a déjà annoncé qu'il cherchait des sources alternatives pour approvisionner ses clients occidentaux.

L'aviation turque a mené depuis décembre des raids contre les bases du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak, avec l'aide des services de renseignement américains surveillant les mouvements des rebelles dans la région.

En février, l'armée turque a mené une offensive dans le nord de l'Irak, tuant au moins 240 militants du PKK et détruisant des camps d'entraînement, des bases et des dépôts de munitions.

Les autorités turques ont accusé le PKK d'avoir commis les deux attentats à la bombe qui ont fait 17 morts et plus de 150 blessés le 27 juillet à Istanbul.

AP Associated Press

Turquie: le PKK brandit la menace d'attaques contre des cibles économiques

8 août 2008 The Associated Press

LES REBELLES kurdes du PKK ont brandi vendredi la menace d'attaques contre des cibles économiques en Turquie, quelques jours après avoir revendiqué la responsabilité d'un incendie touchant une section d'un oléoduc stratégique, selon une agence de presse pro-kurde.

Le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan a affirmé qu'il avait saboté la section turque de l'oléoduc Bakou-Tbilissi-Ceyhan le 5 août. Les autorités turques, cependant, n'ont pas confirmé que l'incendie était le résultat d'un sabotage.

D'après l'agence de presse Firat, le chef rebelle Behroz Erdal a déclaré que le groupe "étendrait" ses attaques vers des cibles turques si l'armée turque continuait de presser en

faveur d'opérations contre les séparatistes kurdes tant en Turquie que dans le nord de l'Irak

"Nous estimons que ces actions commises contre les ressources économiques (de la Turquie) ont un effet dissuasif" face à "sa guerre destinée à détruire le peuple (kurde)", a déclaré Ergal.

Des représentants des autorités ont déclaré que l'incendie -largement ramené sous contrôle jeudi mais toujours actif vendredi- pourrait entraîner la fermeture de l'oléoduc pendant une quinzaine de jours.

Le ministre de l'Energie Hilmi Guler a déclaré vendredi que le feu devrait brûler pendant un jour ou deux, précisant que les autorités s'exprimeraient sur l'origine de l'incendie et sur l'étendue des dommages, une fois les flammes éteintes.

Le Monde
Mardi 5 août 2008

TURQUIE ILKER BASBUG, CHEF D'ÉTAT-MAJOR

Le nouveau chef de l'armée turque, gardien du kémalisme et eurosceptique

ISTANBUL

CORRESPONDANCE

Comme de coutume dans l'armée turque, le général qui commande l'armée de terre, Ilker Basbug, a été nommé chef de l'état-major, lundi 4 août, au cours du Conseil militaire suprême (YAS). Ce « faucon » de 65 ans va diriger la deuxième armée de l'OTAN en nombre d'hommes (environ 600 000) jusqu'en 2010. Il succède à Yasar Büyükanit qui, ces deux dernières années, a occupé le devant de la scène politique, multipliant les avertissements sur la laïcité contre le gouvernement dirigé par le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP).

Ilker Basbug, réputé plus fin diplomate que son prédécesseur et surnommé « le guerrier de glace », devra gérer une cohabitation délicate avec le premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Ce dernier avait soutenu le général Aydogan Babaoglu, chef de l'armée de l'air, et maintenu le suspense sur sa décision finale. Il ne s'est finalement pas opposé à Ilker Basbug, plébiscité par l'institution militaire. « *Le gouvernement n'a pas pris de risque, cela aurait pu créer de nouvelles tensions politiques* », décrypte Lale Sariibrahimoglu, journaliste spécialiste des questions de défense.

L'entente entre le premier ministre et le général déterminera pour une grande part l'atmosphère politique des mois à venir. Le général Basbug sera un gardien sourcilieux de la laïcité, pilier de la Constitution, et du kémalisme, l'idéologie d'Etat. « *Les forces armées turques ont toujours défendu et défendront toujours l'Etat nation, l'Etat unitaire et l'Etat laïc* », avait-il déclaré en 2006. Une mise au point répondant aux critiques de l'Union européenne (UE), qui reproche aux militaires de freiner la démocratisation du pays.

Dans la guerre menée par Ankara dans le sud-est du pays, Ilker Basbug est un général inflexible. Il a gagné ses galons en supervisant les opérations transfrontalières menées en 2007 en Irak contre les rebelles kurdes du PKK. Il avait déclaré qu'il y avait à Hakkari, une ville kurde proche de la frontière irakienne, « *des microbes qui doivent être nettoyés* », en faisant allusion au maire de la ville qui soutenait, selon lui, le PKK.

Présenté comme un pragmatique froid et intelligent, partisan d'une alliance forte avec l'OTAN et avec Israël, Ilker Basbug n'est, en revanche, pas un enthousiasme de l'adhésion turque à l'UE. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

IRAK

Quinze morts et 35 blessés dans une série d'attentats

BAGDAD. Quinze personnes ont été tuées et au moins 35 blessées, dimanche 3 août, dans une série d'attentats à la bombe à Bagdad et au sud de la capitale irakienne. L'attaque la plus meurtrière a fait 12 morts et 20 blessés lors de l'explosion d'une bombe dans une camionnette près d'un bureau de délivrance de passeports dans le nord de Bagdad.

D'autre part, l'armée irakienne a annoncé dimanche qu'elle avait arrêté quatre responsables de la rébellion, lors d'une série d'opérations dans la province de Diyala, (nord-est de Bagdad). Parmi les personnes capturées figure notamment Qoussaï Ali Khalaf, un chef de la province de Diyala pour l'« Etat islamique d'Irak », califat autoproclamé en octobre 2007 et allié d'Al-Qaida. Les forces irakiennes et américaines tentent depuis plusieurs mois de chasser les insurgés – des sunnites alliés à Al-Qaida et des militaires chiïtes – de cette région peuplée de chrétiens et de musulmans. – (AFP.)

IRAN

Fin de non-recevoir de M. Ahmadinejad aux grandes puissances sur le nucléaire

TÉHÉRAN. Le président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a opposé, samedi 3 août, une fin de non-recevoir à l'offre des grandes puissances sur le nucléaire iranien. La date limite expirait théoriquement samedi. « *La nation iranienne ne cédera pas un pouce sur ses droits au nucléaire* », a déclaré M. Ahmadinejad en recevant son homologue syrien, Bachar Al-Assad, à Téhéran. Dimanche, il avait précisé : « *Nous sommes sérieux dans nos discussions et nous voulons que ces discussions soient basées sur la loi pour donner des résultats concrets.* »

Lors d'une rencontre avec le négociateur iranien, Saïd Jalili, à Genève le 19 juillet, les « Six » (les cinq membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité et l'Allemagne) avaient accordé deux semaines à Téhéran pour répondre à leur offre, qui contient des mesures de coopération économique et politique en échange d'une suspension iranienne des activités d'enrichissement d'uranium. – (AFP.)

Le Monde

Samedi 9 août 2008

Report des élections provinciales prévues en octobre en Irak

LES AUTORITÉS irakiennes ont annoncé, jeudi 7 août, le report des élections provinciales prévues le 1^{er} octobre. Le projet de loi électorale avait été approuvé, fin juillet, par le Parlement, mais des irrégularités au niveau de la procédure de vote, notamment un boycottage suivi par les députés kurdes, ont poussé le conseil présidentiel à y opposer son droit de veto.

Le principal sujet de désaccord reste la ville multicommunautaire de Kirkouk. Les Kurdes de la région s'opposent à un article de ce projet de loi, qui propose une répartition à parts égales du pouvoir entre les communautés arabe, kurde et turcomane, et réclament plutôt une répartition dépendant des résultats électoraux.

Pour les Etats-Unis, le problème de Kirkouk ne devrait pas « *prendre en otage* » la loi électorale. Quant à l'ONU, elle se montre sceptique sur la tenue de ces élections cette année et s'inquiète des retards dans le processus de réconciliation nationale.

Jeudi, le Conseil de sécurité a voté à l'unanimité le renouvellement pour un an du mandat de la Mission d'assistance des Nations unies en Irak (Unami). – (AFP.)



Vocies of Iraq
August 7, 2008

Political pressures hinder passing elections law - MP

BAGHDA, Aug. 7 (VOI) – AN MP from the Kurdistan Coalition (KC) said on Thursday that political pressures exerted by some parliamentary blocs on the Parliament Speaker Mahmoud al-Mashhadani were the main reason for Wednesday's session adjourning without passing the provincial council elections law.

"We are in the Kurdistan Coalition had agreed with the Unified Iraqi Coalition (UIC) to pass the law during yesterday's session in accordance to the proposal made by the UN," Sirwan al-Zahawi told *Aswat al-Iraq - Voices of Iraq - (VOI)*. "The proposal says that if the Kirkuk cause has not been resolved during this year, political powers should leave the issue to the Iraqi government and the parliament's chairmanship to put all necessary mechanisms and conditions to hold the elections in the oil-rich Kirkuk," he explained. "The KC had announced its agreement on the proposal thus there is an agreement among main political powers on passing the law," he also said. "After the KC agreed to pass the law, we were surprised during yesterday's session that the speaker adjourned the session, the matter made us feel injustice," the MP noted. A legislator from the Kurdistan Coalition parliamentary bloc, Abdul-Mohsen al-Saadon, said yesterday that the Iraqi Parliament ended Wednesday afternoon's extraordinary session, after forming a committee of parliamentary blocs' heads to find a consensus text for the provincial election bill. He ex-

plained that the parliament's speaker announced September 9 as the start of the second legislative term of parliamentary sessions for 2008. On July 22, the Iraqi Parliament, with the approval of 127 deputies out of 140 who attended the session, passed the law on provincial council elections, which includes an article postponing the elections in the city of Kirkuk. Lawmakers from the KC, which holds 53 seats in the 275-member Parliament, had withdrawn from the session in protest against Speaker Mahmoud al-Mashhadani's decision to have a secret balloting over article 24 of the law, pertaining to the status of Kirkuk. Balloting over all the other paragraphs of the law, however, was open. The Presidential Board, with the unanimity of President Jalal Talabani and his two deputies Adel Abdelmahdi and Tareq al-Hashimi, rejected the law in a rapid reaction one day after the Iraqi Parliament passed it during a session that raised hue and cry over its constitutionality. The law drew angry reactions from the Kurds, who considered the way the law was passed as a "twisting of the constitution," threatening to use the right of veto, granted by the Iraqi constitution for the Presidential Board, headed by President Talabani, a Kurd, to reject the law and return it to the Parliament for debate. The law on provincial council elections, seen as supplementary to the law on regions and non-regional provinces, specifies the system of government in Iraq, and if applied, a federal system may be established in the country with three separate regions, a call echoed by some Iraqi political parties.

The
Economist

Aug 7th 2008

Turkey : AFTER THE STORM

ANKARA The avoidance of a political collision has helped economic confidence. But without reform, it may be short lived

WHEN Turkey's constitutional court stepped back from a threat to ban the ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party last month, businesspeople had more reasons than most to raise a cheer. The treasury's borrowing rates promptly fell and the main stockmarket index rose by about 2%. Standard & Poor's, the international credit-rating agency, revised its outlook for Turkey from "negative" to "stable".

Mehmet Simsek, the outspoken economy minister, said in July that the crisis had cost the treasury \$16 billion in higher interest payments since March, when the state prosecutor's lawsuit against AK rattled the bond markets. The prosecutor accused the government of trying to introduce elements of Islamic law in defiance of the state's secularist constitution. He wanted the AK disbanded and leading figures banned from political activity for five years, among them the president, Abdullah Gul, and the prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In the event, the court decided by a narrow margin not to ban AK or its leaders, but instead imposed a hefty fine for anti-secular activity.

The global credit crunch and rising oil prices have hurt emerging markets; Turkey's big current-account deficit makes it more vulnerable than most. "It's been a difficult year," said Mr Simsek in an interview. "But not a lost one." Even as AK locked horns with the meddlesome generals, it managed to push through a raft of reforms which Mr Simsek says "should fix Turkey's structural problems". These include overhauling a bankrupt social-security system (some \$30 billion is needed to plug this

year's gap), easing taxes on employers and reforming the energy sector.

There is more good news for foreign investors. After months of hesitation, Turkey is prepared to rejig a \$10 billion loan agreement with the IMF that expired in May. "We are in the process of technical negotiations on a potential precautionary standby arrangement," confirms Mr Simsek. Translation: the IMF will continue its scrutiny of the economy, which will reassure investors, and put aside more money for Turkey's possible use.

Mr Simsek is the first to admit that recent reforms are not as tough as they should be. For instance Turkish women can still retire at 43, and men at 47. The newly adopted retirement age, 65, does not become effective until 2048. That is because the constitutional court struck down the government's attempt to introduce it sooner, saying "the rights of civil servants cannot be taken away".

The immediate political danger may have passed, but there is no certainty that AK's pro-secular foes will remain quiet indefinitely. All eyes are on the former land-forces commander, General Ilker Basbug, who became the chief of the general staff this week. Taciturn and aloof, the new army chief is an old-style secularist, but with a twist. He is said to welcome new ideas and understands that the festering Kurdish insurgency, which Turkey says has cost it \$120 billion since it began in 1984, cannot be solved through force alone.

In a hopeful sign, the Supreme Military Council that appointed General Basbug has for the first time in 16 years declined to boot out

any officers for alleged anti-secular mischief, as is customary every year. Lale Sariibrahimglu, a defence expert, suggests that this may well be an olive branch from the generals.

A bigger risk to the economy may be the government itself. Mr Erdogan, feeling vindicated, may yet persist in provoking the secularists, as he did with his ill-fated attempt to lift the ban on the Islamic-style headscarf in universities. Ominously, a row between President Gul and the country's assiduously pro-secular academics is brewing after the president ignored Istanbul Technical University's choice for a new rector and picked another (presumably less stridently anti-Islamist) man instead.

Some people worry about the local elections to be held in March. AK's assertion that this time round it will capture Izmir and Diyarbakir, the only big cities run by pro-secularists and Kurds respectively, has not helped. Many suspect that the government's drift towards economic populism—it recently unveiled a \$12 billion investment package for the poor and largely Kurdish south-eastern provinces just as the central bank is trying to keep inflation in single digits—may be electoral tactics.

The business community's main concern, however, is not that the government will become over-confident. Rather, it is that a chastened government may abandon reforms to placate its enemies. "Striking the right balance between courage and caution", says an Istanbul-based banker, "remains the greatest challenge of all."

07 August 2008



Barzani explains Kurds' attitude over Kirkuk issue

Kurds reject foreign agendas in Kirkuk and show readiness to sign guarantees to other ethnicities.

By Ako Muhammed
The Kurdish Globe

President Massoud Barzani warns that further violations of the Iraqi Constitution might "tear the country apart."

In a press conference Monday evening in Erbil, Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani promised the Kurdish nation that he and other Kurdish authorities will never let foreign agendas prevail in Kirkuk. Barzani's statement came 10 days after his visit to Baghdad for a meeting with Iraqi powers over the process of the provincial council elections.

Barzani delivered a message to the Arabs and Turkmen of Kirkuk: "I don't want you to be misused by sides that have other agendas. You will achieve more with your understanding [agreement] with Kurds."

"You are our brothers. We have no issues with you; our sensitivities are with the external agendas," he added.

President Barzani explained that some circles, which he left unnamed, are accusing Kurds of bringing in half a million Kurds from Iran and Turkey to alter the demographics of Kirkuk. He denied the accusation: "We have not been able to return half of the displaced [Kurdish] people to Kirkuk; how could we bring in half a million Kurds? How can this half a million be concealed? What kind of logic is this?"

He addressed other components in Kirkuk: "Any guarantees you want, we will sign for you, but not within a law. We are ready to

sign any guarantees on a separate paper with witnesses from the U.S. and British embassies, any other embassy, the UN, and all other parties."

Barzani questioned why other components insist on issuing a private law for Kirkuk alone while Mosul and Diala have similar conditions and are multi-ethnic provinces with Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen.

"If you still want them [guarantees] in a law, it must include three main issues: Do not oppose Article 140; do not include any part regarding law 13, and any agreements must be carried out by the federal and regional governments."

President Barzani explained that Kurdish negotiators in Baghdad have made their opinion clear in the three choices: First, Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution is essential for Kurds and no alternative for this article is acceptable through other laws, agreements, or any other way. Article 140 concerns the disputable areas, including Kirkuk. Second, the Kurdish leaders reject excluding Kirkuk from law 13; this Iraqi Parliament law, approved last February, allows any provincial council to decide to join any region in the country. Third, the Kurds say a common committee from the federal and Kurdistan regional governments must carry out the law of provincial council elections.

"We have these three choices?let's carry out the elections together everywhere. And if you want to delay the election in Kirkuk, let it be so, but the [current] Kirkuk provincial council continues with its



authority," Barzani stated. Barzani's statements come as Iraqi lawmakers in Baghdad are meeting to reach an agreement on the second draft of the provincial council elections law. The law was vetoed by the Iraqi presidency after it was passed on July 22 in a session that angered Kurdish members. The Kurdistan Coalition list and members of the Kurdistan Union list withdrew from the session in protest of secretly voting on one article of the law concerning Kirkuk. This article, number 24, seeks to delay elections in Kirkuk and to distribute authority among Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen of Kirkuk with 32% each, and 4% for Christians, in addition to bringing new Iraqi military units from the south and center of the county to the city, essentially replacing Peshmerga currently in place.

"After the long talks we held it was clear to us that what happened

on July 22 was a big conspiracy and very dangerous for the democratic and constitutional process of Iraq, in particular against the Kurds," Barzani said. Some sides, he continued, attempted to abort Article 140, deprive the (current) Kirkuk provincial council of its authority, and jeopardize other Kurdish achievements.

Regarding whether the Kurds will withdraw from the government in Baghdad if negotiations fail, Barzani said they are not only a part of the government but one of its founders, and the possibility of Kurds' withdrawing is not "valid." However, he warned that further violations of the Iraqi Constitution would tear the country apart.

Barzani stated that Kurds' agreement to delay the elections in Kirkuk is a big compromise and shows great flexibility.

THE TIMES

August 7, 2008

Kirkuk row scuppers chance of Iraq elections next year

Deborah Haynes in Baghdad

The chances of key local polls taking place in Iraq this year all but vanished yesterday after Parliament failed to pass an law on elections because of a row over the contested city of Kirkuk, which threatens to heighten Arab-Kurdish tensions.

Lawmakers will meet again after a month-long summer break to continue the debate, to the disappointment of the United Nations, Britain and the United States. They see the polls as a crucial step towards national reconciliation.

Mahmud al-Mashhadani, the parliamentary



speaker, said that MPs would also set up a committee under the supervision of the UN to discuss further the text of the legislation to govern the polls, which was originally scheduled to take place by October 1.

Andrew Gilmour, political director of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), said that the world body would continue to offer help.

He said: "An important opportunity to pass an elections law was missed. We are still counting on the Iraqi leaders to reach an agreement through dialogue to allow elections, and as

quickly as possible."

Disagreement between Kurdish politicians and a body of Sunni Arabs and Turkomen over an article in the legislation that relates to Kirkuk created the impasse that several attempts at re-drafting failed to overcome.

Even if an accord is reached after Parliament resumes on September 9, it will almost certainly be too late to hold elections this year. The United Nations has said that the law needs

to be passed by the end of last month at the latest to achieve such a timeframe.

Dragging the polls into 2009 will be a blow for the Iraqi Government, which is under pressure to make the most of

a drop in violence to its lowest level in four years by progressing on the political front.

The Kirkuk row has also inflamed old tensions between Iraq's majority Arabs and its minority Kurds, who enjoy semi-autonomy in Iraqi Kurdistan in the north and are keen to extend their region's boundaries to incorporate oil-rich Kirkuk.

Last week a female suicide bomber killed and wounded scores of people who were holding a protest in the northern city about the election law.

A senior UN official in Baghdad said that all parties involved should use the additional time to allow tempers to settle and reason to prevail.

"While it is bad for the timeline of the elections it maybe good in terms of softening the tense atmosphere that has dominated the last few days if there is a period of down time," the official told The Times. "But that is conditional on neither side doing provocative acts or issuing provocative statements."

A version of the law that would have delayed a vote for Kirkuk, set up ethnic quotas for its governing council and dispersed Kurdish security forces there was passed by Parliament last month, but Kurds boycotted the vote.

President Jalal Talabani, himself a Kurd, then vetoed the bill as unconstitutional, given the walkout by a big parliamentary faction. It was sent back for lawmakers to reach a compromise.



07 August 2008

Ninewa province's Christians prefer Kurdistan Region

Most believe their rights would be preserved under a Kurdish government.

By Qassim Khidhir
The Kurdish Globe

Mosul's Christians believe joining with Kurdistan Region is better than being under Baghdad's authority.

The Christian community in Ninewa province in northern Iraq believes that the Kurdish Region administration would better preserve their rights than the government in Baghdad. Father Josef Yohannes, a priest in one of Ninewa province's Christian villages, stated that the Baghdad government cares little for Christians and considers the Christian community a minority. Christians in Iraq constitute one percent of Iraq's population. Minorities in Iraq will be offended if consider or call them minority, they believe they are not minority they just like other communities and originally are from Iraq.

"Sometimes we feel that the Baghdad government looks at us as if we are refugees in Iraq and we are not originally from this country," said Father Yohannes. "If we join Kurdistan Region, the Christian community will then be 15% or 20% of Kurdistan Region's population; then our rights will be more preserved," he told the Globe.

Father Yohannes said he is not very optimistic that the lives of Christians will improve, even after a meeting last week between Pope Benedict XVI and Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. Benedict has frequently expressed concern about the plight of Christians caught in sectarian violence in Iraq. A Vatican statement after al Maliki and Pope meeting said the Christian commu-

nity in Iraq "strongly feels the need for more security."

The need to assist in the repatriation of Iraqi refugees, the struggle against terrorism, and the need for religious freedom were central issues in the talks with Prime Minister al-Maliki, said the Rev. Federico Lombardi, a Vatican spokesman.

Al-Maliki said the government is keen to provide the appropriate security atmosphere to protect Iraqi Christians. He added that his government intends to hold a large religious conference with the gathering of clerics from different religions to highlight brotherhood in Iraq.

Meanwhile, the Christian community in Ninewa province has established their own security; their villages and towns are protected by armed, civilian Christian men who call themselves "Guards of

Churches." Some are funded by the churches in Kurdistan Region. One must now pass through several checkpoints established by these guards to reach a Christian village.

Saleem Yusuf, commander of the civilian guards in Kramalis village, said the purpose of these checkpoints is to prevent car bombs from entering the village. His village has 250 guards funded by churches in Kurdistan Region.

Yusuf said Christians are still afraid of insurgents and are terrified of being kidnapped or killed, especially when they go to Mosul city, the capital of Ninewa.

Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho, who was from Karamlis village, was abducted by unknown gunmen and three of his companions were shot to death after they left Mass in Mosul in February 2008. Two weeks after



A Christian civilian guard secures a gate leading into the Kramalis village. GLOBE PHOTO/Qassim Khidhir

the kidnapping, on Thursday, March 13, the archbishop's body was found in al-Intisar neighborhood in Mosul city.

The death of Archbishop Rahho, who suffered from a serious heart ailment, created outrage and shock all over the world and increased the possibility that more Christians might be forced to flee Mosul city as well as the country of Iraq.

Security is not the only concern of Christians in Ninewa; unemployment is also a big issue. Father Yohannes said Christians in Ninewa are afraid to work in the city, causing the unemployment rate to skyrocket. "After the war in 2003, all the Christians who used to work in the factories and government establishments in Mosul left work due to insurgents' threats," said Father Yohannes, who himself has not visited Mosul in three years for fear of the danger.

He said even Christians who left Iraq and now live in neighboring countries and in Europe are in bad financial shape; on top of now having nothing in Iraq, they had to spend all of their money.

Before leaving Iraq, most Christians sold everything, including houses, land, and equipment. When they reached neighboring countries like Syria and Jordan, they were forced to spend their money when they couldn't find jobs.

Some Christians who moved to Kurdistan Region were given homes and receive monthly salaries from the regional government. Most live on Duhok province.



Kurdish rebels say they sabotaged Turkey pipeline

ISTANBUL, Turkey 07 August 2008 By C. ONUR ANT

KURDISH separatist rebels claimed responsibility Thursday for sabotaging a critical Turkish pipeline, helping push global oil prices back above \$120 per barrel.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which brings Azeri oil from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean for westbound shipments, caught fire Tuesday night and Turkey's state-run Anatolia news agency said it could remain shut down for up to 15 days. The pipeline can pump slightly more than 1 million barrels of crude oil per day or more than 1 percent of the world's daily crude output.

It was not clear what ignited the blaze and by late Thursday, the fire still had not been fully extinguished.

Global oil prices jumped back above \$120 a barrel, rising for the first time in four days after the rebel Kurdistan Workers' Party, known as PKK, claimed responsibility for sabotaging the pipeline, according to the pro-Kurdish news agency Firat which often carries the group's statements.

Oil prices had been easing off the record high of \$147.27 a barrel set on July 11.

Shipments from the Ceyhan port terminal, at the southern tip of the pipeline on Turkey's Mediterranean coast, were continuing as of early Thursday using oil that had already been stockpiled, said a spokesman for pipeline shareholder British Petroleum.

"Exports in Ceyhan were continuing as of this morning. There was enough oil for the tankers waiting there," BP's Murat Lecompte told The Associated Press, adding that he did not know how long the stocks would last.

Lecompte said it was too early to predict how long the pipeline would be shut down because they would not know the exact damage until the fire is extinguished.

The 1,100-mile pipeline, backed by the U.S., allows the West to tap oil from Azerbaijan's Caspian Sea fields, estimated to hold the world's third-largest reserves, and bypass Russia and Iran. The project cost around \$4 billion.

Oil companies declared force majeure, freeing them of contractual obligations to deliver crude with the prospect of a prolonged shutdown of the pipeline.

Turkish officials said is currently under control and is isolated to a valve in Turkey's eastern Erzincan province, where it first broke out. Two other valves along the pipeline were shut



down as a precaution, halting the flow of all oil being sent to Ceyhan terminal from Azerbaijan.

Output at the Azeri-Chirag Guneshli oil field, which feeds the pipeline, was ramped down Thursday but was still continuing, Lecompte said.

BP Azerbaijan spokeswoman Tamam Bayatli told The Associated Press on Wednesday that most of the oil produced was being stored at a terminal near the field and some being pumped via alternate routes such as the Baku-Supsa pipeline.

The Baku-Supsa, which had been out of service for repairs, has been put back into operation and will be able to receive some of the oil that normally goes to Ceyhan, she said. Supsa is a Georgian Black Sea port. The pipeline has capacity of 140,000 barrels a day.

The PKK is fighting for self rule in eastern and southeastern parts of Turkey. Tens of thousands have been killed since the rebels took up arms in 1984.



In Iraq, fault lines run deep over Kirkuk's future

07 August 2008 Reuters - By Sherko Raouf

KIRKUK, Iraq- The failure of Iraqi politicians to resolve competing ethnic claims for the oil-rich northern city of Kirkuk is storing up explosive problems for the country's future.

After months of debate, parliament shut for a summer break without agreement on a new law paving the way for the first provincial elections since 2005 -- and it was divisions over how to hold the vote in Kirkuk that scuppered a deal.

"Postponing the election law will complicate the situation in Kirkuk and lead to a struggle between the factions and eventually a civil war may erupt," said Ali Ibrahim, an Arab.

"The parliament and the government has to work seriously to resolve the situation", he said.

Kirkuk sits atop oil reserves that supply a fifth of Iraq's export income, and the country's Kurds want to fold a city they consider their ancestral capital into their autonomous northern region of Kurdistan.

But Arab and Turkmen residents want Kirkuk to remain part of a federal Iraq run by the government of Shi'ite Arab Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki from the capital Baghdad.

An initial version of the election law, which would have given Arabs and Turkmen a fixed quota of seats on Kirkuk's provincial council, was passed by parliament last month. But Kurdish deputies boycotted the session and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, himself a Kurd, vetoed it.

Both sides now fear prolonged wrangling over the election law could worsen ethnic tensions in Kirkuk. A suicide bomber killed more than 20 people at a Kurdish protest against a disputed version of the election law last week.

Maliki's government has come under enormous pressure from Washington and the United Nations to hold provincial elections but the Kirkuk impasse now means polls will not take place on October 1 as initially planned.

U.S. President George W. Bush personally phoned Iraqi politicians to press them to compromise at talks that ran late into the night this week.

The United Nations offered a last-minute proposal but parliamentarians failed to strike a deal and decided to put the issue aside until September.

REFERENDUM

Reliable statistics on the ethnic breakdown of the city are hard to find. Many Arabs were moved into Kirkuk under Saddam to "Arabise" the city, and fear that Kurds want to push them out.

Kurds want a referendum to be held in the city, as promised in Iraq's constitution, believing that they would win and Kirkuk would join Kurdistan. They believe Arab political parties are trying to avoid that reckoning.

"Kurds are fed up with the crooked policy of Maliki's government. It is time to bring Kirkuk back to its origin: Kurdistan," said Khorsheed Jibari, a Kurdish taxi driver.

"Annexing Kirkuk to Kurdistan is the right call," said Ribwar Hashim, a Kurdish laborer. But he believes a referendum, which might tip the scales in the Kurds' favor, won't happen.

Arabs and Turkmen fear Kurdish domination of local government. They want the Kurdish Peshmerga security forces in the area replaced with troops from other parts of Iraq.

"Kirkuk has become a real problem," said Suad Muhammad, a Turkmen student. "Maliki's government has to prove its influence by ensuring all Iraqi factions are represented in the provincial council and not let some parties control the city," she said.

The United States wants Iraq to push ahead with provincial elections to bolster the country's fledgling democracy -- and resolving the Kirkuk dispute is key.

Neighbors Iran and Turkey are also watching closely. They fear a resurgent Kurdistan with Kirkuk as its capital could encourage separatist Kurdish movements in their own countries.

Many Kurds are resentful.

"We have fears about foreign agendas by parties inside and outside Kirkuk. Why have all the parties' positions unified against the Kurds?" said Muhammad Abdul-Rahman, a Kurd.

Kirkuk 'city of Kurdistan': Barzani

Barzani emphasized the Kurdish nature of the Kirkuk city, as he made a visit to Kirkuk city.

The president of Iraqi autonomous region of Kurdistan Massoud Barzani on Friday emphasised the Kurdish nature of the disputed oil-rich city of Kirkuk, as he made a visit to Kirkuk city.

"I have come to send a message of peace to Kirkuk which is both a city of Kurdistan and of Iraq," the president of the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan told reporters as he toured the city.

Kirkuk is a mixed city with a Kurdish majority but substantial Arab and Turkmen minorities and has been a source of at times deadly ethnic tension since the fall of Saddam.

Iraq's parliament has proposed evenly dividing powers on the regional council between Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen but the Kurds are bitterly opposed, pointing to their superior numbers.

"All the elements in this city must live together because the time when the strong could eat the weak is over. I came here to banish the fear and improve the atmosphere between the different elements," said Barzani.

Barzani arrived in Kirkuk on Friday morning in a visit that



was paid amid ethnic rivalry on provincial elections due to stalled negotiations over the future of oil-rich city.

The legislation aims to hold a provincial poll scheduled for October 1, but it has hit a major snag over how the council governing the multi-ethnic region of Kirkuk - claimed by both Kurds and Arabs - should be formed.

But in a sign of the continued divisions between the ethnic groups in the city, his visit was boycotted by representatives of both the Iraqi Turkmen Front and the United Arab Bloc.

"I invited people to this meeting who are not in agreement with us but they did not come. In any case, they do not represent all the Arabs and Turkmen and when they are ready to talk we will be too," said Barzani.

Saddam placed Kirkuk outside the region of Iraqi Kurdistan, which has behaved essentially as an independent entity since 1991. But Iraqi Kurds, many of whom see Kirkuk's oil wealth as vital to the future viability of their region, have called for the city to be placed within the autonomous region.

The failure to find a solution for Kirkuk's regional council has forced the postponement of local elections in Iraq initially scheduled for October 1. Kirkuk city is historically a Kurdish city and it lies just south border of the Kurdistan autonomous region, the population is a mix of majority Kurds and minority of Arabs, Christians and Turkmen. lies 250 km northeast of Baghdad. Kurds have a strong cultural and emotional attachment to Kirkuk, which they call "the Kurdish Jerusalem."

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is related to the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk city and other disputed areas.

The article also calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province.

The former regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had forced over 250,000 Kurdish residents to give up their homes to Arabs in the 1970s, to "Arabize" the city and the region's oil industry.

United Press International

Kurdish Peshmarga forces ponders uniting with Iraqi forces

09 August 2008 UPI

Kurdish officials moved to unify Peshmarga forces into a singular entity as Iraqi defense ministers invited former army officers to join the national military.

The Kurdish Peshmarga security forces, under the authority of Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan chief and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, are charged with protecting Iraqi Kurdistan's borders with Iran and Turkey.

Barzani said in a meeting with his top commanding officers he would like to explore merging Peshmarga forces, VOI said Friday.

"Kurdistan's President Massoud Barzani headed a meeting of the general command of the region's border guarding forces to discuss the issue of unifying the two ministries of Peshmarga and Peshmarga Affairs into one ministry," a statement from Barzani's office read. Barzani also discussed uniting the Peshmarga with Iraqi national forces in order to preserve regional stability. The move follows an earlier decision to transfer Iraqi security forces to the Kurdish region.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi Ministry of Defense said it would establish committees throughout the Iraqi army to invite former military personnel from the Saddam era to join the national security forces.

L. Paul Bremer III, the former U.S. civilian administrator of Iraq, disbanded the Iraqi military in May 2003.



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Turkish soldier killed in PKK attack in Elazig province

Xinhua - August 10, 2008

One Turkish soldier was killed when militants of the outlawed Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) staged an attack on a police outpost in eastern Turkey, the semi-official Anatolia news agency reported Sunday.

Cem Havale Soldier died when the PKK rebels opened fire on the police outpost in Elazig province on Saturday, Elazig Governor Muammer Musmal was quoted as saying.

A comprehensive operation has been launched and it continued in the province, Musmal said.

The PKK, listed by the United States and Turkey as a terrorist group, took up arms in 1984 with the aim of creating an ethnic homeland in southeast Turkey. About 40,000 people have been killed in the over-two-decade conflict.

Iraqis can't agree on thorny election law

By Campbell Robertson

BAGHDAD: Parliament failed to come to an agreement on a provincial election law before adjourning Wednesday for its monthlong summer recess, leaving the fate of provincial elections in doubt for this year.

The provincial council elections are seen by the United States as a necessary step toward reconciliation among Iraq's political factions, particularly Sunni Muslims, who are underrepresented in Iraqi politics. President George W. Bush had called the nation's political leaders to urge them to find a solution.

The announcement that Parliament was adjourning without an agreement, made by the speaker, Mahmoud Mashhadani, took many lawmakers by surprise. "We entered the hall because we had already made a deal to vote for that law and we were astonished that the session is finished," said Fouad Mas-soum, a Kurd.

Others involved in the discussions said the atmosphere had become so

fraught that there was no choice but to delay a vote.

Mashhadani said he had formed a committee to continue talks on the matter, with representatives from the United Nations. He raised the possibility of an exceptional session of Parliament sometime during the recess, which ends Sept. 9.

The disputes that have held up the law center on the ethnically mixed city of Kirkuk, which is claimed by Arabs and Kurds and heavily populated by Turkmen. The Kurds have been trying to maintain their demographic and political dominance of the city, in an oil-rich province in northern Iraq.

The dispute, which pits the Kurds and their political allies against Turkmen and Sunni Arabs, has turned violent. Last month, a suicide bomber killed 17 Kurds who were protesting a draft of the election law, setting off a riot in which 12 more people were killed and dozens were wounded.

The Kurds insist that the law include a clause mandating a referendum on

whether Kirkuk will join the Kurdistan regional government or stay under the control of Baghdad. The Arabs and Turkmen refuse to include such a clause.

The UN proposed the inclusion of an article calling for a resolution to the Kirkuk issue sometime before the end of October. Preparations for the elections could then proceed in the rest of the country, if Parliament passed the bill. Earlier this week, leaders of the nation's political parties met to try to reach a deal. They gathered at the Baghdad residence of Massoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Among those attending the meeting were Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki; Ryan Crocker, the U.S. ambassador; and a UN representative. Bush called several officials, including Maliki and Mashhadani, urging them to come to an agreement, lawmakers said. But the pressure from the Americans irked some participants as outside interference.

Graham Bowley contributed reporting from New York.

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INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune
THE WORLD'S DAILY NEWSPAPER

Iraq militia to divide its fighters into 2 units

One to give up arms, other to target U.S.

By Stephen Farrell

BAGHDAD: Moktada al-Sadr, the anti-American Shiite cleric, said Friday that he would divide his Mahdi army militia in two: one elite unit of fighters and a group that would work on community and religious programs.

The announcement was made by Sadrists preachers in their sermons at Friday prayers in cities across Iraq. The speakers urged Shiite followers of the radical cleric to volunteer for the new social wing named the Momahidoun, meaning "those who prepare the way."

There have been previous signals that the Sadrists were shifting the emphasis from armed to community activities, as its militia found its operations increasingly curtailed by recent major American and Iraqi military operations in its strongholds, including Basra, Amara and the Sadr City district of Baghdad.

However, Sadrist officials insisted

that it would remain a "resistance" movement and would not be giving up its arms.

"We will restrict the weapons in the hand of the first group, which will be a special and small group," Mudhafer al-Musawi, the imam in Sadr City, told tens of thousands of Sadr followers.

The district is named after Sadr's revered father, Ayatollah Muhammad Sadeq al-Sadr, who was assassinated in 1999. The announcement Friday was seen by some as vindication of veteran advisers within the elder Sadr's circle, who long ago urged his son and successor to give up violence, but initially failed to persuade him.

Sadr declared a cease-fire a year ago after an outbreak of fighting between Mahdi army units and Iraqi forces in Karbala during a major religious festival, which provoked widespread anger within the Shiite community.

After the announcement, Sadrists officials said the Momahidoun would not be a direct rival to the government in the provision of social services but would concentrate on religious, cultural and social issues.

In Najaf, Sheik Salah al-Obaidi, the principal spokesman for Sadr, said that the remaining armed groups would "take direct orders from Sayyed Moktada al-Sadr only in emergency cases" and would "only target the American forces."

He said they had not carried out any attacks yet but were "playing the role of the spectator" as they awaited the outcome of negotiations between the Iraqi and U.S. governments about a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

It remains unclear how large the armed and unarmed groups will be and

also whether fighters will agree to move to the religious and cultural side.

Abu Ahmed, a senior Mahdi army commander, said in a telephone interview: "We always obey orders from Najaf, but in this case we expect there are many members of the Mahdi army who will reject this order. That happened the last time when Moktada al-Sadr froze the activities of the Mahdi army. They left and joined the special groups."

■ Bomb hits crowded market

A car bomb struck a crowded market in the northern city of Tal Afar on Friday, killing at least 18 people and wounding 25, the police said. The Associated Press reported from Baghdad.

The attack was the latest in a series of deadly bombings that have shown that militants retain the ability to carry out high-profile attacks despite recent security gains, particularly in northern Iraq.

A security official in Tal Afar said the blast occurred in the Wahda commercial district less than 30 minutes after the expiration of a regular weekly vehicle ban to prevent bombers from targeting Islamic services.

The security official and a member of the Iraqi police, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to release the information, both gave the casualty toll as 18 killed and 25 wounded.

The U.S. military confirmed the attack but said initial reports showed 15 people killed and 50 wounded.

AFP

BARZANI AFFIRME LE CARACTÈRE KURDE DE KIRKOUK LORS DE SA PREMIÈRE VISITE

KIRKOUK (Irak), 8 août 2008 (AFP)

LE PRÉSIDENT de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, a affirmé vendredi le caractère "kurde" de Kirkouk lors de sa première visite dans cette ville depuis la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein en 2003.

"Je suis venu transmettre un message de paix à Kirkouk qui est à la fois une ville du Kurdistan et d'Irak", a-t-il affirmé aux journalistes lors de sa visite de quelques heures qui a été boycottée par les représentants du Front turcoman irakien et du "Bloc arabe uni".

"J'ai invité à cette réunion des personnalités qui ne sont pas d'accord avec nous mais elles ne sont pas venues. En tout cas, ils ne représentent pas tous les Arabes et les Turcomans de la ville et quand ils seront prêts au dialogue nous le serons aussi", a-t-il dit aux journalistes.

Située à 250 kilomètres au nord de Bagdad, Kirkouk avait été placée par l'ancien président Saddam Hussein hors du Kurdistan irakien, une région indépendante de facto depuis 1991. Alors que les Kurdes ont aujourd'hui consolidé

leur pouvoir au sein du nouvel Irak, ils exigent son rattachement à leur région autonome, située à une cinquantaine de km plus au nord.

M. Barzani a insisté sur le fait que la solution au problème de cette ville doit se faire selon l'article 140 de la constitution irakienne. Elle prévoit la tenue d'un référendum après que des mesures auront été prises pour annuler les conséquences de l'arabisation forcée menée par Saddam Hussein dans cette région riche en pétrole.

"Toutes les composantes de cette ville doivent vivre ensemble car est fini le temps où le fort pouvait manger le faible. Je suis venu ici pour dissiper la peur et assainir l'atmosphère entre les différentes composantes", a-t-il encore dit.

C'est le problème posé par Kirkouk qui a empêché le vote de la loi électorale permettant la tenue des élections provinciales initialement prévue le 1er octobre.

AFP

IRAK: VIVES CRITIQUES KURDES CONTRE LA TURQUIE

SOULEIMANIYEH (Irak), 9 août 2008 (AFP) -

UN DES plus influents députés kurdes au Parlement irakien a accusé samedi la Turquie de chercher à réduire l'influence acquise par sa communauté depuis la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein en 2003.

"La Turquie a manœuvré pour faire adopter une loi anti-kurde au Parlement. Elle est derrière l'adoption de l'article 24 de la loi électorale car elle essaie par tous les moyens de réduire les acquis obtenus par le Kurdes après la chute de Saddam Hussein", a affirmé Mahmoud Othmane, lors d'une conférence de presse dans la ville kurde de Souleimaniyeh.

L'article 24 du projet de loi devant régir les scrutins provinciaux proposait une répartition à part égale du pouvoir au conseil provincial de Kirkouk entre Arabes, Kurdes et Turcomans. S'estimant majoritaires, les Kurdes sont totale-

ment opposés à cet article et souhaitent que leur prépondérance soit reconnue, ce que refusent les Arabes et les Turcomans.

Le projet avait été approuvé le 22 juillet par le Parlement, dans un contexte tendu: seuls 140 députés sur 275 étaient présents lors du vote et de nombreux parlementaires avaient dénoncé des irrégularités dans la procédure. Le vote a été boycotté par les 54 députés kurdes et d'autres législateurs hostiles à la loi.

En réaction, le Conseil présidentiel, composé du chef de l'Etat, Jalal Talabani, et de ses deux adjoints, avait décidé d'opposer son veto au texte.

M. Othmane a également critiqué les Etats-unis "qui ont joué un rôle négatif en ne réagissant pas aux manœuvres turques pour faire passer cet article 24". Il s'en est également pris à la Grande-Bretagne qui "a fait pression sur les Kurdes pour qu'ils acceptent les demandes des Arabes et des Turcomans"

AFP

18 morts dans un attentat dans le nord de l'Irak

Mossoul, Irak 08 août 2008 Agence France-Presse

Au moins dix-huit personnes ont été tuées et 55 blessées vendredi dans un attentat à la voiture piégée sur un marché dans le nord de l'Irak, ont indiqué à l'AFP un responsable médical et l'armée américaine.

LA BOMBE, placée dans une voiture, a explosé dans un marché de Tal Afar, à 450 km au nord de Bagdad. Dix-huit personnes ont péri et 55 ont été blessées dans l'attentat, a indiqué à l'AFP le docteur Mohammed Al-Qassem, de l'hôpital de Tal Afar.

Selon un porte-parole de l'armée américaine, Sam Smith, l'attentat a tué 20 personnes et blessé 50. Un responsable de la police locale avait auparavant fait état de 15 morts et de 20 blessés.

Tal Afar est située à l'ouest de Mossoul, la capitale de la province de Ninive réputée être le «dernier bastion urbain d'Al-Qaïda» selon l'armée américaine. Le 16 juillet, une voiture piégée avait explosé sur un autre marché de Tal Afar, tuant douze personnes et en blessant 30. Décrite en 2006 par le président américain George W. Bush comme un modèle de sécurité, Tal Afar était redevenue depuis mars 2007 une des villes les plus dangereuses du pays. Un attentat au camion piégé avait ainsi tué 152 personnes le 27 mars 2007.

L'armée irakienne mène depuis le 14 mai une vaste offensive à Mossoul contre la branche irakienne d'Al-Qaïda. Mossoul et ses plus de 1,5 million d'habitants sunnites, chiïtes, chrétiens et kurdes, est considérée par le commandement américain comme l'épicentre de l'action des partisans en Irak d'Oussama ben Laden, repoussés en 2007 de Bagdad et de l'ouest du pays.

AFP

Neuf soldats turcs tués dans un attentat à la bombe

ANKARA, 11 août 2008 (AFP)

NEUF SOLDATS TURCS sont morts et deux autres sont blessés, lundi, lorsqu'une explosion s'est produite au passage de leur véhicule. Elle a eu lieu sur une route de campagne dans la province d'Erzincan, dans l'est du pays.

Selon l'armée turque, l'engin explosif a été déclenché à distance. L'attaque, qui n'a pas été revendiquée, est survenue près d'un secteur où des accrochages entre l'armée turque et les miliciens du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) sont fréquemment rapportés.

La semaine dernière, le PKK a revendiqué un attentat à l'explosif perpétré le 5 août contre une station de pompage de l'oléoduc Bakou-Tbilissi-Ceylan située dans la province d'Erzincan. L'incendie qui en a résulté n'a été éteint que lundi.

La Turquie n'a pas confirmé que les séparatistes kurdes ont bel et bien fomenté cet attentat, préférant attendre que les conclusions de l'enquête soient connues. Selon la société d'État qui gère les installations, il faudra 15 jours pour procéder aux réparations.

La sûreté de l'approvisionnement fourni par l'oléoduc Bakou-Tbilissi-Ceylan est également mise en doute par les combats qui opposent, depuis la semaine dernière, les troupes géorgiennes et russes en Géorgie.

Le PKK, qui réclame la création d'un État kurde, est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par les États-Unis et l'Union européenne. Sa lutte contre l'État turc a fait plus de 30 000 morts depuis 1984.



L'Irak reprend l'exploration de ses gisements pétroliers

L'IRAK, déterminé à tirer parti de ses immenses réserves de brut, a repris vendredi 8 août l'exploration de ses gisements pétroliers après une vingtaine d'années d'interruption, consécutive aux sanctions internationales imposées à ce pays sous le régime de Saddam Hussein.

« Aujourd'hui, vendredi, le ministère du pétrole célèbre le retour au travail après vingt ans d'interruption d'exploration de pétrole irakien », a déclaré le porte-parole du ministère, Assem Jihad. Le ministre du pétrole, Hussein Chahristani, des députés irakiens et le gouverneur de la province de Zi Qar, Aziz Kadam Alwan, ont assisté à une cérémonie sur le gisement d'Al-Gharraf, près de Nassiriyah (350 km au sud de Bagdad).

En relançant l'exploration des gisements pétroliers, les autorités espèrent doubler les réserves prouvées, qui se situent actuellement à 115 milliards de barils de brut.

« Le ministère a commencé à établir de nouvelles raffineries dans le pays, dans les provinces de Zi Qar, de Kirkouk, de Kerbala et de Missane, tout en rénovant d'autres raffineries à Bagdad, Bassorah et Diwaniyah », a souligné M. Chahristani.

Le ministère dispose désormais de

« trois équipes, entraînées à l'étranger aux techniques les plus récentes », selon M. Jihad. « Les premiers éléments indiquent qu'il y a un milliard de barils de brut de réserve à Al-Gharraf. Ce chiffre pourrait doubler », selon le porte-parole du ministère du pétrole. Les autorités espèrent extraire 500 000 barils par jour d'ici à dix-huit mois à Al-Gharraf. La province de Zi Qar compte aussi le gisement de Nassiriyah. Sur l'ensemble de la province, le ministère du pétrole espère puiser dans des réserves estimées à 4 milliards de barils de brut.

Après l'invasion du Koweït en 1990 et la série de sanctions de l'ONU instaurant un strict embargo, l'Irak avait cessé d'explorer ses gisements et avait été forcé de limiter drastiquement ses exportations.

Un programme de l'ONU, « Pétrole contre nourriture », avait permis à Bagdad entre 1996 et 2003 de vendre du pétrole en échange de biens humanitaires dont le pays manquait en raison des sanctions internationales.

Quarante compagnies sur les rangs

Après cinq ans de guerre et une relative accalmie sur le front de la sécurité, les autorités ouvrent progressivement leur exploi-

tation aux entreprises étrangères.

Il s'agit pour le gouvernement de faire appel aux multinationales pour des contrats d'assistance technique afin d'augmenter sa capacité de production de 500 000 barils/jour. De leur côté, les majors occidentales espèrent reprendre pied en Irak et bénéficier à terme des gigantesques réserves de brut du pays. D'ici juin 2009, le ministère du pétrole doit choisir parmi une quarantaine de compagnies pétrolières étrangères pour « six gisements pétroliers et deux gisements gaziers ».

Les autorités irakiennes ambitionnent d'extraire d'ici à la fin de l'année 3 millions de barils par jour (mbj) contre 2,5 mbj actuellement, soit le niveau de production précédant l'invasion américaine de mars 2003. Le but dans les cinq ans est d'atteindre une production de 4,5 mbj.

Actuellement, 2,11 millions de barils sont exportés chaque jour.

L'Irak, qui dispose des troisièmes réserves prouvées de brut au monde, manque cruellement de technologies et de capitaux. Mais avant tout investissement étranger majeur, les députés irakiens doivent approuver un projet de loi sur le pétrole, qui prévoit une distribution juste des revenus pétroliers entre les 18 provinces irakiennes. - (AFP.)

ISRAËL INQUIÉTUDES AMÉRICAINES

Washington tenterait de dissuader Israël de mener un raid contre des installations nucléaires iraniennes

JÉRUSALEM

CORRESPONDANCE

Les Etats-Unis multiplient les signaux visant à dissuader Israël d'entreprendre une attaque contre les sites nucléaires iraniens. D'après le quotidien israélien Haaretz, Washington a récemment rejeté une demande d'assistance militaire qui aurait amélioré la capacité de frappe de l'Etat juif. Selon le journal qui ne cite pas ses sources, les autorités américaines ont interprété cette requête, « présentée et refusée au plus haut niveau », comme le signe de l'avancement des préparatifs de l'armée israélienne en vue d'une telle attaque.

Toujours selon Haaretz, Washington a averti Israël qu'un raid aérien contre l'Iran nuirait à ses intérêts et a demandé à être prévenu si celui-ci devait toutefois être mené. Pour atténuer l'impact de leur refus de coopérer, les autorités américaines ont proposé à leur allié israélien de renforcer son système de défense antimissile.

Interrogé par la radio de l'armée, le ministre israélien de la défense, Ehoud Barak, a implicitement confirmé ces révélations en déclarant que les Etats-Unis s'opposaient pour l'heure à un bombardement de l'Iran. « La position des Etats-Unis est

connue : ils ne veulent pas d'une action contre l'Iran », a déclaré M. Barak. « Pour l'heure, il faut que le processus diplomatique progresse, mais il y a beaucoup d'options, Israël est un pays fort, et il vaut mieux ne pas en parler », a-t-il ajouté, tout en appelant à « agir dans le domaine du renseignement », et à « accentuer les sanctions économiques contre le régime de (Mahmoud) Ahmadinejad », le président iramien.

Survol de l'Irak

En juin, à l'occasion de leur passage à Jérusalem, le patron des services de renseignement américain, John Michael McConnell, et le chef d'état-major, Michael Mullen, s'étaient déjà efforcés de tempérer les ardeurs israéliennes. D'après le Washington Post, les deux hommes avaient déclaré à leurs interlocuteurs que l'Iran était encore loin d'obtenir l'arme nucléaire et qu'en conséquence les Etats-Unis s'opposeraient à un survol de l'Irak par l'aviation israélienne.

Peu après, une source américaine avait révélé au New York Times que l'Etat juif avait organisé au-dessus de la Méditerranée un important exercice aérien. D'après Israël, cette fuite téléguidée par le Pentago-

ne, avait pour objectif de contrecarrer d'éventuels plans d'attaque.

En juillet, enfin, la presse américaine avait révélé que le département d'Etat entendait ouvrir une section d'intérêt à Téhéran. Dernière étape avant l'ouverture de relations diplomatiques, cette initiative entretient de fait une ambiance peu compatible avec la préparation de bombardements.

D'après un récent rapport américain, détaillé par le quotidien Haaretz, il est d'ailleurs « improbable » qu'une telle opération soit couronnée de succès. L'Institut pour la science et la sécurité internationale (ISSI), un think tank basé à Washington, affirme que la destruction des installations qui abritent le programme iranien d'enrichissement de l'uranium nécessiterait une puissance de feu largement supérieure à celle employée lors du bombardement du réacteur irakien Osirak en 1981.

A supposer qu'Israël connaisse la localisation exacte des sites suspects et décide de se lancer dans une telle aventure, l'Iran, selon l'ISSI, serait en mesure de relancer son programme nucléaire « relativement rapidement ». ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE

AFP

IRAK: DIYALA, NOUVELLE POMME DE DISCORDE ENTRE KURDES ET POUVOIR CENTRAL

SOULEIMANIYEH (Irak), 13 août 2008 (AFP) -

UN NOUVEAU conflit oppose le gouvernement central irakien aux dirigeants kurdes qui refusent de retirer leurs troupes de la province de Diyala car ils ont la ferme intention de la rattacher au Kurdistan, comme Kirkouk et une partie de la province de Mossoul.

"Le commandant en chef des forces terrestres irakiennes, le général Ali Ghidane, nous a demandés le 10 août de retirer nos forces du nord de Diyala, mais nous ne recevons nos ordres que de la présidence de la région autonome du Kurdistan", a affirmé à l'AFP le général kurde Nazem Kirkouki.

"Nous avons une brigade déployée dans les localités de Saadiya, Qara Tapa, Jalawla (dans le nord de Diyala) et nous ne bougerons pas car nous n'avons pas reçu jusqu'à présent d'ordre de la présidence (kurde)", a ajouté le général qui commande la brigade 34 des peshmergas, forte de 4.000 hommes.

Les combattants kurdes ou peshmergas se sont déployés dans ces zones il y a deux ans, à la demande des armées irakienne et américaine, alors que Diyala était à feu et à sang en raison notamment des activités d'Al-Qaïda, a-t-il précisé.

"Nous sommes venus pour participer au rétablissement de la sécurité dans la région et depuis lors nous avons pris part avec les forces américaines et irakiennes à de nombreuses opérations", a-t-il souligné.

Près de 40.000 hommes des forces irakiennes, soutenues par l'armée américaine, ont lancé le 29 juillet une vaste opération, "Heureux présage", visant les cellules d'Al-Qaïda dans cette province considérée comme la plus dangereuse d'Irak.

Pour le porte-parole des peshmergas, le général Jabar Yawar, "la zone où nous nous trouvons est sécurisée et n'a pas besoin d'opérations militaires ni d'un déploiement de l'armée irakienne".

"Nous avons donné notre sang pour y maintenir la paix", a-t-il estimé.

Située à la lisière de la province de Souleimaniyeh, cette zone septentrionale de Diyala est habitée en majorité par des Kurdes chiites et les dirigeants

kurdes voudraient l'annexer. La majorité des Kurdes irakiens sont sunnites.

"Il y a des réunions entre les responsables kurdes et le ministère de la Défense pour trouver une solution", a confié pour sa part Jafar Moustafa, secrétaire d'Etat du gouvernement autonome kurde pour les affaires des peshmergas.

Lors d'une conférence de presse, le porte-parole du ministre irakien de la Défense, le général Mohammed al-Askari, a affirmé que "la brigade des peshmergas était venue du Kurdistan pour prendre position dans la vallée de Khamrine quand l'armée et la police irakiennes étaient occupées ailleurs".

"L'accord stipulait leur retrait quand l'armée irakienne serait prête. Aujourd'hui nous sommes venus leur dire que nous n'avions plus besoin d'eux."

Mais en filigrane apparaît l'ambition des Kurdes de doubler la surface de leur territoire pour le passer de 40.000 à 78.000 km², ce qui représenterait 18% de l'Irak.

Les Kurdes revendiquent un territoire s'étendant de la frontière turque au nord jusqu'à la lisière de Kout, à 160 km au sud-est de Bagdad, ainsi que la province pétrolière de Kirkouk, la majorité des gouvernorats de Diyala et de Ninive jusqu'à Mossoul ainsi qu'une partie de la province de Salaheddine.

"Nos dirigeants ont peur que si l'armée irakienne réussit à se déployer dans la province de Diyala, elle veuille le faire aussi dans les régions de Kirkouk et de Mossoul où sont présentes nos forces", a affirmé sous couvert de l'anonymat une responsable kurde de Souleimaniyeh.

Forts de 70.000 hommes, les peshmergas sont déployés dans la région kurde, ainsi que dans le nord de Diyala et dans le nord-est de Mossoul. A Kirkouk, se trouvent les "Assaïch" (forces de sécurité) dépendant des deux grandes formations politiques kurdes.

Le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, a affirmé vendredi le caractère "kurde" de Kirkouk lors de sa première visite dans cette ville depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein en 2003.

Comer
INTERNATIONAL.COM

14 août 2008

TURQUIE-IRAN • Un rapprochement controversé

A l'invitation du président turc Abdullah Gül, le président iranien Mahmoud Ahmadinejad effectue une visite de deux jours en Turquie. Ankara se positionnant comme médiateur sur le dossier du nucléaire iranien. Une initiative qui suscite certaines critiques côté turc. Revue de presse.

LA VISITE du président iranien Mahmoud Ahmadinejad le 14 août 2008 revêt une importance particulière écrit Nuray Mert dans un éditorial de *Radikal* intitulé "une amitié difficile". En effet, l'Iran n'est pas un voisin ordinaire. Il s'agit d'un pays qui est aujourd'hui sous les feux de l'actualité mondiale. "Ce n'est pas la nature théocratique du régime en tant que tel, mais plutôt la puissance qu'il incarne désormais qui pose problème aux Etats-Unis. Depuis l'invasion de l'Irak, la puissance qu'incarne l'Iran est devenue une source de tracas pour les Occidentaux et les Etats-Unis en particulier. Les projets nucléaires iraniens ont ainsi débouché sur des scénarios d'attaque militaire contre l'Iran. Face à un régime devenu très populaire dans le monde musulman, y compris non chiite, la perspective d'une attaque directe contre l'Iran semble difficile. L'idée actuellement serait plutôt d'étouffer l'Iran par un large éventail de sanctions. C'est dans ce contexte que la Turquie est soumise à d'énormes pressions afin qu'elle prenne part sans discuter à cette politique de sanctions contre l'Iran. Ankara essaie tant bien que mal de résister à ces pressions. Il serait à ce propos injuste de penser que l'attitude turque ne s'explique que par les intérêts communs des deux parties concernant la question kurde [Ankara et Téhéran coopèrent de plus en plus étroitement sur le dossier des séparatistes kurdes]. En tant que puissance régionale moyenne, la Turquie serait forcément affectée par l'affaiblissement de ce voisin direct. Outre les liens historiques et la proximité cultu-

relle, c'est donc cette perspective d'affaiblissement et ses conséquences qui expliquent les réserves de la Turquie dans ce dossier. Plus la crise entre l'Iran et l'Occident s'accroît et plus les relations turco-iraniennes se transforment en une amitié difficile. Espérons que cette amitié ne devienne pas impossible."

Mehmet Y. Yilmaz dans *Hürriyet* critique très sévèrement le gouvernement AKP [islamo-conservateur] qui, "en accueillant Ahmadinejad, apporte un soutien indirect à l'attitude intransigeante du président iranien sur le dossier nucléaire. L'AKP semble ne pas avoir compris que les deux pays qui ont tout à perdre d'une nucléarisation de l'Iran sont Israël et la Turquie. Les responsables du parti au pouvoir affirment vouloir que la Turquie devienne un acteur politique régional majeur et prétendent que cette visite va y contribuer. Ils ne se rendent pas compte qu'à côté d'un Iran doté d'une force de frappe nucléaire, la Turquie n'aura plus grand-chose à dire dans la région."

A la suite des critiques de Mümtaz Soysal, éditorialiste du très kémaliste quotidien *Cumhuriyet*, qui fustigeait le fait qu'Ahmadinejad ne visite pas le mausolée d'Atatürk à Ankara, traditionnellement visité par les chefs d'Etats étrangers, et que cela soit qualifié de "détail" par le ministre des Affaires étrangères turc, Ali Babacan, Taha Akyol réagit dans *Milliyet* par une leçon de réalpolitik en écrivant que cette polémique ne doit pas masquer l'es-



sentiel. "C'est parce qu'Ankara et Téhéran ont développé leurs relations qu'il existe aujourd'hui une collaboration très étroite entre la Turquie et l'Iran dans la lutte contre le terrorisme, sur le dossier irakien ainsi qu'en matière d'énergie [les ministres de l'Energie des deux pays ont signé récemment un accord sur le transfert du gaz naturel iranien à travers le territoire turc et autorisant des compagnies turques à développer trois champs de gaz naturel dans le sud de l'Iran]. Il ne sortira certainement rien de concret de la rencontre entre Gül et Ahmadinejad. Mais montrer à la communauté internationale que la Turquie est "dans le coup" sur ce dossier, voilà qui, à long terme, est une attitude intelligente."

Pierre Vanrie

Outbreak of armed conflict in tense Kirkuk feared

By Basil Adas, Correspondent

Baghdad: Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki has commissioned a special committee of the Council of Ministers to urgently prepare a report on the potential outbreak of armed conflict in Kirkuk.

"Prime Minister Al Maliki is extremely concerned by the evolution of differences between Kurds and the Arab and Turkmen," sources in Al Maliki's Da'awa Party told Gulf News.

These sources added that Prime Minister Al Maliki is worried about two dangerous scenarios in Kirkuk. Firstly, Al Maliki fears that any limited or comprehensive eruption of violence could pave the way for ethnic cleansing.

Also, he fears the disintegration of the Iraqi Army if the Kurdish-majority Iraqi forces in Kirkuk support the annexation of the city.

Iraqi forces stationed in the Sunni Arab provinces of Nineveh, Salahuddin and Diyala would then have to step in to protect the Arabs and Turkmen in Kirkuk.

Regional considerations

There are two brigades of the Iraqi army and 9,000 policemen in Kirkuk. The Kurds

constitute more than 90 per cent of the leadership and more than 70 per cent of soldiers in the lower grades.

"There is no equal in military power. Kurdish forces are too large. They would be able to impose total control over Kirkuk in hours," Tourhan Al Mufti, a member of the Turkmen bloc in the governorate of Kirkuk told Gulf News.

He added, however, the likelihood of such a takeover is small because of regional and international considerations.

"Barzani [Iraqi Kurdish leader] cannot annex Kirkuk without the greenlight from Washington, and I think if the US does this they will lose the support and cooperation of the Sunni Arab forces in the governorates of Al Anbar, Baghdad, Salahuddin, Diyala and Ninevah which will undermine any security improvements achieved by the US in Iraq," Abdul Karim Al Dulaimi, a senior official of the Iraqi Interior Ministry told Gulf News.

Mohammad Al Jouburi, a member of the Arab bloc in the governorate of Kirkuk confirmed to Gulf News that two brigades of the Peshmergas forces who are responsible for the protection of Kurds have moved from Sulaimaniyah and Arbil to the towns of



An Iraqi soldier inspects weapons which were found during military search operations in different parts of Diyala province.

Qerager and Shawan about 20 kilometres outside of Kirkuk.

Also in Kirkuk are about 4,000 US troops at the Al Hurria air base who still maintain control over security in the city.

REUTERS

Eight Turkish soldiers killed in landmine blast

TUNCELI, Turkey, Aug 11.2008 (Reuters) - Eight Turkish soldiers were killed in a landmine explosion in the eastern Turkish province of Erzincan, military sources said on Monday.

The sources told Reuters in addition to the eight dead, four soldiers were injured in the blast in the district of Kemah. No further details were immediately available.

Kurdish guerrillas frequently use landmines in their conflict with the Turkish state.

The separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) took up arms against Turkey in 1984 with the aim of establishing a Kurdish homeland in the southeast of the country.

Some 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict.

Erzincan Governor Ali Gungor said the blast occurred as a military vehicle passed along a country road in Kemah.

He said soldiers were being treated in various hospitals and he could not give a specific casualty toll, state-run Anatolian news agency reported.

TURKISH DAILY NEWS

August 11, 2008

Iraqi-Kurdish lawmaker lashes out at 'Turkish interference'

SULAIMANIYAH (AFP)

An influential Kurdish member of the Iraqi parliament on Saturday accused Turkey of undermining the influence Kurds have gained since the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

"Turkey has maneuvered to create an anti-Kurdish (Iraqi) parliament," Mahmoud Othman told a press conference in Sulaimaniyah, one of the main cities of the autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq.

"It is behind the adoption of article 24 of the electoral law as it is trying by all means to reduce the gains made by the Kurds after the fall of Saddam Hussein," he said.

Iraq's parliament proposed under article 24 of the election bill a deal that will share power equally between Arabs, Kurds and Turkomen in the oil-rich Kirkuk region, a move bitterly opposed by the Kurds, given their numerical superiority.

Othman did not elaborate on how he thought Ankara had managed to influence Iraqi MPs to write a clause in the electoral bill, though Kurds have long complained of Turkish efforts to undermine them through alliance with ethnic Turkomen and Sunni Arabs.

Saddam placed Kirkuk outside the Kurdish region, which has behaved essentially as an independent entity since 1991.

But Iraqi Kurds, many of whom see Kirkuk's oil wealth as vital to the future viability of their region, have called for the city to be placed within the autonomous region.

Kirkuk has a large population of Sunni and Shiite Arabs, as well as Turkomen, making for a fragile ethnic mix.

The failure to find a solution to Kirkuk has forced the postponement of local elections in Iraq initially scheduled for Oct. 1.

Othman also singled out the United States and Britain, claiming they had played negative roles.

He said the United States had "not reacted" to Turkish attempts to push the bill through parliament, while Britain had pressured the Kurds to accept the demands of the Arabs and Turkomen.

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is related to the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk city and other disputed areas. The article also calls for conducting a



census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province.

The Washington Post August 12, 2008

Dispatches From the Other Iraq

By Joshua Partlow, a Washington Post foreign correspondent who reported from Iraq from

INVISIBLE NATION

How the Kurds' Quest for Statehood Is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East

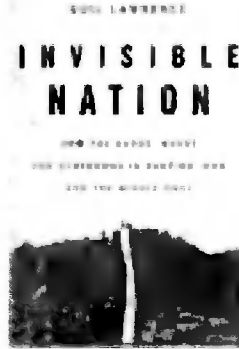
By Quil Lawrence
Walker, 366 pp. \$25.95

In journalistic accounts of the Iraq war, the Kurds, if they are mentioned at all, tend to be used as a counterexample. Kurdistan is a place of relative calm amid chaotic violence. Its construction boom highlights the economic wasteland elsewhere. Its politicians are stalwart partners of the United States in a country bristling under U.S. occupation. A Kurdish public relations campaign describes the region simply as "the other Iraq."

In "Invisible Nation," the first thorough, book-length chronicle of the Kurds' recent history and their role in the war, BBC reporter Quil Lawrence doesn't deny these differences. But his brisk and engaging narrative makes clear just how tenuous -- and anomalous -- is this period of relative peace and prosperity for the Kurds of Iraq. They endured a genocidal campaign by Saddam Hussein and have been pushed to the corners of the four nations they primarily inhabit: Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria. With a population of about 25 million, Lawrence notes, the Kurds may be the largest ethnic group in the world without an independent homeland.

"So in a dearth of good news, why isn't the United States crowing about this one great achievement in Iraq?" Lawrence writes. "Because Kurdistan's success could be cataclysmic. Like no event since the 1948 creation of Israel, a declared Kurdish state within the borders of Iraq will unite the entire region in opposition, from the Black Sea to the Persian Gulf."

Facing such a hostile neighborhood, the Kurds who live in Iraq's three northern provinces have tried to carve out a niche of near-autonomy just on the safe side of independence. Lawrence, who writes a sympathetic but balanced portrait of the Kurds, describes their leaders' gradual transition from guerrilla fighters to statesmen, including how they were betrayed by their ostensible allies (such as Henry Kissinger and the Shah of Iran, who effectively handed over the Kurds to Hussein in 1975) and how they often squandered their best opportunities. For example, the belated U.S. creation of a no-fly zone over Kurdistan



after the Gulf War helped protect the Kurds from Hussein -- "Washington unwittingly had become the midwife to a de facto Kurdish state," Lawrence writes -- only to have the two leading Kurdish parties slug it out for years in sporadic civil war.

"Invisible Nation" briefly traces the ancient history of the Kurds but really begins in earnest with their struggle for survival during Hussein's vicious campaign against them in the late 1980s. The book continues through the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and into the time of the subsequent occupation, trailing off in 2006. The now-familiar themes of the Iraq war echo in the Kurds' story as well. The intelligence, for one thing, rarely panned out.

Before the invasion, the Bush administration claimed that al-Qaeda-linked Islamist militants were operating in Kurdish territory inside Iraq. But Lawrence shows those claims were riddled with errors and mostly wrong. While the militant group Ansar al-Islam operated in Kurdistan, for example, no links to Hussein or al-Qaeda were proved. And the opening airstrike of the war, a failed attempt to kill Hussein in southern Baghdad, was the result of an elaborate but often ineffectual intelligence-gathering operation based in Kurdistan and led by CIA informant Sheikh Muhammad Abdul Karim al-Kasnazani, a Kurd and Sufi leader who was paid millions for his followers' work as spies.

In Kurdistan, as elsewhere in Iraq, faulty U.S. planning had unintended consequences.

Sometimes this benefited the Kurds. The Bush administration's inability to persuade Turkey to allow a ground invasion of Iraq from the north prevented thousands of Turkish troops from accompanying U.S. troops and may have averted guerrilla war between the Turks and Kurds -- something that "may go down in history as the luckiest thing that happened to America regarding Iraq," Lawrence writes.

The partnership between Americans and Kurds was far from easy, and many Kurdish officials have expressed exasperation over the years. Lawrence recounts how Iraq's current foreign minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, couldn't even walk through the State Department doors as a Kurdish emissary during the Gulf War. On a visit to Washington in 1991, the best he got was a cup of coffee with junior staffers at a cafe around the corner from the State Department's C Street headquarters. After the 2003 invasion, Lawrence says, there was considerable Kurdish frustration with Gen. David Petraeus, then a division commander in northern Iraq. Many Kurds were upset because Petraeus was working with their Sunni Arab enemies in Mosul and not giving Kurdish soldiers more control in what they saw as their territory.

Lawrence, who has reported extensively in Kurdistan over the past eight years, dwells less on how the Kurds have governed their territory in the later years of the war. He only alludes to the darker side of Kurdish rule: the seemingly unlimited power of the rival Barzani and Talabani clans over the population, the allegations of corruption among government officials, the mistreatment of Arabs living in Kurdistan.

But he succeeds in drawing lively portraits of the Kurds who have worked against terrible odds for the rights of their people. Their stories remind us how many of Iraq's top politicians -- President Jalal Talabani, Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, Foreign Minister Zebari, to name just a few -- endured prison torture, assassination attempts and long years of war on behalf of Kurdistan and against the country they are now helping to govern. "There are short- and there are long-term deals," Talabani says at one point in the book. And it is not entirely clear which kind the Kurds have entered into with Iraq.



Voices of Iraq
August 13, 2008

Withdrawal of Kurdish forces from Khanqeen asserts security in Diala-MP

BAGHDAD, Aug. 13 (VOI) - A lawmaker from the main Sunni bloc on Wednesday said the withdrawal of Kurdish forces from ethnically-mixed areas in Diala would help assert stability in the volatile province.

Kurdish forces are refusing Iraqi Defense Ministry orders to pull out of Kurdish-populated areas of ethnically divided Diala province where they have been deployed for the past two years.

"The withdrawal of Kurdish troops from Khanqeen town would boost trust building among Iraqi denominations and would help reach better a understanding to end current tensions in Iraq," MP Nour al-Din al-Hayali, from the Iraqi Accordance Front (IAF), said in a statement received by Aswat al-Iraq - Voices of Iraq - (VOI).

The so-called Peshmerga troops made up of Kurdish former gunmen have never been integrated into the Iraqi army and continue to operate under the command of the autonomous regional government that holds sway in Iraq's three far northern provinces.

But with U.S. backing, the disciplined and battle hardened troops have de-

ployed elsewhere in Iraq to support the army in its efforts to rein in armed groups, particularly those loyal to al-Qaeda.

The deployment in northern districts of Diala province is a sensitive one as they are Kurdish-inhabited and Kurdish leaders have long sought to incorporate them in the autonomous region.

Commanders have long regarded Diala as Iraq's most dangerous province. Its volatile ethnic mix of Sunni Arabs, Shiite Arabs and Shiite and Sunni Kurds has proved fertile ground for insurgents loyal to al-Qaeda who have made it one of their main strongholds.

Since July 29, mainstream Iraqi security forces have been engaged in a major offensive against al-Qaeda in the province involving 50,000 soldiers and police.

Diala province is just one of a number of areas where longstanding Kurdish claims have drawn opposition from their non-Kurdish neighbors.

Concerns among Arabs and Turkmen about Kurdish claims to the northern oil province of Kirkuk was the main factor behind the Iraqi parliament's failure to adopt a provincial election law in time for polls to go ahead as planned in

October.
The Sunni lawmaker called for Kurdish forces to "withdraw Peshmerga and Asayesh (Kurdish intelligence service) from Ninewa province."
The Kurds have also historically laid claim to parts of Nineveh, the province centered on the main northern city of Mosul.

Earlier, a Kurdish forces source said the Iraqi army entered and deployed its troops in Qara Taba district of Khanqeen town. The Kurdish commander noted Iraqi army ordered Kurdish troops to withdraw in 24 hours, but they refused to do, citing ongoing threat to Kurdish residents' areas as a reason.



13 August 2008.

Kurdistan's peshmerga military forces on high alert

Kurdish Forces have withdrawn from Khanqin.

By **Aram Azez**

Although high-level officials in the Kurdistan Peshmerga Forces Command denying the reports published by some Iraqi media about Peshmerga forces being surrounded by the Iraqi army in Jalaula, local sources and Iraqi officials say Kurdish Forces have withdrawn from Khanqin.

In recent days, tensions on high rise between Kurdistan Army and Iraqi Army in Diyala province. In order to monitor the situation closely, on Tuesday Mahmoud Sangawi, representative of the Iraqi President in the Kurdistan Peshmerga Forces Command and the Deputy Peshmerga Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government Major General Anwar Haj Othman visited Khanaqin.

Khanaqin and the other areas linked to Diyala, which mostly populated by Kurds, were also

subject to Saddam's Arabization plan and now are part of the areas included in the implementation of article 140. Iraqi defense Ministry spokesman Brigadier Muhammad Askari also confirmed today that commanders of Kurdish Peshmerga forces have agreed to withdraw the Peshmerga forces from Khanqin as the first step to withdraw from the other areas of Diyala province, in order to be replaced by the Iraqi security forces.

Askari told the some local Iraqi news agencies that "constitution says Kurdish Peshmerga forces should remain only within the border of Kurdistan region; therefore, Khanqin and the other areas belong to Diyala province, should come under the control of the Iraqi forces." Tensions rose on Monday between Peshmerga and Iraqi forces after Iraqi forces gave Kurd-

ish forces 24 hours to leave Qara Tapa area, a call refused by the Kurdish forces leaders and prospects of the first possible clashes between the two forces raised.

Peshmerga have been responsible for protecting the areas from the terrorists for more than five years, as the Iraqi forces were nascent and barely could control the other parts of Iraq. Some 20000 Kurdish forces also controlling some areas of Baghdad, the Iraqi capital.

Some Iraqi media reported that "Iraqi forces have imposed blockade on Peshmerga bases west of Jalaula, the problem still exists between the Iraqi army and Peshmerga and the siege has not been lifted yet. While some sources from the Kurdistan Army say that the attempts to end the problems occurred between Iraqi army and Kurdistan Peshmerga forces in

Diyala province move toward a solution, www.ekurd.net and the security situation is now stable in that region, reliable sources from Kurdistan today told Independent Kurdistan Journalism (IKJ) that all the 200000 or so Kurdistan Region's strong Army is on high alert as tensions between Iraqi and Kurdistan Government is on rise in Kirkuk and Diyala provinces.

With regard to reports about the withdrawal of Peshmerga forces from Diyala province in response to a demand from the Iraqi government, a source in the Kurdistan Peshmerga Forces Command denied the withdrawal of Peshmerga troops from their positions, stressing that "these troops are still stationed in place and will not withdraw except by order of the presidency of Kurdistan region." Local Kurdish News Reported.



13 August 2008.

BRITAIN AND TURKEY BACK ARABS ON KIRKUK

Arabicizing the city unacceptable, says MP Othman.

By **Gassim Khidhir**
The Kurdish Globe

Kurds are called to stand united against those who are "attempting to return the Kurdish situation to the era of the former Iraqi government of Saddam."

Iraqi Parliament member from the Kurdistan Coalition List (KC) Dr. Mahmud Othman said that while Britain is backing Arabs on the Kirkuk issue, both Britain and the U.S. are making behind-the-scenes efforts to encourage Kurds not to annex Kirkuk into Kurdistan Region.

The Globe tried to contact the British Consulate in Erbil city on Mahmud's comment but unfortunately the Consulate refused to make any comment.

U.S. Embassy spokesperson Mirembe Nantongo commented on

Mahmud's statement by saying, "The status of Kirkuk is a sensitive issue that needs to be addressed in a serious fashion that takes into consideration the concerns of all parties. The UN is providing technical assistance in support of Iraqi efforts to identify acceptable solutions. We support the UN role and

urge Iraqis to work peacefully together to find a workable compromise."

Dr. Mahmud blamed Turkey for plotting to create an anti-Kurdish (Iraqi) Parliament. "Turkey is behind the adoption of Article 24 of the electoral law as it is trying by all means to reduce the gains made by

the Kurds after the fall of Saddam Hussein," stated Dr. Mahmud, an influential Kurdish MP. "Those who voted for Article 24 visited Turkey several times before the vote. Turkey is well-informed about the Kirkuk situation," he added.

He also stated: "Article 24 has ended. Next time, a huge number of voices in Iraqi Parliament against Kurds cannot be assembled, but we have to prepare ourselves for other possibilities and conflicts; there are groups who want to reduce Kurdish power and Kurdistan Region authority." On July 22, Iraqi Parliament passed the provincial council elections law and secretly voted for Article 24, which delays elections in Kirkuk and divides authority there based on percentages of ethnic Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, and Christians, and replaces the mainly Kurdish army in Kirkuk with forces



Dr Mahmud Othman, MP of the Kurdistan block in the Federal Parliament in Baghdad

from middle and southern Iraq. This occurred after the Kurdistan Coalition (KC) withdrew from the session and without any KC agreement on the vote.

The law was illegally passed by Parliament since Article 24 was voted on secretly. According to the Iraqi Constitution, no article can be voted on secretly except to elect a

head of Parliament or an Iraqi president.

Dr. Othman believes that bringing forces from middle and southern Iraq to Kirkuk means Arabicizing the city, which is exactly what the Iraqi government of Saddam did. "We as Kurds will never accept any kind of decision to bring forces from southern and middle Iraq to Kirkuk city," he asserted.

Iraqi deputy Prime Minister Dr. Barham Saleh, a Kurd, affirmed that many challenges are awaiting Kurds and Kurdistan Region.

Kurds should be united in the face of all challenges and they should have one voice, Saleh said during a seminar with members of Kurdistan's two main political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party

(KDP) and the Patriot Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

"Dictatorship is still part of Iraqi culture; it is no surprise that some groups oppose Kurdish rights," said Saleh. "We have some enemies inside Iraq and around Iraq who are attempting to return the Kurdish situation to the era of the former Iraqi government of Saddam, but if we stand united we will succeed."



August 14, 2008

Kirkuk reflects challenges of ethnic conflict in Iraq

By Charles Levinson, USA TODAY

KIRKUK, Iraq — Hiwa Assad and his wife, Guller Sabbah, are still visibly in love after 20 years of marriage. They snuggle on the couch, exchange smiles as they talk and keep their sparsely furnished home ringing with laughter.

He is a Kurdish former guerrilla. She comes from a separate ethnic group, the Turkmen. Yet there is no sign that, just outside their door, their peoples are locked in a struggle for the city of Kirkuk.

Until, that is, she steps out of the room.

"If there is a fight," Assad quietly confides, "if the Turkmen try to take this city from us, I will take my weapons and I will fight for my people. I can never let my people lose what they've won.

"There will be a fight for Kirkuk," he adds. "Things are getting worse day by day."

Such warnings are becoming ever more common here: at violent street demonstrations, in the angry speeches of politicians, and even in previously harmonious places such as the Assad family home. The city's status has become one of Iraq's most urgent political issues, threatening to spark a new conflict just as security gains have been made in other parts of the country and debate intensifies about when to bring more American troops home.

The confrontation in Kirkuk comes down to who will control the city and the surrounding oil fields, which contain 40% of Iraq's massive reserves of crude. Nearly every ethnic and religious group in Iraq is present here — the city of about 850,000 has been called "Iraq's Jerusalem" — meaning an eruption of sectarian violence in Kirkuk



A policeman inspects damage to a police truck following a roadside bomb attack last month in Kirkuk. The oil-rich city's status has become one of Iraq's most urgent political issues.

By Marwan Ibrahim, AFP/Getty Images

could spread quickly elsewhere in the country.

This month, arguments over Kirkuk prevented the Iraqi parliament from reaching a deal on bigger national issues, namely scheduling a date for provincial elections that President Bush says are crucial to a long-term peace in Iraq. The war of words has since become more heated, with one leading politician in Kirkuk threatening to cut off his rival's head.

"Kirkuk is a minefield," says Redha Taki, a leading Shiite politician. "If we touch it and try to solve the problem, it will blow up. And if we continue ignoring and delaying it, it will also eventually

blow up."

Kurds, who make up the city's majority, believe that Kirkuk should be incorporated into Kurdistan, the Kurdish-controlled region that lies just a few miles to the northeast and operates almost like a separate country from the rest of Iraq. Arabs and Turkmen, fearful of discrimination if that happens, want the city to remain under the power of the central government in Baghdad.

The political tensions have started to spill into the streets. Two weeks ago, a demonstration by Kurds was hit by a suicide bomber. Seeking revenge, the protesters overran the headquarters of the local Turkmen party, exchanged gunfire with the guards and set the building on fire. Twenty-two people were killed.

So far, the clashes are not of a scale similar to those between Sunni Arabs and Shiites that left tens of thousands of Iraqis dead in 2006 and 2007.

Maj. Gen. Mark Hertling, commander of U.S. forces in northern Iraq, says Kirkuk is "relatively peaceful," but acknowledges the military is closely watching the "flash point there."

Indeed, some familiar warning signs are present: Al-Qaeda is trying to use its remaining foothold in northern Iraq to enflame sectarian tensions here, just as it once did in Baghdad, according to Hussein Kamal, head of intelligence at Iraq's interior ministry.

Yahya Barzangi, a 38-year-old photographer, was badly beaten during the recent demonstration when one of the protesters accused him of being a Turkmen agent.

"Suddenly there were 50 people hitting me, kicking me, shouting, 'Kill him, kill him,'" says Barzangi, who is not Turkmen but from a well-



Former Kurdish guerrilla Hiwa Assad and Guller Sabbah, a Turkmen, have been married for 20 years.

known Kurd family.

Friends were able to pull him away to safety, but not before he was wounded. Barzangi spent two days in the hospital.

"In the past it was just the politicians talking about fighting and civil war, but now the people are starting to follow," Barzangi says. "This is the real danger, and this is exactly what happened in Baghdad in 2006."

'They want to kill each other'

Just as Sunnis and Shiites in Baghdad once pointed to mixed marriages, jointly owned businesses and a long history of coexistence as proof that a civil war would never occur, Kirkuk's people make similar arguments now.

During a lunch of spiced rice and salted fish at the Assad house, the mix of languages — jokes flew in Kurdish, Arabic and Turkmen — reflects the patchwork of ethnicities and tribes that have long lived side by side.

"The problem is between politicians and political parties," says Rizkar Mohammad, Assad's brother-in-law and life-long friend, who also is married to a Turkmen.

"There are no problems between the people," he says.

Assad listens politely to such talk — and later dismisses it, when no one else is around.

"Don't believe a word they say," he says. "With their tongues they say everything is all right, but in their hearts they want to kill each other."

"People in Kirkuk have two faces," he continues. "They sit with you and talk as if they're angels. They say, 'I have no enemies and don't hate other religions and nationalities.' But the minute they are alone with their own sect, they are the first ones to

insult and hate."

Meanwhile, many Iraqi politicians have dropped any pretense of civility when it comes to Kirkuk. Kurdish President Massoud Barzani said last month that, if his people were denied control of the city, "there were other choices available," a possible threat to use force to take the city if politics didn't work.

Arab leader Mohammad Hussein al-Jabbouri countered that Arabs would defend Kirkuk. In response, the Kurds' senior leader in Kirkuk, Najat H.K. Manmi, vowed: "We will cut off Jabbouri's head. If he thinks he can beat the Kurds, he doesn't understand Kurdish history."

Together 'hundreds of years'

The rancor has surprised many city residents. "We've lived together for hundreds of years," says Abdel Razaqa, an Arab arts professor. "But things are different today."

The confrontation is also pulling in people of all ages. Back at the Assad house, lunch is ongoing as his 17-year-old son steps in from the street. Some young kids just got into a fight, he says. It was Turkmen vs. Kurds.

Even between Assad and Sabbah, husband and wife, the ethnic tension occasionally surfaces. They are adept at laughing it off, but a sharp edge occasionally shows through.

"Your father always says bad things about the Kurds. He calls us thieves and hooligans, and I stay quiet out of respect," Assad says.

"You stay quiet because you know Kurds are bad," she counters.

Then, as if talking to a dog, she says: "Down Kurd! Down Kurd!"

They share a laugh, and then turn serious

again.

"The Kurds think they should get special treatment because they suffered under Saddam (Hussein), but Saddam did the same thing to the Turkmen as he did to the Kurds," Sabbah says, prompting angry cries of protest from Assad.

"Nooooo!" he says. "Anfal, Anfal! It wasn't the same," he says, referring to Saddam's genocidal campaign against the Kurds in 1988 that killed tens of thousands of Kurds.

It is that history of persecution that makes Kurds so eager to control their own destiny in Kirkuk, and in Kurdistan just to the north. The Kurds have been largely left alone by Iraq's Arabs since the U.S. invasion toppled Saddam in 2003, but that is now changing as violence comes down elsewhere.

The Kurds "are doing everything they can now to secure their long-term advantage," says Sam Parker, an analyst with the Washington-based U.S. Institute of Peace.

Iraq's constitution calls for a referendum in Kirkuk so the city's residents can determine whether to become part of Kurdistan. Voting has been postponed for years now because of fears that forcing a decision could spark violence, and Parker says "the best solution on Kirkuk is to just keep delaying it."

Whether that's a viable strategy, or whether Kirkuk's politicians and residents force a decision, remains to be seen. In the Assad family, though, the vote is for the fragile status quo.

"We don't talk about politics in the house so things remain calm," Assad says. "If we did, we'd have big problems

REUTERS

Bombs hit northern Iraq, forces expect more

August 13 2008

By Aws Qusay BAGHDAD (Reuters) -

CAR BOMBS in three parts of northern Iraq killed at least five people on Wednesday, and Iraqi forces said they expected more attacks as they pursue Sunni Arab militants in the volatile north.

With violence falling in other parts of Iraq, the ethnically and religiously mixed provinces north of the capital Baghdad remain the most volatile parts of the country.

Al Qaeda Sunni Arab militants driven out of other areas have sought refuge in the fertile river valleys of the north. Tension between Arabs and Kurds has also simmered in cities and villages along the frontier with the Kurdish autonomous region.

In a sign of the ethnic tension, the central government said it had asked ethnic Kurdish forces to withdraw from an area outside their autonomous region. The Kurds said they had not agreed to pull back their troops to Kurdistan.

The U.S. military said a suicide car bomber struck an Iraqi army patrol in the northern city of Mosul, killing an Iraqi soldier, two civilians and wounding 15 people.

A parked car bomb in the town of Qaiyara south of Mosul killed two people and wounded nine.

Another suicide car bomber struck the mayor's office in the small town of al-Motaqa near the ethnically divided city of Kirkuk on Wednesday. The mayor, Abdul Karim al-Jubouri, who also leads pro-U.S. security volunteer forces in the area, was wounded along with three bodyguards.

Disagreement between Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen over control of Kirkuk has held up a provincial election law, delaying voting throughout the country and paralyzing its politics.

"LAST REDOUBT"

U.S.-backed Iraqi forces are conducting a crackdown in Diyala province north of the capital, which follows operations in and around Mosul in recent months - all targeting al Qaeda militants.

"They know very well that this is their last redoubt," Defence Ministry

spokesman Major-General Mohammed al-Askari told a news conference, predicting more bombings.

"We expect the battle will be a battle of roadside bombs, explosive belts and a battle of explosions."

On Tuesday, the governor of Diyala province survived an assassination attempt when a suicide bomber struck his convoy in the provincial capital Baquba. A curfew was imposed on the town.

Askari said Iraqi military operations in Diyala would resume on Friday after a four-day pause ordered by the authorities to give militants a chance to surrender.

He also said the central government had told Kurdish troops it was ready to take over security from them in Diyala, and they would soon withdraw to provinces within autonomous Kurdistan.

A brigade of the Kurdish troops, known as Peshmerga, patrols parts of Diyala where many Kurds live, even though the province is not part of Iraq's Kurdish autonomous region. The Kurdish government said it had not reached an agreement to remove them.

"So far there is no deal made. Talks are going on between the two governments regarding the presence of this brigade in the area," Jaffar Mustafa, Minister for Peshmerga in the Kurdish regional government told Reuters in the Kurdish capital Erbil.

In the capital, the U.N. mission in Iraq held a ceremony to mark five years since a bomb at its Baghdad headquarters killed 23 people, a turning point in 2003 that prompted nearly all aid and development organisations to pull out of the country.

A new U.N. mission is back with an expanding role and signed a deal on Wednesday with Iraq's planning ministry to do development work for two more years.

"There are moments when we wonder whether all this was worth it or not," U.N. special representative Staffan de Mistura said.

"What we are doing at the moment is sending a signal that the U.N. is back. The U.N. is back to stay. The U.N. is back to have its footprint increasing."

Aug 12, 2008

TIME

BP shuts down Georgian pipeline as precaution

By JANE WARDELL AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) -- BP PLC said it shut down an oil pipeline that runs through Georgia on Tuesday as a precautionary measure, but added that it is unaware of any Russian bombings on pipelines in the region.

BP said the 90,000-barrel-a-day pipeline to Supsa on Georgia's Black Sea coast from Baku in Azerbaijan will remain closed indefinitely.

Another pipeline operated by the London-based oil company in the former Soviet Republic, the larger Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, is already out of action after a fire last week on its Turkish stretch. The BTC pipeline usually provides around 1 million barrels of Caspian crude to international markets.

BP spokesman Robert Wine said that the Baku-Supsa line was closed because it runs through the center of Georgia, where there was greater risk of conflict.

However, he added that BP had no reports of damage to pipelines in Georgia, despite claims

from some officials there that Russian forces had attacked the lines.

"I think those reports out there are inaccurate," he said.

Turkish President Abdullah Gul also said Tuesday that fighting in Georgia had not damaged the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.

Wine later said that BP also had stopped pumping gas into the South Caucasus pipeline, which runs from the Caspian Sea through Georgia into Turkey. However, gas will continue to run though that line for another seven days.

BP would continue to assess the security situation in Georgia over the next few days to consider when to reopen the pipelines, Wine said.

Georgian ports on the Black Sea are a main shipping point of Caspian Sea crude from Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. More than 500,000 barrels leave these ports daily, and plans are afoot to expand capacity by an additional 200,000 barrels a day.

The Baku-Supsa pipeline was only reopened a

few weeks ago after 18 months of inaction. It has the capacity to pump up to 150,000 barrels a day, but has recently been pumping around 90,000 barrels a day.

BP said it still has no timeframe on the potential reopening of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline after it was damaged by a fire late last Tuesday. Kurdish rebels took responsibility for sabotaging the pipeline.

Workers for Botas International Ltd., which operates the BTC line, put out the fire on Monday and are expected to carry out a closer inspection of the damage over the coming days.

Another pipeline that runs to the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiysk, also known as the Northern Route Export Pipeline, which BP uses to export oil, but does not operate, remains open.

Wine said that there was still some production in oil fields in the Caspian Sea, but it had been reduced because of the pipeline closures.

GULF NEWS

August 13, 2008

Will the Kurds fit into Iraq?

By Francis Matthew Editor at Large

The argument in Iraq over the status of Kirkuk - currently focused on how the planned provincial elections should be run - is only one element of the single biggest problem that the country now faces, which is how to merge the Kurdish regions back into a federal state, and even finding out if that is still possible.

Most of Iraq's political action in the past three years has focused on how the 45 per cent of Iraq's population who are Shiite will find a way to get along with the 30 per cent who are Sunni.

The fighting and the political dialogue between the many elements of Shiites (some in favour of a more Iraqi national outcome, and some in favour of closer links to Iran) and various Sunni groups (some more tribal and some more national) have all been part of the struggle to build a new political identity in Iraq.

The Kurds have held aloof from all this. They achieved effective independence in 1992, when the Western forces enforced a no-fly zone on Saddam Hussain's forces after the liberation of Kuwait, and Saddam withdrew his government officials from what then became Kurdistan.

Importantly for what is happening today, the no-fly zone ran a few miles north of Kirkuk, which allowed Saddam to 'Arabise' the city by encouraging Arabs to move in and settle, tipping the population towards an Arab majority.

The Kurds have been vigorously reversing this trend since Saddam's fall, getting more and more Kurds to go and live in Kirkuk.

Bitter civil war

The Kurds achieved internal political stability after a bitter civil war in 1994 and 1995, which left Masoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party, (KDP) in control of Irbil and northwest Kurdistan; and Jalal Talabani (now President of

Iraq) with his Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in charge of Suleimaniyah.

Successful government in the two areas gave the Kurdish population a calm and prosperous life, very different from the misery and chaos that the rest of Iraq had to endure under Saddam, and the chaos of the aftermath of his toppling.

Till today, both parties have solid support among the Kurds. Importantly, they have also maintained their militias, the peshmerga, which are some of the most effective armed forces in Iraq.

Moreover, they owe nothing to the central government and everything to their Kurdish leaders. This all means that the Kurds have a lot to lose by joining in what is happening in the rest of Iraq, and nor do they see much to gain.

This lack of interest is what the Iraqi central government will have to deal with in some way, or face a serious collapse of its national plans. Most of Iraq would benefit hugely from the planned elections in the 18 provinces.

They would allow local regional government to operate more effectively through a popular mandate, and would also allow regional leaders to emerge and take their formal place in public life.

The proposed Provincial Election Law was proceeding on its way, but the Kurds saw it as an attack on their interests. Not so much as on what was happening in their home territories of Irbil and Suleimaniyah, but in their struggle to gain acknowledged control of Kirkuk, and its province of Tamim.

The city of Kirkuk suffers from having twin identities as both the historic and spiritual capital of the Kurdish region, but also as the centre of Iraq's oil industry. It is impossible for the Kurds not to insist that Kirkuk is recognised as Kurdish,

but it is also impossible for the Iraqi government to grant control over its oil reserves to the Kurds.

The clumsy solution the government tried to achieve in Article 24 of the proposed Provincial Election Law, required that the membership of the Tamim assembly should be split three ways equally between Kurds, Turkmens and Arabs. This outraged the Kurds, who are certainly the largest group in today's Kirkuk, if not the majority.

The solution is for the Iraqi central government to tackle the stalled problem of the law governing control of the nation's oil reserves, which should reduce any provincial rights and have the strategy and control of the nation's oil revert to the central government.

While the central government should assert its authority over the oil, it should also be prepared to implement provincial elections based on the demographics of the regions, and accept the result.

The issue of how to ensure representation of the minorities in the assemblies can be solved by using the list-based system of proportional representation voting that Iraq's national elections used in 2005.

Minorities should not have to rely on very clumsy central government edicts, dictating that each group gets a third each, regardless of population.

Elections based on proportional representation also mean that any minority need not just be ethnic or religious groups. In time, and in a more hopeful future, minorities seeking support from the popular vote could include minority political parties or social action groups.

Anything that Iraq builds at the moment, should allow for the introduction of less ethnically driven politics, and should let an active civil society emerge.

Kurdistan Regional Governmen

13 Aug. 2008



Prime Minister Barzani Visits Tehran

Erbil, Kurdistan – Iraq (KRG.org) - PRIME MINISTER Nechirvan Barzani this week visited Tehran in response to an official invitation from the Islamic Republic of Iran. The purpose of the trip was to reinforce the economic, business, and commercial ties between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr Barzani met with President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for substantive talks on Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. Other government officials receiving the Prime Minister included Ali Larijani, Chairman of Parliament; Saeed Jalili, Secretary of the Supreme Security Council; Dr. Ali Saeed Lou, Vice President for Executive Affairs; Ali Raza Sheikh Attar, First Deputy of the Foreign Ministry; and Perwes Fatahee, Minister of Electricity.

A number of topics were discussed, including the prospect of Iranian assistance in the economic reconstruction and development of the Kurdistan Region. Cultural and historic ties were also a topic, as many Kurdish refugees found shelter in Iran in the past. The Prime Minister said, "Iran opened its arms to us during the difficult days and helped us in our hour of need. And now for the reconstruction of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, we look forward to your participation."

Falah Mustafa Bakir, Head of the Department of Foreign Relations, explains "Iran is an important neighbour to Iraq. The visit to Tehran comes as part of a continued KRG policy of reinforcing good neighbourly relations, with a view to creating prosperity in the Region and mutual benefit for all parties. This includes co operation in the spheres of joint border security, economic investment, and general commerce."

An expansion of commercial trade between the two sides was a topic of discussion in a seminar with leading businessmen and representatives of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce. In the seminar Prime Minister Barzani urged Iranian commercial leaders to join the reconstruction efforts in the Kurdistan Region and use it as a first step towards the Iraqi market.



KURDISHGL BE 13 August 2008

"Battle for Kirkuk" continues

The Iraqi mindset is, as long as there is no democracy in Kirkuk, there is no chance of a Kurdish victory

By By Bashdar Pusho Ismael
The Kurdish Globe

AFTER years of foot-dragging by Baghdad over the status of Kirkuk, Kurds have decided to dig their heels in. The heated battle for Kirkuk continues apace with decisive concord out of sight. Iraqi leaders, after weeks of deliberation within the Baghdad political chambers and with much pressure from President George W. Bush and other senior U.S. officials, failed to strike a deal on the provincial election law that would facilitate the progression of crucial elections, raising great doubt that the elections could be held this year. After failed attempts to form elusive concord via extraordinary parliamentary sessions on Sunday and Tuesday of this week, Wednesday was almost perceived as a last throw of the dice with politicians optimistic that an agreement could be finally reached. However, Wednesday's session was adjourned without a vote on the provincial law, serving as a major setback to the Iraqi political landscape and the U.S. administration. The debate was closed after it was decided to form a committee composed of the heads of parliamentary blocs to find acceptable text for the provincial election bill. Mahmoud al-Mashahadani, the Parliament speaker and a source of much controversy over the past couple of weeks, announced September 9 as the start of the second legislative term of parliamentary sessions for 2008. The tense standoff among

Iraqi parliamentarians hinges on the hotly disputed issue of elections in oil-rich Kirkuk. In spite of frequent pledges by Baghdad to abide by the Iraqi Constitution, which under Article 140 calls for the normalization in Kirkuk and the suburbs followed by a referendum to decide eventual control of the district, deadlines and extensions to the implementation of this article have continuously ended with a lack of any real progress. Now the issue of Kirkuk, which Baghdad has left simmering for far too long, threatens to come to a boil in spectacular fashion. Seemingly, against the will of the Kurds, Arab blocs have sought to delay the process of dealing with Kirkuk even further.

Baghdad foot-dragging Even as another six months were added to the implementation of Article 140 after it missed its original December 31, 2007, deadline, it was hard not to feel a great deal of pessimism that no real change in attitude would be witnessed on the ground. Indeed, somewhat inevitably, the six-month deadline passed and Iraq appears no closer, or eager for that matter, to resolving the status of Kirkuk than the decades before it. Foot-dragging and a lack of desire to implement a constitution adopted by millions of Iraqis in a legal and democratic fashion has understandably compounded Kurdish frustration. Now, lawmakers in Baghdad are suggesting methods to resolve the dispute in Kirkuk that are simply too little too late, and which Kurds see as a sure way of getting the short straw again.

Intense negotiations in past days were designed to finally bring a level of compromise between all parties, but the level of sentiments expressed suggest that the time of more compromise on the status of Kirkuk may have passed.

Article 24 Ironically, Article 24, a special addition to the provisional and governorate law pertaining to provincial elections, is designed to effectively cancel Article 140 and suppress Kurdish ambitions to winning formal control of the city. The inclusion of Article 24 in the provincial law was seen as a red line by Kurds, leading to angry demonstrations throughout Iraqi Kurdistan. However, although in recent sessions the text contained in Article 24 was watered down significantly, this was simply not enough to appease weary Kurds. Under Arab proposals, Article 24 would mean that the elections in Kirkuk would be essentially prefixed with the Kurds, Arabs, and Turks sharing the same number of seats. In addition, existing security forces in the region would be replaced by those in the center and south—a clear attempt to undermine the mainly Kurdish security forces patrolling the province. Although the law that was passed in spite of a mass boycott by Kurdish lawmakers was always going to be vetoed, it was passed by Arab lawmakers more as a message to Kurds rather than in hope that it would bypass the presidential committee.

Ruffling Kurdish feathers Controversial calls in Baghdad for a delay in the elections in

Kirkuk, to replace Kurdish security forces, and non-implementation of the constitution is designed to ensure that Kurds do not wrestle control of Kirkuk. Suggestion and notions such as Article 24 are a flagrant attempt to destabilize Kurdish ranks and are specifically aimed at ruffling Kurdish sentiments. Once Kurdish anger has been stoked, Arabs are aiming to induce a harsh reaction from them. The mass walkout is one example. This naturally places the Kurds as the representation of the spanner in the Iraqi machine. This perception continued in recent parliamentary sessions with Kurds unwilling to cave in to pressure for greater compromise. Baghdad has failed to implement satisfactory measures to tackle Article 140 for many years, and is now blaming the Kurds for the current standoff. Increasingly, this places Kurds in the context of over-reaching and as an obstacle to Iraqi reconciliation, which could not be further from the truth. The persistent disputes around the hydrocarbon law, which still has not been passed, and the provincial elections law have been used as a marketing ploy by Baghdad to discredit the Kurds as genuine partners in the Iraqi union. Cases of injustices against Arabs and Turkmen minorities in Kirkuk under the hands of the Kurds have been greatly exaggerated. Clearly, foreign proxy elements as well as political factions in Baghdad have sought to influence proceedings by creating instability and promoting an environment of mistrust. There is plenty of Arab

and Turkmen representation in the provincial council as well as security forces for that matter. In fact, many Arabs and Turkmen groups have been in support of implementing Article 140 and the eventual annexing of the region to Kurdistan Region. The end goal of the anti-Kurdish bandwagon is to create an environment where holding an election would be unfeasible and against the interests of security gains in Iraq. For the Arabs it is simple: As long as there is no democracy in Kirkuk then there is no chance of any Kurdish victory.

Role of the UN special representative Staffan de Mistura was appointed to help resolve the issues in Kirkuk by providing mainly "technical" assistance and to look at alternatives to implementing a referendum on the status of Kirkuk, which many have touted as a one-way ticket to bloodshed. However, after six months of "fact-finding and analysis," UN suggestions fell short of many expectations and provided solutions that were unrealistic and in some cases lacked the right level of political, ethnic, and geographical measurements. In either case, Iraq moved no closer to stopping the "ticking time bomb" that de Mistura so boldly claimed to have done at the turn of the year. Now the UN has entered the provincial council debate by suggesting a postponement of elections in Kirkuk until a proposed committee can decide the best method for dealing with the current standoff. However, if the current track record of resolving the Kirkuk debate is anything to go by, the Kurds will miss the chance to solidify their hold on Kirkuk and yet nothing more will have been done in another six months' time.

Why not hold elections in Kirkuk? On the surface, according

to lawmakers in Baghdad, holding elections in Kirkuk is technically and politically difficult due to working out a registrar of voters in Kirkuk coupled with the prospect of holding elections in a volatile climate. However, in practice, the fear is that an eventual and almost inevitable victory of Kurds in the provincial elections in Kirkuk would make implementation of Article 140 even more contentious. In many ways, holding elections at the current time would be perceived as a de facto substitute for holding a referendum on the status of the city. Even if a referendum was never arranged, a Kurdish majority in the Kirkuk council would make things that much more complicated for Baghdad. It would reinforce the Kurdish view that Kirkuk is a Kurdish city and would lead to more public efforts at annexing of the region. Furthermore, the recommendations of de Mistura were formulated based on a number of factors such as historical influences but principally previous election results, when devising his suggestions to resolve disputed territories, including Kirkuk. A Kurdish victory at the polls in Kirkuk would make de Mistura's analysis an interesting read to say the least. Kirkuk should be not treated differently than any other place in Iraq. All mutterings in Baghdad around the delay of the vote are centered around ensuring Kurds do not get their hands on the substantial oil reserves. This is hardly Iraq's best kept secret. If it was not about oil, Article 140 would not even appear in Iraqi newspapers, let alone dominate the agenda of neighboring foreign ministers.

Mosul a different example? While minority Arabs and Turkmens state their opposition to living under Kurdish control, Kurds

living under Arab control are now seen as a formality and a historical expectation in Iraq. If minority Kurds asked for Mosul to be given special dispensation for the upcoming elections, since it's also a volatile and ethnically mixed city, Arabs would chuckle at the idea. Then how are the voices of the majority in Kirkuk dampened by unsubstantiated fears of the minority in Kirkuk.

Kirkuk provincial council threat Almost before the Kirkuk provincial council could finish their threat of requesting to be annexed to Kurdistan Region, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan was on the phone to voice his concerns. External interference has only hampered democracy in Iraq, and neighbouring countries have served to only stoke tensions and influence proceedings for their own benefit, rather than promote a new dawn across their border. Turkey in particular has been vociferous in its opposition of any moves toward Kurdish control of Kirkuk. Only this week Turkey called for more UN involvement in Kirkuk and stated the Turkish government was watching all developments in Kirkuk. However, as Baghdad pressured the council not to follow their threat, Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani congratulated their stance. Kurds have always stated Kirkuk as a red line, but now appear increasingly more agitated in the face of the lack of desire by Baghdad to resolve long-standing disputes.

Democracy - the only solution Ultimately, the one and only solution to the Kirkuk standoff should not be decided by Kurdish leaders, the Iraqi National Assembly, or even the Kirkuk council, but by the people themselves. The will of the million is far greater than the will of a small number of politicians,

who have been elected to serve them. If people in Kirkuk decide to vote in favor of joining Kurdistan Region, then Baghdad has no basis to confront legal and democratic measures other than to ensure minority rights are respected. All talk of complex proposals by the UN and the need to place Kirkuk under special consideration is unnecessary and is only designed to complicate matters. The only viable solution is to let the people decide. The U.S. should then do its utmost to be the supporter and protectorate of the wishes of the people. Although the provincial elections is as vital to President Bush leaving his tenure as president on a positive note as a move they consider essential to reconciling Iraq's ethnic and religious communities, elections should not be placed to appease U.S. political interests but should be in the best interests of all groups in Iraq. It is also ironic that Turkey, as the role model of democracy for the region, is unwilling to accept legal and democratic principles chosen by millions of citizens by a neighboring country. If there is genuine interest in seeing a stable, plural, and democratic age in Iraq, then at the minimum true democratic ideals must be encouraged and not hampered by the U.S. and their so-called allies. If the voting in Kirkuk should be suspended, then voting in all of Kurdistan Region should be suspended. More extensions to resolving elections in Kirkuk would be fruitless without any real desire. Baghdad wants to slip the Kirkuk rug from under the feet of the Kurds. Kurds should be warned; after all, they have had enough time and suffering to read the writing on the wall.

FINANCIAL TIMES August 14 2008

US in warning to Turkey over terms of energy deal with Iran

By Andrew Ward in Washington and Alex Barker in Ankara

THE US yesterday warned Turkey not to strike an energy deal with Iran that undermined diplomatic efforts to halt Tehran's nuclear programme, on the eve of a visit to Ankara by Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad, the Iranian president.

A deal to increase Iranian natural gas supplies to Turkey is expected to form the centrepiece of the visit, giving Mr Ahmadi-Nejad a much-needed diplomatic boost as he attempts to defy pressure to isolate Iran.

The US state department said it expected Ankara to avoid a deal that

would harm diplomatic efforts but made clear its opposition to any agreement that eased pressure on Tehran.

"Such a deal by Turkey with Iran would send the wrong message at a time when the Iranian regime has repeatedly failed to comply with its UN Security Council and IAEA obligations," the state department said.

The meeting with Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's prime minister, marks Mr Ahmadi-Nejad's first bilateral visit to a Nato member. Mr Erdogan is seeking to strengthen energy ties with Tehran, step up co-

operation against Kurdish separatists and intensify Turkey's efforts to defuse the dispute over Iran's nuclear programme.

The centrepiece of the visit is likely to be progress on an energy initiative that Ankara and Tehran launched last year. That could see a deal signed to increase Iranian natural gas supply and set rates for the transportation of Turkmen gas across Iran.

The US state department said Washington was opposed to any country deepening economic ties with Tehran. "This is not the time to do business with Iran," it said.

"It is time for the international community, including our ally Turkey, to begin considering additional measures to pressure Iran."

Ankara and Tehran have good relations, particularly where interests on energy and tackling Kurdish militant groups overlap.

But the standoff over Iran's nuclear ambitions has tested the relationship. Turkey wants to prevent Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon but is concerned about the risk of military confrontation.

"Increased tensions between Iran and the US will put Turkey in a

very awkward position," Ihsan Dagi, professor at Middle Eastern Technical University, said. "After the Iraq war, [Turkey] learned it could no longer remain indifferent to regional developments."

One western diplomat welcomed Ankara's "useful" engagement over Iran's nuclear programme but said Iran "has yet to request that Turkey acts as a formal mediator".

Turkey, which is reliant on en-

ergy imports, is keen to diversify its supplies and establish itself as a hub between Europe and the energy rich nations to its east.

Washington and some EU states have expressed deep concerns over

its energy ties to Iran, which pave the way for Iranian and Turkmen gas to be transported to Europe via the planned Nabuko pipeline from eastern Turkey to Austria.

TODAYS ZAMAN

14 August 2008.

BEŞİKÇİ: Solution to Kurdish issue needs analytical deliberations first

EMİNE KART ANKARA

THIS HIGHLY regarded 69-year-old man is "the Blonde Professor" of Turkey's Kurds, since -- as Martin van Bruinessen of Utrecht University has very appropriately said -- for many years he was the only non-Kurdish person in Turkey to speak out loud and clear in defense of the rights of the Kurds.

"The Blonde Professor," is the epithet the esteemed and prominent sociologist İsmail Beşikçi earned from Turkey's Kurds as he spent 17 years of his life in prison for what he said of the Kurds' existence in this country. Before being released from prison in September 1999 under an amnesty law for writers and journalists, he had been sentenced to over 100 years.

No other writer in Turkish history has had to face such an endless series of trials and prison sentences for almost every public utterance as Beşikçi has. The odyssey of Beşikçi's encounters with Turkey's legal system shows, more eloquently than any abstract political or legal analysis could, what is wrong with the system, and it demonstrates effectively how the officially proclaimed human rights and democratic values become null and void where the Kurdish question is involved," Bruinessen says in a paper titled "İsmail Beşikçi: Turkish sociologist, critic of Kemalism, and Kurdologist."

"Continuing to write and speak in spite of all attempts to silence him, Beşikçi has become a powerful and important symbol for the Kurds and for the human rights movement of Turkey. In the eyes of many Kurds he has acquired almost super-human qualities, as the only Turk who has never left them alone and who has, at great risk to himself, always stood up for them and single-handedly challenged an oppressive and brutal state," he says in the paper, published in 2005 in volume five of the Journal of Kurdish Studies.

The following consists of two separate Today's Zaman interviews with Beşikçi; the second interview followed his recent reading of an open call by author and politician Orhan Miroğlu for a debate on unsolved political murders, since evidence submitted to a court last month as part of the indictment against Ergenekon, a shadowy network being accused of plotting to overthrow the government, suggests that the network was behind many assassinations committed by unidentified assailants in relation to the Kurdish issue.

Beşikçi apparently hasn't yet "retired" and he has no intention of doing so. Almost every weekday he takes a public bus from his home to Ankara's Kızılay district to read and write at the office of Yurt Yayınları, the publishing house that publishes his books.

When Today's Zaman arranged a third meeting with Beşikçi to photograph him, he was quite patient with the newspaper's photojournalist, who wanted to take a lot of photographs from different angles. Yet, once more surprising us with his strikingly innocent naïveté and sense of humor, smiling to the camera, Beşikçi said "Edi bese!" ("Enough is enough" in Kurdish). Then it was noticed that one of his hands was marked with henna. When asked, he said he had attended a Kurdish wedding near a village in the district of Cihanbeyli in Konya over the weekend and



İsmail Beşikçi, the most authoritative academic expert on Turkey's Kurds, is also an icon for freedom of speech, as he was the only person from a non-Kurdish ethnic background to passionately defend Kurds' rights.

that he didn't want to refuse his hosts, who wanted to put henna on his hand in line with Kurdish tradition.

Beşikçi has his own dictionary and the meanings he attaches to words need not be the same as those understood by other people. But some of his words in their commonly used forms are loaded with meanings that Today's Zaman cannot identify itself with. But Today's Zaman also cannot identify itself with censorship or taboos. We didn't touch Beşikçi's wording. The ideological positions expressed in this article belong to him alone, but we should advise our readership not to equate him with any anti-establishment rhetoric just because of the words he uses. Take off the glasses of prejudice and you will find the wisdom in his remarks.

Do you agree that the indictment, which provides clues for exposing the Ergenekon organization's activities in the Southeast, could offer a chance for a new social reconciliation concerning the Kurdish issue in Turkey?

The Ergenekon indictment cannot touch upon the Kurdish issue in the literal sense. Since it will not be possible to get involved in the Kurdistan dimension of Ergenekon and since this dimension cannot be decoded, Ergenekon's dimension regarding the Kurdish issue cannot be truly analyzed via this indictment or the case itself.

But this indictment and the case are still elements helping in the improvement of democracy, as military officers and members of the high bureaucracy -- those who are assumed to be "untouchables" -- have been subject to investigation.

On the other hand, the Turkish media's approach to the indictment and the way that different media organs approach it selectively in line with their political disposition reminds me of the story of the blind men and the elephant; the media is like the blind men, each one touching only one different part of the elephant, or let's say the indictment, and coming to view the indictment differently depending upon their perspective.

Don't you believe that now a naked truth concerning Turkey's Kurdish issue is visible for all to see now thanks to the indictment?

That's true and unquestionable. The basic issue that limits political life in Turkey is the Kurdish issue. Not only that, the Kurdish issue is also leading to contradictions in foreign policy, as well. In economy, likewise. ...

Serious steps are needed to be taken concerning the perception of the problem. But I'm not expecting healthy steps to be taken in the upcoming period. Unfortunately, the current government is not approaching the issue in a healthy way, either. While it has been subject to pressure from the Ergenekon gang, it is now putting pressure on Hayat TV [which the Interior Ministry accused of aiding the pro-Kurdish Roj TV] and closing this channel down. [It began broadcasting again earlier this month.]

The government's democratic character is inconsistent.

There is a trauma stemming from the facts exposed by the Ergenekon indictment. How will it be possible for all, including the government, to get over this trauma?

It's very difficult, and it will be very difficult, because the high bureaucracy is not ready for such a confrontation.

Given that there is this stark truth known as the Kurdish issue before us and if, as you said, the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government will not be able to play a healthy role in this issue, who will play this role, then, or who should?

Kurds. Kurds should be more vigorous and should stand strong. They should express their demands more clearly, in a healthy and conscious manner. Thus, they should raise their consciousness. This will also have political impacts and secure the making of a more influential, bold politics.

Are you observing such a stirring among Kurds?

At the moment, such tendencies can be seen. However, the problem is very big.

There are 206 countries in the world, and the populations of many of these states are below 1 million. Meanwhile, there are 40 million Kurds in the Middle East. Whoever you ask, they will respond with this number. But Kurds do not have their names anywhere -- for example, at the United Nations.

Kurds should look at the world and world politics critically and, at the same time, turn back and look at the 1920s. ...

For example, Luxembourg says that it is against an independent Kurdish state. Those who have the same approach on this issue have the conviction that Kurds should cave in and accept some minor rights, such as having newspapers in Kurdish and television stations broadcasting in Kurdish. Yet, Luxembourg is a small state with a population of around 400,000 and it is at the same time one of the six founding states of the then-European Economic Community, now the European Union.

All of these facts, this big picture, should spark a flame in the minds of Kurds in regards to criticizing world politics.

If we turn back to the issue of the 1920s, they are saying that "Beşikçi got stuck in the 1920s." This perception is not correct. For example, there is this event of Sherif Hussein. The British Empire then had promised a "Great Arab Empire." But this promise was not kept and later Iraq, Jordan and Syria were founded with the sons of Hussein

being made the kings of these states. Thus, their eventual situation went beyond the promises made. If Beşikçi had said, "They made promises, but they didn't keep these promises," and questioned the issue this way, then one could say, "Beşikçi got stuck in the 1920s."

Nonetheless, Kurds don't have a name after the 1920s. But this is not the situation for Arabs; they are at a more advanced point than the British intelligence service had promised at the time.

As for the Kurds, until the 1920s -- during the 1910s, until the last period of the Ottoman Empire -- there was an autonomous Kurdistan. But when you look at 1922, 1923, there are no Kurds and this should, of course, be analyzed by the Kurds themselves.

What are those suggesting that "Beşikçi got stuck in the 1920s" saying on this issue?

They are talking about several formulas for a solution, such as autonomy within Turkey's borders. As for me, I'm not talking about the solution; I'm talking about the problem itself.

On March 16, 1988, at a meeting of the OIC [Organization of the Islamic Conference], the problems of Turks in Western Thrace and the problems of Turks in Bulgaria were brought onto the agenda of the meeting. The Halabja disaster [in which Saddam Hussein had used poison gas against the Iraqi Kurdish town of Halabja, killing thousands and injuring many more] had occurred on March 16 and 17 in 1988, but there was not even one shred of criticism against Saddam Hussein at that meeting. Who would bring this issue onto the agenda of the meeting? Turkey, Syria, Iran or Iraq?

For example, the USSR had at the time put too much emphasis on the right of nations to self-determination, but when the issue was Kurds, they didn't even say a word on it.

Kurds were subject to a cursed conspiracy in the 1920s. This conspiracy is like a hood on the heads of the Kurds, and they have to get rid of this hood.

'Kurdish issue impeding Turkey's actions in international relations'

Author and politician Orhan Miroğlu recently made an open call for a thorough debate over political murders committed in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia and said the Kurdish issue could not be resolved without holding this debate. What are your views on this call?

This open call by Miroğlu underlines the activities of Ergenekon on the other side of the Euphrates. It says that Ergenekon is a very important organization in Turkish political life and that democracy cannot be established, in the literal sense, as long as activities and operations carried out on the other side of the Euphrates are not uncovered.

This situation is also hindering the building of a strong structure in foreign policy and relations with other countries. Ergenekon is a coup-minded organization. There needs to be struggle to establish democracy. This is not only important for domestic politics, but also essentially important for foreign policy. For being able to establish democracy, various operations on the other side of the Euphrates should be uncovered.

In my opinion, these things I've briefly mentioned are Orhan's wish. But at this stage, this is not possible because there is still a policy based on the destruction and denial of the Kurds. Bringing the operations on the other side of the Euphrates onto the agenda will only be possible after abandoning this understanding. However, the state is at this stage where it is still relying on this policy.

In a legendary speech delivered in Diyarbakır on Aug. 12, 2005, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called the issue by its name, explicitly saying "Kurdish issue." But earlier this summer when he visited Diyarbakır, he didn't make that emphasis on the political dimension of the problem, and this led to considerable disappointment for those who were at least expecting him to make remarks what would match the strength of his 2005 speech.

Coming to today, there is a serious societal objection to Ergenekon and the Ergenekon mentality. Taking all of these facts into consideration, do we have sufficient reason to be optimistic today?

Prime ministers speak of the Kurdish issue only once. [Former President Süleyman] Demirel said that he "now recognized Turkey's Kurdish reality," upon his election in 1991 as prime minister. But he said this only once. Another former prime minister, Mesut Yılmaz, in a speech delivered in Diyarbakır in 1999, declared, "Turkey's road to the European Union goes through Diyarbakır."

And Erdoğan hasn't made any remarks similar to those of 2005.

The conclusion is that the state is briefing prime ministers following these kinds of statements on the Kurdish issue. They are explaining how massive the problem is and

that their remarks are in contradiction with state policy because "assimilation" is a fundamental policy of the state. The prime ministers are being persuaded, and perhaps even threatened. Nonetheless, the problem has gradually become weightier and gained an international identity, with a Kurdish federal state in the process of being established in south Kurdistan. In any case, this problem will come before the state so that [officials] will have to deliver clear-cut remarks on the issue in the face of public opinion. But not now; although maybe in the future due to the involvement -- one way or another -- of both the United States and the European Union in the issue.

Can we say that there are some officials who have a different stance from the official one?

We can say that the Foreign Ministry and the General Staff are working very closely in the decision-making process. Apparently, however, there is a different wing at the Foreign Ministry and the Interior Ministry, as well as at MİT [National Intelligence Organization]. Yet, this wing is not always able to express itself freely.

Only during tête-à-tête meetings, let's say at parks, pastry shops and coffee houses, do they say "You're right." However, those who say so cannot show the same understanding within decision-making mechanisms. These remain as subjective ideas vis-à-vis the official stance.

There are 40 million Kurds in the Middle East. For example, you say the KKTC [Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus] should be internationally recognized or you recognize Kosovo as an independent nation while encouraging other countries to recognize Kosovo as well. But when the issue comes to your 20 million people, you want them to have no sign, no trace whatsoever; you don't want them to have any political rights.

This entire reality blocks your path as a factor that "shrinks" and "pressurizes" your actions in international relations. Mostly, figures in Turkish diplomacy or other institutions dealing with foreign policy are the ones who encounter this issue the most, but they are not able to speak about this -- for example, in an interview with a newspaper -- or are not able to write an article about it. Only after retiring are they able to speak freely on the issue. Cevat Öneş, the former undersecretary of MİT, is an example of this.

Jalal Talabani in 'good health' after Iraq President has heart surgery

Deborah Haynes, Baghdad

JALAL TALABANI, the President of Iraq, was said to be in "good health" today after undergoing heart surgery in the United States, an operation that left some Iraqis wondering whether he is still fit for the job.

The 74-year-old has not been seen in public since travelling to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota on August 2 for what his office then described as an operation on his left knee.

A statement from the President's office, however, said: "Full examinations revealed that he had a tight heart valve which needed surgery which was done successfully."

Mr Talabani was released from the clinic in the morning in "good health", the statement said, adding: "He received many calls and he is grateful for those who got in touch."

The President was due to travel to Washington, according to a senior official from his Kurdish

political party. Mustafa Sowrash, of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), said: "His return to Iraq is not far off."

Mr Talabani, a popular politician who is known for cracking jokes even at his own expense, has endured health problems in the past. In February 2007 he was flown to a hospital in Jordan suffering from exhaustion and dehydration.

The latest health scare prompted little surprise among a handful of people in Baghdad who were quizzed by *The Times* about the heart surgery.

"I think he is too old to continue as President," said Fadel Dawish, a 32-year-old barber, upon learning about the operation.

"At this time Iraq needs someone younger. Maybe Mr Talabani could be the grandfather of the country rather than the President."

Faisal Farook, a retired history teacher, is a big fan of the Kurdish President -- the first non-Arab head of an Arab state -- praising the work that he has done for his people. However Mr Farook too wondered whether it was time to move on.

"I think we need a stronger person," the 62-year-old said.

Nassar al-Rubaie, a senior Shia politician, said that the medical reports from the hospital would determine whether the heart operation would affect Mr Talabani's ability to work. He noted, however, that the position of President, under Iraq's post-invasion constitution, was not too demanding.

Mr Talabani's role is crucial to Iraq's political process. He is part of a three-member Presidency Council that must approve legislation and other important matters, including a security agreement between the United States and Iraq that covers the status of US troops beyond the end of 2008.

Mr Rubaie added: "We hope that he will be in good health, so that his decisions are healthy too."

Mr Talabani also heads the PUK, one of the two main political parties in the semi-autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan. He spent many years fighting for Kurdish rights.

Le Monde
18 août 2008

En Irak, attentats contre des pèlerins chiites et appel de Moqtada Sadr à la « résistance »

Alors que la communauté chiite célèbre à Kerbala la naissance du Mahdi, l'imam Sadr fait signer de leur sang un « pacte » aux fidèles, les incitant à combattre l'armée américaine

La communauté chiite d'Irak est visée par une série d'attentats, alors qu'elle célèbre, dimanche à Kerbala, l'anniversaire de la naissance du Mahdi, le douzième et dernier imam du chiisme, l'« imam caché ». Par ailleurs, dans un communiqué lu pendant la prière à Koufa, vendredi 15 août, l'imam chiite Moqtada Al-Sadr a appelé les croyants à « signer avec leur sang un pacte d'allégeance à l'imam Mahdi » et à « résister à l'occupant » américain.

Au moins vingt-quatre fidèles chiites sont morts depuis jeudi dans des attentats qui ont aussi fait des dizaines de blessés sur la route menant à Kerbala, ville sainte située à 110 km au sud de Bagdad.

Vingt-deux personnes sont mortes, jeudi soir, dans un double attentat-suicide perpétré par deux femmes à Iskandariya. Les deux femmes ont actionné leur ceinture d'explosifs à cinq minutes d'intervalle alors qu'elles se trouvaient à 50 mètres l'une de l'autre, a précisé le lieutenant Kazem Al-Khafaji, de la police de la province de Babylone. L'armée américaine a de son côté fait état d'une seule kamikaze. Soixante-treize personnes ont été blessées dans cet attentat-suicide.

Iskandariya subit régulièrement des attentats-suicides, perpétrés notamment par le mouvement Al-Qaida en Irak, contre la population chiite et les pèlerins empruntant cette route pour se rendre dans les villes saintes de Nadjaf et Kerbala. Dans cette zone, soldats, femmes policiers, commandos de police ont été déployés et les barrages ont été renforcés.

Malgré l'impressionnant dispositif de sécurité mis en place, un nouvel attentat a tué vendredi matin un pèlerin et en a blessé dix autres, dans le sud-est de Bagdad, au passage d'un bus transportant des dizaines de pèlerins. Puis, vendredi soir, cinq personnes ont été tuées et 20 autres blessées par l'explosion d'une voiture piégée dans la ville chiite de Balad, au nord de Bagdad.

A Kerbala, 40 000 soldats et policiers irakiens sont mobilisés pour accueillir les pèlerins qui affluent d'Irak, d'Iran, mais aussi de plusieurs pays musulmans d'Asie. Parmi eux figurent 2 000 femmes ayant pour mission de fouiller les éven-



Des femmes chiites en pèlerinage vers Kerbala sont fouillées par des policières irakiennes, vendredi 15 août, à Latifiya. LOAY HAMEED/AP

tuelles candidates à une mission-suicide au milieu de la foule des chiites venus célébrer le Mahdi. Des avions irakiens survolent Kerbala, alors que des appareils américains surveillent les environs de la ville sainte, notamment l'ouest désertique, d'où les insurgés sunnites ont coutume de tirer au mortier ou de lancer des roquettes.

Plusieurs dizaines de milliers de chiites sont attendus à Kerbala pour vénérer Mohammed Al-Mahdi, né en 869 à Samarra. Il est le dernier imam pour les chiites duodécimains et, selon leur croyance, n'est pas mort mais restera caché jusqu'au jugement dernier, avant de revenir sous les traits du Mahdi.

L'imam chiite Moqtada Al-Sadr, qui se trouve, selon les Américains, en Iran, a appelé, vendredi, ses partisans à « signer avec leur sang un pacte d'allégeance à l'imam Mahdi », selon un communiqué lu par cheikh Assaad Al-Nasseri pendant la prière du vendredi à la mosquée de Koufa.

En signant ce pacte, les croyants « s'engagent à résister dans tous les pays musulmans, et spécialement en Irak, militairement et idéologiquement, aux occupants, colonisateurs et à la pensée laïque occidentale ». « Mes seuls ennemis sont les occupants, les infidèles et les "nawasseb" [radicaux sunnites

40 000 soldats et policiers sont mobilisés pour accueillir les pèlerins qui affluent d'Irak et d'Iran

anti-chiites], les colonisateurs et les envahisseurs. (Je m'engage à) ne pas négocier avec eux, à ne signer aucune trêve et à ne pas m'asseoir à la même table qu'eux tant que je serai en vie », conclut le pacte.

Les candidats à la signature du pacte doivent s'inciser le pouce et l'apposer sur le document. Pour Salah Al-Obeidi, le porte-parole de Moqtada Al-Sadr, la campagne a déjà commencé. « Il s'agit de mettre l'accent sur le culte de Dieu plutôt que sur la politique, et sur le fait que la résistance n'a pas de fin tant qu'il y a occupation. »

Moqtada Al-Sadr s'est toujours déclaré opposé à l'occupation américaine en Irak. Il a fait sortir l'an dernier ses ministres du gouvernement, et ses députés ont retiré leur soutien au premier ministre, Nouri Al-Maliki, que les partisans de Moqtada Al-Sadr accusent de faire le jeu des États-Unis. - (AFP.) ■

AFP

TROIS REBELLES, UN SOLDAT TUÉS DANS LE SUD-EST DE LA TURQUIE

ANKARA, 15 août 2008 (AFP) –

TROIS REBELLES kurdes ont été tués vendredi lors de combats et un membre des forces de sécurité a péri dans l'explosion d'une mine dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a affirmé l'état-major de l'armée turque.

Les trois rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont été abattus lors d'un accrochage dans la région montagneuse de Sason, dans la province de Batman, a indiqué l'état-major sur son site internet.

Un membre des forces de sécurité a perdu la vie et un autre a été blessé par l'explosion d'une mine posée par le PKK dans une zone montagneuse proche de la ville de Semdinli, dans la province de Hakkari, aux confins de l'Irak et de l'Irak, selon le communiqué.

Jeudi, une patrouille militaire a mis en fuite un groupe de six rebelles qui tentaient de pénétrer illégalement en Turquie depuis la Syrie et ont abandonné dans leur fuite 144 kilos d'explosifs, déclare encore l'armée.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait plus de 37.000 morts.

L'armée turque a renforcé depuis décembre sa répression contre l'organisation séparatiste, intensifiant les opérations dans le sud-est du pays, et menant des incursions aériennes contre des camps du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak.

AFP

IRAK: LES KURDES ACCEPTENT DE RETIRER LEURS FORCES DE LA PROVINCE DE DIYALA

SOULEIMANIYEH (Irak), 15 août 2008 (AFP) –

LES DIRIGEANTS KURDES ont finalement accepté de retirer leurs troupes de la province de Diyala à la demande du gouvernement irakien, a annoncé vendredi Jafar Moustafa, secrétaire d'Etat du gouvernement autonome pour les affaires des peshmergas.

"Les peshmergas se retireront d'ici dix jours du district de Qara Tapa à la suite d'un accord avec le gouvernement irakien", a-t-il affirmé à l'AFP.

Ce district situé dans le nord de Diyala comprend, outre la ville de Qara Tapa, les localités de Saadiya et Jalawla, où sont déployés depuis près de deux ans 4.000 combattants kurdes (peshmergas).

Située à la lisière de la province de Souleimaniyeh, cette zone septentrionale de Diyala est habitée en majorité par des Kurdes chiites, et les dirigeants kurdes ont affirmé qu'elle faisait partie du Kurdistan.

"Une délégation de dirigeants de la province autonome kurde, conduite par le vice-président Kosrat Rassoul et Fadel Mirani, secrétaire du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK de Massoud Barzani), a rencontré jeudi le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki", a expliqué M. Moustafa.

Selon lui, "lors de cette rencontre les deux parties sont convenues d'un retrait des peshmergas du district de Qara Tapa".

Le secrétaire d'Etat a assuré que la brigade de peshmergas était déployée depuis plus d'un an dans cette région à la demande des forces irakiennes et de la coalition afin d'assurer la sécurité et la lutte contre les groupes "terroristes".

"Aujourd'hui, sa mission est terminée et la brigade va regagner la région de Kurdistan", a-t-il ajouté.

Dans un premier temps, les Kurdes avaient refusé d'obtempérer.

"Le commandant en chef des forces terrestres irakiennes, le général Ali Ghidane, nous a demandé le 10 août de retirer nos forces du nord de Diyala, mais nous ne recevons nos ordres que de la présidence de la région autonome du Kurdistan", avait affirmé mercredi à l'AFP le général kurde Nazem Kirkouki.

Près de 40.000 hommes des forces irakiennes, soutenus par l'armée américaine, ont lancé le 29 juillet une vaste opération --"Heureux présage"-- visant les cellules d'Al-Qaïda dans cette province considérée comme la plus dangereuse d'Irak.

Pour sa part, le porte-parole des peshmergas, le général Jabar Yawar avait assuré: "la zone où nous nous trouvons est sécurisée et n'a pas besoin d'opération militaire ni d'un déploiement de l'armée irakienne. Nous avons donné notre sang pour y maintenir la paix".

Selon une carte qui figure sur le site internet du gouvernement autonome, l'ambition des Kurdes est de doubler la surface de leur territoire pour le passer de 40.000 à 78.000 km2, ce qui représenterait 18% de l'Irak.

Les Kurdes revendiquent un territoire s'étendant de la frontière turque au nord jusqu'à la lisière de Kout, à 160 km au sud-est de Bagdad, mais aussi la province pétrolière de Kirkouk, la majorité des gouvernorats de Diyala et de Ninive jusqu'à Mossoul, ainsi qu'une partie de la province de Salaheddine.

AFP

L'AVIATION TURQUE BOMBARDE DES REBELLES KURDES DANS LE NORD DE L'IRAK (ARMÉE)

ANKARA, 17 août 2008 (AFP) –

L'AVIATION TURQUE a bombardé dans la nuit de samedi à dimanche un repaire de rebelles kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak, a annoncé l'armée.

Le raid aérien visait une caverne dans la région d'Avasin-Basyan servant de base à un "grand groupe" de membres du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, séparatistes kurdes de Turquie) qui se préparait à lancer une offensive en Turquie, indique le communiqué de l'armée.

Le repaire "a été atteint avec succès" et les avions sont retournés à leurs bases, précise le document, sans préciser si les frappes ont fait des victimes.

L'armée turque a bombardé à plusieurs reprises depuis décembre 2007 les positions du PKK dans le Kurdistan irakien. Elle a effectué des raids aériens ainsi qu'une opération terrestre d'une semaine en février dans cette région où sont retranchés, selon Ankara, plus de 2.000 rebelles kurdes.

Depuis le début des actions d'Ankara contre le PKK en Irak, les Etats-Unis, alliés de la Turquie au sein de l'Otan, l'assistent en lui fournissant en temps

réel des informations sur les mouvements des rebelles kurdes en territoire irakien.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait plus de 37.000 morts.

Les rebelles séparatistes kurdes ont revendiqué le sabotage de l'oléoduc Bakou-Tbilissi-Ceyhan (BTC), coupé le 5 août par une explosion dans la station de pompage de Refahiye (est de la Turquie), et ont prévenu qu'ils poursuivraient les attaques contre les intérêts économiques du pays tant que l'Etat turc leur ferait la guerre.

Les autorités turques ont minimisé l'hypothèse d'un sabotage mais doivent encore déterminer quelle est la cause de l'explosion.

Ankara a par ailleurs accusé le PKK d'avoir commis les deux attentats à la bombe qui ont fait 17 morts et plus de 150 blessés le 27 juillet à Istanbul.

AFP

TURQUIE: UN SOLDAT TUÉ, HUIT BLESSÉS DANS L'EXPLOSION D'UNE MINE (AGENCE)

ANKARA, 18 août 2008 (AFP) –

UN SOLDAT TURC a été tué et huit ont été blessés lundi dans l'explosion d'une mine dans la province de Sırnak (sud-est), une attaque imputée par l'armée aux séparatistes kurdes, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie.

La mine a explosé sur la route reliant les villes de Cizre et Sırnak, près de la frontière avec l'Irak, au passage d'un convoi militaire, selon la même source.

Suite à cette attaque imputée aux séparatistes kurdes de Turquie du Parti des

travailleurs du Kurdistan, l'armée a lancé une offensive contre eux dans la région.

Les activistes kurdes ont multiplié ces derniers temps les attaques à l'explosif contre les forces de sécurité dans le sud-est de la Turquie, à majorité kurde.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait plus de 37.000 morts.

Iraq. Le gouvernement a finalement obtenu l'accord des Kurdes pour le départ de leurs combattants de Diyala. Mais les Kurdes ambitionnent toujours du rattachement de cette province au Kurdistan.

Le sursis

LE NOUVELLE crise politique entre le gouvernement central iraquien et les Kurdes autour de la province de Diyala a finalement été désamorcée, les dirigeants kurdes ayant accepté de retirer leurs troupes de cette province. « Les peshmergas se retireront d'ici dix jours du district de Qara Tapa à la suite d'un accord avec le gouvernement iraquien », a annoncé vendredi Jafar Moustafa, secrétaire d'Etat du gouvernement autonome kurde pour les affaires des peshmergas (combattants kurdes). Ce district situé dans le nord de Diyala comprend, outre la ville de Qara Tapa, les localités de Saadiya et Jalawla, où sont déployés depuis près de deux ans 4 000 combattants kurdes. Située à la lisière de la province de Souleimaniyeh, cette zone septentrionale de Diyala est habitée en majorité par des Kurdes chiïtes, et les dirigeants kurdes ambitionnent de la rattacher au Kurdistan, comme la riche ville pétrolière de Kirkouk et une partie de la province de Mossoul. D'où le caractère explosif de cette question.

Les peshmergas se sont déployés dans ces zones à la demande des armées iraquienne et américaine, alors que Diyala était à feu et à sang en raison notamment des activités

d'Al-Qaëda. Le porte-parole du ministère iraquien de la Défense, le général Mohammed Al-Askari, a affirmé que « la brigade des peshmergas était venue du Kurdistan pour prendre position dans la vallée de Khamrine quand l'armée et la police iraqiennes étaient occupées ailleurs ». « L'accord stipulait leur retrait quand l'armée iraquienne serait prête. Aujourd'hui, nous sommes venus leur dire que nous n'avions plus besoin d'eux ». Mais le porte-parole des peshmergas, le général Jabar Yawar, avait contesté les propos du porte-parole de l'armée, affirmant que la « la zone où nous nous trouvons est sécurisée et n'a besoin ni d'opération militaire ni d'un déploiement de l'armée iraquienne. Nous avons donné notre sang pour y maintenir la paix ». La position initiale des dirigeants kurdes, qui refusaient le retrait de leurs troupes et le déploiement à leur place de l'armée iraquienne, tenait à leur crainte de créer un précédent en leur défaveur. « Nos dirigeants ont peur que si l'armée iraquienne réussit à se déployer dans la province de Diyala, elle le fera aussi dans les régions de Kirkouk et de Mossoul où sont présentes nos forces », a affirmé sous couvert de l'anonymat une responsable kurde de Souleimaniyeh.

Forts de 70 000 hommes, les peshmergas sont déployés dans la région kurde. A Kirkouk, se trouvent les « Assaïch » (forces de sécurité) dépendant des deux grandes formations politiques kurdes, l'Union Patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) de Massoud Barzani, président de la région autonome du Kurdistan, et le Parti Démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) de Jalal Talabani, le président iraquien.

Mais en filigrane apparaît l'ambition des Kurdes de doubler la surface de leur territoire. Selon une carte qui figure sur le site Internet du gouvernement autonome, l'ambition des Kurdes est de doubler la surface de leur territoire pour le passer de 40 000 à 78 000 km², ce qui représenterait 18 % de l'Iraq. Les Kurdes revendiquent un territoire s'étendant de la frontière turque au nord jusqu'à la lisière de Kout, à 160 km au sud-est de Bagdad, mais aussi la majorité des gouvernorats de Diyala et de Ninive jusqu'à Mossoul, une partie de la province de Salaheddine et surtout la province pétrolière de Kirkouk.

Cette dernière est la principale pomme de discorde. Riche ville pétrolière au nord de Bagdad, les Kurdes veulent la contrôler au dam des Arabes et des Turcomans. Ce contentieux est à l'origine du report de

la tenue des élections provinciales qui étaient prévues le 1er octobre et qui sont considérées comme cruciales pour le processus de réconciliation entre communautés iraqiennes. Principaux partenaires du gouvernement iraquien dominé par les chiïtes, les Kurdes s'opposent à l'article 24 du projet de loi électorale qui propose une répartition à part égale du pouvoir au Conseil provincial de Kirkouk entre les trois communautés arabe, kurde et turcomane. Adopté par le gouvernement en avril, le projet de loi avait été approuvé, après de longues discussions, le 22 juillet par le Parlement dans un contexte tendu : seuls 140 des 275 députés étaient présents et de nombreux parlementaires avaient dénoncé des irrégularités dans la procédure du vote, boycotté par les 54 députés kurdes et d'autres. En réaction, le Conseil présidentiel, composé du chef de l'Etat Jalal Talabani et de ses deux adjoints, avait décidé d'y opposer son veto. Et le Parlement n'était pas parvenu à un accord sur une proposition de l'Onu suggérant le report d'un an du scrutin à Kirkouk, afin de permettre la tenue des élections provinciales dans le reste de l'Iraq.

Hicham Mourad

Turquie : 9 policiers blessés dans l'explosion d'une voiture

AFP

ANKARA, 19 août 2008 (AFP)

NEUF policiers ont été blessés dans l'explosion d'une voiture, vraisemblablement déclenchée par un kamikaze mardi près de Mersin, dans le sud de la Turquie, a-t-on appris auprès des autorités.

«Nous envisageons la possibilité d'un attentat suicide», a déclaré à l'agence de presse Anatolie le gouverneur de Mersin, Huseyin Aksoy.

Selon lui, une personne se trouvait dans le véhicule qui a explosé alors que les policiers tentaient de l'arrêter dans la banlieue de la ville, blessant neuf policiers, dont deux grièvement.

La voiture était poursuivie par les forces de l'ordre, prévenues qu'un attentat-suicide se préparait dans la ville, selon Anatolie. Le véhicule ne s'est pas arrêté malgré les avertissements répétés de la police et a explosé sur une route à l'extérieur de la ville, a ajouté l'agence.

La chaîne de télévision CNN Turquie avait auparavant annoncé que deux

personnes se trouvaient à bord du véhicule.

Mersin est une des principaux ports des côtes méditerranéennes de la Turquie. La ville, dont une part importante de la population est originaire du sud-est du pays majoritairement kurde, a été le théâtre de violentes manifestations pro-kurdes dans le passé.

Le 28 juillet, des attentats survenus dans un quartier populaire d'Istanbul avaient fait 17 morts, dont 5 enfants, et plus de 150 blessés. Les autorités turques ont imputé la responsabilité de l'attentat, qui n'a pas été revendiqué, aux séparatistes kurdes. Des groupes islamistes et d'extrême gauche sont également actifs à Istanbul.

En novembre 2003, les explosions de quatre camions piégés à Istanbul avaient tué quelque 60 personnes et causé d'importants dégâts. Les attaques avaient été imputées à une cellule turque du réseau d'Al-Qaëda.

AFP

DEUX REBELLES KURDES TUÉS LORS DE COMBATS AVEC L'ARMÉE TURQUE

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 22 août 2008 (AFP) –

DEUX REBELLES kurdes ont été tués lors de combats avec l'armée turque dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a-t-on appris de source administrative locale.

Les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont été abattus jeudi lors d'un accrochage dans la province de Hakkari, aux confins de l'Irak et de l'Irak, ont affirmé dans un communiqué les services du gouverneur de Hakkari,

précisant que les opérations de l'armée se poursuivaient.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait plus de 37.000 morts.



Voices of Iraq
August 15, 2008

Kurdish PM confer ways to resolve Faili Kurds problem with Immigrants Minister-Statement

ARBIL, Aug.15 (VOI) - Iraq's Kurdistan Prime Minister Negervan Barazani confer the ways to resolve problems of displaced Faili Kurds with Minister of Immigrants. "Kurdistan's PM Barazani conferred the problem of the displaced and Faili Kurds with Minister of Immigrants Abdel Samad Rahman Sultan," said regional PM office statement received by Al-Iraq-Voices of Iraq (VOI). The announcement noted "regional PM Barazani expressed readiness to open a department in the region to deal with the displaced's problems and to set a mechanism for their return through the federal Iraqi ministry of Immigrants. The Kurdish official highlighted the important of "speeding up measures to return of the Faili Kurds' properties confiscated by the former regime "of

Saddam Hussein". Faili Kurds a Kurdish group living in Baghdad and Diyalah province of Iraq around towns of Khanqeen and Mandali. They speak a Faili dialect, which is different from main Kurdish dialects Sorani and Badani. Unlike the majority of Kurds in northern provinces, Faili Kurds are Shiite, which aggravated their discrimination under the former regime of Saddam Hussein who displaced thousands of them to Iran. They are considered as stateless, with both Iran and Iraq claiming they are citizens of the other country. In the 1970s, Iraq expelled around 40,000 Shia Faili Kurds, alleging that they were Iranian nationals.



Kurdish troops to withdraw from restive Iraq province

ARBIL, Iraq, Aug 16, 2008 (Reuters) -

IRAQ'S KURDISH autonomous region has agreed to withdraw troops from a neighbouring Iraqi province and hand over security in the area to forces of the central government, a Kurdish official said. Kurdish officials have struck an agreement with the central government in Baghdad to withdraw the 4,000 Kurdish troops, known as Peshmerga, from restive Diyala province over the next 10 days, said Jaffar Mustafa, Kurdistan's Peshmerga minister.

The Peshmerga, who evolved from guerrilla cadres fighting against Saddam Hussein into the official security force of the Kurdish autonomous region, have been patrolling ethnically Kurdish parts of Diyala for more than a year.

Diyala remains one of the bloodiest areas of Iraq at a time when overall violence in the country has declined sharply.

The province, with a religious mix of Sunni and Shiite Muslims and an ethnic mix of Arabs and Kurds, has been the scene of a crackdown by U.S. and Iraqi government forces over the past few weeks, searching homes and arresting suspected militants.

Parts of Diyala are seen as one of the few remaining strongholds for Sunni Arab al Qaeda militants.

After the security operation ends and the Kurdish troops are withdrawn from Diyala, they will be folded into regular Iraqi forces under the authority of the defence ministry, Mustafa told Reuters late on Friday in the Kurdish capital Arbil.

Defence Ministry spokesman Mohammed al-Askari confirmed the Peshmerga would be integrated into a Defence Ministry division and based in Kurdistan from Aug. 25.

"The 34th Peshmerga Brigade will leave Diyala to join the 15th mountain division within Kurdistan," Askari said.

Tensions between Kurds and other Iraqi groups have intensified in recent weeks over the northern oil-rich city of Kirkuk, which Kurds want to make part of Kurdistan.

Parliament adjourned for a summer break earlier this month without passing a long-awaited provincial elections law because politicians could not agree on provisions that will shape the future of Kirkuk, home to a mix of Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs. (Reporting by Shamal Aqrabi in Arbil, and Waleed Ibrahim and Wisam Mohammed in Baghdad; Writing by Missy Ryan)



August 16 2008

US must share power in new world order, says Turkey's controversial president

In his first interview with a foreign newspaper since becoming head of state, Abdullah Gül tells Stephen Kinzer of his vision for his country as a bridge between nations

Stephen Kinzer

DAYS after Russia scored a stunning geopolitical victory in the Caucasus, President Abdullah Gül of Turkey said he saw a new multipolar world emerging from the wreckage of war.

The conflict in Georgia, Gül asserted, showed that the United States could no longer shape global politics on its own, and should begin sharing power with other countries.

"I don't think you can control all the world from one centre," Gül told the Guardian. "There are big nations. There are huge populations. There is unbelievable economic development in some parts of the world. So what we have to do is, instead of unilateral actions, act all together, make common decisions and have consultations with the world. A new world order, if I can say it, should emerge."

Gül, relaxing in a hotel suite with a spectacular view of the glistening Bosphorus, spoke just hours before meeting with the visiting president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

He rejected the idea, promoted by the United States and Israel, that the best way to

deal with Iran was to isolate, sanction and punish it. "There are so many important issues, like the nuclear issue, Iraq, the Caucasus, Afghanistan," he said. "Iran is definitely having some influence of these issues, so we are talking."

Gül said Iran had a right to develop nuclear energy but not nuclear weapons. "We don't want to see weapons of mass destruction in this region," he said. "If it's in our neighbourhood, we definitely don't want to see it." Asked about the possibility of an American attack on Iran, Gül replied: "I don't want to think about that. Everybody should take a lesson from what happened in Iraq," he said. "Diplomatic solutions are always better than hard solutions."

Few countries in the world have changed as dramatically as Turkey over the last decade, and Gül is among the most intriguing new political leaders to emerge here during that period.

When first elected, he seemed to be part of a new Islamic wave that was challenging the entrenched secular elite. He is a practicing Muslim who married his wife when she was 15; she



wears the headscarf that some secular Turks consider a badge of reactionary Islam. Yet he and his closest political ally, the prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, have led a political revolution that has brought Turkey closer to democracy than any regime in the modern state's 85-year history.

Gül said Turkey could play a decisive role in bridging the chasm that separates the west from more turbulent regions. His country's effort to join the European Union, he said, was its "main agenda".

"I wish to see Turkey as an island where the European standard of democracy is being fulfilled and the free market economy is functioning very well," he said. "This will be a real gift to the region, to the world, for peace. And this Turkey will be a source of inspiration for so many."

"As we are transforming ourselves in that direction, we will not forget our natural links and relationships and advantages with other countries - Muslim countries, central Asian countries, Caucasus countries, Middle Eastern and other countries," he added, speaking in fluent English.

"Turkey is having a positive impact on them, spreading the values of democracy, freedom, rule of law. Also, the economic changes here ... are admired. Maybe that is the indirect influence of this country."

For much of this year, political life in Turkey was frozen as the constitutional court considered a prosecutor's charge that the ruling Justice and Development party should be banned because it was a "focus of anti-secular activity". Last month the court rejected that argument.

Now, Gül said, Turkey's priority must be to resume its stalled progress towards political

reform. "In the last two years, we spent our energy on domestic issues, and the reforms slowed down," he said. "Now, after the court case, there is a new era. This is a big opportunity for Turkey. Everybody realises that reforms are necessary."

Some European leaders, Gül said, failed to recognise the contribution that Turkey was making to stability in the world's most volatile region.

"This is a big asset for Europe," he said. "Turkey has great capacity to influence the region, indirectly, very peacefully, being an inspiration for changes. Turkey has been playing this role already. This has not been appreciated enough."

Opposition to Turkish membership in the EU was for years based on the country's failure to meet democratic standards. More recently, politicians in some European countries have sought votes by bashing Turkey and pledging to keep it out of the EU regardless of its progress toward democracy. These campaigns, Gül said, harmed Europe's long-term interests.

"Europe should realise that Turkey can do more for the stability and security of the region," he said. "Start with the Caucasus; last month, the problem was not serious, but suddenly we found ourselves in a war situation."

"Europe should encourage Turkey, and not create some artificial problems during the nego-

tiation process with us. Some member countries or some politicians should not mix domestic issues and strategic issues. Domestic issues are conjunctural; today it's there and tomorrow it's not. But the strategic issues are always there, and we cannot sacrifice strategic issues for domestic issues. Unfortunately, nowadays we see this kind of shortsighted policies in some countries."

Gül repeatedly returned to the importance of Turkey's democratisation process. He said it would ultimately resolve all of the country's domestic problems, including the long-festering conflict with Kurdish nationalists in south-eastern provinces. "Some call it terror, some call it the south-east problem, some call it the Kurdish problem - whatever you call it, we will find a solution," he said.

"There are other problems - secularism and anti-secularism - those things will also find solutions in this climate. That is why I focus on the reform process. The problem was this: the lack of democracy, the standard of democracy. That was creating problems, not only in the south-east but in other issues. That is when we upgrade the standards, these problems will find solutions."

With that, Gül was off to meet Ahmadinejad. "Our values are different," he said with a smile, "but having a good relationship helps the stability of the region."

Guardian

August 16 2008

Iran president holds Turkey talks

Iran's leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has held talks with Turkish President Abdullah Gul during his first official trip to Turkey since taking office.

THE trip is seen as a sign of closer ties between the two countries, whose relations have improved since Turkey's governing AK party took power in 2002.

But there has been no word on an expected deal to supply more Iranian gas to Turkey - a Nato and US ally.

Mr Ahmadinejad will also meet PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan during his two-day trip.

The visit is also his first bilateral visit as president to a Nato member country.

It comes amid continuing international tension over Iran's nuclear programme. Turkey appears keen to act as a go-between between Iran and the West over the issue, correspondents say.

The energy deal might not now be signed during Mr Ahmadinejad's visit following new demands from the Iranian side, a source from the Turkish prime minister's office told Reuters news agency.

The US state department had warned Ankara not to strike a deal with Iran that would undermine diplomatic efforts to halt Tehran's nuclear programme, the UK's Financial Times newspaper reports.

After Russia, Iran is said to be the biggest provider of gas to Turkey.

The visit had already provoked controversy in the press over the usual protocol of foreign leaders visiting the mausoleum of the founder of the Turkish republic, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, says the BBC's Pam O'Toole.

Turkish media have speculated Mr Ahmadinejad is holding talks in Istanbul rather than Ankara to sidestep paying respects to Ataturk, a champion of secularism.

Turkish officials say the talks are expected to focus on bilateral ties, regional and international issues.

Troubled past

Relations between Turkey and Iran have not always been entirely cordial, our correspondent adds.

Although Turkey is predominantly Muslim, in the past, the staunchly secular Turkish establishment has suspected Iran of trying to export its Islamic revolution to neighbouring countries.

And Ankara is a close ally of Tehran's arch enemies, the US and Israel; Israeli officials have made clear their unhappiness with the Iranian president's visit.

But in recent years relations between Tehran and Ankara have improved dramatically.

They have considerable trade ties and Ankara's begun purchasing Iranian gas via a pipe-



line between the two countries, despite Washington's disapproval.

The two countries are also likely to discuss their growing co-operation in the fight against Turkey's Kurdish militant group, the PKK, and its sister organisation, PJAK, which launches attacks against Iran.

And Turkey, which supports Iran's right to nuclear power for peaceful purposes, is likely to renew its offer to facilitate negotiations between Iran and six world powers over Tehran's controversial nuclear programme.

REUTERS

Turkish car bomb attack kills one, injures nine

August 19, 2008 By Daren Butler ISTANBUL (Reuters)

- A SUSPECTED suicide bomber detonated explosives in his car in Turkey's southern Mersin province on Tuesday, killing himself and injuring nine police officers, the local governor said. Television pictures showed firemen extinguishing the smoking remains of the vehicle on a motorway, some 10 km from the major port city of Mersin on Turkey's Mediterranean coast.

The assailant detonated the bomb after police officers halted his vehicle near a traffic police checkpoint, Mersin Governor Huseyin Aksoy told state-run Anatolian news agency.

"We are working on the probability that it was a suicide bomber. Investigations on the matter are continuing," he said.

The white car destroyed in the blast had a number plate from the southeastern city of Sanliurfa and was heading towards Mersin city, the governor said.

He said one of the police officers was badly hurt.

Police in the city were not available for comment.

The identity of the assailant was not known. Islamist militants, Kurdish and leftist guerrillas have all carried out bomb attacks in Turkey in the past.

Some 40,000 people have been killed in the Kurdistan Workers Party's (PKK) conflict with the Turkish state since it broke out in 1984.

Last month, 17 people were killed in a double bombing in Turkey's largest city, Istanbul, which officials have blamed on PKK guerrillas. They were the most lethal such attacks in Turkey since 2003 when Islamist al Qaeda militants carried out a series of bombings in Istanbul, killing more than 60 people.

Also last month, three Turkish policemen and three gunmen were killed in an attack on the United States consulate in Istanbul.

KURDISHGL BE

21 August 2008

The PKK and Kirkuk

International world politics are in deep-crisis mode, with the possibility of the advent of a new Cold War era, mainly between Western bloc countries and Russia/China.

The Globe

THE REGIONS of the Middle East, East Europe, and Caucasia are focal points for international contention. The war in Iraq, the conflict between Georgia and Russia, the row over Iran's nuclear program, and the missile defense system deal signed this week between the U.S. and Poland despite Russia's serious objections indicate the dangerous path of world politics.

Kurdistan as a geostrategic region in the Middle East and its approximate closeness to the Caucasus (through north Kurdistan/Turkey Kurdistan) without doubt makes it a very strategic region, thus attracting the attention of international powers.

The Kurdish nationalist movement in general has been caught unprepared and disoriented in this sensitive period when the

great powers are in a deep struggle for restructuring world politics and the economy. South Kurdistan's political actors' relevant organization and united stance thankfully elevated the political status of southern Kurds (Iraqi Kurds) to a recognizable position. The divided, disoriented, and confused state of affairs of Kurdish political movements in other parts, however, not only reduces the chance and opportunities for the realization of Kurdish national rights, but at the same time presents a serious menace on further political gains of southern Kurdistan (Iraqi Kurdistan), particularly on the issue of Kirkuk. In this confused state of affairs, the PKK is the major reason and it must be dealt with swiftly.

The Ergenekon case in Turkey not only exposed the dark side of the Turkish state's illegal acts, but it also revealed the PKK's relation

with Ergenekon. The Istanbul public prosecutor's accusation about Ergenekon throws serious doubt on the PKK's real intentions and its dirty relations with it. Ergenekon is not what most observers claim-a gang supported by some high-ranking military officials. It is a legacy of Teskilati Mahsusa, a clandestine organization set up by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which played a major role in the Armenian Genocide in 1915 and the formation and development of the Kemalist movement following World War I.

The PKK is a Trojan horse in Turkey, used initially to fragment the Kurdish national movement during the 1980s and later to destabilize Iraqi Kurdistan from the 1990s to the present. The incorporation of Kirkuk into Kurdistan Region will be a historical turning point for a century-long Kurdish

national movement, and the reality is that, among all others, it is Turkey that exerts all its pressure and threats not to allow this to happen. The only serious weapon that Turkey has to destabilize southern Kurdistan is the PKK card and it plays it well. Military and political destabilization of Kurdistan Region of Iraq and constant threat of a possible Turkish invasion is a key stumbling block in the way of southern Kurds to press further on Kirkuk.

It is crucial to notice that without a resolution to the PKK problem, the incorporation of Kirkuk to Kurdistan Region will barely be possible. Southern Kurdish political actors' seriousness in the Kirkuk issue must be reflected on the issue of the PKK. This card must be taken out of the hands of Turkey without further delay.

United Press International

Put Kirkuk to a vote, analysts say

August 20, 2008 Kirkuk, Iraq's border with Kurdistan region (UPI)

THE STATUS of the ethnically diverse city of Kirkuk in northern Iraq may be best settled by a public vote on the matter, analysts said.

The Iraqi Constitution calls for a reversal of the demographic policies of Saddam Hussein, who forcibly displaced the Kurdish population from the oil-rich region. Skirmishes in the Kurdish areas of Iraq erupted following a failed referendum on the provincial elections law that included a provision on Kirkuk.

Iraqi lawmakers were scheduled to decide the status of the city in December, but the provision stalled when ethnic Arabs and Turkomen accused their Kurdish counterparts of influencing regional demographics in their favor.

Solutions to the matter vary, with some residents calling for unification with greater Iraq and some ethnic communities calling for the annexation of Kirkuk by the Kurdistan Regional Government, the U.N. Integrated Regional Information Networks said Tuesday.

But many scholars and Iraqi lawmakers say the matter is best left for the people of Kirkuk to decide in a public referendum.

"I do believe that the best solution for Kirkuk is that it be run as a separate

region -- after resolving all pending issues between its segments, conducting a census and then letting its population determine its fate through a referendum, instead of one party imposing a solution," said Amer Hassan al-Fayadh with Baghdad University.

Kirkuk city is historically a Kurdish city and it lies just south border of the Kurdistan autonomous region, the population is a mix of majority Kurds and minority of Arabs, Christians and Turkmen. lies 250 km northeast of Baghdad. Kurds have a strong cultural and emotional attachment to Kirkuk, which they call "the Kurdish Jerusalem."

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is related to the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk city and other disputed areas.

The article also calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province.

The former regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had forced over 250,000 Kurdish residents to give up their homes to Arabs in the 1970s, to "Arabize" the city and the region's oil industry.

Kurdish Peshmerga forces praised for role in Diyala

United Press International

August 20, 2008 DIYALA, Iraq.—(UPI)

KURDISH officials praised the role of the Peshmerga forces in restive Diyala province as Iraqi troops arrested a Sunni provincial council leader there.

The 34th Brigade of the Kurdish Peshmerga handed over security responsibility to Iraqi troops Monday, earning praise from Kurdish lawmakers.

A delegation of Kurdish officials met with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to discuss the role of the Peshmerga in the predominately Kurdish areas of northern Diyala province.

The Peshmerga brigade, comprising 4,000 troops, was located in Diyala to protect the Kurdish civilians in the district.

The Kurdish officials praised the 34th Brigade for securing the cities of Jalawlah, www.ekurd.net Qarah Tappah and other northern areas while ensuring

peace among the regional Kurdish, Arab and Turkomen communities, the media arm of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, PUKmedia, said Tuesday.

The departure of Kurdish forces comes as Iraqi troops Tuesday stormed the offices of Hussein al-Zubaidi, the head of security in the Diyala provincial council.

Unnamed sources for the Kuwait News Agency said Iraqi forces raided the offices early Tuesday morning, killing Zubaidi's secretary and wounding four others.

Zubaidi is a member of the Sunni Islamic Party of Iraqi Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, which has voiced its support for a Kurdish federal region in Iraq.

Iraqi authorities ordered a probe of the raid



August 21, 2008

Iraq: Kirkuk's 'Asayish' Force Commander Denies Force Involved in Arrests

By **Hewa Aziz** Kirkuk, **Asharq Al-Awsat**

BRIGADIER General Halkut Abdullah, commander of the Kurdish security force "Asayish" [Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's security forces] in the city of Kirkuk, has stressed the significance of the role his force and its members "are playing in consolidating security and stability and resisting the armed groups seeking to undermine stability in the city."

However, in an interview with Asharq Al-Awsat the Commander stated that there are parties, "trying to damage the honesty and neutrality of the Asayish force, which is keen to maintain security with the utmost professionalism and in accordance with the law, by making false accusations against it and casting doubt on its honesty."

"The fabricated accusations being deliberately spread here and there about the performance of the Asayish force, its loyalty, and its role in Kirkuk are baseless and everyone can ascertain this security organ's honesty and neutrality by asking the American forces deployed in Kirkuk and also the police commander." Brig. Gen. Abdullah told Asharq Al-Awsat.

"The Asayish force's tasks are confined only to the collection of intelligence information about the

armed groups practicing terrorism in the city and its suburbs and handing over this information to the parties concerned with the arrest of the armed terrorist elements." He added.

Regarding the Asayish force's role in arresting suspects, especially at night, and bringing them to Al-Sulaymaniya for questioning, Brig. Gen. Abdullah said the "Asayish force is not involved in the arrests and this force's units did not and will not arrest anyone in Kirkuk because this is not their task." He continued that "Anyone who makes these fabricated and baseless accusations against the Asayish force must present evidence of what he says because making false accusations is easy but proving them is the criteria. We as the Asayish force in Kirkuk challenge any person making these accusations against us to come forward even with a single piece of evidence of what he is claiming or bring the name of any person arrested by the Asayish force."

Irfan Karkukli, leader of the Iraqi Turkoman People's Party and vice chairman of the security committee in Kirkuk Governorate, backed these remarks and extolled the "Asayish" force's role in controlling security and consolidating stability in the city and its suburbs.

According to Karkukli, "The city's

security committee chaired by the governor of Kirkuk includes in its membership representatives of all the races and acts in cooperation and coordination with all the security organs in the governorate in addition to the Iraqi army's two brigades which are deployed in the city and its outskirts." He told Asharq Al-Awsat that the security committee, which is the highest security authority in the governorate, "supervises the performance of the city's security organs in addition to organizing and following up the security affairs. In other words, no security organ can or has the authority to carry out any security task without the higher security committee's knowledge and supervision. Therefore the accusations against the security organs and reports about their performance are absolutely baseless." Karkukli went on to say, "The security situation in Kirkuk is at present stable in a very good way and the credit for this goes to all the security organs that have joined forces, including the Asayish force which is playing an important role in controlling security."

Regarding the arrests being carried out in Kirkuk, he said "the arrest orders or warrants are issued by the judiciary in accordance with the law and the security organs, which are the

executive parties, implement the judicial orders. There were absolutely no raids on citizens' houses except with an official order from the judge and in accordance with the law. The security committee watches very closely the security situations and the security organs' performance in the city and it has not received any complaints from the citizens so far."

The Turkoman leader referred to the possibility of members of the armed terrorist groups pretending to be security men or from the security committee to arrest certain persons at random, in a barbaric way, and for certain purposes but this absolutely does not mean that the real policemen are the ones carrying out these random arrests. He said the security committee stays up all night until the morning looking after the city's security and its citizens' safety and also watches the security organs' performance and prevents any violation of the law. Those arrested under official judicial warrants are referred to the judiciary and then those who have legal sentences issued against them are moved to the central reform and discipline jail in accordance with the law.

U.S. says Iraq mustn't let Kirkuk feud sink polls

REUTERS

August 21, 2008 - Erbil-Hewler, - Kurdistan region "Iraq",

— IRAQI politicians must not let a bitter feud over the oil-rich city of Kirkuk stand in the way of provincial elections expected to redraw the country's political map, the U.S. ambassador in Baghdad said on Wednesday.

"It's important that the elections law focus on elections, not on attempting to use this legislation to solve a difficult and much more complicated problem,"

Ryan Crocker, Washington's ambassador to Iraq, told Reuters in Iraqi Kurdistan's capital, Erbil.

Earlier this month, Iraq's parliament failed to pass a draft law needed to hold the provincial polls after politicians reached deadlock over how the vote might alter the balance of power in the ethnically mixed northern city.

Washington had been urging Iraqi politicians to shelve the feud over Kirkuk,

which minority Kurds want to fold into their autonomous northern region over the fierce objections of Kirkuk's Turkmen and Arab residents.

The fate of Kirkuk threatens to force a serious delay in the long-awaited polls, originally scheduled for October 1, and poses a major political test for Iraq's fledgling democracy.

Both the United States and the United Nations hope the elections will foster reconciliation after five years of bloodshed and give a greater voice to the Sunni and Shi'ite factions that stayed away from previous polls.

An earlier version of the law was vetoed by President Jalal Talabani, himself a Kurd, and sent back to parliament.

Crocker, speaking at an economic forum in Erbil, told officials from different ethnic and political blocs that they must do more to bridge partisan and sectarian divisions.

"You have faced and suffered from common enemies," Crocker said, such as former leader Saddam Hussein and Sunni al Qaeda militants who have targeted Iraqis of all stripes.

"It is very important to remember what brings you together, not only the differences," he said.

He said a plan brokered by the United Nations, which would have allowed the local polls to go ahead across Iraq, except in Kirkuk, whose fate would be dealt with in a separate law later on, "seems to be the way to proceed".

But so far, the plan has yet to produce any definitive consensus surrounding the Kirkuk tinderbox.

SCANT SIGNS OF PROGRESS

Deputy Prime Minister Rafie al-Esawi, from the Sunni Accordance Front, told reporters after the conference that politicians were still seeking a solution to

the impasse.

Some fear tensions will fester, triggering renewed strife just as violence in Iraq falls to levels not seen since 2004.

The Kirkuk issue has prompted protests, including one in which more than 20 people were killed in a suicide attack.

In Baghdad, U.N. officials on Wednesday unveiled a new plan for resolving territorial disputes in Iraq, proposing for Kirkuk a broad political deal backed by all sides, which would be put to a "confirmatory referendum".

Kirkuk Governor Abdul Rahman Mustafa, a Kurd, downplayed tensions among the city's diverse population and rejected the idea that the elections impasse could ignite new violence.

"No, no," he told Reuters. "We are like brothers with each other."

Kirkuk city is historically a Kurdish city and it lies just south border of the Kurdistan autonomous region, the population is a mix of majority Kurds and minority of Arabs, Christians and Turkmen. lies 250 km northeast of Baghdad. Kurds have a strong cultural and emotional attachment to Kirkuk, which they call "the Kurdish Jerusalem."

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is related to the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk city and other disputed areas.

The article also calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province.

The former regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had forced over 250,000 Kurdish residents to give up their homes to Arabs in the 1970s, to "Arabize" the city and the region's oil industry.



ANALYSIS - Weakened PKK steps up bombings in show of defiance

ISTANBUL, Aug 21, 2008 (Reuters) - By Daren Butler

WEAKENED by Turkish warplane strikes in northern Iraq, separatist Kurdish guerrillas are stepping up bomb attacks in Turkey's cities in an attempt to show they are still a force to be reckoned with.

Analysts said two car bomb attacks in the Turkish coastal cities of Mersin and Izmir in the last three days bore the hallmarks of bombings earlier this year which officials have blamed on the separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

But the wave of violence represents a campaign by the group to grab headlines rather than a serious security threat to Turkey, a NATO-member country which aspires to join the European Union, they said.

"The PKK has lost many of its bases in Iraq, and in the countryside of south-east Turkey they can't move so easily. Hence to protect their existence they are turning their attention more to urban attacks," said Ercan Citlioglu, who heads the Strategic Research Centre at Istanbul's Bahcesehir University.

The attacks, including one on Thursday which wounded eight police officers and three soldiers when a car bomb ripped through a minibus in the western city of Izmir, are likely to reinforce the government's determination to destroy the group's military capability in northern Iraq.

The country's powerful armed forces have conducted regular air strikes on rebel targets in the mountains of northern Iraq since launching a major incursion across the border in February, dealing a severe blow to the rebels.

President Abdullah Gul on Thursday was to chair a bi-monthly National Security Council meeting, and violence blamed on the PKK was expected to be high on the agenda.

Nobody has claimed responsibility for the attacks. One senior military source said the group was employing leftist militants in its operations, while media cited police intelligence warning of further PKK car bomb attacks.

SCHOOL BLAST

The PKK's use of such bombs was highlighted in January when six people were killed in a blast outside a school in Diyarbakir, the largest city in mainly Kurdish southeast Turkey.

Experts believe the bombers are being trained in Iraq, the scene of extensive insurgent violence.

"I think these attacks are inspired by events in Iraq and I think they were trained there," Citlioglu said.

As part of a campaign to erode support for the rebels, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan has unveiled plans to increase investment in the southeast and in Kurdish-language broadcasting.

The explosives used in Tuesday's attack in Mersin, carried out by a suspected

suicide bomber who killed himself and wounded nine police officers, were the same as those used in a double bombing in Istanbul last month, media reports said.

Eight people are being held in connection with that attack, which the government says was the work of the PKK.

"The PKK is seeking to win back the old authority which it has lost in the region and recover with headline-grabbing attacks," said Samil Tayyar, a columnist with Star newspaper.

According to a story on the website of Zaman newspaper, police intelligence issued an internal report last week warning of four potential PKK car bombs targeting cities across Turkey.

ELECTION RISK

The PKK launched its armed insurgency in 1984 with the aim of creating a Kurdish state in southeast Turkey. Around 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict.

Some 3,500 PKK fighters are believed to be based in northern Iraq, from where they launch attacks mainly on security force targets in Turkey, where another 1,200-1,600 rebels are based.

Tayyar said the group may try to step up its attacks ahead of local Turkish elections scheduled for March 2009.

"It seems there is a high probability that the PKK, which is being drawn into a whirlwind of inner conflict and which is losing underlying support, will try and increase the dose of bloody attacks in the run-up to local elections," he said.

In the last parliamentary election the ruling AK Party encroached strongly upon traditional support in the southeast for the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party, which faces possible closure in a court case on charges of PKK links.

A senior military source told Reuters the PKK was resorting to using leftist militants to carry out attacks which in the past were executed by the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks, believed to be a PKK splinter group.

"(Leftist) group members are being trained in the PKK's camps in northern Iraq to try and carry out attacks in big Turkish cities," the source said. "This shows that the PKK is having trouble finding people (to carry out attacks)."

It was also focusing more on daytime attacks on security forces in southeast Turkey because of the PKK's vulnerability faced with the night-vision cameras used by the military.

"They are not entering into clashes in their attacks on police and military installations but are trying to strike from a distance. These are low-risk attacks," Citlioglu said.

Kurds consolidating control over Kirkuk

Rival groups charge a campaign of fear

By Richard A. Oppel Jr.

KIRKUK, Iraq: The phone rang, and it was answered by a Kurdish security commander, Hallo Najat, sitting in his office in this deeply divided city. On the line, he said, was a United Nations official wanting to know: Was it true that the Kurdish militia, the pesh merga, had left their bases in northern Iraq and were occupying Kirkuk?

No, Najat told the caller. But, hanging up, he wryly revealed the deeper truth about Kirkuk, combustible for its mix of ethnicities floating together on a sea of oil: The Kurds already control it.

"It's true," Najat said. "What is the need for the troops?"

Of all the political problems facing Iraq today, perhaps none is so intractable as the fate of Kirkuk, a city of 900,000 that Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen all claim as their own. The explosive quarrel over the city is one major barrier to creating stable political structures in the rest of Iraq.

Beyond that, it demonstrates that despite a recent decline in violence, Iraq's unsettled ethnic and regional discord could still upend directives emanating from Baghdad and destabilize large swaths of the country — or even trigger civil war.

Earlier this month, legislation in the national Parliament to set the groundwork for crucial provincial elections

collapsed in a bitter dispute over Kirkuk, as Arabs and Turkmen demanded that the Kurds be forced to cede some of their power here. But with the Kurds having already consolidated their authority in Kirkuk, there seemed little chance — short of a military intervention — of that happening.

Kurdish authority is visible everywhere in the city. In addition to the provincial government and command of the police, the Kurds control the Asaish, the feared undercover security service that works with the American military and, according to Asaish commanders, U.S. intelligence agencies.

Asaish officers are often the first to the scene of an attack and, other Kurdish officials concede, seem always to have the best intelligence. The leaders of the Asaish report only to the dominant Kurdish political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

"He's my boss," said Najat, commander of the KDP Asaish force in Kirkuk, glancing at a picture of Masrur Barzani, head of intelligence for the KDP and the son of the party's leader, Massoud Barzani.

The Kurds' control over the security forces — and their ability to use that for political purposes — was evident three weeks ago, rival groups say, after a suicide bomber attacked Kurdish demonstrators, igniting a riot that left dozens

dead and hundreds wounded.

After the attack, a mob of Kurds set upon a Turkmen political headquarters, eventually firebombing the building. At some point, the Turkmen guards inside fired at the crowd. All in all, American officials believe, far more people were killed and wounded in the riot than in the bombing that touched it off.

Yet, while the police quickly arrested 13 Turkmen at the headquarters, charging them with firing on the crowd, they did not apprehend any of the Kurds who burned the building. One of the Turkmen guards wounded in the fighting was quickly interrogated at the hospital by the Asaish and the police. A video, in which the guard said he was ordered to fire on the crowd, soon appeared on Kurdish television.

Kurdish police commanders promise an impartial investigation of the bombing and its aftermath, overseen by officers from all of the city's ethnic groups. But the senior Turkmen on the force, Major General Turhan Abdul-Rahman Youssef, fears a whitewash.

"I don't think we will have a result," he said, describing the broadcast of the wounded Turkmen guard as "illegal."

The Kurds' accumulation of power has stoked tensions with Arabs and Turkmen. "There is much fear," said Mohammed Khalil, head of the Arab bloc on the provincial council. "The Asaish are saying they will annex Kirkuk by force, and that is terrifying people." Arabs also say the Asaish conduct kidnappings, a charge Asaish officers deny.

But rival ethnic leaders also warn that the Kurds' control of the security forces will not prevent chaos in the event of an outbreak of ethnic fighting. The city's Arabs, said Khalil, "will not stay handcuffed by Kurdish actions."

Under Saddam Hussein, tens of thousands of Kurdish families were driven out of Kirkuk, replaced by Arabs as part of his drive to obtain a firmer political grip on the enormous oil reserves here. But after the 2003 invasion, Kurdish mi-



Benjamin Lowy/VII Network for The New York Times

Destroyed Turkmen political offices in Kirkuk, Iraq. Rioting broke out after a bombing at a Kurdish protest three weeks ago.

litiamen reversed the process, driving out Arabs and bringing in Kurds. Arabs and Turkmen now make up about 40 percent of Kirkuk's population, according to American military estimates.

The Kurds want to fold Kirkuk into the neighboring Kurdistan region. They also warn that any plan involuntarily stripping them of power will be harshly contested.

"It's fate will be failure," said Nejad Hassan, the senior KDP official in Kirkuk.

That conflict was evident in a dispute played out largely behind the scenes after the suicide bombing: Whether to bring a substantial number of Iraqi troops into the city, in a direct challenge to Kurdish supremacy.

In a series of sweeps conducted with the Americans, the Iraqi Army has helped establish stability this year in other volatile parts of Iraq. But Iraqi troops have largely stayed out of Kirkuk.

After the July 28 attacks, however, Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki ordered in a battalion from a nearby base. The troops took up positions in the city.

Aware that part of the proposal being debated in Baghdad was to send a far larger force from central and southern Iraq to administer security — which would mean a mostly Arab force, loyal to the Baghdad government, set against Kurdish-controlled forces — the Kurds objected strenuously.

Kurds were not the only ones opposing the deployment of a major Arab security force after the July 28 violence. The American military commander here, Colonel David Paschal, feared that if Baghdad sent in additional troops, Kurdish leaders would retaliate by sending in their own militia from northern Iraq, creating a potentially

disastrous confrontation.

"I just saw this continued escalation of force happening," he said. Baghdad is expected to withdraw the troops, according to American commanders.

Paschal blames all the political parties for inflaming tensions to serve their interests. But he said it was difficult to comprehend the level of mistrust.

"Negotiations here are, 'You give me everything I want, and I will walk away happy,'" he said. "It is hard for us to appreciate the level of ethnic hatred."

The severity of those tensions became indisputably clear three weeks ago when thousands of Kurds poured into central Kirkuk to protest the power-sharing proposal in Baghdad.

In a video that American commanders believe to be authentic, a young man who the Americans say appears to be the bomber can be seen standing in a sea of demonstrators. He ritualistically raises his hands, palms up, toward his face, then lowers them to his side. An instant later the explosion engulfs him and everyone around him.

It took only a few moments for the demonstrators to turn their fury on the Turkmen, who they instantly blamed. One mistook a well-known Kurdish journalist, Yayha Barzanji, for a Turkmen correspondent, shouting, "He's working for the Turkmen," Barzanji recalled. A video captured the crowd furiously beating Barzanji, chanting, "Kill him! Kill him!"

Within minutes the mob was in front of the Turkmen party headquarters. While American and Kurdish officials agree that the Turkmen guards fired into the crowd, Paschal — who watched the skirmish unfold in a video feed from an unmanned aerial drone — said the Turkmen did not appear to fire wantonly, and instead gradually escalated until they

were firing directly into a large and growing mob that posed a threat.

All told, at least 28 people died and 213 were wounded in the suicide attack and the ensuing riot, according to the Asaish commander at the main hospital. Kurdish officials have sought to play down the intensity of the fight between the Kurds and the Turkmen, but Paschal said most of the casualties were sustained during the riot.

Despite this outbreak, Paschal said attacks in Kirkuk have dropped by two-thirds since last summer. Kurds attribute some of that improvement to the Asaish.

"They are in direct contact with the people," said Hemin Shafiq, 24, a policeman. "They are more rapid. That is why they are much more active than the police."

Rifat Abdullah, head of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan here, said, "The Asaish have lots of sources, and that's why the Americans depend on them and the police depend on them. That might explain why they have more power."

Turhan admitted the Asaish were, at times, more powerful than the police and said there were thousands of Asaish in the city, though Kurdish officials said no more than 1,000. "They have a major role combating terrorism, but the problem is they are loyal to the political parties," he said.

In an interview, the provincial police chief, Major General Jamal Taher, a Kurd, did not answer a question about whether he had the power to control the activities of the Asaish. But he praised their ability to ferret out information.

"Maybe they have better sources than me," he said.

Iraq Shiites pushing out Sunnis who assist U.S.

Leaders order arrests of former insurgents in security operation

By Richard A. Oppel Jr.

BAGHDAD: The Shiite-dominated government in Iraq is driving out many leaders of Sunni citizen patrols, the groups of former insurgents who

joined the U.S. payroll and have been a major pillar in the decline in violence around the country.

In restive Diyala Province, U.S. and Iraqi military officials say there were orders to arrest hundreds of members of what is known as the Awakening movement as part of large security operations by the Iraqi military. At least five senior members have been arrested there in recent weeks, leaders of the groups say.

West of Baghdad, former insurgent leaders contend that the Iraqi military is going after 650 Awakening members, many of whom have fled the once-violent area they had kept safe. While the crackdown appears to be focused on a relatively small number of leaders whom the Iraqi government considers the most dangerous, there are influential voices to dismantle the U.S.-backed movement entirely.

"The state cannot accept the Awakening," said Jalaladeen Sagheer, a leading Shiite member of Parliament. "Their days are numbered."

The government's rising hostility to-

ward the Awakening councils amounts to a bet that its military, feeling increasingly strong, can provide security in former guerrilla strongholds without the support of these former Sunni fighters who once waged devastating attacks on U.S. and Iraqi targets. It also is occurring as Awakening members are eager to translate their influence and organization on the ground into political power.

But it is causing a rift with the U.S. military, which contends any significant diminution of the Awakening could result in renewed violence, jeopardizing the substantial security gains in the past year. U.S. commanders say that the practice, however unconventional, of paying the guerrillas has saved the lives of hundreds of U.S. soldiers.

"If it is not handled properly, we could have a security issue," said Brigadier General David Perkins, the senior military spokesman in Iraq.

"You don't want to give anybody a reason to turn back to Al Qaeda." Many Sunni insurgents had previously been allied with Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia

and other extremist groups.

Even before the new pressure from the government, many Awakening members were growing frustrated — and at an especially delicate time.

U.S. and Iraqi negotiators have just completed a draft security agreement

that next year, Iraqi officials say, would substantially pull U.S. forces back from cities and towns to be replaced by Iraqi security forces.

Awakening members complain, with rising bitterness, that the government has been slow to make good on its promises to recruit tens of thousands of its members into those security forces. Perkins said only 5,200 members had been recruited in a force of about 100,000.

“Some people from the government encouraged us to fight against Al Qaeda, but it seems that now that Al Qaeda is finished, they don’t want us anymore,” said Abu Marouf, who, according to U.S. officials, was a powerful guerrilla leader in the 1920s Revolutionary Brigade west of Baghdad. “So how can you say I am not betrayed?”

After he said he discovered his name on lists of 650 names that an Iraqi Army brigade was using to arrest Awakening members west of Baghdad, Abu Marouf fled south of Falluja. His men, he said, “sacrificed and fought against Al Qaeda, and now the government wants to catch them and arrest them.”

The government, which is dominated by Shiites, who also make up the majority group in the country, has never been pleased with the continuing U.S. plan to finance and organize Sunni insurgents into militia guards, charging that they will stop fighting only as long as it serves their interests.

“These people are like cancer, and we must remove them,” said Brigadier General Nassir al-Hiti, commander of the Iraqi Army’s 5,000-strong Muthanna Brigade, which patrols west of Baghdad, said of the Awakening leaders on his list for arrest.

The Awakening began in western Anbar Province in 2006 as the violence in Iraq peaked and Sunni tribal leaders began feeling pressure from all sides, and then spread around the country as a means of Sunni self-preservation.

The U.S. military focused its operations on Sunni insurgent groups, cooperating meantime with the Shiite-led government. The bodies of dozens of Sunnis surfaced on streets every morning, the victims of Shiite death squads. And many Sunnis themselves grew disgusted with the large number of civilian casualties in near-daily suicide bombings.

The U.S. military began paying many members of the Awakening movement as the program expanded, even including Shiite members who make up about

one fifth of the program. Now all are paid roughly \$300 a month by the United States to guard checkpoints and buildings and — for those who used to be insurgents — to no longer blow up American convoys and shoot American troops.

Although the “surge” is often described as the turning point that led to lower violence, a number of U.S. officers contend the Awakening, which began well before the surge in 2006 in Anbar Province and continued in Baghdad last year, was the most significant reason for the decline. In some places, American casualties plunged within weeks of the Sunnis joining with U.S. forces.

Colonel Kurt Pinkerton, the former U.S. battalion commander who oversaw the Awakening program established west of Abu Ghraib last year, said it was critical to quelling violence.

“I don’t think that area would have been calmed without those guys,” he said, giving credit to three of the most important members, including Abu Marouf, who are now being tracked down by Hiti.

Hiti says he has orders to arrest Abu Marouf, whose older brother, Colonel Faisal Ismail Hussein, was also a guerrilla leader before he became the Falluja

police chief. Hiti also says he has orders to arrest Abu Azzam and Abu Zachariah, brothers who were leaders of the Islamic Army of Iraq but who were publicly hailed by Pinkerton and other U.S. commanders last year for bringing relative peace to an insurgent stronghold west of Baghdad.

The general says his orders come from the military’s Baghdad Operations Center, which he said is taking orders from the Iraqi judicial authorities. He said that some disenchanting fighters might take up arms again “like a drug addict who quits only to take drugs again.”

But he says that reconciliation is impossible and that he would quit before he ever worked with former insurgents with blood on their hands. “They committed crimes and attacked the Iraqi army and the U.S. Army, and there is no way to rehabilitate them,” he said.

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25 killed in attack on Iraqi police Bomber hits recruits in Diyala Province

By Stephen Farrell

BAGHDAD: A bomb killed at least 25 people in an attack on a group of Iraqi police recruits outside a police station in Diyala Province on Tuesday, Iraqi security officials said.

They said the attack was carried out by a suicide bomber who wore an explosive belt and blew himself up at 10:45 a.m. near a line of volunteers outside a

government building in Jalawla, near Khanuqin. The blast also wounded 45 people.

Some survivors, however, said that they believed the attack had been with a car bomb because they saw a vehicle driven toward the building at high speed just before the explosion.

Jalawla is about 130 kilometers, or 80 miles, north of Baghdad in a region where some districts are in dispute between the Arab-majority Baghdad government, and the Kurdish regional authorities in northern Iraq. The area has been regularly attacked by Sunni insurgent groups exploiting the ethnic and sectarian tensions.

The Iraqi authorities were recruiting in Jalawla in a drive to increase the number of security forces in Diyala, where many police officers and soldiers have been killed in similar attacks.

Security officials in the provincial capital, Baquba, said the bomber had been a young man who wore a long,

white traditional robe and who approached the recruits through a market area and then blew himself up. An Iraqi explosives expert in Diyala said that the bomber had worn 25 kilograms, or 55 pounds, of explosive materials packed with steel ball bearings, which increased the casualties, and that the confusion about a car had been caused by his standing near a car when the bomb went off.

One of the wounded recruits, however, Saeed Ahmed, a 20-year-old Kurd, said that he had been going to check whether his name was on a list of recruits when the bomb went off. “I saw the car coming very quickly,” he said from his hospital bed in Sulaimaniya. “It passed me and then blew up.”

Yasser Nawaf al-Dulaimi, 19, an Arab who was guarding the building, also said he had seen a car “driving toward the base, and before it got to the gate it blew up.”

U.S. agrees to remove troops by end of 2011

Iraqi leaders must approve draft accord

By Stephen Farrell

BAGHDAD: The United States has agreed to remove combat troops from Iraqi cities by next June and from the rest of the country by the end of 2011 if conditions in Iraq remain relatively stable, according to Iraqi and U.S. officials involved in negotiating a security accord governing American forces here.

The withdrawal timetable, which Bush administration officials called "aspirational goals" rather than fixed dates, are contained in the draft of an agreement that still must be approved by Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki and other Iraqi leaders before it goes before the fractious Parliament. It has the support of the Bush administration, American and Iraqi officials said.

American officials stressed repeatedly that meeting the timetables depended on the security situation in Iraq, where sectarian killings and attacks on American troops have declined sharply over the past year from the peak levels of 2006 and 2007. Iraqi officials, who have pushed for an even tighter target date for the United States to end its military operations, could also end up

rejecting the draft agreement.

Even so, the accord indicates that the Bush administration is prepared to commit the United States to ending most combat operations in Iraq in less than a year, a much shorter time frame than seemed possible, politically or militarily, even a few months ago. President George W. Bush and many leading Republicans, including the party's presumptive nominee for president, Senator John McCain, had repeatedly dismissed timetables for pulling out of Iraq as an admission of defeat that would empower America's enemies.

But Iraq's Shiite-dominated government demanded a withdrawal timetable as the price of legalizing the U.S. military presence after the expiration of the United Nations mandate at the end of this year. Security gains in recent months also made the prospect of a winding down of military operations more palatable to the White House and top military officials, said people involved in the talks.

If approved in its current form, the accord seems likely to take center stage in the presidential race. McCain has vowed to stay in Iraq until the war is won but has suggested that he would have the troops out by 2013, two years later than the Bush administration has agreed to withdraw them if conditions in the accord are met.

Senator Barack Obama, the presumptive Democratic nominee for president, has argued that the United States should withdraw its troops 16 months after he took office, or by mid-2010, a faster pace for full withdrawal than envisioned in the draft accord. But the draft's interim goal of ending combat operations in Iraqi cities by next summer is faster than any commitment made by Obama.

The draft appears to contain one significant concession on the Iraqi side. A senior Bush administration official said that Maliki had allowed the timeline for ending combat operations to slip to 2011. Previously, he and other Iraqi officials had said they wanted American

troops out by 2010.

A deal between American and Iraqi officials was given fresh impetus by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's surprise visit to Baghdad on Thursday. Rice met with Maliki and other Iraqi leaders and confirmed that both sides saw the value in "aspirational timetables" to govern the continuing role, mission and size of American forces in Iraq.

She declined to discuss the timing, saying that "would be inappropriate at this time" and that decisions must be based on events, not timetables.

"We have always said that the roles, missions and size of the American forces here, the coalition forces, was based on the conditions on the ground and what is needed," Rice said at a news conference in Baghdad with the Iraqi foreign minister, Hoshiyar Zebari.

Iraqi officials were more forthcoming with their interpretation of the draft agreement. In an interview by telephone in Baghdad, Mohammad Hamoud, the chief Iraqi negotiator, said that the draft contained two dates: June 30, 2009, for the withdrawal of American forces from "cities and villages," and Dec. 31, 2011, for combat troops to leave the country altogether.

Hamoud said the draft specified that meeting the timetable, particularly the goal of full withdrawal by 2011, depended on the security situation. He said that at the end of 2011 the Iraqi government "will review the security situation in the country and if necessary will ask the American side for certain forces for training or supporting the Iraqi Security Forces."

Even if the goal of withdrawing combat troops by 2011 is realized, the accord does leave open the possibility that American military trainers and support forces could remain in Iraq after that time. It is unclear whether the accord provides for semipermanent military bases in the country, and what role the United States would play in providing air and naval support for Iraq.

Iraq reaches oil accord with China, as West lags

Reuters

BEIJING: Iraq and China have agreed on the terms of a \$3 billion oil service contract, the Iraqi oil minister said Wednesday, announcing his country's first major oil contract with a foreign company since the fall of Saddam Hussein.

The oil minister, Hussain al-Shahristani, warned that time was running out for big Western oil companies, which have pressed for years for Iraqi

contracts, to seal even short-term deals that had been expected to mark their return to Iraq, which has the world's third-largest oil reserves after Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Iraq and the Chinese state-run oil company, CNPC, have agreed on the renegotiated terms of a deal signed in 1997 to pump oil from the Ahdab oil field, Shahristani said. CNPC is the biggest oil and gas company in Asia.

"Finally we have reached an agree-

ment," Shahristani said. "The total investment of the project is expected to be about \$3 billion."

Iraq has toughened the terms, changing the contract to a set-fee service from the production-sharing agreement signed under Saddam.

Iraq needs billions of dollars of investment in its energy sector after years of war and sanctions. With high oil prices and strong competition for access to some of the world's cheapest oil to produce, Iraq has been negotiating from a position of strength.

Under the revised contract, Ahdab will produce 110,000 barrels per day, up from the previous target of 90,000 barrels per day, Shahristani said. The first output would come in three years, and

the field should pump for 20 years.

CNPC would own 75 percent of a joint venture to be set up for the contract and Northern Oil of Iraq would own 25 percent, Shahristani said. The value of the contract would be reviewed every quarter, he said.

The agreement is pending final approval by both governments.

The probability of a series of short-term service contracts with oil majors was dropping after delays in signing, although negotiations are continuing, Shahristani said.

Iraq wanted six contracts to increase oil output by 100,000 barrels per day, each to be signed in June and put into effect within a year.

The firms that have been negotiating deals are Royal Dutch Shell; Shell in partnership with BHP Billiton; Exxon Mobil; Chevron with Total. A smaller consortium of Anadarko, Vitol and Dome had negotiated for another deal but Anadarko dropped out this month.

Iraq still hopes to increase production by 500,000 barrels per day by the mid-2009, Shahristani said. "We are working at increasing our production, hopefully by another 500,000 bpd, by the middle of next year," he added.

Iraq pumped around 2.4 million barrels per day in July, according to a Reuters survey.

A long-delayed draft oil law to set the framework for foreign investment was

unlikely to be approved in parliament in the near future, Shahristani said.

"Different parliamentary blocs still have serious differences about the law," he said. "I have not heard anything new from the parliament to make me expect that the law will be passed any time soon."

But Iraq was going ahead with new deals anyway under existing legislation, he said.

Disputes with the regional government in Kurdistan have hobbled the progress of the law. There had been no progress in resolving differences between Baghdad and the Kurdish regional government, Shahristani said.

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Inflation puts Turks in pessimistic mood

Confidence in central banker is falling

By Steve Bryant and Ben Holland

Bloomberg News

ANKARA: Customers at Denizati, a bakery in the Turkish capital, no longer can afford the top-priced pistachio-and-cream wedding cakes. The cost of flour and sugar has more than doubled since 2007, and the bakery has laid off 4 of 15 employees.

The bakery, which is family-owned, is one of the fortunate shops on Hosedere Street. Along 5 blocks, 10 businesses are for sale or shuttered.

"Customers aren't coming anymore," said Hanim Baltici, manager of the Kartal liquor store, which is expected to close if no buyer emerges. "They're all in debt, and every penny they earn goes straight to the bank."

After a six-year boom, the Turkish economy, valued at \$660 billion, is racked by inflation once again. Driven by record prices for commodities including fuel, and a surge in government spending, the inflation rate jumped to 12.1 percent in July from a 37-year low of 6.9 percent a year earlier.

As inflation quickens, the economy is slowing, reminding Turks of the stagflation that afflicted them in 2000 and 2001 and shaking their confidence in the central bank governor, Durmus Yilmaz.

Executives are pessimistic about the situation. "Inflation is like high blood pressure: Once you have it, it's very difficult to get rid of," said Ersin Ozince, chief executive of Turkiye Is Bankasi, Turkey's second-biggest publicly traded bank by market value, after Akbank.

The political turmoil in Turkey — the only predominately Muslim member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and a Western ally in the fight against terrorism — is not helping.

In July, the Constitutional Court put an end to the latest confrontation between the Islamists who control the government and secularists. The military, which heads the secularist camp, has toppled four governments since 1960 and is fighting the governing party, the Justice and Development Party, known as the AKP, over its push for Islamic practices like the wearing of head scarves by women.

The court rejected a lawsuit to outlaw the party for mixing politics and religion while also punishing the AKP by cutting its state financing in half to \$20 million for next year.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is increasing public spending, particularly now that he is no longer reined in by an agreement with International Monetary Fund. In 2005, Erdogan agreed to IMF-backed budget targets in exchange for a \$10 billion loan to pay off debt stemming from the government's rescue of the banking system four years earlier.

Last year, in an appeal to voters prior to the general election, the AKP violated the IMF accord by increasing spending to bring drinking water to isolated villages and to distribute free food and household supplies to 500,000 of the four million inhabitants of Ankara.

The AKP, which also tried to criminalize adultery in 2004 in a country where 99 percent of the people are Muslim, won the election with 47 percent of the vote.

Erdogan is now stepping up infrastructure spending. In May, during the same week in which the IMF agreement expired, the government announced plans to invest \$15 billion over

five years in farm irrigation and new roads in southeastern Turkey, which is largely Kurdish.

The spending, which may help Erdogan and his party win elections in the region in March, will turn a budget surplus of 1.9 billion liras, or about \$1.6 billion, in the first half of the year into a 15.9 billion-lira deficit by the end of 2008, according to government projections.

"There is fiscal loosening, and it will not bode well for inflation," said Asli Savranoglu, an economist at EFG Istanbul Securities.

Yilmaz, the central bank governor, has stumbled in trying to restrain inflation. Within a month of becoming governor in 2006, he reversed three years of steady rate cuts that had taken the benchmark overnight borrowing rate to a low of 13.25 percent from 80 percent in 2001. Seeking to prop up the slumping lira, he added 4.25 percentage points to the rate in the space of two months.

The next year, government ministers and industrialists, concerned about an economic slowdown, began publicly attacking the higher rates. Yilmaz trimmed the rate to 16.75 percent in August, arguing that inflation was slowing toward his 4 percent target for 2008.

Yilmaz's series of four more cuts to 15.25 percent by February 2008 prompted economists and investors to question the bank's independence from political pressure. Ozince, the banking executive, said that "the central bank is still maturing into its autonomy."

In May, as it became clear that Yilmaz would miss his inflation target for the third consecutive year, he began raising rates again, to 16.75 percent. He also set a higher inflation target of 7.5 percent for 2009. Yilmaz has not responded directly to his critics but does say that the bank needs to gain the public's confidence.

"We've been defeated by inflation — there's no question about it," he said in a speech to business leaders in June. "From now on, our credibility depends on what we do. We can win it back."

IRAK RETRAIT DES TROUPES AMÉRICAINES

Washington et Bagdad finalisent un accord sur la présence américaine

NEW YORK

CORRESPONDANT

La Maison Blanche a démenti, vendredi 22 août, qu'un accord sur un retrait des troupes américaines d'Irak ait été finalisé avec le gouvernement de Bagdad. Depuis son ranch texan, où le président George Bush se repose, son porte-parole, Gordon Johndroe, a indiqué que les négociations « se poursuivaient », « de nombreux détails » restant à régler. M. Bush et le premier ministre irakien, Nouri Al-Maliki, précisait-il, en avaient discuté ensemble une heure durant lors d'une vidéoconférence sécurisée.

Quelques heures auparavant, le chef des négociateurs irakiens, Mohammed Al-Haj Hammoud, avait assuré qu'un projet d'accord fixant un tel retrait au plus tard « à la fin 2011 » se trouvait désormais entre les mains des dirigeants des deux pays. Selon lui, les deux parties se sont accordées sur cette échéance pour parvenir à un retrait global des troupes américaines. Mais le texte prévoit également, « en fonction de la situation », la possibilité aussi bien d'un retrait anticipé que d'une prolongation de leur présence au-delà de cette date. Par ailleurs, il est

acquis qu'un nombre indéterminé de militaires américains, cantonnés dans plusieurs bases, dont le nombre n'est pas plus fixé, resteraient en Irak après 2011 « en appui » de l'armée irakienne.

« Feuille de papier »

Engagées en février, les négociations américano-irakiennes devaient initialement être conclues avant la fin juillet. M. Bush a déjà fait savoir qu'en cas d'accord final il ne le soumettrait pas à la ratification du Sénat. En Irak, il devra être voté par le Parlement et accepté par le Conseil présidentiel (qui réunit le président, ses deux vice-présidents, le premier ministre et le président de la région autonome kurde).

L'expert en stratégie Anthony Cordesman, du Centre for Strategic and International Studies, à Washington, ne doute pas que les grands principes de cet accord sont acquis. Pour autant, il le juge « circonstanciel : il ne règle rien sur le fond ; simplement, chaque partie, pour ses propres raisons, en avait besoin ». Les Etats-Unis, parce que le Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies avait décidé, en 2007, de ne reconduire le mandat de la force internationale

en Irak que jusqu'en décembre 2008.

La Maison Blanche devait donc absolument se prévaloir d'une acceptation irakienne pour y maintenir ses troupes au-delà. Et Bagdad « pour contenir les pressions internes anti-américaines » en se prévalant d'avoir obtenu une date de départ des troupes étrangères.

En soi, « fixer l'objectif d'un retrait américain peut être utile » en obligeant les fractions irakiennes à prendre leurs responsabilités, poursuit M. Cordesman. Mais l'enjeu, pour Washington, consiste à anticiper ce retrait avec un réel « plan » de stabilisation de l'Irak pour y résorber les tensions communautaires, développer un Etat de droit et des finances publiques saines et surtout une armée et une police autonomes et opérationnelles. Cela n'a pas été fait et « on en est très loin », constate-t-il.

Ce plan « fixant des objectifs réellement accessibles », le futur président américain, conclut-il, devra immédiatement s'y atteler s'il ne veut pas que le présent accord « reste une feuille de papier ». ■

S. C.

AFP

Irak: au moins 25 morts dans un attentat suicide contre la police

BAQOUBA (Irak) 26 août 2008 (AFP) —

Un kamikaze a perpétré mardi un attentat devant un centre de recrutement de la police, tuant 25 personnes, en majorité des futures recrues, dans la très instable province de Diyala, au nord-est de Bagdad.

L'attentat, qui a également fait 40 blessés, s'est produit devant un centre de recrutement de la localité de Jalawla (150 km au nord-est de Bagdad), où se pressaient de jeunes Irakiens venus s'enrôler, a indiqué à l'AFP le chef de la police locale, le lieutenant-colonel Ahmed Khalifa.

Selon plusieurs sources policières, un homme, muni d'une ceinture d'explosifs, est arrivé en voiture devant le centre avant d'être bloqué par la police qui a voulu le contrôler.

Les versions divergent ensuite: pour certaines sources policières, le kamikaze est alors sorti de son véhicule et s'est précipité dans la foule où il s'est fait exploser.

Pour sa part, le lieutenant-colonel Khalifa a simplement parlé d'"attentat suicide à la voiture piégée", sans préciser si l'homme était sorti de son véhicule.

Les attentats suicide, surtout ceux commis par des femmes, ont fortement augmenté en 2008 en Irak, indiquant une nouvelle forme de lutte des groupes anti-américains, notamment celui d'Al-Qaïda.

La province de Diyala, considérée comme l'une des plus dangereuses d'Irak, est régulièrement touchée par des attentats, résultat de la lutte meurtrière entre des affiliés d'Al-Qaïda et les "Sahwa" (Réveils), des comités d'ex-



insurgés reconvertis dans la lutte contre le réseau extrémiste et payés par l'armée américaine.

L'armée irakienne, soutenue par l'armée américaine, y a lancé le 29 juillet une vaste opération, "Heureux présage", visant les cellules d'Al-Qaïda mais également des miliciens extrémistes chiites.

La semaine dernière, à la demande du gouvernement de Bagdad, quatre mille peshmergas, combattants kurdes, déployés depuis deux ans, s'étaient retirés de cette région.

Mahmoud Singari, un représentant du président irakien Jalal Talabani, a regretté que la "majorité des soldats irakiens envoyés de Bagdad pour remplacer (les peshmergas, ndr) soient chiites".

"Cela a des conséquences néfastes car il y a beaucoup de tribus sunnites dans la région", a estimé l'ancien leader peshmerga.

Dans d'autres violences en Irak, treize personnes, dont quatre policiers, ont été blessées dans l'explosion d'une voiture piégée devant le siège du département de la Santé à Tikrit, à 180 km au nord de Bagdad.

Et l'armée américaine a annoncé la mort d'un de ses soldats qui a succombé lundi à ses blessures après avoir été touché lors d'une patrouille dans le nord de Bagdad.

Le décès de ce soldat porte à 4.147 le nombre de militaires américains tués en Irak depuis l'invasion de mars 2003, selon un bilan établi par l'AFP à partir du site internet indépendant icasualties.org.

Le Monde
Samedi 30 août 2008

Al-Anbar, première province sunnite à repasser sous contrôle irakien

Le désengagement américain traduit le relatif retour au calme dans l'ancien fief de la guérilla sunnite. Il risque cependant d'alimenter des tensions entre factions irakiennes

Afghanistan oblige, la pressante demande, émise depuis des mois par le gouvernement irakien, de récupérer le contrôle sécuritaire de la province sunnite d'Al-Anbar, a finalement été acceptée par les forces américaines. Plus calme que jamais depuis l'invasion anglo-américaine d'avril 2003, la plus vaste et la moins peuplée des dix-huit provinces d'Irak devrait rejoindre, lundi 1^{er} septembre, les dix autres provinces qui sont repassées, au cours des dernières années, sous le contrôle du gouvernement fédéral de Bagdad.

Patron du corps des marines, le général James Conway a justifié ce passage de témoin, qui n'implique qu'un retrait partiel non encore quantifié des 28 000 soldats américains qui y sont stationnés, par deux constats. D'abord, a dit l'officier supérieur, qui passe, à Washington, pour un fervent partisan du renforcement des troupes en Afghanistan, là-bas, « les talibans se montrent de plus en plus audacieux ». Et puis, « franchement, les jeunes qui rejoignent les marines veulent se battre pour leur pays ». Or, et c'est le second argument du général, « si les 25 000 marines déployés dans Al-Anbar font du bon travail dans le business de "construction d'une nation" qui est largement le leur aujourd'hui, ils disent eux-mêmes qu'il n'y a plus, là-bas, beaucoup de mauvais types à combattre ».

De fait, si la province, qui compte autour d'un million et demi d'habitants (sur 26 millions), fut longtemps le principal bastion des extrémistes sunnites affi-

liés à Al-Qaida en Irak et le théâtre le plus sanglant de la guerre – c'est dans les sables et les villes d'Al-Anbar comme Ramadi ou Fallouja que les Américains ont subi leurs plus grosses pertes (1 305 soldats tués sur 4 000 morts au total) auxquelles il faut ajouter plus de 25 000 civils irakiens –, le général Conway note aujourd'hui que « le changement y est réel et perceptible ». De plusieurs dizaines d'attaques et d'attentats enregistrés chaque jour jusqu'à début 2007, on est passé progressivement « à trois ou quatre ».

Le dernier attentat a eu lieu le 24 août, quand un jeune kamikaze envoyé par Al-Qaida en Irak s'est fait exploser au milieu d'un dîner de policiers irakiens, tuant trente personnes avec lui. L'attaque a eu lieu à Al-Zaidane, tout près de Fallouja qui fut le théâtre de deux offensives meurtrières, dont la dernière, en novembre 2004, a pratiquement laissé cette ville d'un demi-million d'habitants en ruines.

Pourtant, l'allègement annoncé de la présence américaine dans Al-Anbar ne fait pas que des heureux. Beaucoup, dans cette unique province intégralement sunnite et tribale, n'ont qu'une confiance très limitée dans la capacité du gouvernement central, largement dominé par des partis religieux chiites, à se montrer équitable vis-à-vis de la minorité arabe à laquelle ils appartiennent, qui soutenait Saddam Hussein et qui représente 20 % de la population. « Prince » héréditaire de la grande tribu des Doulaïm, dont les divers clans forment l'essentiel de la population d'Al-Anbar, et dirigeant parmi d'autres des fameux Comités du réveil, ces milices sunnites qui se sont révoltées contre les extrémistes djihadistes dans leur région à partir de la fin 2006

et qui sont membres, désormais, de quelque cent mille supplétifs salariés par l'armée américaine, Cheikh Ali Hatem Al-Suleiman s'est publiquement opposé au passage de témoin prévu lundi.

Il n'a pas évoqué les tensions qui se multiplient dans d'autres provinces entre le gouvernement fédéral de Nouri Al-Maliki et les supplétifs sunnites qui se plaignent d'avoir été « trompés » par les Américains quand ceux-ci leur promettaient pour prix de leur « retour » des emplois stables dans les forces régulières de l'Irak ou dans d'autres activités publiques. De fait, le pouvoir chiite rechigne toujours à les intégrer et, un an ou plus après leur engagement, les trois quarts d'entre eux sont toujours payés 300 dollars par mois par les Américains. Il existe aussi, dans Al-Anbar, de fortes

tensions entre sunnites. Cheikh Ali Hatem a rappelé que si le transfert de responsabilités n'avait pas eu lieu à la date initialement prévue, en juin, « ce ne fut pas à cause d'une tempête de sable comme l'affirmèrent les Américains, mais en raison d'une véritable tempête politique » avec le Parti islamique de l'actuel vice-président

de la République, Tarek Al-Hashemi.

Cette formation sunnite avait profité, en 2005, du boycottage à 98 % des élections locales dans Al-Anbar pour prendre le contrôle de tous les postes du gouvernement. Or les prochaines élections locales qui devaient avoir lieu en octobre et que les « comités » entendent remporter viennent d'être reportées sine die. La tension entre les miliciens et ce parti, qui contrôle notamment la distribution des crédits de reconstruction, n'a jamais baissé et les affrontements, parfois sanglants, pourraient repartir de plus belle. ■

PATRICE CLAUDE

« Les marines déployés là-bas disent qu'il n'y a plus beaucoup de mauvais types à combattre »

Général James Conway



WASHINGTON DÉNONCE L'ARRESTATION D'UN OPPOSANT KURDE SYRIEN

WASHINGTON, 29 août 2008 (AFP) –

Les Etats-Unis ont dénoncé vendredi l'arrestation et la détention d'un opposant kurde syrien, Machaal Tammo, et ont demandé sa libération immédiate et sans condition.

"Nous sommes inquiets pour l'activiste kurde syrien Machaal Tammo, dont l'interpellation inquiétante est la plus récente d'une série d'arrestation d'activistes de la société civile syrienne par les autorités", a déclaré un porte-parole du département d'Etat, Robert Wood, dans un communiqué.

M. Tammo a été arrêté le 15 août puis transféré dans un centre de détention de Damas où il a été privé de tout contact avec l'extérieur pendant deux semaines, a indiqué le porte-parole.

Il a été présenté à un tribunal en audience préliminaire le 27 août et il reste en détention, a-t-il ajouté.

"Nous condamnons la détention de M. Tammo et d'autres prisonniers de conscience syriens, nous appelons à leur libération immédiate et inconditionnelle", a poursuivi M. Wood.

"Nous encourageons la communauté internationale à se joindre à notre appel au gouvernement syrien pour qu'il cesse d'arrêter les critiques du régime", a-t-il conclu alors que le président français Nicolas Sarkozy s'apprête à se rendre les 3 et 4 septembre à Damas après avoir reçu le président syrien Bachar al-Assad en juillet à Paris.

AFP

IRAK: L'ONU PROPOSERA À L'AUTOMNE DES "OPTIONS" POUR LES RÉGIONS CONTESTÉES

BAGDAD, 20 août 2008 (AFP) -

L'ONU a déclaré mercredi qu'elle proposerait cet automne une série d'options pour trouver un accord global sur les régions qui sont l'objet de contestations, notamment la riche ville pétrolière de Kirkouk où un conflit oppose Kurdes, Arabes et Turcomans.

"Nous allons proposer entre septembre et octobre des options pour un accord global sur les régions disputées, dont bien sûr Kirkouk, qui est le problème le plus chaud actuellement en Irak", a affirmé à des journalistes Staffan de Mistura, représentant spécial du secrétaire général de l'ONU en Irak.

Il s'agit de tractations sur douze (bien douze) secteurs qui se trouvent dans le nord de l'Irak.

Ces régions sont l'objet de conflits à la suite de mouvements de populations ordonnés par l'ancien dictateur Saddam Hussein dans le cadre de sa politique "d'arabisation" et de répression contre les populations qu'il jugeait hostiles.

"J'espère que vers octobre, les options que nous allons proposer seront prises en considération et de manière constructive par toutes les parties (irakiennes) et qu'une formule de compromis sera trouvée afin de donner une solution pacifique et juste à Kirkouk", a ajouté M. de Mistura.

Un différend sur la répartition du pouvoir entre les trois communautés de la région de Kirkouk, à 250 km au nord de Bagdad, a empêché l'adoption de la loi électorale et entraîné le report de scrutins provinciaux qui étaient prévus en octobre et sont considérés comme une étape cruciale du processus de réconciliation nationale.

A majorité kurde, Kirkouk avait été placée par Saddam Hussein hors du Kurdistan irakien, une région indépendante de facto depuis 1991. Les Kurdes ont aujourd'hui consolidé leur pouvoir au sein du nouvel Irak et exigent le rattachement de Kirkouk à leur région autonome, située à une cinquantaine de km

plus au nord.

Evoquant le compromis envisagé, M. de Mistura a ajouté que "cette formule pourra éventuellement ensuite être confirmée par un referendum", une référence à l'article de la Constitution prévoyant une consultation populaire avant décembre 2007 mais qui a été depuis repoussée.

Selon lui, il y a 30 à 40 régions qui font l'objet de disputes depuis l'époque de Saddam Hussein, mais il n'y en a pas plus de 12 qui posent vraiment problème et sont liées à la question de Kirkouk.

L'ONU a déjà présenté au Conseil présidentiel irakien le 5 juin des rapports sur Akra, Hamdaniya et Mahmoud, trois districts se trouvant dans la province de Ninive, et Mandali, qui est situé dans le gouvernorat de Diyala.

Les rapports des sept autres régions plus Kirkouk seront sur la table du Conseil qui regroupe le président kurde et deux vice-présidents chiite et sunnite, d'ici l'automne.

Il s'agit de quatre secteurs de la province de Ninive: Sinjar Tal Afar, Toulkay et Shaikhan; Kifri dans la province de Souleimaniyah, Khanaqine dans celle de Diyala et Tuz dans celle de Salahedinne.

"Il faut aller au plus dur en commençant par les problèmes les plus faciles et en montrant ce que doit être une discussion politique", a indiqué M. de Mistura.

"Il s'agit de les (dirigeants politiques irakiens) préparer à un processus politique de donnant, donnant et montrer que ce qui peut se faire dans les endroits les plus faciles peut l'être également pour les lieux les plus compliqués comme Kirkouk", a-t-il ajouté.

Pour préparer les propositions de l'ONU, une équipe de 15 diplomates, universitaires, historiens et négociateurs, travaille depuis mars et examine notamment l'ensemble des décrets administratifs pris par les autorités irakiennes depuis l'indépendance de 1932.

AFP

Attentat à la voiture piégée: 16 blessés en Turquie

ANKARA, 21 août 2008 (AFP) -

SEIZE PERSONNES, pour la plupart des policiers et des militaires, ont été blessés par l'explosion d'une voiture piégée visant les forces de sécurité jeudi à Izmir, dans l'ouest de la Turquie, ont affirmé les autorités.

La police n'a pas fait de déclaration sur les instigateurs possibles de l'attentat, mais un ministre a émis l'hypothèse d'une implication des rebelles kurdes luttant pour l'indépendance du sud-est anatolien à la population en majorité kurde.

La voiture, garée au bord d'une route, a explosé vers 7h45 (0h45 HAE) au passage d'une voiture de l'armée et d'un bus de la police, ont affirmé les services du gouverneur d'Izmir.

«L'explosion s'est produite dans une voiture vide stationnée sur les lieux de la déflagration. Nous pensons que celle-ci a été provoquée par des explosifs déclenchés à distance», a déclaré le gouverneur d'Izmir Cahit Kiraç, cité par l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Un porte-parole du gouverneur a déclaré que l'explosion avait blessé sept policiers, trois soldats dont un colonel et six civils. «Un des soldats blessés est dans une situation critique et est en train d'être opéré», a déclaré cette source, parlant sous le couvert de l'anonymat. Une fumée noire s'échappait de la carcasse d'une voiture carbonisée, devant un minibus de la police, alors que les forces de l'ordre installaient un cordon de sécurité autour de la scène, selon des images diffusées par la télévision NTV.

Les vitres des bâtiments alentour ont été soufflées par la déflagration, décrite par les résidents comme puissante. Le ministre des Transports Binali Yildirim a suggéré que l'explosion était l'oeuvre de «l'organisation terroriste», un terme habituellement employé pour désigner les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), a rapporté Anatolie.

L'agence a cité M. Yildirim affirmant que les rebelles s'étaient lancés dans une campagne d'attentats à la bombe visant les centres urbains depuis que les opérations militaires les empêchaient d'agir dans le sud-est anatolien.

Une importante communauté kurde vit à Izmir, le principal port turc sur la mer Egée, et la ville a dans le passé été la cible d'attaques de séparatistes kurdes. En octobre, deux bombes ont explosé à quelques heures d'intervalle dans une zone commerciale de la ville, tuant une personne et en blessant sept. La police avait imputé l'attentat au PKK.

Les médias ont récemment rapporté que les rebelles s'apprêtaient à lancer une campagne d'attentats en riposte aux bombardements menés par l'aviation turque contre leurs camps dans le nord de l'Irak.

L'attentat d'Izmir intervient deux jours après l'explosion d'une bombe à Mersin (sud). Le poseur de bombe supposé, poursuivi par la police, a déclenché la bombe, se tuant et blessant 12 policiers.

AFP

TURQUIE: ARRESTATION DE SIX SUSPECTS D'ATTENTATS REVENDIQUÉS PAR DES KURDES

ANKARA, 23 août 2008 (AFP) -

LA POLICE a arrêté six suspects à la suite de l'attentat à la bombe perpétré jeudi à Izmir, dans l'ouest de la Turquie, et qui a été revendiqué par un groupe radical kurde, a annoncé samedi l'agence Anatolie.

Trois suspects ont été appréhendés à Diyarbakir, principale ville du sud-est turc à population kurde, à l'intérieur d'une voiture qui avait été louée pour l'attentat de jeudi, selon l'agence nationale turque. Les trois autres suspects ont été détenus à Izmir.

Les Faucons de la liberté du Kurdistan (TAK), un groupuscule kurde qui a déjà revendiqué plusieurs attentats meurtriers, ont affirmé samedi avoir commis l'attaque d'un bus de la police qui a fait 16 blessés jeudi à Izmir et l'attentat suicide dans lequel 12 policiers ont été blessés mardi à Mersin (sud), dans un communiqué publié sur leur site internet.

Dans leur texte publié sur leur site internet, les TAK ont précisé qu'ils s'étaient "vengés" des mauvais traitements infligés, selon eux, par Ankara à la population kurde et ont menacé de nouvelles attaques.

"Nous luttons et continuerons de lutter en faisant payer très cher les attaques commises contre notre peuple et nos valeurs nationales", lit-on dans le communiqué.

En février, les TAK avaient menacé Ankara de nouveaux attentats contre les forces de sécurité et centres touristiques et économiques, après les bombardements de l'aviation turque des bases du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le nord de l'Irak.

Pour les autorités turques, ce groupuscule sert de prête-nom au PKK quand celui-ci s'attaque aux civils. Le PKK rétorque que les TAK sont des éléments incontrôlés sortis de ses rangs.

Parmi les différentes attaques à la bombe revendiquées par les TAK, celle de Kusadasi au bord de la mer Egée en 2005 avait fait cinq morts.

Taxé d'organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, le PKK se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait plus de 37.000 morts.

Iraq. Un accord sur le statut futur des troupes américaines a été finalisé par les négociateurs, prévoyant un retrait à la fin 2011. Mais plusieurs détails restent en suspens.

Horizon de retrait

C'EST « presque » fini. Les négociations sur un pacte de coopération entre les États-Unis et l'Iraq ont abouti à un projet d'accord, qui prévoit notamment un départ des forces américaines à l'horizon 2011 selon un négociateur iraquien, est désormais entre les mains des dirigeants des deux pays. « A la fin 2011, les troupes américaines se retireront d'Iraq », a souligné Mohammed Al-Haj Hammoud, chef des négociateurs iraqiens sur le futur statut des troupes américaines en Iraq, avant d'ajouter : « Il existe toutefois une clause stipulant que le retrait peut avoir lieu avant 2011 ou que la présence peut être prolongée après 2011 en fonction de la situation ».

Selon M. Hammoud, au-delà de 2011, soit plus de huit ans après l'invasion par les forces de la coalition, il restera en Iraq « un certain nombre de troupes, en appui ou pour entraîner les forces iraqiennes. Le nombre de bases militaires américaines dépendra des effectifs et de leurs besoins », a-t-il noté.

Mais le premier ministre, Nouri Al-Maliki, a indiqué que son pays était parvenu à un accord avec les États-Unis selon lequel il n'y aura plus de troupes étrangères en Iraq après 2011. « Il y a un accord entre les deux parties pour qu'il n'y ait plus aucun soldat étranger en Iraq après 2011 », a-t-il affirmé lundi devant des chefs de tribus. « Les intérêts nationaux de l'Etat nous commandent à avoir un calendrier précis (sur la fin de la présence militaire) et nous n'accepterons pas de signer un accord sans un tel calendrier », a-t-il ajouté. Les propos de M. Maliki ont été immédiatement démentis par la Maison Blanche qui a indiqué que les États-Unis n'avaient pas encore trouvé d'accord final avec l'Iraq sur le statut futur des troupes américaines. « Les discussions continuent, nous n'avons toujours pas finalisé d'accord », a déclaré un porte-parole de la Maison Blanche, Tony Fratto. « Jusqu'à ce que nous en ayons un, il n'y a pas d'accord », a de son côté insisté Robert Wood, porte-parole du département d'Etat, refusant en outre de commenter la date de 2011 avancée par M. Maliki.

Le premier ministre iraquien avait demandé des modifications du projet d'accord sur le statut futur des forces américaines. « Dans l'accord, il reste des points en suspens qui ne



peuvent être approuvés dans l'état et qui nécessitent des modifications préservant totalement la souveraineté de l'Iraq », a affirmé dimanche un communiqué du Conseil Suprême Islamique en Iraq (CSII), dirigé par Abdel-Aziz Al-Hakim, citant les propos tenus samedi par M. Maliki devant les responsables de cette formation chiite, une des principales composantes gouvernementales. Les commentaires de M. Maliki ont été faits lors d'une réunion avec l'Alliance Iraquienne Unifiée (AIU), le bloc chiite dont le CSII et le parti Dawa sont les deux principales composantes.

M. Maliki va encore devoir convaincre les responsables politiques du bien-fondé du pacte. Le texte doit être discuté d'abord par le Conseil exécutif, une instance regroupant le Conseil présidentiel (le président kurde Jalal Talabani et les deux vice-présidents chiite et sunnite), le premier ministre et le président de la région autonome kurde Massoud Barzani. Le projet de loi devra être ensuite voté par le Parlement puis approuvé par le Conseil présidentiel. Les plus hostiles au pacte sont les partisans du chef radical chiite Moqtada Sadr, qui ont manifesté après la prière du vendredi à Koufa (centre) et scandé : « Nous ne tolé-

rons pas que l'Iraq devienne une colonie américaine ».

Les Iraquiens considèrent cependant comme une victoire le fait d'obtenir un calendrier de retrait longtemps refusé par les États-Unis. Autre point sensible sur lequel les Iraquiens se sont montrés insistants : la fin de l'immunité pour les employés des compagnies privées de sécurité travaillant avec les forces de la coalition. « Dans les négociations sur le Sofa, le gouvernement iraquien n'a accepté aucune immunité » pour ces compagnies, a récemment affirmé le porte-parole Ali Al-Dabbagh. S'agissant de l'immunité des soldats américains, M. Hammoud a répondu que des comités étaient « prévus (...) pour examiner les problèmes de violation de la loi iraquienne par des troupes » américaines.

Objectif et non une échéance ferme

Après avoir refusé pendant des années de se laisser lier les mains par des dates trop précises, le président américain George W. Bush semblait aujourd'hui prêt à accepter un calendrier de retrait total des troupes américaines d'Iraq d'ici fin 2011. La Maison Blanche, qui avait par le passé qualifié de « reddition »

face aux extrémistes islamistes l'acceptation d'un calendrier défini, s'est défendue d'avoir changé de cap, alors qu'il commençait à y avoir des fuites sur les détails de l'accord. Les responsables américains soulignent que la date évoquée dans le projet d'accord est un objectif et non une échéance ferme, et que son respect exigera des progrès continus en matière politique, économique et de sécurité. « Le président et tous les Américains veulent voir rentrer les soldats à la maison, mais pas avant que le travail soit fait et que des progrès supplémentaires soient accomplis », a déclaré le porte-parole de la Maison Blanche, Gordon Johndroe. En outre, l'évocation d'une possible fin de l'occupation américaine a été rendue possible seulement « grâce aux gains réalisés sur le front de la sécurité depuis que le président a ordonné l'envoi de cinq brigades de combat en renfort en Iraq en janvier » 2007, qui sont depuis rentrées, a-t-il fait valoir. « La sécurité à Bagdad a permis au gouvernement d'avancer sur le plan de la réconciliation nationale et de faire certains progrès politiques que nous souhaitons tous », a-t-il souligné.

Mais les résultats de la politique du président Bush restent mitigés : elle a certes contribué à une baisse des violences mais a échoué à transférer aux Iraquiens la responsabilité de leur sécurité en novembre 2007, comme l'espérait M. Bush, ou encore à faire passer des législations considérées comme cruciales par Washington pour unifier le pays et ses trois principales communautés (chiites, sunnites et kurdes). Les autorités iraqiennes ont récemment reporté des élections provinciales prévues le 1er octobre et l'Onu a même émis de sérieux doutes sur la tenue cette année du scrutin considéré comme une étape majeure pour ramener la frange sunnite de la population dans le champ politique. Les députés iraqiens tardent également à approuver une loi sur le pétrole qui vise notamment à cadrer la redistribution des revenus pétroliers entre les 18 provinces iraqiennes, un texte que les États-Unis estiment fondamental pour la stabilisation de l'Iraq.

Hicham Mourad

AFP

TURQUIE: 14 REBELLES KURDES TUÉS LORS DE COMBATS AVEC L'ARMÉE

ANKARA, 26 août 2008 (AFP) –

QUATORZE rebelles kurdes ont été tués mardi lors de violents combats avec l'armée dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Un précédent bilan fourni par l'agence faisait état de sept rebelles abattus.

Les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont été abattus dans la province de Bitlis lors d'une vaste opération de l'armée au cours de laquelle trois "gardiens de village", membres d'une milice supplétive kurde de l'armée turque luttant contre le PKK, ont aussi trouvé la mort.

Un autre milicien a été blessé, a ajouté Anatolie, indiquant que les combats se poursuivaient.

Selon les chaînes de télévision, des renforts ont été dépêchés dans la zone de combat où des hélicoptères de l'armée sont engagés.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait plus de 37.000 morts.

AFP

LE KURDISTAN IRAKIEN APPELLE BAGDAD À "CONTENIR LA CRISE" À KHANAQINNE

ERBIL (Irak), 30 août 2008 (AFP) –

LE KURDISTAN irakien a appelé le gouvernement irakien à "contenir la crise" ayant éclaté entre l'armée irakienne et les peshmergas dans la région de Khanaqinne, dans la province de Diyala (nord), a annoncé samedi la présidence kurde.

Le président de la région autonome kurde Massoud Barzani s'est entretenu vendredi avec le Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki pour lui "demander de contenir la crise dans la région de Khanaqinne entre l'armée irakienne et les peshmergas" (combattants kurdes), a indiqué la présidence kurde dans un communiqué.

Les peshmergas ont quitté le 18 août la région de Khanaqinne, laissant le champ libre aux soldats irakiens.

Ces derniers ont l'intention de chasser les partis politiques kurdes des bâtiments publics qu'ils occupaient depuis 2003, déclenchant la colère des Kurdes.

"Il faut poursuivre le dialogue avec tous les partis politiques afin d'empêcher d'agir ceux qui veulent faire dérailler le processus démocratique", a déclaré Massoud Barzani.

Une délégation kurde doit rencontrer samedi et dimanche M. Maliki "pour résoudre la crise", a indiqué à l'AFP Mahmoud Sinjaoui (BIEN Sinjaoui), le représentant du président irakien Jalal Talabani à la direction des peshmer-

gas.

Près de 175.000 personnes vivent dans la municipalité de Khanaqinne.

Durant la politique d'arabisation de Saddam Hussein, dans les années 1980, un grand nombre de Kurdes chiites avaient été déplacés par la force et ils ne sont revenus qu'à la chute du régime en 2003.

En juin 2006, le conseil municipal de Khanaqinne avait demandé que la région soit intégrée au Kurdistan. La région compte des champs pétroliers qui produisent 16.000 barils par jour.

Selon Fouad Hussein, le secrétaire général de la présidence kurde, "la crise a éclaté entre la direction kurde et le gouvernement (central) quand l'armée irakienne est entrée sans coordination avec les dirigeants kurdes dans la ville de Khanaqinne et a ordonné aux partis kurdes d'évacuer les bâtiments publics".

Le gouvernement a fixé à début septembre l'évacuation de ces bâtiments et les contrevenants risquent dix ans de prison.

Pour M. Sinjaoui, "les combattants kurdes ont laissé la place le 18 août à l'armée irakienne et cela a provoqué la colère des habitants qui ont manifesté le 25 août contre la présence de l'armée irakienne".

Le 15 août, les dirigeants kurdes avaient accepté de retirer leurs troupes de la province de Diyala, où est située Khanaqinne, à la demande du gouvernement irakien.

REUTERS

Attaque du PKK contre une base Militaire turque, six morts

31 août 2008. (Reuters)

QUATRE SOLDATS turcs et deux activistes kurdes ont été tués dans une attaque des rebelles séparatistes contre une base militaire dans l'est de la Turquie, apprend-on de source autorisée.

Une quinzaine de militants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont lancé une attaque contre un bâtiment de l'armée à Bingol vers 01h00 dimanche, tirant au lance-roquettes et avec des armes à longue portée, a précisé cette source.

Les activistes ont pris la fuite après la mort de deux d'entre eux dans l'affrontement qui a suivi. L'armée a lancé une opération de recherche.

Les médias turcs ont par ailleurs rapporté que deux autres soldats ont trouvé la mort samedi lors d'une attaque des séparatistes contre une autre base militaire dans la province de Silopi, dans le sud-est du pays.

Affaiblis par les raids militaires contre leurs positions dans les montagnes du Kurdistan irakien, les militants du PKK s'en prennent de plus en plus à des cibles civiles ou militaires, soulignent des analystes.

Le PKK a lancé son insurrection en 1984 pour obtenir la création d'un Etat kurde indépendant dans l'est de la Turquie. Quelque 40.000 personnes sont mortes depuis le début de ce conflit. (Reuters)





Voices of Iraq
August 22, 2008

No satisfactory solution yet about Kirkuk – Mahmoud Othman



BAGHDAD, Aug. 22 (VOI) – A senior figure of the Kurdistan Alliance bloc, Mahmoud Othman, said on Friday that all political powers in dispute concerning the Kirkuk issue did not yet reach a solution that satisfies all sides, noting that meetings in this regard are still underway, but without any positive result.

"Disputing political powers did not yet reach solutions with respect to the Kirkuk issue, as those powers are still sticking to their previously announced stances," Othman told *Aswat al-Iraq – Voices of Iraq – (VOI)*. "All political powers are waiting for the suggestions of Staffan de Mistura, the UN Secretary General's representative in Iraq, regarding Kirkuk," he added. Othman estimated that de Mistura's proposal "would be discussed in September by the political council for national security." He hoped that political powers would show some flexibility "by giving up some of their demands concerning Kirkuk in order to achieve solutions that satisfy all sides." On Aug. 9, 2008, Othman, from the Kurdish province of Sulaimaniya, described the issue of deploying Iraqi forces from the country's southern part in Kirkuk city, according to article 24 of the provincial election bill, as "an attempt to re-Arabize the city," expressing the Kurds' rejection to any step in this direction. "Deploying forces from the south in Kirkuk is a re-Arabization of the city," Othman said in a press conference in Sulaimaniya. "We will not accept this," he added. "Other Iraqi sides cannot reach a consensus to solve this issue, as they object to any new suggestion, and insist on article 24," he explained. He did not name those sides. "Enacting article 24 was a conspiracy against the Kurds, similar to the issues of oil contracts and Kurdistan region's budget, aimed at limiting Kurds' power," he said. The controversial provincial election bill aims at holding a provincial poll scheduled for October 1, but it has hit a major snag over how the council governing the multi-ethnic region of Kirkuk – claimed by Kurds, Arabs and

Turkmen – should be formed. Iraq's 275-member parliament on July 22 adopted a bill which should allow the provincial polls to go ahead. But the draft faced strong opposition from major blocs in parliament – mainly Kurds – who walked out in protest, leaving only about 140 MPs to vote. "The Kurdistan Alliance committed a mistake by withdrawing from the parliamentary voting session," Othman said. "The difference would have been much bigger if we had withdrawn before the voting," he added. The legal wrangle centers on article 24 of the draft legislation that aims to evenly divide power in the regional council among Kirkuk's three main groups –Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen. The Kurds, who currently constitute a majority, are vigorously opposed. The vote forced the three-member Presidential Board, headed by President Jalal Talabani, himself a Kurd, to send the legislation back to MPs for reworking, where it remains stalled. Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution called for normalizing the ethnic condition in Kirkuk and deciding the status of the city by holding a referendum. Arab and Turkmen residents are concerned they would be marginalized if the city was handed over to the Kurds, who now make up the majority of the population. "Lawmakers who voted for the provincial election bill have an agreement in this respect with Turkey that plays a role in the problems Iraq is experiencing," Othman said. "During his visit to Baghdad, the Turkish premier, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was informed about how article 24 of the provincial election bill was formed," he added. Ethnic tension has dogged Kirkuk since the U.S.-led invasion of 2003 that ousted the former regime of Saddam Hussein. "The U.S. played a negative role in the Kirkuk issue, but the United Nations (UN) formed a committee to find a consensus solution in that regard," Othman said. "If this solution would be achieved, the parliament will hold an extraordinary session to vote on the committee's proposal; otherwise, solving this issue would be postponed until the end of the parliament's summer recess," he asserted.



Voices of Iraq
August 24, 2008

Kurdish official condemns Iraqi army raid on Peshmerga HQ

SULAIMANIYA, Aug. 24 (VOI) – A REPRESENTATIVE of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's (PUK) secretary general on Sunday condemned an Iraqi army raid on the headquarters of the Peshmerga forces in Qurat Tabba, describing the act as one of the "blunders" of the Iraqi army.

"On Saturday, Iraqi army forces entered the headquarters of Kurdish parties in Qurat Tabba areas," Mahmoud Sankawi told *Aswat al-Iraq- Voices of Iraq- (VOI)*. "We have informed the deputy prime minister, Burham Saleh, of the incident and submitted a memorandum to the prime minister in which we explained that the Peshmerga forces are not Mahdi army militia groups..." Sankawi noted. The Mahdi army is the military wing of the Sadrist movement, which is led by Shiite Cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and holds 30 seats in the 275-member parliament. Political tensions erupted between Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's government and the Mahdi Army following a military operation by Iraqi forces in Basra and Baghdad's eastern city of Sadr in May with the aim of tracking down armed groups and outlaws. Sankawi added that Saleh held a meeting with the minister of defense, during which they agreed to postpone the evacuation of governmental buildings, which are currently occupied by Kurdish parties. VOI has made every effort to contact government sources, but to no avail. On Saturday morning, Iraqi army personnel raided the headquarters of

the PUK, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Kurdistan Communist Party, lowering the flag of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). In cooperation with the Multi-National Force (MNF), Iraqi forces have launched a wide-scale security operation called *Bashaer al-Kheir* (Promise of Good) in Diala province with the aim of eliminating armed groups. In the past three weeks, the operation included the areas of Jalawlaa, al-Saadiya, and Qurat Tabba, which is affiliated with DIALA's Khanaqin district. The central government has ordered Kurdish bodies to hand over the security responsibility of DIALA's border areas to the Iraqi army and withdraw their Peshmerga forces from those areas. The Peshmerga is a term used by the Kurds to refer to armed Kurdish fighters. DIALA province extends to the northeast of Baghdad as far as the Iranian border. Its capital is Baaquba. It covers an area of 17,685 square kilometers (6,828 sq mi). A large portion of the province is drained by the DIALA River, a major tributary of the Tigris. Because of its proximity to two major sources of water, DIALA's main industry is agriculture, primarily dates grown in large Date Palm groves. It is also recognized as the orange capital of the Middle East. In January 2008 Operation Phantom Phoenix was launched in an attempt to eradicate the remnants of al-Qaeda network following the DIALA province campaign between 2006 and 2007.



Kurd militants claim bombings responsibility-agency

ISTANBUL, Aug 24, 2008 (Reuters)

- A KURDISH militant group has claimed responsibility for bomb attacks last week in the Turkish coastal cities of Mersin and Izmir, a news agency close to Kurdish separatists said.

A suspected suicide bomber detonated a bomb in his car near the Mediterranean city of Mersin on Tuesday, killing himself and wounding 12 police officers.

Two days later 16 people were wounded, including eight police and three soldiers, in a car bomb which ripped through a minibus in the western Turkish city of Izmir.

Turkish media said on Sunday eight people had been detained in connection with the Izmir attack.

The Firat news agency reported the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK) as saying their militants had carried out both attacks. The shadowy TAK group is believed to have close links to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) guerrillas.

The PKK launched its armed insurgency against the Turkish state in 1984 with the aim of creating an ethnic homeland in mainly Kurdish southeast Turkey. Some 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict. Before the claim of responsibility analysts said the PKK was stepping up bomb

attacks in Turkey in an attempt to show it was still a force to be reckoned with despite being weakened by Turkish air strikes on its bases in northern Iraq. Islamist militants and leftist guerrillas have also carried out bomb attacks in Turkey in the past. (Writing by Daren Butler; Editing by Giles Elgood)



Voices of Iraq
August 24, 2008

Feyli Kurds case trial starts in October

BAGHDAD, Aug. 24 (VOI) – THE TRIAL of the 16 defendants on the Feyli Kurds case will start next October, the president of Iraq's Higher Criminal Court (IHCC) revealed on Sunday.

"The IHCC will hold its first session to try defendants on the Feyli Kurds case next October," Judge Aref al-Shahin told *Aswat al-Iraq – Voices of Iraq – (VOI)*. Lawmaker Amer Thamiir, a member of parliament from al-Tadamun bloc, which represents Feyli Kurds, had recently told VOI that Feyli Kurds had been subjected to forced relocation by the former regime. Several International organizations estimated that nearly one million Iraqi Feyli Kurds were displaced by force between the years 1970 and 1990. The defendants on this case are Saadoun Shakir, Tareq Aziz, Fadel Sulfeij al-Azzawi, Watban Ibrahim al-Hassan, Sabaawi Ibrahim al-Hassan, Ahmed Hussein, Mazban Khedr Hadi, Ali Hassan al-Majid, Saber al-Dori, Aziz Saleh al-Nawman, Abdelhamid Soliman, Saad Saleh Ahmed Sultan, Muhammad Khudeir al-Halboussi, Fadel

Abbas al-Aamiri, Nu'man Ali al-Tikriti and Iyad Taha Shihab. Feyli Kurds are a group of people of Iranian stock living in Baghdad and Diala province, around Khanaqin and Mandili. Feylis speak Feyli, a dialect of the Pahlawani. The roots of the Feylis go back to the Aryan immigrants of the first millennium BC, and more specifically, the Parthian/Pahlawi/Pahlawanid settlements of the 2nd century BD. They embraced Islam in the early stages of the Islamic conquest and colonization of Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Iran, though archeological evidence from the Ilam province in Iran indicates that a significant proportion of Feylis were Nestorian Christians until the 18th Century. When the Safavid dynasty (1507-1721) held sway over Persia, Feyli Kurds switched to the Shiite Jaafari doctrine under Persian influence. In modern times the Feylis have been subject to state persecutions. They are considered as a stateless people, with both Iran and Iraq claiming they are citizens of the other country. In mid-1970s, Iraq expelled around 40,000 Shiite Feyli Kurds who had lived for generations near Baghdad and Khanaqin, alleging that they were Iranian nationals.



Voices of Iraq
August 26, 2008

Khanaqin residents protest military presence

DIALA, Aug. 26 (VOI) – THOUSANDS of residents of Khanaqin staged a demonstration protesting the presence of an Iraqi force in the district and the setting up of several checkpoints there, according to the district mayor on Tuesday.

"The demonstrators, who gathered in front of the mayorality building, submitted a memo of protest in which they demanded the exit of the force from the district, where security conditions are stable," Muhammad Mulla Hasan told *Aswat al-Iraq – Voices of Iraq – (VOI)*. For his part, Mulla Bakhtyar, a member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) politburo, told VOI "political motives were behind the Iraqi army forces' entry into the district," not giving more details. The Khanaqin municipal council chief, Sameer Muhammad, said during the demonstration that the measure was "a red line and will get a response from the masses". The autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan government had set up the Kermyan administration to run the districts of Khanaqin, 155 km northeast of Baaquba, the capital city of Diala province, and Kafri, Klar and Jamjamal. The Iraqi forces, with logistical support from the U.S. forces, have launched a large-scale security campaign in July codenamed *Bashaer al-Kheir* (Promise of Good) in a number of cities and districts of Diala with the aim of eliminating armed groups active in those areas. The operation has recently advanced to areas belonging to Khanaqin district, where the Kurdish peshmerga forces withdrew from the districts of Qara Taba and Jalawlaa through an agreement between the Kurdish authorities and the central government in Baghdad. Khanaqin is one of the areas subject to dispute between the two sides pending a hoped-for solution is reached over it through the application of article 140 of the Iraqi constitution. Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is related to the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk city and other disputed areas. It calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province. These stages were supposed to end on December 31, 2007, a deadline that was later extended to six months to end in July 2008. The former regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had forced over 250,000 Kurdish residents



to give up their homes to Arabs in the 1970s in a bid to "Arabize" the city and the region's oil industry. Kurds, however, seek to include the city in the autonomous Iraq's Kurdistan region, while Sunni Muslims, Turkmen and Shiites oppose the incorporation. The article currently stipulates that all Arabs in Kirkuk be returned to their original locations in southern and central Iraqi areas, and formerly displaced residents returned to Kirkuk. The article also calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province. Kirkuk, 250 km (156 miles) north of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, sits on the ruins of a 5,000-year-old settlement. Because of the strategic geographical location of the city, Kirkuk was the battle ground for three empires, Assyria, Babylonia and Media which controlled the city at various times. Kirkuk is the centre of the northern Iraqi petroleum industry. It is a historically and ethnically mixed city populated by Assyrians, Kurds, Arabs and Iraqi Turkmen. The population was estimated at 1,200,000 in 2008.

Chicago Tribune August 24, 2008

Iraqi Arabs seek vacation escape in Kurdistan's relative peace and cool

By YAHYA BARZANJI and KARIN LAUB Associated Press Writers

IRAQI Arabs looking for a break from five years of war and sectarian strife — or just the heartland's heat and dust — are finding one in the green, tranquil mountains of Kurdistan.

More than 23,000 Iraqis headed north to the autonomous Kurdistan region this summer, up from just 3,700 last year, tourism officials say. A week in a modest hotel, with bus fare, costs about \$160 per person, or one-third an average monthly salary.

The organized tours are made possible by improved security in recent months, though roads remain treacherous and visitors are stopped at a string of roadblocks for ID checks before reaching their vacation getaways.

The budding tourist trade is helping to soften some of the hard feelings between Iraq's Kurdish minority and Arab majority.

The two share a bloody history, particularly Saddam Hussein's brutal repression of the Kurds and establishment of their U.S.-protected self-ruled region in 1991.

Iraq's Kurdistan, about the size of Switzerland and home to nearly 3.8 million people, is perhaps the only destination for Iraqis thirsting for a little normalcy.

Arab countries, trying to keep out Iraq's troubles, grant few visas, while Europe and the U.S. are too expensive for most. Iran is more welcoming, but largely attracts Shiite pilgrims.

Now, with large numbers of Iraqi Arabs trekking north for vacation, more and more ordinary people are getting to know each other in a peaceful setting.

"I have no resentment against Arabs who come to Kurdistan as workers or tourists," said Hama Rashid, 47, who translates political books into Arabic, Turkish and Persian and as a young man fought Saddam's soldiers as a member of the Kurdish Peshmerga forces.

"We want Kurdistan to be the tourist destination for Arabs who will pump money into our economy," Rashid said.

Mazin Zidan, visiting Sulaimaniyah from chaotic Baghdad, about 160 miles away, said he was impressed by Kurdistan's orderly traffic and friendly police. "All my bad impressions about the Kurds have been wiped out," said Zidan, 28, strolling in the city's Freedom Park, once site of an Iraqi army base where Kurds were imprisoned.

Zidan said he was reluctant at first to make the trip,

not sure how he would be received.

Since the fall of Saddam in 2003, Kurds have held key positions in the national government, including the presidency. The Kurdish region has also absorbed thousands of displaced Arab families and workers, Kurdish officials say.

But there are tensions between the Kurds and the central government, particularly over the fate of Kirkuk, an

Saddam in 1991, aided by a U.S.-British no-fly zone that helped keep the dictator at bay.

After his 2003 ouster, Kurds eased border controls, leading to a first surge of Arab tourism that year, but closed the gates again in February 2004 when suicide bombers killed 109 people in an attack on Kurdish party offices.

Arab visitors are still carefully screened.



ethnically mixed city just south of Kurdistan claimed by the Kurds.

Nevertheless, the Iraqi government and the authorities in Kurdistan, comprising three of Iraq's 18 provinces, have encouraged the bus convoys. The Iraqi and Kurdish tourism ministers met in March and licensed 38 travel agents to arrange the Kurdistan tours, said Abdul-Zahra Talakani, spokesman for the ministry in Baghdad.

For the Kurds, it's mainly business. For the central government, it may also be politics.

"Kurdistan is part of Iraq, and we encourage Iraqis living in the south and center to visit the Kurdish region," Tourism Minister Kahtan Abbas said in an interview.

Talakani's small office, stuffed with clunky computers and files stacked against a wall, displays a lone tourism poster — showing a lush landscape in the Kurdish city of Irbil, referred to by its Kurdish name, Hawler.

In Saddam's days, most Iraqis were barred from travel abroad and even Kurdistan was largely off limits. The Kurds separated from the rest of Iraq after rising up against

Kurdish troops board buses carrying Iraqi Arabs at checkpoints, and compare names with lists sent ahead by the travel agents, travelers say.

"We have very tight security. We don't want Sulaimaniyah to be like Fallujah," said Mohammed Ihsan, Kurdish minister of extra-regional affairs, referring to what was once Iraq's most violent city. "But the visitors are welcomed everywhere in Kurdistan."

The Kurdish Tourism Ministry says it hopes to double the number of Arab visitors next year.

The influx has been good for Sulaimaniyah.

Shamal Hama Ali, who owns the 25-room Mawla hotel in the city, said more than half his guests are Arabs. Souvenir shop owner Saman Karim said his Arab customers favor items not easily available at home, such as crystal glasses and copies of classic paintings.

The visitors fill local restaurants, take their children to amusement parks or head out to small mountain resorts.

The Kurds and the central government also try to attract foreigners.

Several foreign airlines fly to Irbil and Sulaimaniyah, and the Kurdish government's Web site boasts that not a single foreigner has been killed or kidnapped in its territory since 2003. Iranian pilgrims make up the bulk of the visitors to the rest of Iraq.

But tourism remains a high-risk business, and the Kurds could close their borders if sectarian violence flares again.

"Tourism like a flower," said Talakani, the ministry spokesman. "It needs a good environment to flourish."

Karin Laub reported from Baghdad. Additional reporting by Sameer N. Yacoub and Bushra Juhi.



TODAYS ZAMAN

August 26, 2008

Cola Kurda not given patent by Turkish institute

TODAY'S ZAMAN

THE Turkish Patent Institute (TPE) has not approved applications for beverage brand name "Cola Kurda" because it found resemblances to the emblem of the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the product's name and colors.

The most recent patent application was made by Ramazan Aslan, who named the beverage "Cola Kurda" and used yellow, green and red colors in its emblem together with a star symbol -- bringing to mind the colors used by the PKK.

The Akşam daily stated yesterday that Aslan had applied to the TPE in 2007, but that the TPE had refused the application because "it was against the public order and general ethics." To Turkey's

dismay, Cola Kurda has been offered in Iraq and on Kurdistan Airlines, which is operated by the regional Kurdish administration in northern Iraq.

The first patent application to the TPA for Cola Kurda was made in 2003 by Akil Good Industry and Commerce (Akil Gıda Sanayi ve Ticaret). The application was repeated in 2004 by Ahmet Doğan, who also asked for the approval of brand names on some textile products.

Meanwhile, the Tobacco and Alcohol Market Regulatory Agency (TAPDK) has been evaluating an application for the Kurdish "Roj Beer." A patent for the beer has not been given yet because the brand name and brand colors are also seen as allusions to the PKK, and because the product slogan, "One sip of freedom," is found to be disturbing.



Voices of Iraq
August 26, 2008

Iraqi forces withdrew from Khanagin

DIALA, Aug. 26 (VOI) — THE Iraqi forces withdrew from the district of Khanagin after local residents staged a demonstration demanding their pullout on Tuesday, the district mayor Mulla Muhammad Hassan said.

"A force from the Iraqi army withdrew from the Khanagin district gates while the rest are currently withdrawing now," Hassan told VOI.

Earlier in the day Hassan said thousands of residents of Khanagin staged a demonstration protesting the presence of an Iraqi force in the district and the setting up of several checkpoints there.

"The demonstrators, who gathered in front of the mayoralty building, submitted a memo of protest in which they demanded the exit of the force from the district, where security conditions are stable," Hasan said.

For his part, Mala Bakhtyar, a member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) politburo, told VOI "political motives were behind the Iraqi army forces' entry into the district," not giving more details.

The Khanagin municipal council chief, Sameer Muhammad, said during the demonstration that the measure was "a red line and will get a response from the masses".

The autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan government had set up the Kermyan administration to run the districts of Khanagin, 155 km northeast of Baaquba, the capital city of Diala province, and Kafri, Klar and Jam-jamal.

The Iraqi forces, with logistical support from the U.S. forces, have launched a large-scale security campaign in July codenamed Bashaer al-Kheir (Promise of Good) in a number of cities and districts of Diala with the aim of eliminating armed groups active in those areas.

The operation has recently advanced to areas belonging to Khanagin district, where the Kurdish peshmerga forces withdrew from the districts of Qara Taba and Jalawlaa through an agreement between the Kurdish authorities and the central government in Baghdad.

Kurdish Peshmerga forces withdraw from Khaneqin on August 19, the Peshmerga brigade, comprising 4,000 troops, was located in Diyala to protect the Kurdish civilians in the district. Diyala province, a restive part of Iraq outside the Kurdish autonomous zone but home to many Kurds.

Khaneqin is one of the areas subject to dispute between the two sides pending a hoped-for solution is reached over it through the application of article 140 of the Iraqi constitution.

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is related to the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk city and other disputed areas. It calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province. These stages were supposed to end on December 31, 2007, a deadline that was later extended to six months to end in July 2008.

The former regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had forced over 250,000 Kurdish residents to give up their homes to Arabs in the 1970s in a bid to "Arabize" the city and the region's oil industry.

Kurds, however, seek to include the city in the autonomous Iraq's Kurdistan region, while Sunni Muslims, Turkmen and Shiites oppose the incorporation. The article currently stipulates that all Arabs in Kirkuk be returned to their original locations in southern and central Iraqi areas, and formerly displaced residents returned to Kirkuk.

The article also calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province.

Kirkuk city is historically a Kurdish city and it lies just south border of the Kurdistan autonomous region, the population is a mix of majority Kurds and minority of Arabs, Christians and Turkmen. lies 250 km northeast of Baghdad. Kurds have a strong cultural and emotional attachment to Kirkuk, which they call "the Kurdish Jerusalem."

REUTERS

Iraqi Kurd forces angered by pressure to pull back

MAYDAN, Iraq, Aug 26, 2008 (Reuters) – By Sherko Raouf

KURDISH troops say they lost many men trying to bring security to a volatile, ethnically mixed part of Iraq only to be ordered out by the central government.

A brigade of about 2,000 Kurdish Peshmerga forces withdrew on Monday from some towns they had been patrolling in Diyala province and moved to a part of the province bordering the largely autonomous enclave of Iraqi Kurdistan.

They had come under pressure from the central government, which is seeking to tighten its grip on Diyala and other parts of northern Iraq where Arabs and Kurds live side by side.

Some Arabs and Turkmen accuse the Kurds of trying to extend their influence into areas of Iraq beyond their autonomous homeland.

Dozens of Kurdish soldiers looked tired and pale-faced after hours spent

marching some 40 km (24 miles) to an old castle in the town of Maydan, after leaving the town of Qarah Tappah to be replaced with regular Iraqi army and police units.

Some slept on the few available bunk beds, others cleaned their AK47s and machineguns or propped up mortar tubes.

"We were fighting terrorism and our goal was to bring stability," said the brigade commander, Brigadier-General Nadhim Najim Ahmed, as he sat in his office in the castle wearing a traditional Kurdish robe with a thick turban.

"We gave numbers of martyrs to get this goal. Now we are afraid that Kurds could be targets for revenge attacks by the terrorists," he added.

"During the period we served there, we did not discriminate between people as Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen."

Diyala province, home to Sunni and Shi'ite Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen, has

become as flashpoint for ongoing violence as the rest of Iraq grows more stable.

Some Peshmerga felt their contribution to helping tackle that violence had gone unheeded.

"During our deployment there, in spite of the serious threats, we were happy because we felt we had secured the lives of people in these areas," said Shakhwan Hussain, a non-commissioned officer in the brigade.

Government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh, speaking in a television interview, played down differences over the Peshmerga's withdrawal and said there was no conflict with the Kurdish government over their whereabouts.

"If the government feels there is no need for the presence of the army ... or the people believe there is no threat to the region, the decision should be left to the federal government." (Writing by Tim Cocks; Editing by Andrew Dobbie)

TODAY'S ZAMAN

August 28, 2008

Okkan assassination linked to JITEM

TODAY'S ZAMAN

A former member of the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has said the gunmen who killed a prominent police chief in an ambush in southeastern Turkey in 2001 were linked to a secret military intelligence unit known as JITEM, not the Islamic militant group Hizbullah, which was believed to have been behind the assassination.

Diyarbakir Police Chief Okkan, who was on good terms with the Kurdish people of the predominantly Kurdish region, which is the center of Turkey's conflict with Kurdish separatists, was assassinated on Jan. 24, 2001, in an ambush on his vehicle. Five other police officers were killed in the attack. Abdülkadir Aygan, a former PKK member who had confessed his crimes and joined JITEM and now lives in Sweden, said Okkan was killed by JITEM, in response to questions posed by the Sabah daily in Stockholm.

"JITEM killed Okkan, not Hizbullah. Because JITEM was able to do anything it wanted in Diyarbakir before Okkan was appointed. Their commander, Zahit Engin, was free to act in any way he wanted. JITEM had connections and sometimes they attacked or murdered people," Aygan told Sabah yesterday.

JITEM's existence has so far been officially denied.

Aygan said he had heard Engin and Abdulkerim Kirca, also a JITEM member, curse Okkan because they were not able "work freely" anymore. "Okkan's murder was JITEM's work," Aygan repeated.

No group claimed responsibility for the attack. Later a member of Hizbullah, Mehmet Fidancı, was convicted of the murder and received life sentence, but no other member of the group could be tied to the killing. The court verdict on the Okkan case indicated that the assassination was not committed in the style of Hizbullah.

Hizbullah, a Turkish Islamist group, is based in Turkey and has no relation to the Hezbollah group based in Lebanon. It began as an oppositional force against the Marxist-Leninist PKK.

Okkan was spearheading a crackdown against Hizbullah and is said to have been on the group's death list. It would have been the first time that Hizbullah killed a Turkish official.

A major police operation against Hizbullah in the late 1990s led to the arrest of hundreds of its mem-

bers. Scores of bodies of the group's victims were found in dungeons throughout the country. Guns seized during the raids were later matched with four unsolved murders that had occurred between 1993 and 1996 across Diyarbakir. The organization is listed as a terrorist group in Turkey.

At the time some newspapers had claimed that the Hizbullah "death squad" that killed Okkan was composed of 15 people and hid in a mosque before staging the attack.

Mahmud Övür, a Sabah columnist, wrote yesterday: "Isn't that unbelievable? Interestingly, the attackers not only opened fire on a police chief from a distance, they also approached his car and shot him in the head. Then they disappeared into the streets of Diyarbakir. The media and others said the murder was Hizbullah's work, but this was not believable. Because Hizbullah had neither the power nor the brains to carry out such an attack. Furthermore, it could have taken responsibility for the assassination, but it didn't."

Övür went on to say that a document had "appeared" showing Hizbullah's hand in the murder and that a gun, Makarof, was left at the crime scene to convince people that Hizbullah was the perpetrator.

"However, not even one person was found despite all efforts. But who committed that crime? I remember comments at the time similar to those made about the assassinations of Uğur Mumcu and Abdi İpekçi [prominent journalists]: The murder was the job of the state within the state, referring to JITEM and Counter-guerillas. In other words, it was the job of some powers who have fears about democratization and transparency," he wrote.

The Sabah columnist drew attention to the fact that retired Gen. Levent Ersöz, who is being sought as part of the Ergenekon investigation, is still missing. He said Ersöz was one of the most influential people in the military in the region at the time of Okkan's murder.

The investigation into Ergenekon, a behind-the-scenes criminal network attempting to use social and psychological engineering to shape the country in accordance with its own ultra-nationalist ideology, began in 2007, when a house in İstanbul's Ümraniye district that was being used as an arms depot was discovered by police.

Over the course of the investigation, the case was expanded to reveal elements of what in Turkey is called the deep state, finally proving the existence of the Ergenekon network, which is currently being



accused of trying to incite chaos in order to trigger a coup against the government. The indictment, made public last month, indicates that Ergenekon was behind a series of political assassinations over the past two decades.

More links Aygan's book

Aygan has offered many revelations in his book "Crossfire." He claimed that during his military service, Arif Doğan was the person who made him a member of JITEM. Doğan was taken into custody as part of the investigation into Ergenekon and then confessed to being the leader of JITEM.

Aygan wrote that he was serving in Kars but was unhappy because of the harsh winter conditions there. When he received an offer to serve in Diyarbakir, he accepted and met Doğan, who sent him money for travel expenses.

He also named former PKK members who served with him in the Silvan district of Diyarbakir. "They gave us new civilian clothing from the budget of the governor and Smith and Wesson guns. ... I had a temporary post at JITEM in Urfa. When I was in Urfa, Col. Veli Küçük [also arrested as part of Ergenekon investigation] came to inspect our unit. His was in civilian clothes and had a big moustache. I don't know what other purposes he had in Urfa. I don't think he would just inspect a small unit."

In his testimony a couple of weeks ago, Doğan said that he transferred his position as the head of JITEM to Küçük in 1990, adding, "In later years, after he became a general, we had meetings and spoke both on the phone and face to face about the duty of the gendarmerie organization."

Barack Obama's vice presidential pick Joseph Biden advocates Three Autonomous Ethnic Regions in Iraq

Daya Gamage – US Bureau Asian Tribune

Washington, D.C. 28 August (Asiantribune.com): SENATOR Joseph Biden, a veteran foreign policy expert for 35 years in the United States Congress who currently chairs the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has been an influence on Senator Barack Obama on foreign policy for some time.

Barack Obama's selection of Senator Joe Biden as his vice presidential candidate last week drew mixed reviews in Iraq because of his advocacy to divide the country into autonomous regions along sectarian and ethnic lines.

It was his lack of foreign policy and national security credentials that Barack Obama, the Democratic Party candidate for this November U.S. presidential election, selected Senator Biden to be his vice presidential running mate.

In mid-2006 Biden, then the Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee proposed three ethnically divided autonomous regions for Iraq.

Mr. Biden's so-called soft-partition plan — a variation of the blueprint dividing up Bosnia in 1995 — calls for dividing Iraq into three semi-autonomous regions, held together by a central government. There would be a loose Kurdistan, a loose Shiastan and a loose Sunnistan, all under a big, if weak, Iraq umbrella.

"The idea, as in Bosnia, is to maintain a united Iraq by decentralizing it, giving each ethno-religious group — Kurd, Sunni Arab and Shiite Arab — room to run its own affairs, while leaving the central government in charge of common interests," Senator Biden wrote in The New York Times Op-Ed column on May 1, 2006. "We could drive this in place with irresistible sweeteners for the Sunnis to join in, a plan designed by the military for withdrawing and redeploying American forces, and a regional nonaggression pact," he wrote.

The Biden Plan, as it was called, proved remarkably popular in the U.S. Senate — in September 2007 it faced a Senate vote and passed with the support of 75 senators, including 26 Republicans. The non-binding measure did not compel the President to act, only expressed the will of the Senate. Hillary Clinton voted with Biden; Obama and McCain did not vote at all.

But Senator Biden never gave up. The following statement by Barack Obama shows that Joe Biden has had some influence over Mr. Obama on an important foreign policy issue of dividing countries that face internal ethnic issues into autonomous regions or awarding 'homelands' which could be a vital foreign policy plank of a future Obama-Biden administration.

In a July 2007 town hall campaign event, Obama said, "[Partition] may end up being the best solution, but here's the thing. We can't impose it on the Iraqis. The Iraqis have to make the decision themselves.... If the Iraqi government believes that it can form a unified government they should do that. If they want a soft

partition, they should do that. If they want us simply to leave, we can do that too. But they have to make a series of decisions."

Senator Obama has left the issue wide open for discussion without totally rejecting it or avoiding it as he, and McCain, did when the Senate vote came up.

Barack Obama's selection of Senator Joe Biden as his vice presidential candidate last week drew mixed reviews in Iraq because of his advocacy to divide the country into autonomous regions along sectarian and ethnic lines.

Two years ago when Mr. Biden advocated the solution it drew sharp criticism, especially from Sunni Arabs who opposed autonomy provisions that were written into the Iraqi constitution of 2005.

"Basically, this is an internal American affair, but it is giving us cause for concern because Biden was clear in his call to divide Iraq according to sectarian and ethnic lines," said Sunni lawmaker Adnan al-Dulaimi.

USA Today editorial on August 25 said: "Biden's command of foreign policy and his acquaintance with foreign leaders are impressive assets, but they don't guarantee good judgment. He's been wrong on Iraq, voting against the 1991 war to oust Saddam Hussein from Kuwait but for the resolution that President Bush used to justify his reckless 2003 invasion."

The question is how much influence Joe Biden will exercise on Barack Obama on areas of foreign policy and national security in an Obama-Biden administration?

Senator Joseph R. Biden and Council on Foreign Relations President Emeritus Leslie H. Gelb first laid out a detailed five-point plan for Iraq on May 1, 2006 in a joint op-ed in the New York Times. Since that time, the Biden-Gelb plan has sparked much intellectual debate - from left, right and center. The plan is a chance to achieve the objective most Americans share: to leave Iraq without leaving chaos behind. After a month of hearings in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee examining different options for Iraq and with the release of the National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq in January 2007, the Biden-Gelb plan emerged as a clear path forward.

The Five-Point Plan advocated by Senator Joe Biden is:

1) Maintain a unified Iraq by decentralizing it and giving Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis breathing room in their own regions. The Iraqi constitution already provides for federalism. The central government would be responsible for common interests, like border security and the distribution of oil revenues.

2) Secure support from the Sunnis - who have no oil -- by guaranteeing them a proportionate share (about 20 percent) of oil revenues, allowing former Baathists to go back to work and re-integrating those with no blood on their hands.

3) Increase economic aid, asking oil-rich



Barack Obama's selection of Senator Joe Biden as his vice presidential candidate last week drew mixed reviews in Iraq because of his advocacy to divide the country into autonomous regions along sectarian and ethnic lines.

Arab Gulf states to fund it, tie assistance to the protection of minority rights and create a jobs program to deny the militia new recruits.

4) Convene a regional conference to enlist the support of Iraq's neighbors and create a Contact Group of the major powers to enforce their commitments.

5) Ask our military for a plan to responsibly withdraw most U.S. forces from Iraq by 2008 - enough time for the political settlement to take hold - while refocusing the mission of a small residual force on counter-terrorism and training Iraqis.

The National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iraq - a consensus report of all U.S. intelligence agencies, released 2/2/07 - makes clear the need for a political settlement based on federalism, as called for in the Biden-Gelb plan.

The NIE identifies developments that could "reverse the negative trends driving Iraq's current trajectory," including: "broader Sunni acceptance of the current political structure and federalism" and "significant concessions by Shia and Kurds to create space for Sunni acceptance of federalism." These elements are central to the Biden-Gelb plan for Iraq.

The NIE also warns of the danger of Iraq's civil war becoming a regional war, which underscores the urgent need for a regional diplomatic strategy that involves Iraq's neighbors in supporting a political settlement or containing the violence should reconciliation fail, as called for in the Biden-Gelb plan.

Former UN Ambassador Richard Holbrooke in the Clinton administration and a veteran foreign policy expert who is strongly tipped to be the Secretary of State in a Obama-Biden administration told the *Washington Post*

which the paper carried on 24 October 2006: "I urge [President Bush] to lay out realistic goals, redeploy our troops and focus on the search for a political solution. We owe that to the Iraqis who welcomed the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and put their trust in us, only to find their lives in danger as a result. By a political solution, I mean something far more ambitious than current U.S. efforts aimed at improving the position of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki by changing ministers or setting timelines for progress. Sen. Joe Biden and Les Gelb have advocated what they call, in a reference to the negotiations that ended the war in Bosnia in 1995, a "Dayton-like" solution to the political situation -- by which they mean a looser federal structure with plenty of autonomy for each of the three main groups, and an agreement on sharing oil revenue."

The consensus in Washington is that Joe Biden will fill in the gaps in the areas of foreign policy and national security in Senator Barack Obama's credentials. And if Mr. Biden becomes an important foreign policy and national security advocate in a Obama-Biden administration the Biden-Plan which was advocated for Iraq can be possibly used as a guideline for other areas in this world where separatist sentiments smolder, whether for independence, autonomy, ethnic homeland, or realignment with another country. Dozen such places can be identified at present:

Kurdistan: The region dominated by ethnic

Kurds that stretches across Iraq, Turkey and Iran has never been independent, although it came close in 1920 before Turkey vetoed the partition. Turkey invaded Iraq this year to chase Kurdish separatist guerrillas. In July 2008, the Turkish government blamed Kurds for a pair of bombings that killed 17 in Istanbul.

Crimea: a Peninsula in the Black Sea that former Soviet leader Khrushchev made part of one of the Soviet provinces Ukraine in 1954, Crimea remained Ukrainian when the Soviet Union broke up in 1989. But now, with Russian anger building over Ukrainian aspirations to enter NATO, there is increasing tensions over the area, which has a Russian majority.

Kosovo: Once a part of Serbia, but with a largely Albanian population, Kosovo recently was recognized as independent by Western Europe and the United States. Russia had threatened to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia which are located within the borders of the Republic of Georgia if the West recognized Kosovo. Russian military invaded the two territories in early August 2008 pushing Georgian forces aside.

Chechnya: The Russian province declared independence in 1991. Russian troops invaded in 1994, withdrew after a 1997 peace treaty, and returned in 1999. A low-grade conflict continues, but the intensity of fighting has declined since 2004 as a pro-Russian president has consoli-

dated power.

Kashmir: Kashmir has been the object of dispute between India and Pakistan since the British partitioned the subcontinent in 1947. The two countries, along with China, which asserted control over part of the territory in 1962, observe an uneasy standoff over the region.

Mindanao: a Muslim region in the south of the Philippines. Islamic rebels fighting for decades to win an independent nation.

Sri Lanka: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) popularly known as Tamil Tigers are fighting the Sri Lankan state to win an independent state for minority Tamils in the Northern and Eastern regions of the country since late seventies. The Tamil Tigers accuse the government which they say is controlled by the majority ethnic group Sinhalese has for decades discriminated against the minority Tamils. Currently Tiger separatists have been militarily defeated in the eastern region, and the government forces have penetrated into LTTE held areas in the northern region with remarkable success. An US State Department official last year advocated a 'Homeland' for the minority Tamils in the northern and eastern region which the government totally rejected. Nevertheless, US advocate regional autonomy for minority Tamils.

Asian Tribune



Voices of Iraq
August 28, 2008

Kurdistan's president says Khanaqin is safe area

ARBIL, Aug. 28 (VOI) – THE PRESIDENT of Iraq's Kurdistan region, Massoud al-Barazani, expressed his surprise at the raid conducted by Iraqi army personnel on Khanaqin district, which he described as a "safe" area.

The remark was made on Wednesday during his reception of a high-ranking delegation from the U.S. embassy, according to a statement released by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and received by Aswat al-Iraq- Voices of Iraq- (VOI). "Khanaqin is a safe area and it's a wonder that the Iraqi army entered it under the pretext of combating terrorism," Barazani said. The Kurdish president wondered why the Iraqi army did not coordinate with the regional government. "The two sides discussed recent development on the Iraqi political scene, including Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution, the United Nations' role in its implementation, and the recent incidents that took place in Khanaqin," the statement noted. In cooperation with the Multi-National Force (MNF), Iraqi security forces have been conducting a wide-scale security operation called *Bashaer al-Kheir* (Promise of Good) since July 2008 in DIALA with the aim of tracking down armed groups in the province. The operation has recently extended to include areas affiliated with the province, including Khanaqin district. Following an agreement between Kurdish authorities and the central government in Baghdad, Peshmerga forces withdrew from the districts of Qurtuba and Jalawlaa, which are affiliated with Khanaqin. Peshmerga is a term used by the Kurds to refer to armed Kurdish fighters. Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution, pertaining to the situation in Kirkuk, is expected



to put an end to the controversy over disputed areas, including Khanaqin. The article currently stipulates that all Arabs in Kirkuk be returned to their original locations in southern and central Iraqi areas, and formerly displaced residents returned to Kirkuk, 250 km northeast of Baghdad. The article also calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province. These stages were supposed to end on December 31, 2007, a deadline

that was later extended to six months to end in July 2008. Mosul, the capital city of Ninewa, lies 405 km north of Baghdad. The original city of Mosul stands on the west bank of the Tigris River, opposite the ancient biblical city of Nineveh on the east bank, but the metropolitan area has now grown to encompass substantial areas on both banks, with five bridges linking the two sides. Despite having an amount of Kurdish population, it does not form part of the area controlled by the The fabric Muslin, long manufactured in Mosul, is named for this city. Another historically important product of the area is Mosul marble. The city is also a historic center for the Nestorian Christianity of the Assyrians, containing the tombs of several Old Testament prophets such as Jonah, Yunus in Arabic, and Nahum.

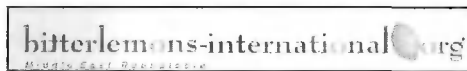


Voices of Iraq
August 28, 2008

Kirkuk market blast kills, wounds 8

KIRKUK, Aug. 28 (VOI) – EIGHT civilians were killed or wounded in an explosive charge attack that ripped through a popular market in southern Kirkuk city, a police source said on Thursday.

"An improvised explosive device (IED) went off in a popular market in Domeez area, southern Kirkuk, killing a civilian and wounding seven others," the source, who preferred to remain unnamed, told *Aswat al-Iraq- Voices of Iraq- (VOI)*. "The attack caused damage to several nearby shops," the source noted. The body was taken to the morgue and the wounded were rushed to a nearby hospital for treatment, the source explained. The source did not provide further details. Kirkuk, 250 km (156 miles) north of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, sits on the ruins of a 5,000-year-old settlement. Because of the strategic geographical location of the city, Kirkuk was the battle ground for three empires, Assyria, Babylonia and Media, which controlled the city at various times. Kirkuk is the centre of the northern Iraqi petroleum industry. It is a historically and ethnically mixed city populated by Assyrians, Kurds, Arabs and Iraqi Turkmen. The population was estimated at 1,200,000 in 2008.



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What Iraq do the Kurds want?

By Hiwa Osman

IN the absence of a permanent United States presence in Kurdistan--something that would be welcomed by almost every Kurd--the Iraq that the Kurds and most Iraqis want when US troops withdraw is one that is at peace with itself and the world. They want a federal democracy with a good democratic government that upholds the values of the free world: an Iraq where all citizens are equal and their rights are respected.

The elements of this dream are there. The constitution, referred to by many politicians as the cornerstone of the new Iraq, provides for all of the above. The foundations for the new Iraq are being laid now, but the project is not likely to be completed in the near future. The political process still needs to mature. It is still hostage to the principles of quota and consensus among participating parties that are mostly identified along religious and sectarian lines.

This weakens a common national identity and strengthens the sectarian and ethnic divide in society by empowering the political parties that represent these identities, rendering it a lot more difficult to separate religion from the state. In fact, we still depend heavily on the role of religious figures. On many important issues, the final word is still that of Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani.

While Iraqis realize that a true democratic Iraq will obviously entail the rule of the Shi'ite majority, they are also convinced that the days of exclusive rule by one group are over. The first 80 years of Iraq's history clearly demonstrate that no single group or leader alone can rule the country. The only guarantee for minorities is a federal structure that empowers local and regional governments and allows the various Iraqi communities to conduct their own affairs.

Baghdad does not seem ready to digest the concept of federalism. This is still a new concept for Iraqis. They have become used to a strong central state with a strong leader. The

Kurds are the only people who are actively seeking to hammer out a federal structure for the country. Yet federalism should be not only a Kurdish cause, but an Iraqi cause. "They seem to have forgotten what strong centers and strong leaders did to them," remarked a Kurdish political analyst recently about Iraqis in general. Thus the current debate between the Kurdistan region and Baghdad is over a true federal status for the region and the shaping of a federal architecture for the new Iraq.

Some in Baghdad feel that over the past few years "concessions" were given to Kurdistan due to Baghdad's weakness and that with the security gains Baghdad is making, "this must stop." This is simply the wrong attitude to take. Powers should be devolved to the regions out of Baghdad's understanding of the strengths involved in having a true federal system. The country will be owned by all, as opposed to being owned by the center only.

The Kurds still need some time to develop confidence in Baghdad. Talks over oil contracts, the share of the budget and the status of Peshmerga forces are all issues whose settlement will provide the Kurds with assurances that the old days are not going to be repeated. For example, the dispute over oil contracts is not about the size of the revenue the Kurds want to get. Rather, to the Kurds, a national oil policy rather than a central one will enable the Kurdish areas to benefit from developing the oil industry of Iraq.

The Kurds realize that they are in a marriage with Baghdad and divorce is not an option. At the same time, they feel disappointed by their allies and counter-signatories to the constitution. They feel they have performed their obligation toward Baghdad. "When they need us to fight terrorists, we are their partners, but when it comes to our rights in deciding for ourselves, we become adversaries," said a Kurdish politician involved in the talks with Baghdad recently.

Ironing out the differences and reaching a workable relationship with Baghdad will need

some time. The help and presence of the US is vital to settle these issues. A federal structure will allow more room for development and good governance and less room for corruption and putting the blame on the other side. Iraqis are still picking up the rubble of the destruction caused by the former regime, the terror campaign and the internal fighting that followed. In this process, people usually look for someone to put the blame on. But when people are busy building their own regions, they don't usually ask whether the builder is Shi'ite or Sunni, Kurd or Arab. Rather the test is, can they do the job or not. Of course corruption and mismanagement may take place, but it is a lot easier to fight them at the regional rather than the national level, provided there exist the right anti-corruption bodies and they are not politicized.

While the Kurds are looking at internal arrangements for their future, they are also mindful of the regional dynamics that could dictate the future of Iraq as a whole and the Kurdistan region in particular. They are quietly eyeing the showdown between Iran and the international community. If Iran survives this, it will have a huge say in the future shape and nature of Iraq and the Middle East.

The Kurds also realize the importance of their neighbor Turkey. It is key to a peaceful future that Turkey be at peace with a Kurdish federal region on its border. Similarly, the Kurds will have to assure the Turks that they are not a threat to them. They will have to demonstrate that they serve as a factor of stability rather than irritation.

After all and if all else fails, Turkey is the only access the Kurds have to the free world.

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The divided and broken city of Kirkuk faces up to the curse of oil

Deborah Haynes in Kirkuk

IT should be Iraq's biggest success story. Beneath the soil of Kirkuk lies oil worth billions of dollars - the world's sixth-biggest reserve.

Yet there is no sewerage system, the roads are cracked, rubbish is strewn all over the pavements, unemployment is as high as 40 per cent and there is no sign of any improvement.

Even more worrying - to the Government as well as to the US-led coalition - is that the city is being pulled between different ethnic groups, making it the most dangerous issue facing Iraq.

The Kurds of Kirkuk, who are a majority and hold the top political and security posts, believe that the city belongs to Iraq's largely autonomous Kurdish north.

After years of "Arab-isation" as Saddam Hussein tried to ensure control of its oil wealth, offering poor Arab families money to relocate there, Kirkuk is now filling with Kurdish families returning in their droves.

The Arab settlers have the option to go back to their original towns and cities for a cash payment of 20 million dinars (£9,100). This worries and infuriates the Arabs and the city's other main ethnic group, the Turkomans. They want Kirkuk to stay under the control of Baghdad or for it to be made an independent zone where power is shared.

All sides are equally passionate about their cause, with Kurdish leaders talking of protests if their rights are eroded, while Arab and Turkoman politicians pledge to resist to their last breath any move to make Kirkuk part of Iraqi Kurdistan.

All sides can, however, agree on one thing: the frenzy over the city is because of its oil and gas wealth. "The citizens of Kirkuk have a saying that the blessing of oil has become a curse," Abdulrahman Mustafa Fattah, the Kurdish Governor of Kirkuk, told The Times.

"Oil has destroyed our land; oil has changed the demographics ... Even now we feel there is an injustice done to Kirkuk because of oil."

Caught in the middle is the United Nations, which has the unenviable task of trying to devise a compromise solution to which everyone will agree.

"It is probably the most delicate and potentially explosive issue in Iraq," Staffan de Mistura, head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, said. "That is why we are giving it top priority."

The arguments that put politicians at loggerheads have yet to feed down to the street, where ordinary Kurds, Arabs and Turkomans insist that they remain friends. Press the people of Kirkuk about their hopes for the future, though, and the ethnic fault-lines soon emerge.

"What the Kurds want the Arabs don't. What the Arabs want the Kurds don't. And the Turkomans don't really agree with either side," said Nisreen Shukur, 33, a Kurdish teacher who was one of thousands pushed out by Saddam but who returned after his overthrow.

Arabs and Turkmen, upset by the demographic realignment, accuse the two main Kurdish political parties of exploiting the system to enable additional Kurds to move in. They also claim that Arab and Turkoman families are being forced to leave to manipulate further the ethnic ratio in the Kurds' favour.

"We cannot get jobs, our families are displaced and those who speak out get kidnapped, killed or arrested," said Ahmed Hamid al-Obeidi, general secretary of the Arab Unity Bloc, the main Arab political grouping in Kirkuk. "The Kurdish parties have hurt us in a way that is unprecedented in history."

Kurdish leaders deny charges that they are behaving to others as Saddam did to them.

"Did we ever commit acts of genocide?" asked Rizgar Ali, head of the city's provincial council and a leading member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). "Do we put people in mass graves?"

Rifts over Kirkuk's status have delayed the passage of a law on provincial elections, throwing into doubt the prospect of a nationwide poll before the end of the year. This has dismayed the United States and Britain, who

regard this as a crucial milestone; the Iraqi parliament is due to wrestle with the problem when it reconvenes next month.

In addition, Mr de Mistura says, the UN is working on a variety of proposals for the city to be put first to the various factions, and then eventually to a referendum.

Everyone knows how high the stakes are. Last month a suicide bomber blew himself up among a crowd of banner-waving Kurds in the city centre who were protesting against draft election legislation. In the violent chaos that followed, a mob of angry Kurds attacked the offices of a Turkoman political party. More than 25 people were killed in total and over 200 were injured.

Ahmed Askari, a Kurdish provincial council member who sits on a committee that deals with reconstruction, says that Kirkuk, source of enormous wealth, is itself being neglected by the central Government.

"Who owns the petrol?" he asked. "All the money is taken by Baghdad and spent on cities across Iraq but Kirkuk is at the end of the list. We only get the smoke, dirt and occupation of the land," he said.

Mr Askari believes that the city should receive compensation for helping to generate the main source of Iraq's income.

Mahbuba Kakamir, a rotund Kurdish housewife, summed up the feelings of many of Kirkuk's people. "What is the use of living on a sea of oil if it does not improve my life?"

- Melting pot
- Kirkuk claims to be the oldest site of continuous occupation in Iraq
- It is the capital of Tamin province and sits on top of 13 per cent of Iraq's oil
- The ethnic mix of the 1.2 million population is unknown; Turkomans and Arabs opposed a census
- Kurds seized the city after the US invasion in 2003
- A referendum on Kirkuk's fate was shelved last year

Iraq's Sticky Future

Kurds and Arabs must find a way to share their natural wealth

BENEATH the sands of southern Iraq and the foothills of the Zagros mountains to the north lie the world's third-largest oil reserves. They are proven to contain at least 115 billion barrels, and the country's future depends on them. But extraction has stalled at prewar levels because of a deep rift between Baghdad and the Kurdish north over how to distribute this prodigious oil wealth.

Tensions in one major northern city recently spilt over into riots and a suicide bombing that left 25 people dead and 200 injured. Local leaders fear that there may be worse to come. Iraq therefore faces an urgent choice: to reconcile competing demands for oil money and use it to create a virtuous circle of prosperity and reconstruction; or to succumb to regional and ethnic rivalries, leave the oil industry underdeveloped, and waste the huge sacrifices by Iraqi and allied forces that have made the US-led surge a success and brought the country its best hope of long-term stability in five years.

Nowhere illustrates the deadlock jeopardising Iraq's oil-based patrimony more bleakly or concisely than Kirkuk.

The city, close to the Iraqi Kurdish region but not inside it, was intensively settled with poor Arab families by Saddam Hussein to dilute Kurds' claims on its oil wealth. Since 2003, Kurds driven out under the previous regime have returned in droves, dominating regional politics and seeking unilaterally to approve contracts to develop northern oilfields. The central Government, determined that all oil revenues should flow through the Oil Ministry in Baghdad, has ruled these contracts illegal.

One result is that Iraq's total oil output remains stuck at 2.5 million barrels a day, compared with 3.5 million before the Gulf War in 1991 and a target of 4.5 million within five years. Another is that Kirkuk itself is destitute. Unemployment is between 35 and 40 per cent, modern sewers are non-existent and despair stalks the streets in a city that could be one of the richest on Earth.

Most of Iraq's untapped reserves are in the north, but 80 per cent of its output is from the south, which therefore negotiates from a position of all but unassailable strength in the bargaining over revenues. Hussain al-Shahrastani, the Oil Minister, has proved powerless to end the deadlock by

piloting a law governing the extraction of hydrocarbons through parliament. Without such a legal framework it has proved impossible to persuade Western oil firms to sign the short-term technical support contracts that Iraq desperately needs to boost production.

The picture is not one of unremitting gloom. Thanks largely to the improving security situation, this year's oil export revenues should be double those of 2006 and triple those of 2004. But Iraq is under pressure from the US to start paying for more of its own reconstruction, and oil accounts for 95 per cent of government income. Output therefore needs to increase further. To achieve this, Mr al-Shahrastani must persuade Iraq's rival regions that their national interests come first. If he cannot, he should be replaced. A hydrocarbons law and a transparent bidding process for long-term technical support contracts must then follow swiftly.

Dividing up \$70 billion of oil revenues a year is inevitably complex, but not rocket science. Iraq should be thankful and get on with it.

United Press International

Kurds reject Sunni proposal on Kirkuk

August 29, 2008 Kirkuk, (UPI)

IRAQ'S border with Kurdistan region, — Kurdish lawmakers have rejected a provision submitted by the Sunni Accordance Front to invite foreign officials to negotiate over the status of Kirkuk city.

Accordance Front chief Ayad al-Samarrai proposed inviting the United Nations and representatives from the international community to enter talks on the status of the oil-rich city, the Iranian Press TV said Thursday, citing local Iraqi reports.

The Sunni proposal said Iraqi lawmakers were not considering the interests of the people of Kirkuk while negotiating the provision.

This "proposal calls on delegates from the U.N. and some foreign countries to be involved in talks to solve the dispute over Kirkuk," a statement from the Accordance Front said.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan rejected the proposal, however, saying it was a matter for the Kurdish people to settle.

Kurdish authorities have shunned several proposals for Kirkuk, including one that divides authority among the four main ethnic groups there.

An Iraqi constitutional provision, Article 140, calls for the reversal of policies enacted by Saddam Hussein that forcibly displaced the Kurdish population

from the region.

Kirkuk city is historically a Kurdish city and it lies just south border of the Kurdistan autonomous region, the population is a mix of majority Kurds and minority of Arabs, Christians and Turkmen. lies 250 km northeast of Baghdad. Kurds have a strong cultural and emotional attachment to Kirkuk, which they call "the Kurdish Jerusalem."

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is related to the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk city and other disputed areas.

The article also calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province.

The former regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had forced over 250,000 Kurdish residents to give up their homes to Arabs in the 1970s, to "Arabize" the city and the region's oil industry.

Kirkuk, sits on the ruins of a 5,000-year-old settlement. Because of the strategic geographical location of the city, Kirkuk was the battle ground for three empires, Assyria, Babylonia and Media which controlled the city at various times.



Voices of Iraq
August 28, 2008

VP Hashemi calls on Kurdistan president to attend meeting over army deployment in Khanaqeen

BAGHDAD, Aug. 28 (VOI) —IRAQ'S Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi on Thursday called on Kurdistan region's president Masoud Barazani to join an urgent meeting to discuss deployment of Iraqi army in DIALA's disputed town. "Al-Hashemi today conferred in a phone call with Barazani the current circumstances in DIALA province, and the constitutional ground for the Iraqi armed forces to be present in Khanqin suburb (155 km northeast of Baaquba city)," said the vice president office statement received by Aswat al-Iraq — Voices of Iraq — (VOI). "Al-Hashemi and Barazani discussed the political ways to defuse a dangerous crisis foreboding on the horizon," it added.

VP Al-Hashemi called on Barazani to join an urgent meeting of political leaders to discuss Khanaqeen's issue in Baghdad.

Kurdish forces refused Iraqi defense ministry orders to pull out of Kurdish-populated areas of ethnically divided DIALA province where they have been deployed for the past two years. But then conceded Iraqi army deployment in some areas of the disputed town of Khanaqeen.

The deployment of Iraqi troops in Khanqin unleashed strong protest of Kurdish official, considering the measures as provocative and a political tool to influence Kurd's stances in controversial provincial polls law. On Wednesday, the president of Iraq's Kurdistan region, Massoud al-Barazani, expressed his surprise at the raid conducted by Iraqi army personnel on Khanqin district,

which he described as a "safe" area. The remark was made on during his reception of a high-ranking delegation from the U.S. embassy, according to a statement released by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and received by VOI. "Khanaqin is a safe area and it's a wonder that the Iraqi army entered it under the pretext of combating terrorism," Barazani said.

The Kurdish president wondered why the Iraqi army did not coordinate with the regional government. Following an agreement between Kurdish authorities and the central government in Baghdad, Peshmerga forces withdrew from the districts of Qurtuba and Jalawlaa, which are affiliated with Khanaqin. Peshmerga is a term used by the Kurds to refer to armed Kurdish fighters. Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is enacted by the Iraqi parliament to put an end to the controversy over disputed areas, including Kirkuk and Khanqin.

The article currently stipulates that all Arabs in Kirkuk be returned to their original locations in southern and central Iraqi areas, and formerly displaced residents returned to Kirkuk, 250 km northeast of Baghdad. The article also calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province. These stages were supposed to end on December 31, 2007, a deadline that was later extended to six months to end in July 2008. Baaquba, the capital city of DIALA province, lies 57 km northeast of Baghdad.

Guardian

August 29 2008

Turkish military will defend secular state, government warned

- Commander speaks out in front of president and PM
- Critics wrong to allege links to coup plotters

Robert Tait The Guardian

ONE of Turkey's most senior army commanders has warned the Islamist-rooted government that it will face a powerful military backlash if it seeks to alter the country's secular system.

General Isik Kosaner also vowed to defeat domestic critics who, he said,

falsely linked the army to an alleged anti-government coup attempt known as Ergenekon, and complained that the fight against violent Kurdish "terrorists" was being hampered by new human rights legislation aimed at enhancing Turkey's EU membership bid, which the government strongly backs.

The comments were delivered in a

setting calculated to have maximum political impact, a military ceremony attended by the Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and President Abdullah Gul, who both last month escaped a political ban when the constitutional court narrowly decided against closing the governing Justice and Development party (AKP) for allegedly plotting

an Islamic state.

Kosaner said the army was determined to defend the unitary secular state founded by Ataturk and brushed off accusations of political meddling.

"Protection of fundamental characteristics of the republic cannot be considered an intervention in domestic politics," he said.

The remarks were an apparent signal that the AKP remains on probation after the court ruling, in which judges fined the party for being a "focal point of anti-secularism" but stopped one vote short of closing it. They were also a rebuff to the EU, which criticised the case as judicial interference and which also supports greater rights for the Kurds.

The army has played a pivotal role in Turkish politics since the modern republic was founded in 1923 and has ousted four governments in the past 50 years. It tried unsuccessfully to block Gul's election as president last year because of concerns over his Islamist past and is widely assumed to have backed the clo-

sure case brought by the chief prosecutor.

Kosaner gave the latest demonstration of its clout while handing over command of the gendarmerie to become the new head of the land forces, making him effectively second in command of the army.

He said the army's status as Turkey's most revered institution was under attack from "certain circles" - code for AKP supporters - who blamed it for Ergenekon, an alleged coup plot in which more than 80 hardline secularists, including former army officers, have been indicted. "Imaginary scenarios aim to bring down the reputation of the Turkish armed forces," Kosaner said, in the first public remarks on the saga by a senior commander. "All attacks on our ability to perform our duties are bound to disappear in the face of our resolve."

He also said EU-inspired laws were helping the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) - regarded as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the US and the EU.

"Laws that are amended as if there is

no terrorism threat against our country prevent the security forces from fighting terrorism in a rapid and effective manner," he said. "If terrorists are threatening human rights, we need to reconsider the balance between rights and freedoms and take counter-measures."

Gareth Jenkins, an Istanbul-based commentator on Turkish security issues, said Kosaner's comments were partly aimed at reassuring his own officers.

"But there's also speculation about what AKP will do - will it become more moderate or try again (to impose Islamism)," he said. "The military are giving them the message that they are still here and prepared to defend secularism."

"There is real frustration within the military at what they see as an assault by the AKP on Ataturk's secular legacy and also what they consider to be the political motivations of the Ergenekon investigation. They think the aim isn't to unearth the 'deep state' but to undermine the military as an institution."



Voices of Iraq
August 30 2008

Kurdish academics, politicians discuss fresh mechanism for art. 140

ARBIL, Aug. 30 (VOI) – KURDISH academics and politicians discussed during a meeting in Arbil on Saturday means to hammer out a fresh mechanism for article 140 of the Iraqi constitution on the issue of Kirkuk and other disputed areas, according to a source in the meeting.

"The Kurdistan Information & Strategic Research Center held the meeting in association with the magazine 140, issued in Kirkuk, to consider means on new mechanisms to apply article 140 of the constitution," Hassib Rozbayani, a former aide to the Kirkuk governor and the editor in chief of the Kurdish magazine, told *Aswat al-Iraq – Voices of Iraq* – (VOI). "There are systematic plans by the central government to procrastinate on and lay hurdles before the application of article 140," Rozbayani said.

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is related to the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk city and other disputed areas. It calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province. These stages were supposed to end on December 31, 2007, a deadline that was later extended to six months to end in July 2008.

The former regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had forced over 250,000 Kurdish residents to give up their homes to Arabs in the 1970s in a bid to "Arabize" the city and the region's oil industry. Kurds, however, seek to include the city in the autonomous Iraq's Kurdistan region, while Sunni Muslims, Turkmen and Shiites oppose the incorporation. The article currently stipulates that all Arabs in Kirkuk be returned to their original locations in southern and central Iraqi areas, and formerly displaced residents returned to Kirkuk. The article also calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kur-

istan region or having it as an independent province. Kirkuk, 250 km (156 miles) north of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, sits on the ruins of a 5,000-year-old settlement. Because of the strategic geographical location of the city, Kirkuk was the battle ground for three empires, Assyria, Babylonia and Media which controlled the city at various times.

Kirkuk is the centre of the northern Iraqi petroleum industry. It is a historically and ethnically mixed city populated by Assyrians, Kurds, Arabs and Iraqi Turkmen. The population was estimated at 1,200,000 in 2008. "We have reached the conviction that it is vital to give a hand to the Kurdish leaders with some recommendations and proposals in the face of attempts by some parties in Baghdad to encumber the application of article 140," Rozbayani said.

He did not elaborate on the details of these proposed new mechanisms but said the new project "would be referred to the Kurdish leaders to discuss it".

Arbil, also written Erbil or Irbil, is believed to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited in the world and is one of the largest cities in Iraq. The city lies eighty kilometers (fifty miles) east of Mosul. In 2005, its estimated population was 990,000 inhabitants. The city is the capital of the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, only isolated, sporadic violence has hit Arbil, unlike many other areas of Iraq. Parallel bomb attacks against the Eid celebrations arranged by the Iraqi President Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and KRG President Massoud Barazani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) killed 109 people on February 1, 2004. Responsibility was claimed by the Islamist group Ansar al-Sunnah, and stated to be in solidarity with the Kurdish Islamist faction Ansar al-Islam. Another bombing on May 4, 2005 killed 60 civilians. Despite these bombings the population generally feels safe.



Voiices of Iraq
August 31, 2008

Kurdish delegation discusses Khanaqin crisis with PM in Baghdad

BAGHDAD, Aug. 31 (VOI) – A KURDISH delegation, which arrived earlier on Sunday in Baghdad, met with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to discuss means of reaching a solution for the Khanaqin district crisis, a lawmaker from the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) said.

"I hope the negotiating Kurdish delegation will reach a positive outcome through the use of the language of dialogue instead of the military option in solving the pending issues between the Baghdad and (Iraqi) Kurdistan governments, particularly as regards the Khanaqin crisis," Sami al-Atroushi told *Aswat al-Iraq – Voices of Iraq – (VOI)*. Differences erupted between the Baghdad central government and the government of the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region after Iraqi forces carrying out Operation Bashaer al-Kheir in Diala entered Khanaqin to track down gunmen. The Iraqi forces, by virtue of orders from Maliki, gave the *peshmerga*, or the Kurdish region guards, 24 hours to evacuate their posts in the disputed district.

The *peshmerga* commanders in the area rejected the orders, affirming that they have received instructions from the leaders of the Iraqi Kurdistan region to remain in their positions.

The Iraqi Kurdistan region's cabinet secretary, Muhammad Qora Daghi, had earlier on Sunday told VOI that a Kurdish delegation comprising the deputy secretary general of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Burham Saleh, a member of the PUK politburo, Fouad Maasoum, and two members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) politburo, Hoshiyar Zebari and Roznouri Shawis, had left for Baghdad to discuss the Khanaqin crisis with senior Iraqi officials. Al-Atroushi, whose KIU has five out of a total 275 seats in the Iraqi parliament, described the entry of an Iraqi army force in the Khanaqin district as "political blackmailing and pressures by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki on the Kurdistan region to give up article 140 of the Iraqi constitution." Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is related to the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk city and other disputed areas like Khanaqin.

It calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the

inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province. These stages were supposed to end on December 31, 2007, a deadline that was later extended to six months to end in July 2008.

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In cooperation with the Multi-National Force (MNF), Iraqi security forces have been conducting a wide-scale security operation codenamed *Bashaer al-Kheir* (Promise of Good) since July 2008 in Diala with the aim of tracking down armed groups in the province. The operation has recently extended to include disputed areas in the province, including Khanaqin district. Following an agreement between Kurdish authorities and the central government in Baghdad, *peshmerga* forces withdrew from the districts of Qara Taba and Jalawlaa, which belong to disputed Khanaqin.

FINANCIAL TIMES August 31, 2008

Kurdish troops in standoff with Iraq forces

KHANAQIN, Iraq, Aug 31 - A new flashpoint has emerged in the Iraqi government's tense relationship with Kurds as rival Kurdish and Iraqi government forces vie for control of an ethnically mixed town, officials said on Sunday.

"The Iraqi army still wants to enter Khanaqin, and the *peshmerga* [Kurdish security force] is present. Everyone is on edge," said Ibrahim Bajelani, a Kurd who heads the provincial council in the restive Diyala province northeast of Baghdad.

"If the Iraqi army tries to enter without prior agreement, we can't be held responsible for the consequences," he added.

Tensions in Diyala are mounting after most of the 2,000 Kurdish troops who had been patrolling ethnically mixed areas withdrew this week to the edge of the Kurds' largely autonomous northern region, under pressure from the central government.

The *peshmerga* has refused, however, to pull out of Khanaqin, outside Kurdistan but home to Arabs and Kurds, near the Iranian border.

A suicide bomber killed 28 people at a police recruitment centre in the nearby town of Jalawla, a day after *peshmerga* forces withdrew from the town at Baghdad's request and a *peshmerga* commander said the attack showed the Iraqi government could not handle security in the area.

Thousands of Kurds staged protests as the Iraqi army approached Khanaqin last week to try to replace the *peshmerga*.

"A week ago, the Iraqi army surrounded Khanaqin. This was illogical. Khanaqin is stable and there is no security breach," said Khanaqin mayor Mohammed Mulla Hassan, a Kurd.

Iraqi troops remain outside the town and no fighting has occurred. But tensions are high.

A Kurdish delegation was in Baghdad on Sunday for talks with the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to seek a resolution to the dispute. Both sides have called for calm, saying the row can be resolved through dialogue, but officials have declined to give further details about the discussions.

Diyala, with large populations of ethnic Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen divided into Sunni and Shia religious groups, has remained a battleground for Sunni Islamist al-Qaeda, which is seeking to stoke tensions as the rest of Iraq grows more stable.

"We never discriminated Arabs and Kurds," said Kurdish soldier Abu Peshawa. "Why are they treating the *peshmerga* like rebels? My brother served in Baghdad. Arabs and Kurds are all brothers."

But Mr Maliki's government sees the *peshmerga*'s withdrawal from Diyala as essential to its strategy of giving its own forces, not other armed groups, responsibility for security.

"The presence of *peshmerga* in Diyala is just like the presence of an outlaw militia," Sami al-Askari, a legislator in the ruling Shia alliance, who is close to Mr Maliki, was quoted as saying in the pan-Arab daily *Asharq Al-Awsat* on Sunday.

Such remarks are sure to anger Kurds who say their role in combating al-Qaeda in Diyala has gone unnoticed.

"*Peshmerga* forces have been

martyred in the region in the name of stability and security," said Kurdistan's minister for *peshmerga* affairs, Omar Osman Ibrahim. "There is a hidden hand encouraging greater tensions."

Mustafa Chawresh, a senior *peshmerga* official, said Iraqi forces elsewhere in Diyala had hoisted the Iraqi flag and told residents they had been liberated from the *peshmerga*.

But while Iraqi and Kurdish security men squabble, the town's civilians fear strife between peoples they say have been friends, at least most of the time.

"The Kurdish forces are also Iraqis," said Samia Karim, an Arab, standing in the street in her traditional dish-dasha and black cloak. "We have no problem with them. They know the customs of these areas. We don't want trouble."

At a busy market stall, Hussam Ahmed, added: "We never had problems between Arabs and Kurds and we don't need them now."

The Washington Post August 31, 2008

Iraqi Kurdistan still a tough sell to investors

By Missy Ryan - Reuters

ARBIL, Iraq (Reuters) - Iraqi Kurdistan has been primed for a wave of foreign investment for years, but officials say the grand goals of a relatively peaceful northern enclave are frustrated by violence plaguing the rest of Iraq. Kurdish officials dream big, speaking of bringing Europeans to ski the region's snow-capped peaks, building modern schools and hospitals and rejuvenating thirsty wheat fields.

In Arbil, the Kurdish capital some 310 km (190 miles) north of Baghdad, the streets buzz with activity. Several upmarket hotels and housing projects are going up on the outskirts of town. Direct flights arrive from Europe and westerners are a common sight in the city centre's booked hotels.

"We have many things: oil, iron, phosphate," said Baqi Salaye, a Kurdish businessman sipping sweet tea in an elegant, gold-trimmed reception room in Arbil's chamber of commerce.

Yet Salaye, who dabbles in aviation, tourism and other business, echoes widely felt frustration when he bemoans the muddled perceptions of outsiders, who often fail to notice that Kurdistan has been largely spared the bloodshed in Iraq.

"If something happens in Mosul, they say 'northern Iraq.' If it happened in Diyala, they say 'northern Iraq,'" lamented Karim Sinjari, Kurdish state interior minister, referring to northern areas that fall outside the Kurds' autonomous region.

"So -- someone sitting in the United States -- you see the news and you cannot differentiate."

Kurdistan, closely allied with Washington for years, seemed poised to flourish after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003 toppled Saddam Hussein, the unflinching leader who had waged war against minority Kurds and slaughtered civilians en masse.

Since a new investment law was issued in 2006, promising investors a 10-year exemption from non-customs taxes, Kurdistan has licensed over 100 investment projects, said Nawroz Muhammad Amin, a senior official at the region's Investment Board.

Investments in housing, tourism, industry and other sectors, not including oil and natural resources, total around \$16 billion from 2006 through mid-2008, she said.

About 16 percent of that was foreign investment, 25 percent Iraqi and foreign



partnerships, and the rest local. Among outsiders, Arab companies have so far led the pack.

Damac, a developer from the United Arab Emirates, plans to begin work this year on a small city of residential, commercial and recreational properties near Arbil worth at least \$6 billion, aiming to attract returning Iraqi exiles.

But Western investors are arriving more slowly, which frustrates Muhammad Amin.

"We visit different countries. We have an investment law. We have the government Web site, and ads on Arabic channels," she said, throwing up her hands.

CALCULATING RISKS, BENEFITS

Even before Iraq violence dropped sharply in the last year, the Kurdish government aggressively courted investors, branding itself 'the other Iraq' and wooing clients in foreign capitals.

Timothy Mills, president of the American Chamber of Commerce-Iraq, said most U.S. companies have so far stayed away from Kurdistan because they don't fully understand the balance of risks and benefits of doing business there.

"The perception in American boardrooms is informed by the (U.S. State Department) travel advisory, by what is seen on TV," Mills said. "Degrees of uncertainty."

Another red flag is the fighting between Kurdish PKK rebels in the mountainous area near Kurdistan's northern edge and Turkish forces on the other side of the border.

"The Kurdish government is trying a lot, but some things are not in our hands," Sinjari said. He urged the United States and Britain to relax travel policies discouraging would-be visitors.

The U.S. State Department, in its most recent advisory, strongly warns

U.S. citizens against traveling to Iraq, ticking off a litany of threats: rocket attacks, kidnapers, thugs -- and the PKK, which Washington considers a terrorist group.

But Sinjari hopes a change in such policies, at least for Kurdistan, would encourage business travelers and tourists.

U.S. officials say foreign investment across Iraq has also been hindered by a lack of confidence in its overall regulatory regime. They expect change with the passage of an oil law in Iraq, which has the world's third largest proven reserves.

The Iraqi cabinet passed a draft of the law in 2007, but a final version has been bogged down in a number of disputes, including whether Kurdistan will have the power to sign oil contracts on its own and who will control reserves there.

Also contentious is the status of oil contracts the Kurdish government has already signed, which Baghdad deems illegal.

Kurdish oil reserves amount to 45 billion barrels, officials say. Many have also long dreamed of making the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, just to the south, part of Kurdistan.

Such oil disputes have stopped the world's biggest international oil companies from investing in the Kurdish region's oil and gas reserves, for fear Baghdad will blacklist them from deals in the rest of the country.

Earlier this year, the central government halted oil exports to Austria's OMV and South Korea's SK Energy after the companies signed oil deals with Kurdistan.

Privately, western officials also point to another deterrent to greater investment in Kurdistan -- fear of corruption and lack of trust in contracts signed with local partners.

Indeed, many businessmen mutter complaints about the formidable sway of Kurdistan's KDP and PUK parties, which each control a swath of the region around Arbil and Sulaimaniya, in the private sector.

Yet Mills said local officials were mindful of the need "for Western companies to adhere to anti-corruption standards."