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KIRKOUK : TENSIONS AUTOUR DU RETRAIT DES PESHMERGAS

La « journée de la colère » organisée dans tout l'Irak le 25 février, et diversement suivie selon les provinces, a eu pour conséquences inattendues d'envenimer le débat sur Kirkouk et son statut, disputé entre Kurdes et Irakiens. Le gouverneur de Kirkouk a, en effet, interdit une manifestation d'Arabes dans la ville et imposé un couvre-feu, alors que les troupes des Peshmergas entourent Kirkouk.

Les partis pro-Arabes ont violemment critiqué cette décision, arguant que ses raisons ne tenaient qu'à une des revendications prévues par les manifestants, à savoir le départ des forces kurdes de la province.

Mais le ministre kurde des Peshmergas, Jaafar Sheikh Mustafa, a rétorqué que la présence de ses troupes était nécessaire par le danger que des Arabes extrémistes irakiens faisaient peser sur les Kurdes de Kirkouk. Ainsi, alors que ces derniers refusaient de prendre part aux manifestations du 25, les Kurdes semblaient craindre une attaque des quartiers et des partis politiques kurdes de la part des manifestants.

Cette crainte a été confirmée par Jaafar Mustafa, qui a notamment cité une déclaration hostile aux Kurdes de la part des mouvements arabes : « Les Baathistes avaient l'intention de s'attaquer aux institutions dirigées par les

Kurdes et les Turkmènes (...) quand les forces de sécurité seront à même d'assurer la sécurité de Kirkouk, alors les Peshmergas se retireront. » Jaafar Mustafa a ajouté que les meneurs arabes incriminés ne représentaient pas le point de vue des « véritables » Arabes de Kirkouk.

Le général Aziz Waisi, commandant des Zerevani (forces spéciales kurdes) a confirmé lui aussi que le but des militaires kurdes était de protéger leurs compatriotes des attaques extrémistes arabes : « Nous sommes venus à Kirkouk à la demande du gouverneur, nous ne retirons pas nos forces tant qu'il ne nous le réclamera pas. »

Rizgar Ali, Kurde membre du Conseil provincial de Kirkouk, a, pour sa part, rappelé que les Kurdes ne s'étaient pas déployés autour de la ville sans l'accord des USA : « Cela est survenu après un accord passé entre le ministre des Peshmergas et les forces américaines. »

Par ailleurs, les Peshmergas stationnent dans d'autres zones à population kurde non encore rattachées au Kurdistan, dans des districts de la province de Diyala. Ainsi celui de Jalawla, qui avait perdu près de 600 familles kurdes, obligées de fuir dans la Région du Kurdistan après avoir été menacées par des milices arabes. Plus de 400 civils kurdes avaient été assassinés par des groupes insurgés, ces trois dernières années. Depuis, des Peshmergas issus de Suleïmanieh y stationnent en permanence, comme l'explique Mahmoud Samgawi, leur commandant : « Sous couvert de manifestations, des terroristes voulaient attaquer les Kurdes et les massacrer. Maintenant la situation est stable et les Peshmergas restent à Jalawla. »

Dans une conférence de presse commune, des députés kurdes et turkmènes de la province ont décrit la situation comme « très sensible » et ont insisté sur l'urgence d'organiser des élections provinciales.

Confirmant les craintes sécuritaires des Kurdes, des bâtiments gouvernementaux et des stations de police ont été attaqués et incendiés le 25 février, dans deux villes de la province, Hawija et Riyadh, alors que trois policiers étaient tués.

La polémique a très vite dépassé les frontières de l'Irak quand le journal turc Milliyet, commentant la visite dans la Région du Kurdistan d'une délégation du

ministère des Affaires étrangères turc, menée par Fereydu Sinirlioglu, adjoint du ministre, a rapporté que l'objet de cette délégation venue pour rencontrer Massoud Barzani, était la question de Kirkouk et le stationnement des forces kurdes. Les Turcs auraient ainsi exprimé leur 'inquiétude' pour la communauté turkmène de la ville et demandé au président de la Région kurde de retirer ses troupes.

Mais Jabbar Yawar, porte-parole du ministre des Peshmergas a répliqué qu'il s'agissait d'une affaire interne à l'Irak, et que cette requête du gouvernement turc n'avait jamais eu lieu, à sa connaissance.

Loin de s'apaiser, le débat s'est enflammé quand le président de l'Irak, Jalal Talabani, a déclaré, le 7 mars, que Kirkouk était 'la Jérusalem du Kurdistan', une profession de foi que l'on avait plus l'habitude d'entendre, jusqu'ici, dans la bouche de Massoud Barzani, même si Jalal Talabani s'exprimait moins en président de l'Irak qu'en leader de son parti l'UPK, dans son fief de Suleïmanieh, pour commémorer le soulèvement kurde de 1991.

Si des députés arabes et turkmènes de Kirkouk se sont indignés, d'autres ont vu une possible tentative d'apaiser ou de détourner la contestation à laquelle le gouvernement kurde fait face dans cette même ville. Mais les politiciens hostiles au rattachement ont tous protesté du fait de la fonction politique exercée par Jalal Talabani, qui « ne représente pas un groupe ou un parti quelconque, mais est président de la république d'Irak » comme l'a dénoncé la députée du bloc sunnite Al-Iraqiyya, Wihda Al-Djemeili, ajoutant que « l'inclination » des Kurdes à l'annexion de Kirkouk

était « énorme » et qu'ils avaient, à cet égard, une « vision stratégique ».

Un membre arabe du Conseil provincial de Kirkouk, Mohammed Khalil al-Jubouri, a lui aussi critiqué cette prise de position, disant qu'en tant que président d'Irak il devait rester impartial.

Les Kurdes, par contre, ont répliqué qu'à ce meeting de l'UPK, Jalal Talabani ne parlait qu'en tant que leader de son propre parti.

Cela n'a pas empêché des députés irakiens du groupe sunnite Al-Iraqiyya de lancer une pétition réclamant la 'convocation' de Jalal Talabani au Parlement, demande rejetée par la Coalition nationale, groupe mené par le Premier Ministre Nouri Al-Maliki, qui a estimé que cela nuirait à la stabilité politique en cours, que Kirkouk était une province irakienne et que les propos de Jalal Talabani n'y changeaient rien.

Pendant ce temps, les pressions ont continué, à la fois de la part des Américains et des Irakiens, pour le retrait des Peshmergas kurdes de Kirkouk, pressions qui se heurtaient au refus persistant des Kurdes. Le site de presse kurde Aknews a même, le 15 mars, parlé d'un ultimatum de deux semaines laissé aux Kurdes par les Américains pour ce retrait. Cette nouvelle a été rapidement démentie, dès le lendemain, par un porte-parole de la coalition parlementaire kurde à Bagdad, Muayyid al-Tayyib.

Dans le même temps, le gouvernorat provincial de Kirkouk, ayant démissionné ce mois-ci, un nouveau gouverneur et un nouveau chef du conseil provincial ont été élus, au grand dam de certaines figures politiques arabes de

la province qui avaient appelé au boycott de ces élections. C'est en effet un député kurde, le Dr. Najmaldin Karim, qui a été élu au poste de gouverneur, tandis qu'un Turkmène, Hassan Toran, a pris la tête du conseil provincial de Kirkouk. Cette alliance kurdo-turkmène n'a pas été du goût des

partis arabes qui ont dénoncé cette « marginalisation ».

Finalement, et malgré les dénégations antérieures de « pressions américaines », les forces des Peshmergas se sont retirées de certaines positions au sud-est de Kirkouk et ont cédé la place

aux troupes des USA, le 28 mars. Des troupes kurdes sont maintenues au nord et au nord-est. Le ministre des Peshmergas a annoncé officiellement qu'un accord avait été trouvé avec les forces irakiennes et américaines pour appliquer un nouveau dispositif de sécurité.

KURDISTAN D'IRAK : VISITE HISTORIQUE DU PREMIER MINISTRE TURC

Les 28 et 29 mars le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan s'est rendu en visite en Irak, accompagné de plusieurs ministres et d'une délégation d'hommes d'affaires « pour évoquer les relations politiques et économiques importantes avec ce pays voisin et renforcer la coopération économique et des sujets régionaux » a indiqué une source diplomatique turque, ajoutant que la question de la lutte contre le PKK serait également abordée avec le président de l'Irak, Jalal Talabani et le Premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki.

Mais le point fort de cette visite a été l'étape d'Erbil, puisque c'était la première fois qu'un chef de gouvernement turc se rendait dans la capitale kurde.

Le PKK n'était pas le seul sujet de désaccord entre la Turquie et la Région kurde. La question de Kirkouk et des relations entre Kurdes et Turkmènes a été aussi abordée, comme l'avait annoncé, un jour avant, Saadeddine Arkij, leader du Front turcoman, parti soutenu par Ankara. Mais, signe du réchauffement politique entre Kurdes et Turcs, le chef du Front turkmène a indiqué que le gouvernement turc insistait pour qu'ils règlent « leurs différends avec les Kurdes » : « Un des objectifs de cette visite est d'essayer de réduire les divergences entre Turcomans et Kurdes, mais on ignore ce qui va se décider. » Recep Tayyip Erdogan a profité de

cette visite pour inaugurer avec Massoud Barzani l'aéroport d'Erbil nouvellement agrandi, et qui peut désormais accueillir 150 vols par jour. Dans son discours d'inauguration, le président de la Région du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, a qualifié le nouvel aéroport international de « premier pas dans la construction d'une infrastructure solide dans tout l'Irak, et particulièrement au Kurdistan, et c'est une clef pour beaucoup de projets à plus grande échelle dans le développement du Kurdistan et de l'Irak. »

Massoud Barzani a ensuite salué la présence du Premier ministre et du ministre des Affaires étrangères turcs : « Nous considérons cela comme un moment très historique. Nous croyons que cette visite bâtit un pont très solide dans les relations bilatérales entre l'Irak et la Turquie et tout particulièrement entre la Turquie et la Région du Kurdistan. »

Recep Tayyip Erdogan a souligné les « liens historiques et culturels avec l'Irak » et avec « cette belle région » (sans nommer explicitement le Kurdistan). Il a annoncé que les prochains vols Turkish Airlines pour Erbil démarreraient le 14 avril prochain. Jusqu'ici, c'était une compagnie privée, Atlas Jet, qui assurait, d'Istanbul, 4 vols hebdomadaires pour Erbil et Suleïmanieh. Turkish Airlines mettra en place 3 vols par semaines pour Erbil. En plus du Premier Ministre, la présence de Mehmet Simsek, ministre

des Finances, a permis de mettre à la fois cette délégation turque sous le signe de la coopération économique, mais aussi linguistique, puisque Mehmet Simsek, originaire de Batman, a pu prononcer un discours en kurde, en parlant d'une 'fraternité millénaire' entre Kurdes et Turcs. Mais alors qu'en Turquie même, les élus kurdes peuvent encore être poursuivis pour avoir prononcé des discours en kurde devant leur électeurat, d'aucuns y voient surtout une tentative d'apaiser ou de se concilier les faveurs de l'électeurat kurde de Turquie pour les prochaines élections.

Le cortège des officiels s'est ensuite dirigé vers le consulat turc qui, bien que déjà ouvert depuis un certain temps, était 'inauguré' ce même jour, pour l'occasion. Cette fois, dans son discours, le Premier ministre turc a insisté sur les liens économiques entre les deux capitales et l'ampleur des investissements turcs au Kurdistan :

« L'an dernier, la Turquie a réalisé plus de 7 milliards de dollars de chiffre d'affaire en Irak, dont plus de la moitié dans les provinces du Nord. Il y a actuellement plus de 20 000 Turcs qui ont obtenu des permis de travail dans le gouvernorat d'Erbil et plus de 35 000 si nous y ajoutons Duhok et Suleïmanieh. »

Un entretien privé a ensuite eu lieu entre le président Barzani et le Premier ministre Tayyip Erdogan, portant sur les relations bilatérales, les liens économiques et la coopération énergétique.

SYRIE : FACE À LA CONTAGION DU « PRINTEMPS ARABE », LES KURDES RESTENT PRUDENTS

Le 8 mars, douze organisations syriennes de défense des droits de l'homme, arabes et kurdes, ont réclamé la levée de l'état d'urgence en vigueur depuis le 8 mars 1963, après l'arrivée au pouvoir du parti Baath. Parmi les signataires du communiqué figurent l'Observatoire syrien pour les droits de l'Homme, la Ligue syrienne de défense des droits de l'Homme, l'Organisation nationale des droits de l'Homme en Syrie, le Centre de Damas pour les études théoriques et les droits civiques, le Comité kurde pour les droits de l'Homme en Syrie, l'Organisation kurde des droits de l'Homme en Syrie.

« L'état d'urgence porte atteinte aux droits de l'Homme et aux libertés publiques en Syrie qui font l'objet de violations continues. Nous appelons à la levée de l'état d'urgence et à la libération de tous les détenus politiques »

Les mêmes ONG réclamaient aussi la « promulgation d'une loi sur les partis politiques qui permettrait aux citoyens d'exercer leur droit de participer à la gestion des affaires du pays, l'abrogation de toutes les lois empêchant les organisations des droits de l'Homme de travailler publiquement en toute liberté, et les associations de la société civile de jouer leur rôle avec efficacité » et concernant les Kurdes, « de prendre urgemment toutes les mesures nécessaires

pour annuler toutes les formes de discrimination envers les citoyens kurdes" qui représentent 9% de la population syrienne. Les Kurdes doivent pouvoir jouir de leur culture et de leur langue, en vertu des droits civiques, politiques, culturels, sociaux et économiques. »

Par ailleurs, le « printemps arabe » qui a réussi à renverser le pouvoir tunisien et égyptien, qui a gagné la Lybie et le Yémen, commence aussi d'agiter la Syrie, avec des manifestations à Damas et Deraa, dans le sud, contre la présidence et le parti Baath. Mais, jusqu'ici, les Kurdes ne se sont pas joints aux manifestants, les oppositions kurde et arabe n'ayant eu, jusqu'ici, que peu d'actions coordonnées, en raison de la méfiance suscitée par un éventuel 'séparatisme kurde' : les Kurdes, qui sont le groupe le plus persécuté en Syrie, mènent depuis plus d'une décennie leur propre lutte contre la discrimination particulière dont ils font l'objet, sans avoir, bénéficié d'un grand soutien de la part des autres Syriens, en particulier en 2004, lors des attaques de milices arabes contre des supporters de football kurdes à Qamishlo. Mais si le mouvement s'étend, beaucoup d'observateurs s'attendent à ce que les Kurdes en profitent pour réaffirmer leurs revendications.

En attendant, Bashar Al-Assad, face à la montée de la contestation dans le sud du pays, a repris la

politique de son père, plus souple envers les minorités religieuses et ethniques, afin de mieux tenir la majorité des Syriens sunnites. Ainsi, pour la première fois depuis longtemps, les festivités de Newroz se sont déroulées sans violence ni répression de la part des autorités syriennes, les policiers ayant visiblement reçu des consignes de tolérance. Une conseillère du président, Buthaina Shaaban, a même souhaité publiquement un bon Newroz, « Newroz Mubarak », aux Kurdes de son pays, imitant ainsi les tentatives faites, à la fin des années 90, par les gouvernements turcs pour 'récupérer' le Newroz kurde, mais sans toutefois aller jusqu'à décréter, comme la Turquie, que le Newroz était une fête traditionnelle 'arabe'. Buthaina Nahas a simplement loué la « magnifique coexistence » entre les différentes composantes du peuple syrien.

Mais cela ne résout pas la 'question kurde' en Syrie, particulièrement, celle des Kurdes déchus de leur nationalité, et, de façon plus générale, celle de leurs droits culturels et linguistiques.

Le 28 mars, 260 prisonniers politiques ont été libérés, dont 14 Kurdes, détenus dans la prison militaire de Saydnaya, de sinistre réputation. Selon les associations de droits de l'homme syriennes, la plupart de ces prisonniers avaient déjà purgé les trois-quarts de leur peine.

TURQUIE : IBRAHIM TATLISES SURVIT À SA TROISIÈME TENTATIVE DE MEURTRE

Dans la nuit du 14 mars, le chanteur turc, d'ascendance kurdo-arabe et originaire d'Urfa, Ibrahim Tatlisés, a été victime d'une tentative

d'assassinat à Istanbul, alors qu'il quittait un studio de télévision, peu après minuit. Il était accompagné de son attachée de presse, Buket Cakici, et s'apprêtait à monter dans sa voi-

ture, quand il a été atteint d'une balle dans la tête, tirée d'une arme à longue portée. Les meurtriers, sans doute à bord d'un véhicule, se sont enfuis sans avoir pu être identifiés.

Caglar Cuhadaroglu, le chirurgien qui a opéré le chanteur en urgence, a indiqué qu'Ibrahim Tatlisles avait reçu une « balle dans la tête, qui est entrée par l'arrière du crâne et est ressortie par le front. Sa vie est toujours en danger mais sa situation s'est améliorée depuis son arrivée à l'hôpital. »

L'hémorragie interne consécutive à l'impact de la balle a pu être stoppée mais il est probable que la victime, maintenue en coma artificiel, garde quelques séquelles, notamment une paralysie du côté gauche.

Ibrahim Tatlisles est un chanteur très apprécié en Turquie, dans le registre 'Arabesk', c'est-à-dire

'populaire et oriental'. Mais c'est aussi un homme d'affaire à la tête d'un empire, avec sa propre maison de production, une chaîne de télévision et une autre de restaurants, une compagnie d'autocars, une marque de vêtements, une société de construction immobilière active au Kurdistan d'Irak, ainsi que d'une loterie qu'il projetait d'implanter aussi au Kurdistan d'Irak. En 1990 et 1998, il avait déjà essuyé des agressions par balles mais n'avait été atteint que légèrement. À chaque fois, l'origine de ces tentatives de meurtre a été reliée par la presse à la mafia. Mais le règlement de comptes mafieux peut aussi se mêler à des motifs politiques troubles, Ibrahim Tatlisles ayant été candi-

dat aux dernières législatives pour le parti Genç Partisi, appartenant à un homme d'affaires, Cem Uzan, lui-même poursuivi pour des délits financiers, qui s'est présenté, en vain, aux législatives du 12 juin prochain, dans le but d'obtenir l'immunité parlementaire.

Aux prochaines élections, l'AKP espérait récupérer ce candidat très populaire à Urfa, au point que même la mairie (AKP) de sa ville natale a organisé une veillée de prières en vue de sa guérison. Le Premier Ministre Erdogan s'est même rendu à son chevet, alors que le chanteur, sorti du coma, avait presque entièrement récupéré.

CULTURE :

« SI TU MEURS, JE TE TUE », SORTIE DU DERNIER FILM DE HINER SALEEM

Le dernier film du cinéaste kurde Hiner Saleem, « Si tu meurs, je te tue », est sorti en salle le 30 mars. Comme dans « Les Toits de Paris », toute l'histoire se déroule dans la capitale française. Le héros, Philippe, joué par Jonathan Zaccai, vient de sortir de prison. Il se lie d'amitié avec Avdal, un Kurde à la recherche d'un criminel irakien. Avdal invite sa fiancée, Siba, en France, où il souhaite s'établir définitivement, mais meurt subitement. Entre temps, Siba (Golshifteh Farahani) arrive à Paris, sans savoir que son fiancé est mort, est recueillie par six frères kurdes et rencontre Philippe qui tombe vite sous le charme de la jeune fille. Puis, c'est le père d'Avdal, Cheto, qui débarque en France...

« Après « Les Toits de Paris », j'avais envie de revenir à un genre qui m'est proche : la comédie, l'absurde et le burlesque » explique Hiner Saleem. « Ce qui

m'a excité c'est d'écrire une histoire déstructurée où on ne sait jamais ce qui va se passer et où les personnages se découvrent au fur et à mesure. C'est comme une poupée russe ... Un scénario où chacun des personnages se passe le relais. Le film débute par une amitié entre deux hommes et se termine par une jeune femme qui décidera de son destin. »

Le film a été unanimement loué par la critique, tant dans la presse papier que sur les sites Web spécialisés dans le cinéma. Dans Événement, il est noté que « le réalisateur Hiner Saleem semble mettre dans son cinéma tout ce qu'il aime dans la vie : la cause kurde, Paris, les belles actrices, les boissons alcoolisées, les variations climatiques et le mélange des tons. Le titre de son premier long métrage donnait la note : 'Vive la mariée... et la libération du Kurdistan !' Tous ses films sont des fables, à l'argument ténu et à la morale généreuse. Son sens de l'humour absurde

fait souvent merveille, même (ou surtout) quand il parle de sujets sérieux comme l'intolérance religieuse, les préjugés culturels ou les amours impossibles. »

Dans l'Express, Thierry Chèze voit le film comme « un conte burlesque sublimé par l'interprétation envoûtante de Golshifteh Farahani ». Jean-Luc Douin, du Monde, y voit un film « voué à honorer un Paris populaire et des comédiens fétiches (Maurice Benichou, Mylène Demongeot, Jane Birkin et son "Jane B." diffusé en sourdine) » et en « retient le meilleur : les dialogues cocasses du début, le dialogue de sourds avec l'employé municipal chargé des pompes funèbres, la présence récurrente d'œufs durs récalcitrants, la façon de dépeindre la diaspora kurde comme une bande de Dalton... » Pierre Murat, de Télérama, relève « l'habileté » du réalisateur « à se faufiler entre le drame et la fantaisie », même s'il considère qu'à ce jour, son

meilleur film reste « Vodka Lemon. »

L'actrice iranienne, Golshifteh Farahani, qui joue le rôle de Siba, vit en exil depuis 2008, son rôle dans le film de Ridley Scott, « Mensonges d'État » ayant déplu au pouvoir iranien. Elle a pu quitter son pays juste avant de tomber sous le coup d'une interdiction de sortie du territoire. Hiner Saleem raconte les raisons de son choix pour incarner Siba : "J'ai rencontré Golshifteh presque un an avant le tournage. Je l'avais déjà vue dans quelques films et je sentais un grand potentiel chez elle. Une relation de confiance mutuelle s'est tout de suite établie. Elle m'a vraiment surpris sur le tournage, c'est une actrice extrêmement talentueuse et très généreuse. Elle a amené au personnage de Siba exactement ce que je recherchais, un mélange de tradition et de modernité."

Car pour le réalisateur, Siba, la fiancée kurde, est loin d'être un personnage féminin éploré et passif : « Pour moi, Siba représente la nouvelle génération de femmes de ces régions qui tente de briser les tabous, de se rebeller sans faire une révolution, elle représente une tendance réformatrice lente mais décidée qui veut se libérer. Siba est une jeune fille moderne et libre qui ne se laisse pas intimider. C'est un personnage fort. »

Jonathan Zaccai, qui joue Philippe, a déjà aussi tourné avec Ridley Scott, dans le film Robin des Bois, dans le rôle du roi de France, Philippe Auguste.

Au sujet de Cheto, le beau-père, Kurde traditionnel, qui ne décolère pas que son fils ait été incinéré en France, Hiner Saleem le voit comme « la dernière génération de Kurdes attachée à la tra-

dition. C'est un personnage ambivalent. Pour lui l'homme est le tuteur de la femme. Cheto sait, au plus profond de lui, que Siba est libre. Il pourrait même l'accepter, mais vis-à-vis de la communauté, il réagit différemment pour sauver ce qu'il appelle l'honneur. »

Cheto est joué par un acteur turc, mais dont la mère était kurde, Menderes Samancilar. « Cette expérience pour lui a été très forte », raconte Hiner Saleem, il devait jouer le rôle d'un père et surtout parler le kurde, la langue de sa mère qu'il ne connaissait pas et qui est interdite dans son pays. Il a dû apprendre phonétiquement le kurde et mon assistant lui traduisait mes instructions du kurde en turc. Après tant d'années, ce magnifique acteur a retrouvé avec une grande émotion sa culture kurde.

La région irakienne du Kurdistan veut de l'aide pour mieux accueillir les chrétiens d'Irak

Un colloque organisé samedi par l'Institut kurde de Paris a fait le bilan de l'accueil de 10 000 familles chrétiennes irakiennes dans cette province autonome

Depuis 2003, 10 718 familles chrétiennes irakiennes ont trouvé refuge au Kurdistan. «*La communauté chrétienne fait un travail remarquable pour faciliter l'arrivée de nouveaux arrivants, assure Falah Mustafa, ministre des relations extérieures de la région autonome kurde d'Irak. Mais nous manquons de ressources pour couvrir leurs besoins humanitaires: logement, nourriture, soins, etc.*» Samedi, au cours d'un colloque organisé au Sénat par l'Institut kurde de Paris, Falah Mustafa a vanté la politique d'ouverture menée par son gouvernement à l'égard des chrétiens chassés du reste du pays par la violence et les attentats. Un accueil qui s'est encore accéléré depuis le sanglant attentat du 31 octobre 2010 à Bagdad: 2 000 familles seraient arrivées depuis.

À l'unisson avec Fouad Hussein, directeur de cabinet de Massoud Barzani, président de la région autonome kurde, il a également fait appel à la générosité de la France et de l'Europe pour faire face au coût que représente cet accueil. «*Le Haut-Commissariat des Nations unies pour les réfugiés (HCR) aide les réfugiés irakiens hors d'Irak mais pas les déplacés à l'intérieur du pays*», a-t-il déploré. «*La France et l'Europe ont une tradition d'assistance humanitaire: sans elles, nous n'aurions peut-être pas survécu aux atrocités que nous avons subies dans les années 1980 et 1990. Nous espérons que vous trouverez le moyen de soulager notre fardeau.*»

En pratique, ont-ils plaidé, les



Le 4 décembre dernier, au monastère de la Vierge-Marie de Qosh (Kurdistan irakien), des chrétiens réfugiés ont trouvé un abri temporaire.

autorités kurdes versent une aide financière aux nouveaux arrivants pour leur permettre de trouver un logement temporaire. Elles essaient également de trouver un travail aux hommes, et souhaiteraient «*de nouveaux équipements pour pouvoir scolariser les enfants en arabe*» (la seule langue que parlent la plupart en arrivant), les soigner... Évêque chaldéen d'Amadia au Kurdistan, fervent défenseur de la province autonome, Mgr Raban Al Qas a confirmé que 370 villages chrétiens avaient déjà été construits, dotés chacun «*d'une église ou d'une chapelle et d'une école*». «*Il faut être reconnaissant au gouvernement du Kurdistan qui a mobilisé l'argent nécessaire*, a-t-il insisté. *Dans certains cas, lorsque les chrétiens sont revenus dans le village qu'ils avaient été contraints de quitter il y a quarante ans, les autorités kurdes ont demandé aux habitants de leur rendre leurs maisons.*»

« Certains Kurdes, arabes ou chrétiens, nous demandent parfois pourquoi cet accueil. »

En filigrane percent d'ailleurs quelques-unes des questions que pose cette installation en masse de chrétiens au Kurdistan. Une «*solution parmi d'autres*», comme le note un spécialiste du dossier, mais qui n'emporte pas l'adhésion de l'ensemble des évêques irakiens. Certains imaginent déjà les tensions que pourrait provoquer parmi la population kurde une implantation chrétienne durable, d'autant que les relations entre Kurdes et chrétiens sont loin d'avoir été toujours idylliques par le passé. «*Certains Kurdes, arabes ou chrétiens, nous demandent parfois pourquoi cet accueil, certains doutent de nous, nous accusent de duplicité*», a reconnu Fouad Hussein, assurant qu'il ne fallait y voir que le résultat d'une histoire kurde elle-même douloureuse. «*Les Kurdes savent ce que c'est d'être réfugiés, déplacés mais aussi aidés par d'autres.*»

La soumission des chrétiens à ce gouvernement kurde revendiquant son autonomie par rapport à Bagdad pose aussi question. La piste d'un «*district chrétien autonome*» dans le nord de l'Irak, autour de Mossoul (à côté et peut-être en partie à l'intérieur de la province

kurde), a d'ailleurs été évoquée samedi, même si les représentants du gouvernement autonome se sont montrés évasifs. «Cela dépendra du souhait des communautés chrétiennes: certains disent vouloir vivre comme des citoyens ordinaires

partout en Irak. En ce qui nous concerne, nous disons que là où il y a une majorité de chrétiens, il peut y avoir autonomie administrative», a indiqué le ministre des relations extérieures. «L'exemple du Kurdistan, qui est un peu le chouchou de la France, doit

se répandre dans tout l'Irak, de telle sorte qu'il n'y ait plus de citoyens de seconde zone», a estimé pour sa part le P. Nejjib Mikaël, supérieur des dominicains de Bagdad.

ANNE-BÉNÉDICTE HOFFNER

la Croix

MARDI 1^{ER} MARS 2011

Le premier ministre turc attise le débat allemand sur l'immigration

BERLIN

De notre correspondant

En inaugurant avec Angela Merkel, hier, la foire allemande des hautes technologies, le Cebit, le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, est d'abord venu soigner l'image de son pays. La moitié des foyers turcs sont branchés sur Internet aujourd'hui! «La Turquie n'a plus rien à voir avec les villages de campagne dont étaient issus les immigrés venus renforcer l'industrie allemande dans les années soixante», a-t-il souligné, s'adressant à plus de dix mille de ses compatriotes venus l'accueillir à Düsseldorf.

Le premier ministre en a profité pour s'inviter dans le débat sur l'intégration qui fait rage en Allemagne. «On vous appelle travailleurs immigrés, étrangers ou Turcs allemands, mais peu m'importe. Vous êtes, mes compatriotes, mes frères et sœurs! Vous appartenez à l'Allemagne mais aussi à la grande Turquie», a-t-il lancé, déclenchant des ovations, la salle scandant en réponse: «Nous sommes fiers de toi.»

«Oui à l'intégration, non à l'assimilation», a répété Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Je veux que vous appreniez l'allemand, que vos enfants fassent des études, préparent des diplômes, deviennent médecins, professeurs, responsables politiques en Allemagne.» Mais ils doivent d'abord apprendre le turc correctement, et cultiver leur identité, selon lui. «Personne n'a le droit de contester notre identité. L'islamophobie est un racisme aussi dangereux que l'antisémitisme», a conclu le premier ministre turc, mettant en garde contre la montée de la xénophobie en Allemagne.

Coutumier de cet éloge de la coexistence des cultures, il a ainsi répondu à la fois à la «mort de la société multikulti» allemande annoncée par Angela Merkel et au succès du livre brûlot de l'ex-diri-



geant de la Bundesbank, Thilo Sarrazin, *L'Allemagne se liquide elle-même*. Vendu à plus de 1,2 million d'exemplaires, ce pamphlet met en garde contre l'invasion de l'islam, qui menacerait la culture allemande dominante.

« Personne n'a le droit de contester notre identité. L'islamophobie est un racisme aussi dangereux que l'antisémitisme. »

Recep Tayyip Erdogan avait déjà déclenché les critiques virulentes en Allemagne avec des propos similaires en 2008, lors de sa visite à Cologne. Dès hier, Guido Westerwelle,

le ministre des affaires étrangères d'Angela Merkel, lui répliquait en soulignant que «l'apprentissage prioritaire de la langue allemande est la clé de l'intégration». Tandis que son collègue Alexander Dobrindt, responsable de la CSU bavaroise, s'emportait contre des affirmations qui font «régresser la politique d'intégration des années en arrière».

Mais celle-ci est en échec, avant tout, selon le premier ministre turc, parce que les autorités allemandes n'ont pas pris en compte «les opi-

nions, les attentes, les besoins des Turcs en tant que groupe». Elles ne tiennent toujours pas compte aujourd'hui de l'opinion des autorités turques responsables de ces questions, alors que la coopération entre les deux pays serait indispensable à l'intégration réussie, selon lui. «Une solution impraticable», réplique Philipp Missfelder, porte-parole de la CDU.

Le premier ministre turc était également en campagne électorale à Düsseldorf, en vue des élections turques de juin prochain. Il a annoncé à ses compatriotes qu'ils pourront dorénavant voter d'Allemagne pour les élections dans leur pays d'origine. Et pour ceux qui ont acquis la nationalité allemande, la Turquie va créer une «carte bleue», équivalente à une carte d'identité, qui contournera ainsi l'interdic-

tion de la «double nationalité» en vigueur en République fédérale. De quoi à nouveau irriter Berlin. Autres sujets qui fâchent, le premier ministre turc devait insister hier auprès d'Angela Merkel pour que l'Allemagne lève les visas d'entrée toujours imposés aux ressortissants de son pays, et cesse de faire obstacle à l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union européenne.

MICHEL VERRIER

AFP

Barzani évoque la possibilité d'élections anticipées au Kurdistan

ERBIL - 3 mars 2011 (AFP)

LE PRÉSIDENT de la région autonome irakienne du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, a évoqué jeudi dans un discours télévisé la possibilité d'organiser des élections anticipées, après des manifestations sanglantes dans plusieurs villes kurdes.

«Je demande au Parlement de consulter les partis politiques pour étudier la possibilité d'élections anticipées, parce que la population devrait avoir son mot à dire», a déclaré M. Barzani.

«Je demande également l'accélération du processus d'organisation des élections provinciales au Kurdistan», a-t-il ajouté. Ces scrutins locaux s'étaient tenus en janvier 2009 dans la plupart des provinces kurdes, mais pas dans les trois provinces kurdes.

En juillet 2009, les élections au Parlement régional et à la présidence de la région avaient sans surprise été dominées par le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) de M. Barzani et l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) du président irakien Jalal Talabani, les deux partis qui dominent l'échiquier politique régional depuis des décennies.

Des milliers de personnes ont manifesté le mois dernier dans plusieurs vil-



Le président de la région autonome irakienne du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani. © AFP

les de la province de Souleimaniyeh contre la domination exercée par les deux formations, mais aussi contre la corruption dans la région.

Ces manifestations s'inscrivent dans une contestation plus générale sur l'ensemble du territoire irakien. Si les autorités de Bagdad ont tenté d'apaiser la population en réduisant les salaires des hommes politiques ou en augmentant les aides aux pauvres, les dirigeants kurdes n'ont à ce stade fait aucune concession aux manifestants.

AFP

Un campement de manifestants et une radio attaqués au Kurdistan

SOULEIMANIYEH — 5 mars 2011 - (AFP)

UN CAMPAMENT de manifestants a été attaqué dans la nuit par des inconnus sur une place de Souleimaniyeh, dans la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, où le siège d'une radio indépendante a également été saccagé à Calar, a-t-on appris dimanche.

Plusieurs des tentes érigées place Tahrir à Souleimaniyeh par des manifestants demandant des réformes politiques ont été incendiées dans la nuit par des hommes armés et masqués, a indiqué un porte-parole des manifestants, Nafit Kader, qui a accusé les forces de sécurité locales d'avoir mené cette attaque.

"Ils ont fait irruption vers 02h30 (23H30 GMT samedi) à Tahrir, brûlé des tentes et sont repartis en emmenant certains des manifestants", a déclaré M. Kader, précisant que cette attaque n'avait pas fait de blessés. "Nous sommes convaincus que l'attaque a été menée par des hommes liés aux autorités kurdes".

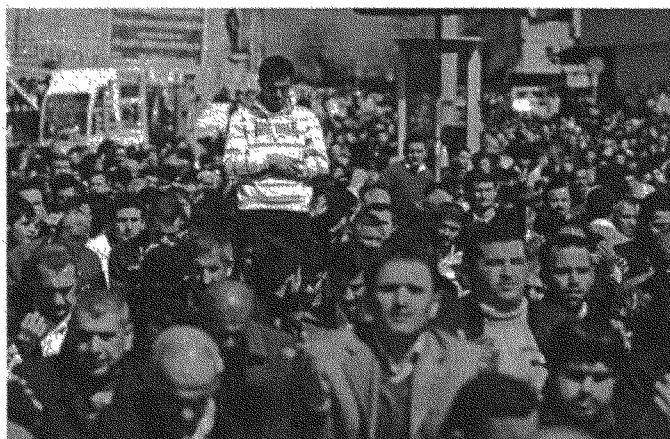
Ces accusations ont été rejetées par le général Hassan Nouri, chef des services de sécurité de la province de Souleimaniyeh, agglomération située à 270 km au nord-est de Bagdad.

"Nous avons entendu dire que des hommes armés ont attaqué des manifestants après minuit et nous avons ouvert une enquête", a-t-il dit. "Mais les forces de sécurité ne sont pas responsables de cette attaque."

Ce campement installé vendredi abritait plusieurs dizaines de manifestants. Plus aucune tente ne subsistait dimanche matin, selon un journaliste de l'AFP sur place.

L'Irak est depuis début février le théâtre de manifestations contre le manque de services, la corruption ou encore l'incompétence des dirigeants.

Au Kurdistan, Souleimaniyeh a été l'épicentre de la contestation du mode de gouvernance du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) du président régional Massoud Barzani et de l'Union Patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) du chef de l'Etat irakien Jalal Talabani.



Des centaines de manifestants kurdes assistent à la prière du vendredi le 4 mars 2011 à Souleimaniyeh dans le nord de l'Irak.

Quatre manifestants ont péri depuis le 17 février à Souleimaniyeh dans des affrontements avec les forces de sécurité.

Le siège d'une radio locale indépendante a par ailleurs été saccagé dans la nuit à Calar, une localité de la province de Souleimaniyeh à environ 200 km au nord-est de Bagdad, a indiqué Mirwan Hama Saïd, responsable du site internet de l'organisation kurde Metro de défense de la liberté de la presse.

"Des inconnus sont entrés en pleine nuit dans les locaux de la radio Dank, ils ont détruit une partie du matériel et volé certains équipements", a-t-il dit.

Il s'agit de la deuxième attaque contre un média kurde après celle menée dans la nuit du 20 au 21 février contre la chaîne "Nalia", qui avait auparavant diffusé des images des manifestations contre le siège du PDK.

Calouste Gulbenkian, le roi du pétrole ottoman



De l'histoire du pétrole, on ne retient que quelques noms : Rockefeller aux Etats-Unis, Nobel et Rothschild en Russie, Knox d'Arcy en Iran ou encore Deterding un peu partout. Or l'un des acteurs majeurs de la première moitié du XX^e siècle n'est pas le propriétaire d'une compagnie, mais un habile négociateur britannique d'origine arménienne du nom de Calouste Gulbenkian (1869-1955).

Né près de Constantinople, Gulbenkian obtient à 20 ans le titre d'ingénieur pétrolier du King's College de Londres. Ses écrits sur les champs pétrolifères de Bakou le font remarquer du gouvernement ottoman, qui le nomme en 1898 conseiller auprès des ambassades à Londres et Paris. A moins de 30 ans, Gulbenkian maîtrise mieux que quiconque l'économie du pétrole et les arcanes de l'administration d'un Empire ottoman sur le déclin. Cette double casquette va le rendre incontournable.

C'est que l'époque s'y prête. Les pays tourment peu à peu le dos au charbon. Churchill impose le moteur à explosion à la Royal Navy dès 1912. Dès lors, la Grande-

Bretagne s'attachera à diversifier ses approvisionnements en or noir. La France, quant à elle, prend tardivement conscience de l'intérêt de cette énergie, les champs pétrolifères se trouvant hors de sa zone d'influence. Le pays dépend de la Standard Oil of New Jersey, de Rockefeller. Menacé d'une pénurie en 1917, Clemenceau juge dès lors « l'essence aussi nécessaire que le sang dans les batailles de demain ». L'approvisionnement stable devient ainsi un enjeu politique. Gulbenkian donnera un coup de pouce providentiel à la France.

Convoitises

En 1912, il est à l'origine de la création de la Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC), dont l'objectif est de négocier des concessions sur le territoire ottoman. Elle est initialement détenue par des capitaux anglais et allemands. Avec la guerre et l'effondrement de l'Empire ottoman, ces derniers sont évincés. A la conférence de San Remo, en 1920, la France récupère la part de l'Allemagne. Celle-ci rentre ensuite dans l'escarcelle de la Compagnie française des pétroles (CFP), créée pour l'occasion en mars 1924

par Raymond Poincaré. La CFP sera rebaptisée Total en 1985.

Le 15 octobre 1927, la découverte d'un important champ de pétrole près de Kirkouk (Irak) suscite bien des convoitises et contraint les actionnaires à renégocier leur participation. Au terme d'un accord signé en juillet 1928, la TPC est détenue par quatre actionnaires à hauteur de 23,75 % chacun. La CFP en fait partie. Les 5 % restants sont entre les mains de Gulbenkian, ce qui lui fera dire qu'« il vaut mieux un tout petit morceau d'un gros gâteau qu'un gros morceau d'un petit gâteau ». Afin de préserver ses intérêts, Gulbenkian trace sur une carte une ligne rouge qui démarque la zone d'influence de la TPC. La compagnie obtient le monopole de la production de pétrole à l'intérieur de cette zone, ce qui interdit de contourner cet encombrant intermédiaire en prospectant pour son propre compte.

Sa participation de 5 % fera de Gulbenkian l'homme le plus riche de son temps. Il constitue une collection d'œuvres d'art de 6 000 pièces, où les peintres hollandais côtoient les impressionnistes. Il vit à Paris dès 1923 ; ses accointances

avec le régime de Vichy le pousseront à partir dix-neuf ans plus tard. Il meurt au Portugal, pays dans lequel il crée la Fondation Gulbenkian. Un musée à Lisbonne rassemble aujourd'hui l'ensemble de sa collection. ■

Jacques-Marie Vaslin,
maître de conférences à l'IAE d'Amiens.

Iran : nouvelle manifestation non autorisée de l'opposition

Les contestataires ont réclamé la libération de leurs chefs de file, MM. Moussavi et Karoubi

La « disparition » des deux figures de proue de l'opposition en Iran, Mir-Hossein Moussavi et Mehdi Karoubi, qui, selon leurs proches, ont été récemment emmenés vers une destination inconnue par les services secrets, n'a pas dissuadé leurs partisans de descendre dans la rue, mardi 1^{er} mars, pour réclamer leur liberté.

Combien étaient-ils ? Des centaines à coup sûr. Des milliers ? Difficile à dire, tant sur les vidéos disponibles, les groupes de manifestants, très nombreux, étaient dispersés pour échapper à un impressionnant dispositif policier à Téhéran, Tabriz, Machad, Rasht ou Ispahan.

Au milieu des gaz lacrymogènes, des heurts se sont produits près de l'université, autour de la place Azadi, l'avenue Vali-A-Ast ou l'avenue Navab à Téhéran.

D'autres, tout aussi violents à Chiraz. La contestation a même gagné Semnan, région d'origine du président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, dont la réélection en juin 2009 est toujours contestée par l'opposition : selon des témoignages recueillis par téléphone, pour calmer les turbulences étudiantes, l'université locale aurait été occupée par les *lebashakhs*, la redoutable police en civil.

Jusque vers minuit, les manifestants ont lancé des slogans réclamant la liberté de MM. Moussavi et Karoubi et d'autres hostiles au Guide suprême : « *Après Ben Ali, Mubarak, au tour de Seyyed Ali [Khamenei]* ». De nombreux contestataires, profitant de l'obscurité, ont repris, chanté depuis les toits des maisons, notamment dans l'est et le nord de Téhéran, le cri révolu-

tionnaire de 1979 : « *Allah akbar* » (« Dieu est le plus grand »).

Les défenseurs des droits de l'homme parlaient, mercredi matin, de blessés mais pas de mort, alors que les deux dernières manifestations, elles aussi non autorisées, les 14 et 20 février, s'étaient soldées respectivement par deux et un morts. Tous des manifestants, ce que conteste la police.

Il y aurait eu aussi, mardi, de nombreuses arrestations. La plus « symbolique » est celle de Fakhrosadat Mohtashamipour, l'épouse de l'ex-vice-ministre de l'intérieur et « cerveau » des réformateurs, Mostafa Tadjadeh, emprisonné depuis les événements de juin 2009, sans que son procès soit achevé. Un état de fait que cette femme courageuse n'avait pas dénoncé ouvertement.

Quant au sort des deux dirigeants « verts », rien n'a filtré. Devant la réprobation et l'inquiétude exprimées par plusieurs capitales occidentales, dont Washington et Paris, un porte-parole du ministère iranien des affaires étrangères s'est borné à déclarer mardi : « *Ce sont des affaires internes. Aucun pays n'a le droit d'intervenir.* »

De son côté, le chef de la diplomatie iranienne, Ali Akbar Salehi, qui se trouvait lundi à Genève, n'avait pas hésité à « *dédramatiser* » la situation dans son pays. Le ministre, qui se disait « *choqué* » par la réaction violente du régime Khadafi en Libye, expliquait qu'en Iran, il n'y avait « *que quelques protestations manipulées alors que dans la région se profilaient d'authentiques mouvements populaires.* » ■

Marie-Claude Decamps

Turkish leader provokes criticism in Berlin

BERLIN

Erdogan tells immigrants in Germany to preserve their own culture first

BY JUDY DEMPSEY

German politicians, already divided over how to integrate immigrants, on Monday criticized the Turkish prime minister after he called on the large Turkish community living in Germany to teach their children the Turkish language first and then German.

Speaking on Sunday night in the industrial city of Düsseldorf to an estimated crowd of 11,000 Turks living in Germany, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan told them they should not let go of their culture.

"You should definitely integrate with the German society, but we are against assimilation," he told the crowd members, who were waving Turkish flags and applauding Mr. Erdogan, who is leader of the moderate Islamic Law and Development Party. "No one should be able to rip us away from our culture and civilization. Our children must learn German, but first they must learn Turkish."

Mr. Erdogan's remarks touched a raw nerve in Berlin, which has largely opposed Turkey's ambitions to join the European Union.

Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle said Monday that it was crucial that children of immigrants learn German first, calling it "the key to integration."

"The children who will grow up in Germany must in the beginning learn German," he said. "Without the German language, they will not continue in schools and they will have far worse opportunities than others."

The country's state secretary for integration issues, Maria Böhmer, said successful integration could not be compared to assimilation.

"What's important is that in our country the German language takes precedence," she said. "Only those with good German have opportunities to advance in our country."

Mrs. Böhmer emphasized that it was an advantage if children were brought up with different languages and cultures, and added that employers could use such experiences.

The German government has been seeking ways to integrate the country's 7.5 million people of foreign origin, of which a third are of Turkish descent. During the 1960s, the Turks came as "guest workers" to what was then West



Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in his speech to Turks living in Germany, said, "You should definitely integrate with the German society, but we are against assimilation."

Germany, when the country was going through a postwar economic boom. It was short of workers, but no attention was paid to integrating the foreigners.

Beginning on Tuesday, the Family Ministry will embark on a €400 million, or \$550 million, program, lasting until 2014, aimed at teaching German in kindergartens and child care centers to children of immigrant background. The

program is focused on children under 3 who speak little or no German at home.

Apart from criticizing Mr. Erdogan's remarks about integration, leading conservatives, including Volker Kauder, a parliamentary leader of the conservative bloc, condemned Turkey's record on religious freedom. Mr. Kauder suggested that E.U. accession talks with Turkey should be suspended until Turkey supports the rights of Christians to ordain priests.

Johannes Singhammer, the conservative bloc's deputy parliamentary leader, said all E.U. membership talks should be suspended until detailed investigations have taken place as to whether there is verifiable progress on religious freedom.

"A country that has over 2,000 years of a Christian tradition now is becoming a Christian-free zone with the state looking on," Mr. Singhammer said. "We cannot and will not accept this development."

On Monday, Mr. Erdogan was in Hannover to inaugurate, with Chancellor Angela Merkel, the annual communications and information technologies fair, CeBIT. Mr. Erdogan was also scheduled to have dinner with Mrs. Merkel to discuss not just Turkey's ambitions to join

"Our children must learn German, but first they must learn Turkish."

the European Union and integration policies, but also the immense changes taking place in North Africa and the Middle East.

Mrs. Merkel has long opposed Turkey's joining the 27-member bloc and instead has proposed a "privileged partnership," that would give Turkey substantial trade, economic and social links with Europe but no voting rights in any of the E.U. institutions.

President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, who is also a staunch opponent of Turkey's becoming a member of the Union, said Friday during a visit to Ankara that Turkey should not join, but instead it should be offered an alternative arrangement.

Kirkuk Under Curfew, Surrounded By Thousands of Kurdish Troops

By BARZAN MUHAMMAD and SAMAN BASHARATI

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan: An indefinite curfew imposed by the government in Kirkuk on Tuesday has so far prevented the occurrence of a planned Arab-led demonstration in the disputed city, which is surrounded by thousands of newly stationed Kurdish peshmarga forces.

Kirkuk's Arab political parties said one of the key demands of Tuesday's protest would be to call for the expulsion of Kurdish security and armed forces from the oil-rich province of Kirkuk.

Iraqi Kurdistan's minister of peshmarga, Jaafar Sheikh Mustafa, said the Iraqi Arabs posed a threat to Kurds in the disputed regions, and that the newly-stationed Kurdish troops would remain in the surrounding areas of Kirkuk and other disputed areas.

Friday, February 25th, was nominated by Iraqis throughout the country as the "Day of Rage," on which thousands of Iraqis staged anti-government demonstrations, calling for more accountability and better services from their elected leaders and government.

However, in Kirkuk, the Kurds had not only refused to protest on political grounds, but because they also feared that the main aim of the Arabs' protest would be to attack the Kurds and the headquarters of their political parties and security forces. Kurds in other disputed areas had the same fears.

"There was a great danger to the Kurdish inhabitants," said Mustafa by telephone from Kirkuk, where he and other high-ranking Kurdish officials had been for nearly a week.

Referring to the Arabs who issued an anti-Kurdish statement before the Day of Rage, Mustafa said that "the Ba'athists had intended to attack institutions run by Kurds and Turcomans on the [Day of Rage]," adding that "when the security forces are able to ensure the security of Kirkuk, the peshmarga forces will be withdrawn."

In another statement on Saturday, Kirkuk's Arab parties demanded an immediate and "unconditional" expulsion of the Kurdish security and peshmarga forces from Kirkuk by Tuesday.

"Their headquarters must be closed without any discussion," read the statement.



Kurdish peshmarga forces being trucked in to surrounding areas of Kirkuk city.

However, Mustafa said the issuers of Saturday's statement did not represent the views of the "genuine" Arabs from Kirkuk.

"We will never leave Kirkuk," he added.

General Aziz Waisi, commander of the Zeravani – an armed force affiliated with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which is headed by Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani – said the aim of stationing the forces in the areas surrounding Kirkuk was to guarantee the security of Kirkuk's population, particularly the Kurds, who had often been targets of radical Islamic Arab militias.

"We went to Kirkuk because of a request from Kirkuk's [Kurdish] governor," said Waisi. "We will not withdraw our forces until he requests it."

Kurdish political experts say they believe the thousands of Kurdish peshmarga forces around Kirkuk could be used to forcefully incorporate Kirkuk into the Kurdistan region, rather than waiting for the implementation of the Iraqi Constitution's long-delayed Article 140, which requires a referendum to determine the fate of the disputed areas.

"Sending Kurdish troops to the disputed areas is a very good thing and a great victory," said Amjad Shakali, a Kurdish nationalist author, who regularly writes on Kirkuk. "That step should have been taken in 2003. Back then, the Kurds should have not pulled their forces out."

Arif Qurbani, editor-in-chief of Kurdistan Nwe, a Patriotic Union of

Kurdistan (PUK) newspaper, said the forces would speed up the "return" of Kirkuk to Kurdistan.

"The presence of peshmarga forces will be a factor in the return of these areas to the Kurdistan region," he said.

Rizgar Ali, a Kurdish member of the Kirkuk Provincial Council, said the United States had agreed to the Kurds deploying their forces to the areas surrounding Kirkuk.

"This has happened after an agreement between [Kurdistan's] minister of peshmarga and the American forces," he said "The divisions deployed in Kirkuk province will...not go back."

Peshmarga forces have also been deployed to Dyalal province and other disputed areas.

In Dyalal's Jalawla district, for instance, from where 600 Kurdish families fled to the official region of Iraqi Kurdistan after they had received threats from Arab militants, Mahmoud Sangawi, a PUK military commander of peshmarga forces in Sulaimani, said a sizeable number of Peshmarga forces had now been stationed in the district.

"Under the name of demonstration, terrorists wanted to attack Kurds and massacre them," said Sangawi. "Now the situation is stable and peshmarga forces are in Jalawla."

More than 400 Kurdish civilians have reportedly been killed by insurgent groups in the past three years in Jalawla. More than a 100 of them have been from one tribe alone, the Zargwshen, whose members are mostly based in Sa'adya town.

Iraq's February oil export highest since invasion

By SINAN SALAHEDDIN -
Associated Press

BAGHDAD - Iraq's oil exports climbed to their highest level in February since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, boosted by a resumption in exports from the semiautonomous Kurdish region in the north, a senior oil official said Tuesday.

The country, which overwhelmingly relies on oil revenues for its budget, also benefited from the spike in higher crude prices triggered by the violent uprising in Libya that has led to a 50 percent cut in production from that OPEC member.

Iraqi oil exports averaged 2.202 million barrels per day in February, up from 2.161 million barrels per day the previous month, said Falah al-Amiri, head of the State Oil Marketing Organization. At prices ranging between \$97-\$98 per barrel, Iraq generated more than \$6 billion from oil sales in February, he said.

The increase is crucial for Iraq which, although sitting atop the world's fourth largest proven reserves of conventional crude, has been struggling to rebuild its oil sector after years of war, sanctions, neglect and more recently, sabotage. But the

country's precarious security situation, coupled with feuding between the central government in Baghdad and the Kurds in the north have slowed efforts to bolster the vital sector.

The Kurds have sought greater control over oil in their crude-rich region, while Baghdad has argued that the oil is a national resource that should be under central government control.

The resumption of exports from the north helped boost February's figures. The Kurdish region's prime minister said Sunday that oil exports were running slightly over 80,000 barrels per day from two northern fields.

In all, Iraq exported an average of 1.708 million barrels per day through the south while 484,000 barrels per day were pumped through to the Turkish port of Ceyhan, through the north, said al-Amiri. In addition, another 10,000 barrels per day were exported to neighboring Jordan using tanker trucks.

Exports from the north were halted a few months after they started in June 2009 amid a disagreement between the Baghdad government and Kurdish officials over payments. Earlier this year, an agreement was

reached to resume the exports.

The government aims to raise daily output to 12 million barrels by 2017, a level that would put it nearly on par with Saudi Arabia's current production capacity. Many analysts, however, say the target is unrealistic.

Even so, the current boost in exports and oil prices will likely help ease pressure on Iraq's budget.

The government has set an \$82.6 billion budget for 2011, based on an average oil price of \$76.5 per barrel and 2.2 million barrels per day in oil exports. The deficit is projected at about \$13.4 billion.

Underscoring the challenges Iraq faces, gunmen last week stormed the 310,000-barrels-a-day Beiji refinery - the country's biggest - and bombed the facility, forcing its shutdown. Hours later, the 30,000 barrel per day Samawa refinery was shut down due to a fire in a storage unit.

On Monday, the Oil Ministry said it had restarted operations partially at Beiji refinery and full operations at Samawa. Beiji produces refined fuels for the local market, and a prolonged outage at the plant can mean electricity cuts and long lines at the pumps for Iraqis who are already fed up with corruption and the pace of develop-



Kurdistan Regional Government
3 March 2011

President Barzani Asks Parliament to Study Possibility of Early Elections in Kurdistan

Salahaddin, Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRP.org) - In a televised address to the people of the Kurdistan Region today, President Barzani called on the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament to study the possibility of holding early general elections in the Kurdistan Region.

The last general election in the Kurdistan Region was held in July 2009 and the next election is scheduled for 2013.

In his address, the President expressed his admiration for the young people of Kurdistan for displaying political maturity in airing their demands through peaceful demonstrations. But he urged them to avoid resorting to violent means in their protests, as this, he said, would tarnish the image of the Kurdistan Region.

"Our people have the right to demonstrate and air their grie-



President Barzani Asks Parliament to Study Possibility of Early Elections in Kurdistan

vances using peaceful means," said the President in his address, adding that he would rather not live in a Kurdistan where its people did not enjoy their freedom.

He once again extended his condolences to the families of those killed during protests in recent days, and called on the KRG authorities to provide all the medical care and assistance to the wounded.

The President also called on the KRG and the Parliament to immediately start making preparations for provincial elections in the three provinces of Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaimaniya, which together constitute the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Provincial elections were last held in the Kurdistan Region at the end of 2005.

REUTERS

Iraq PM demands Kurdish forces leave disputed city

BAGHDAD , March 3, 2011 (Reuters) By Suadad al-Salhy

IRAQ'S PRIME MINISTER asked the Kurdistan Regional Government Thursday to remove thousands of troops surrounding the oil-rich northern city of Kirkuk without central government permission, a cabinet source said.

The government of the semi-autonomous northern region moved the heavily armed peshmerga troops into position around Kirkuk last week to secure the city from threatened attacks during mass protests, a senior Kurdish official said.

The move raised tensions in the volatile north and prompted Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to demand their immediate withdrawal, the Iraqi cabinet source said.

"These troops were deployed without the permission of the central government and the prime minister has asked them to draw down immediately," said the source, who asked not to be named.

Longstanding differences between Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen over land and oil in Kirkuk and other disputed northern areas are considered a potential flashpoint for future conflict.

Jafer Mustafa, the Kurdish minister of peshmerga, said the troops were deployed at the entrances to Kirkuk and in locations around the city to protect Kurds from alleged planned attacks by al Qaeda and members of Saddam Hussein's outlawed Baath party.

"Kirkuk originally was taken from the Kurdistan region and pro-

tecting it is our duty, not just that of the Iraqi government," Mustafa told Reuters.

"There was a serious danger awaiting the Kurds in Kirkuk because of these events (demonstrations). So peshmerga were deployed around Kirkuk to secure it from the threats."

Some 12,000 peshmerga troops armed with small and medium artillery as well as AK-47 assault rifles are surrounding Kirkuk, Arab and Kurdish sources said. The troops also have cannons and armored vehicles.

A police source said a curfew would be imposed on Kirkuk from 6 a.m. (0300 GMT) Friday ahead of the expected protests.

The cabinet source said Maliki had reached a provisional deal with Kurdish officials in Baghdad for the withdrawal of the troops, saying that protecting Kirkuk and other disputed areas was the exclusive responsibility of central government security forces.

But there was no immediate sign in Kirkuk that the Kurdish troops were withdrawing, officials on the spot said.

Iraqi troops and Kurdish peshmerga fighters have come close to blows on several occasions over the past two years as Maliki has sought to strengthen the central government's presence in and around the disputed areas.

The U.S. military has intervened several times to prevent fighting breaking out. U.S. troops will fully withdraw by the end of this year in accordance with a security pact with Iraq.

Ethnic Kurds have staked a claim to Kirkuk, which sits on massive oil reserves, and want it wrapped into their semi-autonomous region. The city's population is a mix of Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen and others.

"The street (people) in Kirkuk are afraid of the entry of these forces into the city in any moment with its big numbers and heavy weapons," said Abdulla Sami al-Asi, a member of Kirkuk's provincial council. "If this happens, there will be a big problem that cannot be controlled."

aknews

Agency of Kurdistan for News

Minister rejects U.S. demand for Kurdish troops' withdrawal from Kirkuk

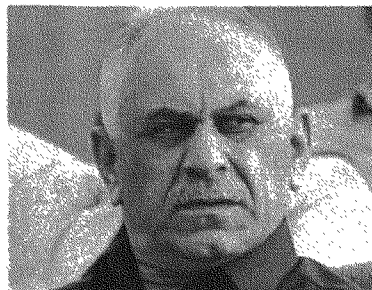
Erbil, March 4, 2011 (AKnews)

KURDISTAN MINISTER for Peshmerga (armed forces) said his ministry will not withdraw the Kurdish troops from the outskirts of Kirkuk city, unless the situation is calmed.

peshmerga la karkuk Jaafar Sheikh Mustafa's statement came in response to an earlier request from the U.S. forces for the Kurdish troops to move from the area.

Following Feb. 25 public protests in the multiethnic Kirkuk which served the anti-government protesters to expel the security forces from some areas in the province and take over the power, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) expedited its troops to the outskirts of Kirkuk city, the provincial capital.

"Whoever asks us to withdraw our troops from Kirkuk province before the situation is alleviated, his demand will be turned down," the minister said.



The KRG claims the tenure of the oil rich province and there are clear signs of an opposition among the different ethnic groups of the province for that ownership. Some groups have asked for the Kurdish troops' withdrawal and wish Kirkuk to remain under Baghdad government auspices.

Mustafa, the minister, also added as long as the threats for "destabilizing" Kirkuk city are there, the peshmerga will remain in the province.

Kirkuk, 255 km north of Baghdad, was already a restless city before the national



Day of Anger, Feb. 25, but since then some parties say there are threats against the residents in Kirkuk coming from the areas which have fallen into the hands of the protesters. Kurds justify their presence in the province by saying the residents have demanded peshmerga to protect them.

Jamal Tahir, Kirkuk police chief, told a press conference Thursday the peshmerga presence in Kirkuk is "temporary, ending whenever the tensions in the province recede."

Reported by Hevidar Ahmed

Iraq coalition suffers blow as key player rejects post

BAGHDAD

BY JACK HEALY
AND MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT

Iraq's shaky power-sharing government suffered another setback Thursday when former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi rejected a high-ranking advisory job that had been created to end the country's protracted political deadlock.

The decision by Mr. Allawi, who leads a political coalition backed by much of Iraq's Sunni minority, exposed new fissures in a coalition government forged with American backing late last year. The government brought together Iraq's main ethnic, religious and political factions, with Mr. Allawi a critical piece of the equation.

But in recent days, Mr. Allawi and members of his coalition, Iraqiya, have accused Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki of failing to follow through on his promises to share power, deepening a

sense of their marginalization.

Mr. Allawi has threatened to leave the government before and it was unclear on Thursday whether his decision was part of a negotiating ploy. Nevertheless, it comes as Iraq braces for potentially violent protests on Friday, calling for more accountability from Mr. Maliki and better government services.

Mr. Allawi said Mr. Maliki had been slow to detail the powers of a new strategic policy council, which Mr. Allawi had agreed to lead. He said he would decline the position "because of a lack of commitment to national partnership."

"I will not participate," Mr. Allawi said, according to excerpts of an interview to be broadcast Thursday evening on Iraqi television. "This is a final decision."

It was a sharp turnabout from three months ago, when Mr. Allawi accepted defeat after last March's inconclusive national elections and agreed to join a government led by his old political rival, Mr. Maliki. Mr. Allawi's coalition narrowly won the popular vote, but was outmaneuvered by Mr. Maliki in nine months of ensuing political deal-making.

With the top positions of prime minister and president out of his reach, Mr. Allawi was offered a consolation prize as head of a strategic policy council that still remains to be formed. The body would have provided a check on Mr. Maliki's power, though its exact powers or membership have still not yet been determined.

Ali al-Alaq, a member of Parliament

from Mr. Maliki's State of Law coalition, criticized Mr. Allawi's withdrawal as rash, and said that Iraqi leaders were still negotiating the contours of the position Mr. Allawi had rejected.

"We need to be more united and flexible for the best of the country," Mr. Alaq said.

The Iraqiya bloc has fumed over the last few months, saying Mr. Maliki has failed to follow through on agreements to share power, and has personally taken control of crucial security ministries in charge of Iraq's police and army.

"Maliki is not interested in this partnership," said Maysoun al-Damluji, a spokeswoman for Iraqiya and a member of Parliament. "He wants to have all powers in his hand. He doesn't want to share with anyone. So let them be in his hands and good luck to him."

Iraqiya is still nominally a part of the government, but its members have increasingly accused Mr. Maliki of renegeing on the deal that helped return him to a second term as prime minister.

"None of it has materialized. None," Ms. Damluji said. "There is no partnership as far as we are concerned."

U.S. officials said the participation of Mr. Allawi and his Sunni-supported political bloc were both crucial to forming a representative government. In November, an American official said Mr. Allawi had to be "a genuine partner in the government with real authority."

A spokeswoman for Mr. Allawi said he would retain his seat in Parliament.

Turkey charges 2 journalists in conspiracy case

ANKARA

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A Turkish court on Sunday ordered two investigative journalists jailed pending the outcome of a trial into an alleged plot to topple the Islamic-rooted government, raising further concerns over freedom of the news media in Turkey.

The defendants, Nedim Sener and Ahmet Sik, were charged with links to the alleged conspiracy to overthrow Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government in 2003, according to Anatolia, the state-run news agency.

On Thursday, the police raided their homes, seized hard disks and notes as evidence and detained them along with six other journalists, drawing expressions of concern from Western governments and international media rights groups. One of the six was released without charge on Sunday, while the others were still being questioned.

About 400 suspects are already on tri-

al for membership in Ergenekon, a network that prosecutors say plotted to create chaos in Turkey and overthrow the government.

The government insists that the trial is strengthening democratic rule in Turkey by helping to unravel shadowing networks linked to state institutions that once operated with impunity in the country.

But critics contend that the government is using Ergenekon case to jail Erdogan's secular-minded opponents and undermine Turkey's secular legacy. They say there is no solid evidence against many of the defendants and denounce their long detention periods.

The prosecutor's office issued a statement saying the journalists were not detained because of their reporting.

"The investigation is not about opinions or books that have been written," the statement said, according to the newspapers Hurriyet and Milliyet. "No one has been detained because of their duty." There is evidence "that cannot

be disclosed due to the confidentiality of the investigation," the statement said.

Earlier, President Abdullah Gul was quoted as expressing worries that the detentions were undermining a country that some have promoted as a model democracy for Middle Eastern nations.

"When I follow the developments, the impression I get is that there are certain developments that the public conscience cannot accept," the president told Milliyet in an interview published on Sunday. "This is casting a shadow over the level that Turkey has reached and the image that is lauded by everyone. I am concerned about this."

Mr. Sik was already on trial for a book he co-wrote about the Ergenekon case. He had just finished writing another book on the influence of an Islamic group within the police force when he was detained, newspaper reports said.

Mr. Sener is known for a book about alleged intelligence failures that he claims led to the murder of Hrant Dink, an ethnic Armenian journalist, in 2007.

The Kurdish Struggle in Iran: A Lost Cause?

By ROZH AHMAD / Rudaw.

The Kurds' ongoing struggle for more cultural and political rights in Iran is more isolated and fragile than ever before, with countless splits occurring in the Iranian Kurdish parties and often ferocious in-fighting.

Due to bans imposed on these political groups by the Islamic Republic of Iran, they are mostly now officially stationed well within the borders of the neighboring semiautonomous Kurdistan region of northern Iraq, as political refugees hosted by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

To this day, the groups are still armed – not adequately enough to counter Iran's military might, but with more than enough firepower to fight each other, as some of them did in recent years, when several party splits led to inter-party armed conflict.

With sectarianism now seemingly more important among these exiled Iranian Kurds than the struggle for their rights, the unity of the Kurdish resistance is weakening in Iran, and there is the ever-present possibility of further armed conflict or even civil war among the groups, which would further weaken the Kurdish cause in Iran.

Currently, five major Iranian Kurdish political groups outlawed by Iran have their bases within Iraqi Kurdistan. The groups, co-existing in an ideologically uneasy relationship, comprise the Democratic Party of Kurdistan-Iran (PDKI), the Komala-Communist Party of Iran (Komala-CPI), and their splinter parties.

Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist government allowed the groups to be in Iraq after the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, due to their opposition to a common enemy: the Iranian government.

During the Kurdish uprising against Hussein in 1991, the groups were allowed to establish bases in Iraqi Kurdistan, and they have been here ever since. The KRG supplies them with power, water and land.

Iran claims the Kurdish groups are terrorists, although the groups themselves renounced armed struggle in 2003, as the Iraqi Constitution does not allow armed political activities to be operated from Iraqi soil. The groups do not allow Iraqi Kurds as members, so as to avoid upsetting the KRG's foreign relations.

Rudaw recently visited the two most prominent camps of these Iranian Kurdish parties and observed the daily life of their peshmarga fighters, which is no longer limited to military duties alone. With their guns put to one side, Rudaw saw both male and female peshmargas – still in their military fatigues – building, planting trees and



Iranian Kurdish communist peshmargas patrol the mountains of Zirgwez in Iraqi Kurdistan. --- Photo by Rozh Ahmad for Rudaw.

armed with microphones and computer keyboards in their media studios, from where they broadcast to Iran and the rest of the world, via television, radio and the internet.

"We support civil struggle, and cultural and political representation of the Kurdish nation, and we also believe in a political solution for the Kurdish question in Iran," said Mohammad Nazifi, member of the PDKI's Secretariat, at the democratic party's camp nestled under the Haibasultan Mountains, just 10 minutes' drive from the town center of Koya in Erbil province.

Hassan Rahmanpanah, spokesman and Central Committee member of the Komala-CPI, said the communist group did not believe in armed struggle, but that it still had weapons and military camps to defend itself from "the Islamic regime's attacks."

"If we did not have our guns we couldn't have our media, our publications and the [clandestine] civil struggle we are operating in Iran against the Islamic regime," he told Rudaw at the Komala-CPI camp in the craggy mountains of Zirgwez, about 45 minutes' drive south from Sulaimani city.

During the 1990s, prominent members of both groups were often assassinated by Iranian secret service members when they were en route to and from their camps and while in Iraqi Kurdish towns. Although there have not been any deadly attacks since security increased in Iraqi Kurdistan in 2003, the groups remain ever-vigilant.

The roots of the political tension

Historically, there have always been political differences between Komala-CPI and the PDKI. These differences reached their highest level in the early 1980s, when, in the Iraqi Kurdistan mountains, a bloody six-year civil war erupted between the two groups, who were both heavily armed at that time.

Komala-CPI, founded in 1967 in the Kurdish region of Iran, is a Marxist organization, which now "fights to destroy capita-

lism in the longer run, but its immediate demand is to form a democratic state with all the other Iranian political forces included," according to Komala-CPI's Rahmanpanah.

He said any democratic government in Iran "must guarantee the democratic rights of the Kurdish nation, even if they want to secede."

"Our socialist demands are similar to those of the Communist Party of Iran [which includes both Kurds and Iranian Persians, and is also based in the Zirgwez camp], but because of the extent of the national oppression in [Iranian] Kurdistan, ending this oppression is one of our prime goals," added Rahmanpanah. "We have agreed to fight for the people's judicial representation in Iran at our latest congress."

The PDKI, led by Mustafa Hijri and founded in 1945 in Iranian Kurdistan, has a contrasting position to Komala-CPI's on the Iranian Kurdish question. The PDKI's Nazifi said its central aim was "to build a federalist government in Iran that assures the right of the Kurds and the other...nations [ethnic groups] in Iran on an ethnic and geographical basis."

He added that the PDKI had long believed in a "decentralized federalist government," similar to the one existing in Iraq today, that "could guarantee the rights of all those nations, settle Iran's problems peacefully and create good relations in the Middle East and internationally."

Breaking away from the mother party

Komala-CPI, known to the communists as "the mother party," has also given birth to two further "Komala" parties which insist on using the term "Komala" (meaning "Group" in Kurdish) in their party names, creating great headaches for outsiders trying to work out the identity of these various groups.

In 2000, the biggest split in Komala-CPI's history occurred when Abdullah

Muhtadi, one of Komala-CPI's most renowned leaders, decided to break away from the party due to his disenchantment with its communist ideology and his increased embracing of a social-democratic position.

He formed a new faction named the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan (Komala-PIK).

"Our faction's split was the only one that occurred for political reasons in the history of Iranian-Kurdish politics," said Farwq Wakili, Komala-PIK Central Committee member and the party's representative in Sulaimani city. "We are still a leftwing organization – left of social democracy. Our Komala fights for federalism in Iran and the rights of the Kurds and other nations on ethnic and geographical grounds."

Perhaps underscoring a fundamental similarity in purpose among the Iranian Kurdish parties, which is ignored due to their highly politicized internecine fighting, Komala-PIK's aim, as expressed in Wakili's statement, appears to be exactly the same as the "democratic" PDKI's, as expressed in Nazifi's statement, even though Komala-PIK is led by former staunch communist Muhtadi and uses the name "Komala," now inextricably associated with communism.

To add even more confusion to the party nomenclature and ideology, the Kurdish-language name of Komala-PIK translates as "Komala-Revolutionary Toilers' Party of Kurdistan," with the party name rather shrewdly toned down in its English version for Western and international consumption.

"This is because 'revolution' and those kinds of names are not popular outside the country and in the West," explained Wakili.

Split after split leads to armed conflict

In 2008, the year when the sectarianism and factionalism among the Iranian Kurdish parties peaked, several Komala-PIK Central Committee members decided to further break away from the Komala splinter party, apparently because of personal politics, to form their own organization, called Komala-Kurdistan Toilers' Party (Komala-KTP), led by Omer Ilkhani Zada.

This separation was not as peaceful as Muhtadi's split from the Komala-CPI "mother party." Tension ran so high between these two "social democratic" splinter groups that armed attacks were mounted against each other, and the parties took each others' cadres as prisoners. This was eventually stopped by the intervention of the Iraqi Kurdish security forces.

The split, and the subsequent violence, had reportedly been simply due to petty personal differences on how to and who should run Komala-PIK, but as a result, instead of fighting their common enemy, the Iranian regime, the refugees had turned their weapons on each other.

"It was a management issue which could have been solved easily, but the

consequence was quite unfortunate," said Komala-PIK's Wakili, adding that there were no political or ideological differences between the two "social democratic" groups, who both blame each other for sparking off the violence and, to this day, will not engage in mutual dialogue.

"The violence was a result of deviating away from Komala-CPI's fundamental principles," said Komala-CPI's Rahmanpanah, adding that no violence had ever taken place during a split from his own party.

"When [Muhtadi's Komala-PIK] first split from us, we even provided them with a camp next to us and paid for all their expenses for three months," he said. The Komala-PIK camp still stands next to the original Komala-CPI camp.

The Kurdish democrat's PDKI did not escape the epidemic of sectarianism either. In that same year, just after the PDKI's 13th congress, a splinter group left the party to form the Kurdistan Democratic Party (PDK), not to be confused with Iraqi Kurdistan's own Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which is one of the region's current ruling parties.

The PDK claimed they had had issues with the original party's "internal democratic structure," while the PDKI claimed the faction had broken away because their demands had not been met in the congress.

Both "democratic" parties have similar manifestos, exasperatingly similar names and even celebrate similar party anniversaries. The lack of fundamental political and ideological differences between them mirrors the relationship of Muhtadi's Komala-PIK with its offshoot, Zada's Komala-KTP.

The 'Iraqi Kurdistan solution' for Iran's Kurds

Apart from communist Komala-CPI, all the Iranian Kurdish parties view the United States' 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the subsequent formation of the KRG, as the solution to the Kurdish question in Iraq. Komala-CPI is the only one of these groups demanding "the right of the Kurdish nation to self determination."

In contrast to the communist party's separatist views, the PDKI's Nazifi told Rudaw that, "to put into practice our federalism, all the regions of the indigenous nations must be part of Iran," adding that his party envisioned a semiautonomous Kurdish region within an "Iranian federalist state," echoing the status of the Kurdish semiautonomous region in Iraq.

However, Komala-CPI remains staunchly opposed to federalism.

"Federalism is unable to answer the Kurdish question and guarantee the democratic rights of the Kurds," said Komala-CPI's Rahmanpanah, adding that federalist-type governments had been equally unsuccessful in addressing such issues in the rest of the world as well.

"The experiences of Palestine, India and Iraqi Kurdistan show that federalism has not offered a solution for the different ethnic minority groups," he said.

Other peoples join the Kurds' struggle

The Iranian Kurdish movement has, on the whole, also fought for the rights of all the major ethnic minorities in Iran, namely the Arabs, Azeri, Baluchis and Turks.

In turn, members of these minorities have joined the Kurds' ranks.

Rudaw met peshmargas in their early twenties from these various nationalities at both the Komala-CPI and PDKI camps, many of them speaking in broken Kurdish.

"We pick up each other's languages, because we struggle together and we are also living here together," said a 21-year-old communist peshmarga, adding that the peshmargas of other ethnicities usually picked up the Kurdish language after being in the camp for a couple of months.

At the PDKI camp there was a cemetery which, as well as having graves and memorials for Kurds, included those for Arab and Turkish party martyrs, killed while fighting the Iranian military forces or assassinated by the Iranian secret service.

A united front or lost cause?

As a member of both Socialist International (SI) and the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), the PDKI is substantially more internationally recognized than the other Iranian Kurdish parties.

In 2004, Komala-PIK also requested to become a SI member, but was refused because SI's policy only allows for the membership of one democratic, including social democratic, party per country.

Despite this, Komala-PIK's Wakili says his party is the most influential Iranian Kurdish party.

"You can see the important position our party holds in the international media, which means we are progressing politically and more recognized than the [other parties]," he said.

The other two splinter groups, the PDK and Komala-KTP, as yet have no great influence nationally or internationally, especially when compared to the PDKI and Komala-CPI, possibly due to the recentness of their formations. Only time will tell whether these groups will become substantial enough to rival the two mother parties, or whether they will simply sink into oblivion like dozens of other parties in the turbulent history of Iranian politics.

All the Iranian Kurdish parties mentioned here told Rudaw, and indeed have often grandly proclaimed to the rest of the world's press, that their aim is to form a united front against their common enemy, Iran. On the surface, this would seem the obvious and most simple solution, but in practice, appears to be a far cry from reality, due to the violent, but often petty and pointless, ideological disputes and personal politics among the groups.

The Kurdish struggle in Iran appears to be a lost cause, stagnating amid the factionalism and sectarianism that is bogging down the Iranian Kurds' simple hope to secure their rights and freedom.

Le vent de la révolte arabe bute sur le régime syrien

Un nouvel appel à manifester pour des réformes a été lancé, après un premier rendez-vous raté.

Le prochain rendez-vous a été fixé au 15 mars. Les Syriens sont théoriquement invités ce jour-là à manifester dans les rues contre le régime du président Bachar Al-Assad, au pouvoir depuis 2000, date à laquelle il avait succédé à son père, Hafez Al-Assad.

Le 4 février, une première invitation avait été lancée, sans rencontrer le moindre succès. A Alep, dans le nord du pays, un activiste qui, selon Human Rights Watch, avait lancé des appels publics pour plus de liberté avait été arrêté. La Syrie est en effet le seul régime autoritaire du Proche-Orient resté imperméable aux insurrections en cours et aux révolutions survenues en Tunisie et en Égypte.

Il faut dire que les deux dernières tentatives de mise en cause publique de la nature du régime syrien ont rapidement tourné court. Le régime du président Assad avait brutalement stoppé en septembre 2001 le « printemps de Damas » : une floraison de salons politiques dans le pays au

sein desquels étaient évoquées la fin de l'état d'urgence, en vigueur depuis 1963, des élections véritablement pluralistes et la libération des prisonniers politiques. Riyad Seif, l'une des figures de proue de ce mouvement pourtant circonscrit à la bonne société syrienne, avait alors été emprisonné.

Une répression identique avait frappé cinq ans plus tard les signataires d'une « déclaration de Damas » appelant à une transition politique, qui avaient été traduits en justice et emprisonnés. Contraint un an plus tôt à se retirer du Liban, soumis à la pression conjointe des États-Unis et de la France, le régime syrien était isolé.

La reprise spectaculaire des relations avec Paris en 2008, qui a culminé avec la visite dans la capitale française du président Assad, en juillet 2008, n'a eu aucune conséquence sur le sort des signataires de cette déclaration qui n'ont pu recouvrer la liberté qu'au terme de leur peine. Trois autres figures syriennes de la défense des droits

de l'homme, l'écrivain Ali Al-Abdallah et les avocats Muhannad Al-Hassani et Haytham Al-Maleh ont été condamnés ces derniers mois à de nouvelles périodes d'emprisonnement pour avoir « répandu de fausses informations » ou « affaibli le sentiment national ».

Contré-pied

L'un des signataires de la « déclaration de Damas », le journaliste et écrivain Michel Kilo, libéré en 2010 après trois ans passés en prison, a accordé lundi un très prudent entretien au quotidien libanais *Al-Nahar* pour dresser un premier bilan de la vague de contestation arabe. « Nous entrons dans l'ère de l'après-despotisme arabe, a-t-il estimé, après la misère, la violence, la corruption vécues dans le monde arabe. Tous les pays vont entrer dans l'histoire libre et démocratique, même si leurs régimes ne vont pas chuter prochainement. (...) Ceux qui refusent les réformes vivent désormais dans un autre temps. »

Sans jamais s'exprimer publi-

quement sur les événements tunisiens ou égyptiens, les autorités syriennes ont pourtant jugé la situation suffisamment inquiétante pour multiplier les mesures d'ordre social, prenant le contre-pied de la politique de rigueur budgétaire suivie précédemment, dès la chute de Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, le 14 janvier.

Alors que les réserves en pétrole du pays s'épuisent, la Syrie doit faire face chaque année à l'entrée sur un marché du travail atone de plusieurs dizaines de milliers de jeunes. Certains signaux témoignent de tensions, ainsi le bref soulèvement d'un quartier de Damas, Al-Hariqa, le 17 février, en protestation contre les mauvais traitements infligés par la police à un commerçant. Comme le montre une vidéo consultable sur YouTube et comme partout ailleurs dans cette région en ébullition, l'événement a été immédiatement filmé par des dizaines de téléphones brandis par les contestataires. ■

Gilles Paris

LE FIGARO

jeudi 3 mars 2011

Chypre du Nord se dresse contre le « protecteur » turc

20 000 personnes ont manifesté hier à Nicosie.

LAURE MARCHAND
ENVOYÉE SPÉCIALE À NICOSIE

MÉDITERRANÉE Le vent de révolte qui souffle sur le pourtour méditerranéen a atteint la partie de Chypre sous domination turque depuis 1974. Hier, plus de 20 000 Chypriotes-turcs, soit un sur sept, ont manifesté dans le nord de Nicosie contre les mesures d'austérité imposées par la mère-patrie et pour se débarrasser de sa tutelle. « Ce pays est à nous, nous voulons le diriger », « Retirez votre paquet ou tirez-vous », « Ankara, lâche-nous », pouvait-on lire sur de nombreuses pancartes hostiles à la mainmise turque. De rares drapeaux chypriotes flottaient dans la manifestation, la police les ayant violemment confisqués, tout comme les pancartes dénonçant « l'occupation ».

Les revendications sont montées d'un cran ces dernières semaines et les griefs

politiques ont pris le pas sur l'opposition au plan de rigueur du gouvernement turc. Le 28 janvier, une première manifestation s'était concentrée sur les mesures visant à assainir le déficit budgétaire de la « République turque de Chypre du Nord » (RTCN), État fantôme reconnu par la seule Turquie et qui survit sous perfusion d'Ankara. Des banderoles anti-Turcs avaient mis hors de lui le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. « Qui sont ces gens ? », avait-il éructé, en les traitant de « charognards ». « Ils crachent dans la main de celui qui les nourrit. (...) Nous avons versé notre sang pour eux. Ils doivent être déferés devant la justice. » Pour les Chypriotes-turcs, ces propos aux relents colonialistes ont fait l'effet d'une douche froide. « La Turquie pense qu'elle est chez elle ici », s'indigne Cinel Hüseyin, enseignante d'anglais qui s'est enveloppée dans un drapeau chypriote.

De fait, la RTCN est administrée comme un protectorat. Elle est bien dotée d'un gouvernement et d'un « président » mais l'« ambassadeur » de Turquie veille à l'application des ordres d'Ankara. Le gouvernement turc vient d'ailleurs de

nommer à ce poste de « président bis » le technocrate qui a mis en place les mesures d'austérité. « Notre banque centrale, notre police et même nos pompiers sont dirigés par les Turcs », explique Güven Varoglu, président du syndicat des enseignants, qui a mis en place la plate-forme de contestation. De plus, 40 000 soldats turcs stationnent toujours dans le tiers nord de l'île. Un noyau dur de Chypriotes-turcs réunis autour du quotidien *Afrika* fait campagne pour la réunification et la fin de l'emprise turque.

« Pris en sandwich »

Vendredi dernier, des coups de feu ont été tirés contre les locaux du journal et son rédacteur en chef, Sener Levent, a reçu des menaces de mort. « Ce n'est pas la première fois, déclare-t-il. Cette nouvelle attaque prouve bien qu'on vit sous occupation. » Si l'ensemble de la population ne réclame pas de couper radicalement le cordon ombilical avec la Tur-

quie, le sentiment d'être menacé dans son identité chypriote est de plus en plus partagé.

Les colons installés à partir de 1974, les travailleurs, les étudiants et les militaires turcs sont désormais plus nombreux que les Chypriotes. « *Nous sommes en danger de mort* », estime Zeki Besiktepe, à la tête du mouvement jasmin. Très peu re-

ligieux, les autochtones supportent de moins en moins les différences de mode de vie avec les migrants turcs et la multiplication de mosquées. Leur nombre est passé de 20 à 47 depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir en Turquie, il y a huit ans, des musulmans conservateurs de l'AKP.

La peur de l'assimilation est renforcée par le blocage complet du processus de

réunification de l'île. Victimes de la mauvaise volonté turque et chypriote-grecque, les négociations sont au point mort. « *On est pris en sandwich entre les deux*, déplore Güven Varoglu. *Nous avons un passeport européen mais nous sommes les citoyens invisibles de l'Union européenne.* » ■

Le Monde

Mercredi 9 mars 2011

Iran : sous la pression, M. Rafsandjani cède la présidence de l'Assemblée des experts

La perte d'un poste-clé par l'ex-président de la République illustre la crispation et l'isolement du pouvoir

Rumeurs, pressions et de rares déclarations : la campagne pour l'élection du président de l'Assemblée des experts, ce rouage religieux de la République islamique au rôle en théorie essentiel puisqu'il peut « *élire, contrôler ou démettre le Guide suprême* », a été aussi discrète qu'acharnée.

Le dénouement est intervenu mardi 8 mars, lorsque les 86 *mojtahed* (docteurs de la loi) qui composent l'Assemblée se sont retrouvés pour une élection qui a lieu tous les deux ans. L'ancien président de la République Ali Akbar Hachemi Rafsandjani a cédé de lui-même la place qu'il occupait depuis 2007 à la tête de cet organe de pouvoir à l'ayatollah Mohammad Reza Mahdavi Kani, 80 ans. Cet ayatollah conservateur, éphémère premier ministre par intérim peu après la révolution de 1979 et dirigeant de l'université Imam-Sadeh qui forme les élites de la République islamique, était soutenu par les fondamentalistes.

Conscient de ce que la bataille était perdue d'avance après les pressions dont ont été l'objet les membres de l'Assemblée (une bonne trentaine avait fait allégeance à M. Mahdavi Kani avant le vote), M. Rafsandjani a préféré éviter un affrontement interne dévastateur.

Mais dans son discours d'ouverture de la séance de l'Assemblée il n'a guère mâché ses mots, sortant de sa réserve habituelle. Expliquant que « *le monde d'aujourd'hui n'est plus le même*

qu'il y a trente ans », il a mis en cause les plus hautes autorités du régime entraînés dans une spirale de répression face à toute forme de contestation, en déclarant : « *La République islamique a perdu la confiance des fidèles, la solution n'est pas la terreur mais le dialogue.* »

Evoquant le vote des « experts », M. Rafsandjani a ajouté : « *Ici, les décisions sont prises en dehors de cette Assemblée.* » Ce qui était une allusion très claire à l'un des paradoxes de cette Assemblée, où les « experts » chargés de surveiller les

« La République islamique a perdu la confiance des fidèles »

Ali Akbar Hachemi Rafsandjani

actions du Guide suprême sont avertisés par ce même Guide sur une liste restreinte soumise ensuite au vote de la population...

Enfin, l'ancien président de la République s'est livré à une vive critique des dérives du régime parlant de « *mystification* », de « *paroles vidées de tout sens islamique* » et de « *mensonges* » permanents.

Pourquoi une telle violence dans ses propos ? Parce qu'en réalité, l'épisode qui s'est dénoué mardi, le début de l'éviction de M. Rafsandjani, n'est que l'aboutissement d'une rivalité politique qui dure depuis plus de vingt ans entre le Guide suprême,

Ali Khamenei, et M. Rafsandjani.

Ce dernier, personnage très contesté (le pouvoir l'accuse régulièrement de corruption) mais historique, et surtout dernier « poids lourd » du régime à ne pas s'être totalement aligné sur le clan fondamentaliste au pouvoir, a pourtant été le « parrain » de M. Khamenei lorsqu'il a succédé à l'imam Khomeyni à sa mort, en 1989. Depuis, les relations entre les deux hommes se sont dégradées.

M. Rafsandjani, qui a l'écoute des grands ayatollahs de Qom, la ville sainte, ou des membres influents du bazar en raison de sa politique affairiste, s'était rendu incontournable. Il était devenu une gêne pour le nouveau Guide suprême qui a toujours manqué, entre autres, d'une grande légitimité religieuse. C'est ainsi qu'en 2005, le clan conservateur, à l'instigation de M. Khamenei, avait évincé M. Rafsandjani de l'élection présidentielle. Le Guide lui ayant préféré la candidature du maire populiste de Téhéran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Une situation qui s'est encore dégradée lors des manifestations suscitées en juin 2009 par la réélection contestée de M. Ahmadinejad. Tout en gardant ses distances, M. Rafsandjani, connu pour son pragmatisme et son habileté à trouver des compromis, a soutenu le mouvement « vert » d'opposition, appelant dans un discours remarqué en juillet 2009, au « *dialogue* » devant « *la grave crise de confiance*

populaire qui met l'avenir de la République islamique en danger ».

A l'heure où, devant un regain de contestation en dépit de la répression, le pouvoir iranien s'est durci demandant à chacun de faire allégeance, l'élimination de l'ancien président de la République d'un poste stratégique semblait cruciale à ses yeux.

Ce n'est pas la première fois que les ultraconservateurs tentaient de le déloger de l'Assemblée des experts. Ces dernières années M. Khamenei avait favorisé l'élection d'experts qui lui sont proches, souvent passés par des postes idéologiques dans les forces armées, mais M. Rafsandjani avait réussi à sauver sa place.

Cette fois, il a jeté lui-même l'éponge, semblant se placer ouvertement dans une forme d'opposition. Il lui reste encore des atouts, ne serait-ce que son poste à la tête du Conseil de discernement qui arbitre les litiges entre le Parlement et le gouvernement.

Sa disparition d'un poste-clé comme celui de président de l'Assemblée des experts marque cependant un tournant. « *Si Rafsandjani saute, le Guide aura franchi la dernière ligne rouge : il sera plus isolé que jamais face à l'opposition, car seul M. Rafsandjani a l'étoffe et la crédibilité pour lancer un pont, si c'est encore possible entre pouvoir et opposition* », nous confiait peu avant l'élection un dirigeant réformateur de passage à Paris. ■

Marie-Claude Decamps



KRG officials discuss plight of Iraq's Christians at Paris conference

Paris, France (KRG.org) – Kurdistan Regional Government ministers last week at the French Senate in Paris said that they will continue to do all they can to help Christians fleeing from violence in other parts of Iraq.

Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir, the KRG's Head of Foreign Relations, said, "We are proud to help in whatever way we can. We remember the material and moral aid that we received in the darkest days of our history. We do all we can to help them, but we lack the resources to meet all their humanitarian needs. We welcome the French Foreign Minister's call to European countries in January to give concrete support to regions that have received fleeing Christians."

Minister Bakir was joined by Dr Fuad Hussein, Chief of Staff to President Masoud Barzani, at a conference on February 26th on the fate of Iraq's Christians in the Senate, France's upper house of parliament. The conference was organised by the Kurdish Institute in Paris.

Since 2003, over 10,000 Christian families have found refuge in Kurdistan. Since October 2010 alone, after an attack on a church in Baghdad, 2,000 families fled there.

Dr Hussein said, "Some have doubts about us and our intentions, and ask why we are open to the Christians. We believe in this policy because we believe in our own humanity and in democracy, in the diversity of our society. We know that we're not alone and that we have to fight together and live together."

He added "Our policy in the Kurdistan Region has much to do with our common history of suffering, and with the future of our country - the country of the Kurds, Arabs, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Turkmen, Muslims, Christians, Yezidis. We believe in the diversity of Kurdistan, and our policy must reflect the reality of this diversity."

Minister Bakir said that the Kurdish government effectively gives the Christians financial support to pay for temporary accommodation and tries to help them find jobs. But, he added, the KRG would like new facilities for social care and to provide schooling in Arabic for the children.

Raban Al-Qas, the Bishop of the town of Amadiya in Kurdistan, commended President Barzani for immediately coming to the aid of Christians and helping many of them to



return to villages in Kurdistan that they had left 40 years before. He said, "Three hundred and seventy Christian villages have been rebuilt, and we should be grateful to the Kurdistan Regional Government for rebuilding them as well as building a school and chapel or church in each. The government also built roads to the villages, where before there were only paths accessible by mules. Above all their ability to return to the villages gave them a chance to live in peace without the threat of terrorism. I invite you to come and visit us there."

Mr Olivier Poupard, Adviser on Religious Affairs to France's Minister of Foreign Affairs, spoke about the threat of terrorism to Christian as well as other communities in different parts of the Middle East, and called on the international community to react strongly to terrorism regardless of the religion of the victims. He said, "President Barzani's initiative last November to open Kurdistan's door to Christians under threat and attack in other parts of Iraq is both generous and a step in the right direction. It helps to avoid the exile of a people that has always lived in Iraq, that is an irreplaceable community acting as a guarantor of peace and social harmony."

He said, "The French authorities will look at the KRG's proposals and respond. Through France's consul general in Erbil, we will study what projects France can fund, notably in the education sector which we hold dear. But any initiative however generous needs a favourable environment."

The Bishop of Mosul, Emile Nona and Father Nejib Mikael, the Superior of the Dominican Order in Baghdad, also spoke about the threats and attacks faced by their communities.

All the speakers at the conference, which was in two sessions, stressed the need to take concrete action to help Iraq's Christians. They included Dr Kendal Nezan, President of the Kurdish Institute; French Senator Bernard Cazeau; the writer Ephrem Isa Yousif; and Abbot Pascal Gollnisch, Director of the Christian charity L'Oeuvre d'Orient.

Turkey's Unity Threatened: Polarization Over Kurdish Policy

TheHuffingtonPost



Tulin Daloglu

While the Arab world is swept by a series of revolutions ending the long lasting status quo in the region, Kurdish separatists announced the end of a six-month cease-fire this week in their nearly 30-year fight against the Turkish state. The timing is undeniably meaningful. March kicks off election season in Turkey, and people will vote on the next government in three months. Kurds also celebrate Newroz this month. The March 21 festivities mark the arrival of spring, and the massive number of people likely to attend increases the odds of a clash between Kurds and Turkish security forces. Such an incident may give a picture that the fever in the region jumped to Turkey, too. And it's needless to say that any type of fight is bound to play a role in the national election.

Before going further though, it's important to give a brief context to the dilemma, which threatens Turkey's unity, peace and security. Without a doubt, Turkey has approached a very crucial turning point in its dealings with its Kurdish citizens. To start with, the issue of secularism and the role of Kurds in Turkey -- either as part of the republic or separate from it -- has been a key weakness since the country's founding 88 years ago. Even after so many years of their own form of democratic government, Turks are still insecure about the strength of the secular regime and Kurds do not feel like equal citizens. The Kurdish political parties have long sought autonomy, leaving open the question of whether they would try to create an independent

Kurdistan with Turkish land.

When the United States military toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003, Turks also feared that its other mission in the region was creating an independent Kurdistan -- a deep-rooted fear based on how the Ottoman Empire was lost by the end of World War I. As a result, the Turkish State seems to have decided between the two "evils" -- surely not used in literal sense but as a metaphor -- and cast its lot with the Justice and Development Party (AKP) on the grounds that the Kurds were less trustworthy than the Islamists. Rightly or wrongly, the military favored an AKP takeover of Turkey's eastern and southeastern regions, which are populated mainly by Kurds, rather than allow the Kurdish parties to rule there. The result is a rather complicated mess.

When Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan rose to power in 2003, he complained that the previous government had failed to address the Kurdish issue and had done nothing to further the state's interests since jailing PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in 1999. Now, after nine years of AKP rule, not much has changed; in fact, the problem has grown even bigger and more chronic.

Turkey's fight against the PKK has not been easy. In the name of counterterrorism, the Turkish military and security forces have acted illegally, shattering innocent lives and spreading fear over the Kurdish population. The United States did not necessarily care what Turkey did in mid-to-late 1980s. The U.S. policy line was that the "PKK is a terrorist organization and we support Turkey's right to defend itself against terrorism." But the Gulf War led to a dramatic shift in the U.S. policies toward the Kurds. That affected the relationship between the U.S. and Turkey throughout the 1990s.

The Congress brought spotlight on Turkey's human rights record in its dealings with the Kurdish issue -- rather in a disproportionate way. In the meantime, the Turks in the western part of the country did not want to know what was happening in the Kurdish regions. And that was even more problematic than anything else...

Under the AKP's leadership, however, the state prosecutor in Istanbul prosecuted Ergenekon, a shadowy Turkish ultra-nationalist gang, in a high-profile trial. Many in the general population thought that Turkey had reached a point where it could deal with its darker elements and end the workings of the "deep state." But nearly three years after the trial began, Turks have not begun to come to terms with the crimes of the past or move forward with a national healing process. Instead, this historic trial is now all about a 2003 coup plot -- and even though no clear evidence exists that steps were taken to carry it out, it is the reason that 1 out of every 10 high-ranking Turkish military officers is in jail.

Still, I'm convinced that the Turkish state backs AKP on its Kurdish policy. Or I can rephrase it differently and argue that the AKP acts accordingly with the Turkish state when it comes to the Kurdish issue. Either way, Kurds made significant gains in the 2009 local elections, but since then many have worried that the AKP and the larger Turkish state are trying to destroy them politically. That seemed the logical conclusion, one Kurdish representative told me, after thousands of Kurdish activists were prosecuted after the local elections in the Kurdish Communities Union (KCK) trial. Unquestionably, the Turkish government should have dealt with the Kurdish parties differently. Yet many speculate that religion and

ideology are Erdogan's reasons for fully supporting Hamas and Hezbollah while refusing to accept the Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) as legitimate. Simply put, Kurds represent a secular movement; the others are Islamist.

To move on, Turks went to the polls last September to decide on a referendum to change parts of the Turkish constitution, and Erdogan stoked the fires by bringing up the Turkish military's operation in 1937 in Dersim to end a Kurdish uprising. Turks should be able to talk about the dark parts of their history -- honesty can only strengthen their country's unity. But Erdogan wasn't trying to be constructive. He was trying to hurt his main opponent, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, whose hometown is Tunceli -- formerly Dersim. Erdogan wanted to embarrass Kilicdaroglu, who represents the Republican People's Party (CHP), and create the impression that he was acting against the people of his own hometown by leading a party that actually had given the order to use air bombardment to end the uprising in Dersim in 1937. He hoped that it would bring him the votes. He was right. But it did not change the fact, Kilicdaroglu insisted that his politics would not be determined by ethnicity or religion and that an overwhelming majority in Tunceli voted against the referendum. What Erdogan should have done, if his real aim was to examine the mistakes of Turkish history, was not to use such a traumatic incident as a political football. Rather, he should have apologized for those past mistakes and tried to move the country forward. As the prime minister, he owns Turkey's past and the present...

The military constitution drafted in 1982 mandated that parties must achieve a 10-percent threshold in the popular vote to be represented in the Turkish

Parliament, and a minimum vote of 7 percent in the national election to be eligible for funds from the state treasury. That stipulation was a blatant move to keep Kurds out of Turkey's politics. But while Erdogan continually talks about Turkey's strengthening democracy, he argues vehemently against lowering those barriers so that people can really be represented in Parliament. He wants to win a third term in June, and by playing the hardball he is trying to hold the vote for the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) under the 10-percent threshold. If he succeeds, he could end up with 367 AKP deputies in Parliament -- which would be the magical number allowing him to

change the constitution without opposition.

Last but not the least, AKP's Kurdish opening or democratic opening lacked a true content. No one seemed to be clear as to what it really constituted. Yet it became clear that AKP had cut a deal with the PKK -- through back channels -- persuading the return of a group of 34 people from northern Iraq through Habur border gate in October. Some of those were PKK members and others were refugees at the Makhmur refugee camp. In the end, both sides misused this opportunity.

The AKP leadership failed to prepare the country, but authoritatively pushed the people to accept whatever they

decide. It backfired. Those returnees are now being arrested and standing trial mainly for supporting a terrorist organization. Alas Erdogan -- as the Turkish prime minister -- should have known better that there is no way for Turkey to really take a step forward on the Kurdish issue without the consent and approval of its two opposition parties -- the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). They were, however, completely excluded from this process. As a result, when Turks saw Turkish judges at the border in the tents issuing them an easy pass to normal life with no ramification, and watched on their television screen the victory festivities in the Kurdish

cities, they could not comprehend what it really meant to them.

Turkey's unity is more at stake than ever. People are becoming more and more polarized, and there is hardly any sincere debate questioning the AKP's policies. Instead the focus is on the military's mysterious plot to overthrow the government rather than genuinely concentrating on the country's well-being. Erdogan's tactics of distraction, manipulation, clouding the issues and causing confusion may keep him in power by dividing people, but they don't change the fact that his policies are hurting rather than helping the country.



Agency of Kurdistan for News

Talabani: opposition is necessary for progress of Kurdistan

March 7th 2011 - (AKnews) - by Sarwa Hawrami

Erbil — Iraq's president and the secretary-general of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Jalal Talabani said on Monday that an opposition is necessary for progress and development of Kurdistan, noting that his party has decided with the Kurdistan Democratic Party to make reforms in the region.

Jalal Talabani, Kongrai PUK Talabani said in a speech during a ceremony held in Sulaimaniyah to the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of March uprising in the nineties of the last century that "the opposition has to maintain the unity and integrity of the people, as their presence is essential for the progress of Kurdistan, we believe in different opinions and ideas."

"We support and work to achieve the demands made by the demonstrators and work to improve the living conditions of society."

The Kurdish people has a mass uprising against the former regime in the spring of 1991, including local people in cities and towns as well as Kurdish Peshmarga forces, which led to the liberation of most of the provinces and cities in Kurdistan from the grip of the former Iraqi regime.

"We support this kind such as the protest that took place in Sulaimaniyah and demonstrate peacefully, this is a legitimate right of every society which is contained in the permanent Iraqi constitution as well as in the Constitution of Kurdistan."

"we hope that these demonstrations are peaceful and the demonstrators would deal in a civilized way with the security forces and we condemn any kind of violence and murder if it was by the demonstra-



tors or security forces".

Sulaimaniyah the second largest city of Kurdistan is experiencing since Thursday of 17 of last February several protests that demand to fight against corruption and provide jobs for the unemployed and political reforms, but it transferred into clashes between demonstrators and security forces that killed and injured a number of people.

Kurdistan Parliament issued a resolution last week about the situation in the region, which included 17 points, and called representatives of the political blocs in parliament to listen to the demands of the demonstrators, and support the results of the national dialogue between political parties and political blocs represented by the members of parliament.

Kurdistan is witnessing mobility internally among the various political parties in an effort to calm the situation after Sulaimaniyah experienced tension on the background of the demonstrations.

Kurdistan region's President, Massoud Barzani demanded on Thursday the need to address the situation in the region, also stressed at the same time the absence of the President for life in the region.

Kurdistan's Gets \$9.5 Billion In Iraqi Budget

By HEMIN BABAN

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan: Iraq's parliament passed the country's budget for 2011 in late February, amounting to 96.6 trillion Iraqi dinars, approximately US\$81.5 billion. Almost US\$9.5 billion of this will go to the Kurdistan region.

Ashwaq Jaff, a Kurdish member of the Iraqi parliament, said the first draft of the budget bill had "many points in it that were not in the Kurds' interest. But the second draft is much better."

She said Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Maliki had agreed to provide the budget for the Kurdish armed forces, known as the peshmarga, and had earmarked a budget of nearly US\$150 million to implement a constitutional article on the territories disputed between the Kurds and the Iraqi government. Key among such territories is the oil-rich city of Kirkuk that the Kurds, Arabs and Turcomans all claim.

However, the parliament has reduced the budget initially proposed for carrying out the constitutional provision by around US\$85 million. Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution demands compensation for the thousands of Kurds expelled from Kirkuk by Saddam Hussein's regime, which will assist them to return to their homes. It also provides for compensation for Arab settlers who were brought to Kirkuk so that they can go back to their original areas.

But, Jaff said the Iraqi government had promised to add funds to Article 140's budget from surpluses in other areas.

The Iraqi government will also pay for the employment of 10,000 people in Kurdistan as part of a national job-creation plan involving

100,000 Iraqis.

Jaff said the budget law obligated Maliki to reach a deal with Kurdish President Massoud Barzani on "the peshmarga's budget and armament."

Ahmed Chawshin, another Kurdish lawmaker in Baghdad, said the 2011 budget had earmarked around US\$37 million for development in Kurdistan's three provinces of Erbil, Sulaimani and Duhok.

However, Chawshin said he had written a complaint to the parliament speaker, because the budget actually needed for development projects in Kurdistan amounted to around US\$245 million.

The budget has been one of the most contentious issues between the Kurdish and Iraqi governments. Under Saddam Hussein, Kurds received around 13 percent of the entire national budget, but since the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, the rate has increased to 17 percent.

In recent years, Iraqi lawmakers have voiced objections to the budget allocated to Kurdistan, saying it is more than what the Kurds deserve on a per capita basis. There are no accurate population statistics for Iraq, but the population of the Kurdistan region is estimated at around four to five million people.

Chawshin said that the victims of the atrocities committed by Hussein's regime had been allocated 20 percent of the budget surplus in compensation. These include survivors of Hussein's genocidal Anfal campaign against the Kurds and the chemical bombardment of Halabja. Iraq's budget mostly depends on oil revenues, and so is linked to the international oil price, which currently stands at around US\$110 per barrel.

Kurdish lawmakers are also concerned about the fate of revenues generated from Iraq's religious shrines in areas such as Najaf and Karbala in the south of Iraq. The

revenue from these sites is estimated at around US\$2 billion, and is not incorporated into the national budget "under the pretext of being used for development projects in their respective provinces," according to Jaff, who criticized the parliament for still allowing money generated from other sources of revenue to be spent on these shrines.

However, she added that, as part of a deal, the Shiite parties had voted for the allocation of more budget for the implementation of Article 140, and in return the Kurds had agreed to allocating budget for the holy shrines.

Five percent of the national budget will go to reparations still being paid to neighboring Kuwait as a result of Hussein's invasion of the country in 1990. Around US\$25 billion of the budget will be allocated for investment projects.

Although Kurdish authorities say the number of civil servants in Kurdistan amounts to 1.2 million people, Iraq's 2011 budget only provides for around 606,000 Kurdish civil servants.

Shoresh Haji, an Iraqi lawmaker from the Kurdish opposition group, Gorran, said there was no "accurate" data on the number of civil servants in the Kurdish region, not even in the Kurdistan parliament's records.

The Iraqi budget allows for the Kurdish Regional Government to employ 10,000 more people this year.

The budget law also allows for provincial administrations to use all revenues generated from ports of entry in their provinces for projects in those provinces.

Chawshin said the Kurds supported that provision because some of Iraq's key border crossings passed through Kurdistan's provinces. Iraqi Kurdistan shares borders with Turkey, Iran and Syria.



8 MARCH 2011

Iraqi Kurdistan's Liberation Square

Hundreds of people have been gathering in Sulaimaniya's central square to demand an end to corruption.

Al Jazeera
Mohammed A. Salih

The winds of change sweeping through the Middle East and North Africa have now reached an otherwise peaceful corner of northern Iraq. Nowhere is their arrival more visible than in Bardarki Sara, the central square of Sulaimaniya, which has turned into a venue for mass protests against the authorities in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Inspired by the protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square, the protesters have renamed their square 'Maydani Azadi', the Kurdish equivalent of Tahrir or Liberation Square.

Yesterday's protests were the largest so far, partly because it was the 20th anniversary of the Kurdish uprising against Saddam Hussein's regime in Sulaimaniya, but protesters have been turning up in their hundreds for the past two weeks, chanting slogans against the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and its two major ruling parties, singing patriotic songs and demanding a change in the status quo. A podium has been set up, from where speakers - intellectuals, students, members of parliament and imams - talk to the crowd.

Protest organisers have called for a period of civil disobedience and public strikes across the region. But there has been only limited participation since Saturday, when they were due to start. In the early hours of Sunday morning, masked men burned down tents that had been set up for a sit-in by protesters at Maydani Azadi and arrested a number of them.

"I'm here to ask for my rights. When are we going to see the benefits of the economic boom in Kurdistan?" asked one young demonstrator who makes his living selling goods on a small stand in downtown Sulaimaniya. "We want jobs, better living conditions, better services and social justice," said the 20-year-old, asking to be identified as Jivara - Kurdish for Che Guevara.

To live 'freely and proudly'

The protests were started on February 17 by a network of civil society groups expressing solidarity with the Egyptian and Tunisian people and voicing discontent over chronic corruption and the poor provision of public services.

But when protesters gathered in front of the Sulaimaniya headquarters of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and started throwing stones, the building's guards opened fire, killing one person and injuring dozens more. Angered by what they saw as a hugely disproportionate response, protesters took to the streets of towns across the province.

Eight people, including a policeman, have died to date in the protests, about 200 have been injured and two television and radio stations in Sulaimaniya have been burned down by unknown assailants.

As elsewhere in the Arab world, social media sites have played a major role in empowering the protesters. There are numerous Facebook pages dedicated to getting out timely accounts of the protests and expressing the grievances of the demonstrators.

And with the protests showing no sign of abetting, officials are now trying to appease the protesters.



Hundreds of protesters are gathering daily in Iraqi Kurdistan
[Credit: Mohammed A. Salih]

"I call on the parliament to engage with all sides to study the possibility of holding early general elections so that the people can make their voices heard and have the final say," said Massoud Barzani, the president of Iraqi Kurdistan, in a televised speech on Thursday. He also called for the government to prepare for provincial elections.

"After looking into the whole situation, I have come to the conclusion that the situation calls for a fundamental remedy, rather than band-aid solutions."

Stressing his unity with the "voices calling for reform and social justice," Barzani added: "I would not like to live in a Kurdistan where its people did not live freely and proudly."

Zones of influence

Barzani's call for early elections came weeks after a similar call by the main opposition group, Gorran (Kurdish for Change). But back then the KDP, headed by Barzani, and its coalition partner in the government, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), headed by Jalal Talabani, Iraq's president, lambasted Gorran for prescribing "a coup d'état".

"We welcome the call for elections as a way out of the current crisis. But to carry out clean elections, the current government needs to be dissolved because any elections under this KDP-PUK government will not be free of fraud and pressure," said Zana Rauf, a member of the Kurdish parliament from Gorran. "There needs to be an interim government run by technocrats and independents to prepare the ground for genuine elections."

Gorran accepted the results of the last Kurdish parliamentary elections in July 2009 but expressed strong criticism of what it said were irregularities and fraud. The group gained 25 seats in those elections, while the KDP-PUK coalition garnered 59.

The role that political parties have carved for themselves in public life is at the root of much of the public wrath. Despite the existence of a government, the autonomous region has, in practise, been divided into two separate zones of influence. The local administrations in the provinces of Erbil and Dohuk are controlled by the KDP, while Sulaimaniya is mostly administered by the PUK.

Ushering in a new era

Many residents of the region are angry at what they perceive to be widespread corruption, control of the economy by politicians and their inner circles and diminishing freedoms. But, unlike in Egypt or Tunisia, where regime change was an overwhelming public demand, there does not appear to be such a broad consensus in Iraqi Kurdistan. While some protesters are demanding a change in Kurdistan's political regime, their representatives have largely been engaged in talks with the government.

According to Rauf, people want "a major restructuring of the political and economic system and [the] reshuffling of the relationship between the ruling parties and state institutions".

The protests have largely been confined to Sulaimaniya province and attempts to organise demonstrations in Erbil - where there have been reports of a security forces crackdown on would-be demonstrators - and Dohuk have not yet produced any significant results.

The fact that there have been regular elections in Kurdistan in recent years, coupled with the existence of vibrant opposition groups and a significant measure of press and political freedoms - surpassing many other countries in the region - may mean that Iraqi Kurdistan will not witness the major political upheaval experienced elsewhere.

But many protesters and observers believe that a new era in the politics of Iraqi Kurdistan has been ushered in. "We are definitely in a new era now. Kurdistan after February 17 is different from the Kurdistan before," said Asos Hardi, the founder of two independent Kurdish newspapers.

"Before that date the people, the media and the opposition all used to call for reforms but their demands were not taken seriously. But after February 17, the authorities can no longer remain indifferent to people's demands and pressure."

Riding the wave of discontent

The challenge the current protests have posed to the ruling parties, and in particular to the PUK, is unparalleled. Sulaimaniya province has been a stronghold of the PUK for decades, but the party's popularity and authority has been eroded since the Kurdish parliamentary elections in 2009, when Gorran gained most of its votes at the PUK's expense.

So who is behind the protests? The organisers claim that they do not owe loyalty to any political party, but the ruling parties, particularly the KDP, have accused opposition groups such as Gorran, some Islamist parties, and neighbouring countries such as Iran of standing behind the protesters.

For their part, opposition parties have strongly denied being involved in organising the protests and, as violence broke out on the first day of protests, Gorran issued a statement calling for calm and cooperation with official institutions.

That was construed by some as a sign that the opposition leaders had turned their backs on the protesters. But when Gorran offices in areas under de-facto KDP rule were attacked, the party adopted a more aggressive tone. And with protests continuing, opposition parties now seem content to ride the wave of popular disgruntlement.

Seizing on the momentum initiated by the protests, Gorran and the two other Kurdish opposition groups - the Kurdistan Islamic Union and the Kurdistan Islamic Group - issued a statement on Thursday calling for a major overhaul of Iraqi Kurdistan's political and economic system.

"There is an interaction between the street and the opposition," said Hardi. "The protests are not controlled by the opposition parties but the opposition tries to use the momentum on the streets in order to create changes in the political system."

The Seattle Times MARCH 7, 2011

Syrian political prisoners go on hunger strike to demand their freedom, end to emergency laws

Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria - Thirteen Syrian political prisoners have begun a hunger strike to demand their release and the lifting of emergency laws that give authorities a free hand to jail political and human rights activists, a rights group said Monday.

The prisoners include prominent human rights activist Haitham al-Maleh, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Al-Maleh, who is 80 years old and has diabetes and thyroid problems, has been under arrest since October 2009. He was jailed from 1980 until 1986 for demanding constitutional reforms.

The rights group said the activists launched the hunger strike in

Damascus' Adra prison. The political detainees also include Ali Abdullah of the Damascus Declaration opposition group, prominent lawyer Anwar al-Bunni and Kurdish activist Mashaal Tammo.

The political detainees demanded an end to the emergency laws in force since the Baath Party came to power in 1963.

"Time has come to end this persecution matter as the winds of democratic change spread in the Arab world," the political detainees were quoted as saying in a statement from the rights group.

The rights group said it backs the detainees and called for their immediate release.

President Bashar Assad released hundreds of political prisoners after coming to power upon the death of his father in 2000, but he clamped

down on liberals, showing that there were limits to dissent under his rule.

The state news agency reported Monday that Assad declared an amnesty for prisoners convicted of minor crimes such as theft and forgery. He has declared such amnesties for thousands of prisoners, usually coinciding with religious or national holidays.

Monday's amnesty came a day before the 48th anniversary of the Baath Party's accession to power.

The amnesty this year comes during a wave of unrest in the Middle East that has already brought down the leaders of Egypt and Tunisia and threatened the rule of others.

It was not clear how many prisoners will be affected by the decree, but lawyers say it involves thousands.

Arabs rise, Tehran trembles

In the long run, the Iranian regime can't afford a free and democratic Middle East.

Karim Sadjadpour

In "Garden of the Brave in War," his classic memoir of life on a pomegranate farm in 1960s Iran, the American writer Terence O'Donnell recounts how his illiterate house servant, Mamdali, would wake him every morning with a loud knock on the door and a simple question: "Are you an Arab or an Iranian?"

"If I was naked," O'Donnell explained, "I would answer that I'm an Arab and he would wait outside the door, whereas if I was clothed I would reply that I was an Iranian and he would come in with the coffee." This joke went hand in hand, O'Donnell wrote, with an age-old chauvinism that depicted the Persians' Arab neighbors as "uncivilized people who went about unclothed and ate lizards."

The Islamist victors of the 1979 Iranian revolution intended to change things, to replace the shah's haughty Persian nationalism with an Arab-friendly, pan-Islamic ideology. Yet Tehran's official reaction to the 2011 Arab awakening shows that, at the heart of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Middle East strategy, there lays a veiled contempt for Arab intelligence, autonomy and prosperity.

What many Iramians see as a familiar struggle for justice, economic dignity and freedom from dictatorial rule, Iranian officialdom has struggled to spin as a belated Arab attempt to emulate the Islamic revolution and join Tehran in its battle against America and Israel.

The delusions of the Iranian regime are partly attributable to a generation gap. Tehran's ruling elite continues to cling to the antiquated ideology of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, whose worldview was formed by decades of imperial transgressions. The demographic boom in the Middle East, however, has brought a wave of young Arabs and Iranians who associate subjugation and in-

justice not with colonial powers, but with their own governments.

Until now, Iran's interests have been served by the Arab status quo: frustrated populations ruled over by emasculated regimes incapable of checking Israel and easily dismissed as American co-dependents. A conversation I once had with a senior Iranian diplomat is instructive. He complained, justifiably, about Washington's excessive focus on military power to solve political problems. I posed a simple hypothetical: What if, instead of having spent several billion dollars financing Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad over the past three decades, Iran had spent that

The seeming consensus among many pundits — that Iran will fill the Middle East power vacuum — is short-sighted.

"What good would that have done for Iran?" he responded candidly. "Do you think if we sent them abroad to study they would return to southern Lebanon and Gaza to fight Israel? Of course not; they would have remained doctors, lawyers and professors."

Iran, in essence, understands that it can inspire and champion the region's downtrodden, but not the upwardly mobile. Its strategy to dominate the Middle East hinges less on building nuclear weapons than on the twin pillars of oil and alienation. Iranian petrodollars are used to finance radicals — Khaled Me-shaal in Syria, Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon and Moktada al-Sadr in Iraq, to name a few — who feed off popular humiliation. As an Arab Shiite friend once complained to me, "Iran wants to fight

America and Israel down to the last Palestinian, Lebanese and Iraqi."

At first glance, the fall of Western-oriented Arab governments may appear to be a blow to Washington and a boon for Tehran. The seeming consensus among Western analysts and pundits — that Iran will fill the Middle East power vacuum — is short-sighted. While the relationship between Egypt and Iran — the regions two oldest and most populous nations — will likely improve, the competition between them will likely intensify.

Tehran's ascent in the Arab world over the last decade has been partly attributable to Cairo's decline. The potential re-emergence of a proud, assertive Egypt will undermine Shiite Persian Iran's ambitions to be the vanguard of the largely Sunni Arab Middle East. Indeed, if Egypt can create a democratic model that combines political tolerance, economic prosperity and adept diplomacy, Iran's model of intolerance, economic malaise and confrontation will hold little appeal in the Arab world.

Renewed Iranian influence in places like Bahrain and Yemen may also prove self-limiting. As we have seen in Iraq, familiarity with Iranian officialdom often breeds contempt. Polls have shown that even a sizable majority of Iraq's Shiites resent meddling by their co-religionists from Iran. "The harder they push," said

money educating tens of thousands of Palestinians and Lebanese Shiites to become doctors, professors and lawyers? Wouldn't those communities now be much better off and in a much stronger position to assert their rights vis-à-vis Israel?

Ryan Crocker, a former U.S. ambassador to Iraq, "the more resistance they get."

Elsewhere in the Arab world, Iranian proxies like Hezbollah will increasingly find themselves in the awkward position of being a resistance group purportedly fighting injustice while simultaneously cashing checks from a patron that is brutally suppressing justice at home.

The Arab uprisings of 2011 will also, of course, have their effect on Iran internally. Iranian democracy advocates have long taken solace in the belief that they were ahead of their Arab neighbors, who would one day too have to undergo

the intolerance and heartaches of Islamist rule. The largely secular nature of the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia have bruised the Iranian ego: were they the only ones naïve enough to succumb to the false promise of an Islamic utopia?

In the short term Tehran's oil largesse and religious pretensions have seemingly created for it deeper, if not wider, popular support than many Arab regimes. But the regime's curiously heavy-handed response to resilient pro-democracy protests — including the recent disappearance of the opposition leaders Mir Hussein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi — betrays its anxiety about the 21st-century viability of an economically floundering, gender-apartheid state led by a "supreme leader" who purports to be the prophet's representative on Earth.

Tehran publicly cheered the fall of Egyptian and Tunisian regimes undone by corruption, economic stagnation and repression. Do its rulers not know that Iran — according to Transparency International, Freedom House and the World Bank — ranks worse than Tunisia and Egypt in all three categories?

A saying often attributed to Lenin best captures the sorts of tectonic shifts taking place in today's Middle East. "Sometimes decades pass and nothing happens; and then sometimes weeks pass and decades happen."

The uprisings may not all end happily. As history has shown time and again — notably in Iran in 1979 — minorities that are organized and willing to use violence can establish reigns of terror over unorganized or passive majorities. Whatever ensues, however, the Arab risings have revealed that Iran's revolutionary ideology has not only been rendered bankrupt at home, but it has also lost the war of ideas among its neighbors.

KARIM SADJADPOUR is an associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.



Le fameux «modèle turc» ? Encore un effort pour être parfait

Par **JEAN MARCOU**
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Nombre d'experts et de commentateurs se sont subitement entichés, ces derniers temps, du «modèle turc». Même le Collège de défense de l'Otan le qualifiait récemment de «régime républicain et démocratique» et, tandis qu'ils renâclent plus que jamais à accueillir la Turquie dans l'Union européenne, des hommes politiques du vieux continent n'hésitent pas désormais à la montrer en exemple à des révolutions arabes qui souvent les inquiètent plus qu'elles ne les réjouissent.

Pour leur part, en dépit du prestige qu'ils ont acquis récemment au Moyen-Orient, du fait de leur nouvelle politique étrangère, les dirigeants turcs s'étaient jusqu'à présent gardés de se poser en modèle. Ils se sont même montrés, initialement, presque aussi réservés que leurs homologues occidentaux lorsque le monde arabe s'est embrasé, semblant surtout préoccupés par l'avenir des investissements qu'ils y avaient fait ces dernières années, et s'attirant à cet égard les critiques acerbes des médias de leur pays.

Depuis, le Premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, tout en persistant à récuser l'idée de modèle, a néanmoins admis de bonne grâce que l'expérience politique turque pouvait être «une source d'inspiration» pour les peuples actuellement en révolte et, la semaine dernière, le président Gül a été le premier chef d'Etat à visiter l'Egypte, depuis le départ d'Hosni Moubarak, pour y faire valoir entre autres les mérites du système turc. Une enquête du think tank turc Tesev a pourtant montré que, autant que son système démocratique, c'étaient les traditions religieuses de la Turquie, ses succès économiques et son soutien à la cause palestinienne qui séduisaient les pays arabomusulmans.

Cette subite «turcomania» doit donc être accueillie avec discernement. Il est vrai que la transition politi-

nières années, a commencé après la victoire électorale en 2002 de l'AKP, un parti issu de la mouvance islamiste, mais qui s'est démarqué de cet héritage en se définissant lui-même comme «conservateur et démocrate».

Le succès de cet agent post-islamiste du changement turc tient avant tout au fait que, sans renier totalement la dynamique religieuse plus marquée qui l'avait révélé dans les années 90, il a réussi à capter à son profit le capital électoral majoritaire dont disposaient les partis de centre droit conservateurs depuis les années 50, en ralliant à lui un certain nombre d'intellectuels et de personnalités qui, exaspérés par l'immobilisme du système, souhaitaient transcender l'alternative sans issue «militaires ou islamistes».

L'apport principal de l'expérience turque est ainsi d'avoir montré que, sous la pression d'un rapport de force s'appuyant sur le suffrage universel pleinement exercé, l'armée peut être progressivement dépouillée de la fonction dominante qu'elle occupe dans un système de démocratie encadrée et que, parallèlement, un parti issu de l'islam politique, et perçu initialement comme un péril par ce système, peut en devenir le gestionnaire en s'employant à le réformer en profondeur. Encore faut-il que cette force politique devenue majoritaire ne devienne pas dominatrice et n'entreprenne pas à son tour d'encadrer un peu trop l'exercice de la démocratie.

Nous n'en sommes certes pas là. Mais, après l'impasse à laquelle ont abouti récemment les tentatives de règlement politique de la question kurde et la confirmation de l'acharnement judiciaire dont sont l'objet des intellectuels comme la sociologue Pinar Selek, certains dysfonctionnements qui affectent actuellement la liberté de la presse et l'Etat de droit sont en train de montrer que le «modèle» turc reste inachevé à certains égards. L'interminable affaire «Ergenekon» – cette enquête visant, depuis plus de trois ans, un réseau de barbouzes nationalistes qui aurait projeté de renverser le gouvernement mais dont on craint qu'elle ne serve aussi à intimider les opposants les plus résolus au gouvernement – vient de conduire à l'arrestation de plusieurs journalistes d'investigation réputés pourtant pour avoir dénoncé naguère les coups tordus de l'armée contre la démocratie. L'un d'entre eux, Nedim Şener, ayant même été distingué récemment par l'Institut international de la presse pour un ouvrage traitant de l'assassinat, en 2007, de son confrère turc d'origine arménienne, Hrant Dink. Et, comme si cela ne suffisait pas, une décision de justice a bloqué l'accès à la plateforme Blogspot, interdisant du même coup 600 000 blogs sur l'ensemble du pays, alors même que YouTube n'y est à nouveau autorisé que depuis novembre, après avoir connu une interdiction de trois ans.

Au train où vont les choses, pour ce qui concerne l'usage d'Internet, c'est bientôt l'Egypte qui risque de faire figure de modèle sur les bords du Bosphore...

Une décision a bloqué l'accès à Blogspot, interdisant 600 000 blogs sur l'ensemble du pays, alors que YouTube n'y est autorisé que depuis novembre, après une interdiction de trois ans.

que, qui est en train d'affranchir la Turquie d'une tutelle militaire longtemps prégnante, tout en ayant au passage dissous l'islamisme dans un paysage politique libéral et sécularisé, mérite la plus grande attention. A l'instar d'autres régimes autoritaires en Méditerranée (l'Egypte, notamment), ce pays a longtemps fait partie de ces systèmes politiques où l'armée est au pouvoir mais ne gouverne pas. En Turquie, loin d'être un héritage direct du kémalisme, cette situation a plutôt été la conséquence des premières expériences pluralistes qui ont vu l'autorité militaire encadrer le processus démocratique, et au besoin l'interrompre, avant de devenir un acteur politique majeur qui n'avait plus besoin de sortir de ses casernes pour tenir le gouvernement civil en respect.

La remise en question de ce système militaire constitutionnalisés, qui s'est accéléré au cours des trois der-

AFP Syrie: 12 ONG appellent à la levée de l'état d'urgence

DAMAS, 8 mars 2011 - (AFP)

DOUZE ORGANISATIONS de défense des droits de l'Homme, syriennes et kurdes, ont appelé mardi les autorités syriennes à lever l'état d'urgence en vigueur depuis près d'un demi-siècle et à voter une loi sur la création de partis politiques.

"L'état d'urgence porte atteinte aux droits de l'Homme et aux libertés publiques en Syrie qui font l'objet de violations continues. Nous appelons à la levée de l'état d'urgence et à la libération de tous les détenus politiques", ont affirmé ces organisations dans un communiqué.

L'état d'urgence a été décrété en Syrie peu après l'arrivée au pouvoir du parti Baas le 8 mars 1963.

Les ONG demandent également la "promulgation d'une loi sur les partis politiques qui permettrait aux citoyens d'exercer leur droit de participer à la gestion des affaires du pays".

Elles appellent aussi à "l'abrogation de toutes les lois empêchant les organisations des droits de l'Homme de travailler publiquement en toute liberté, et les associations de la société civile de jouer leur rôle avec efficacité".

Les organisations soulignent la nécessité de "prendre urgemment toutes les mesures nécessaires pour annuler toutes les formes de discrimination envers les citoyens kurdes" qui représentent 9% de la population syrienne.

"Les Kurdes doivent pouvoir jouir de leur culture et de leur langue, en vertu des droits civiques, politiques, culturels, sociaux et économiques", ajoute le communiqué.

Le texte est signé notamment de l'Observatoire syrien pour les droits de l'Homme, de la Ligue syrienne de défense des droits de l'Homme, de l'Organisation nationale des droits de l'Homme en Syrie, du Centre de Damas pour les études théoriques et les droits civiques, ainsi que du comité kurde pour les droits de l'Homme en Syrie et de l'Organisation des droits de l'Homme en Syrie (kurde).

AFP Iran: le meurtrier présumé de quatre gardes forestiers

TEHERAN, 12 mars 2011 (AFP)

LA POLICE IRANIENNE a tué un membre d'un "groupe religieux extrémiste", responsable présumé du meurtre de quatre gardes forestiers dans la province du Kurdistan (ouest), et a procédé à une arrestation, ont annoncé samedi les médias locaux.

"Lors d'une opération autour de la ville de Dehgolan, la police a réussi à tuer une personne et à en arrêter une autre", a annoncé l'agence officielle IRNA, citant le gouverneur général adjoint de la province du Kurdistan, Iraj Hasanzadeh.

"La personne arrêtée a été blessée durant l'opération et nous a dit qu'elle-même et son compagnon étaient derrière le meurtre de quatre gardes forestiers", au début du mois.

Tous deux faisaient partie d'un "groupe religieux extrémiste". "Des recherches

sont en cours pour retrouver les autres" membres du groupe, a-t-il ajouté.

Dans une dépêche séparée, l'agence de presse Mehr a cité des déclarations de M. Hasanzadeh selon lequel "ce sont des salafistes" (musulmans sunnites radicaux).

Les quatre gardes forestiers avaient disparu le 4 mars et leurs corps avaient été retrouvés quelques heures plus tard.

"Une enquête préliminaire montre que cette action terroriste a été menée de manière brutale par des forces anti-révolutionnaires", avait alors déclaré Kheyrollah Moradi, responsable de l'agence de protection de l'environnement de la province.

Les régions de l'ouest de l'Iran, où vit une importante minorité kurde, sont le théâtre d'affrontements périodiques entre les forces iraniennes et des mouvements rebelles armés kurdes agissant depuis des bases dans l'Irak voisin.

AFP Turquie: 3 rebelles du PKK tués dans le sud-est

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 15 mars 2011 (AFP)

TROIS REBELLES kurdes ont été tués lors de combats mardi avec l'armée dans le sud-est de la Turquie, un incident qui survient après la menace du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) de mettre fin à sa trêve, a-t-on indiqué de source de sécurité locale.

Les affrontements se sont produits dans une zone rurale de Güçlükonak, une localité dépendante de la province de Sirnak, située à la frontière avec l'Irak, a-t-on souligné de même source.

Les soldats ont ouvert le feu contre un groupe de rebelles alors qu'ils effec-

tuaient une mission de ratissage afin d'empêcher les infiltrations de rebelles du Kurdistan irakien où le PKK dispose de bases arrière.

Le PKK, qui a décrété en août 2010 une trêve unilatérale, a menacé le mois dernier d'y mettre fin, dénonçant le manque de dialogue du gouvernement turc.

Le PKK n'a pas brandi à proprement parler la menace d'une reprise de ses attaques, mais a déclaré qu'il se défendrait "de manière plus efficace" contre les opérations des forces turques, sans les attaquer en premier.

Les combats dans le sud-est de l'Anatolie, théâtre de la rébellion du PKK, ont diminué considérablement depuis le début de la trêve.

AFP Irak: démission du président du conseil provincial de Kirkouk

KIRKOUK (Irak), 15 mars 2011 (AFP)

LE PRÉSIDENT du conseil de la province multiethnique de Kirkouk, dans le nord de l'Irak, a annoncé mardi sa démission pour protester contre l'impasse dans le conflit entre Bagdad et la région autonome du Kurdistan portant sur cette province.

"Je démissionne faute de solution pour Kirkouk", a déclaré Rizkar Ali Hama lors d'une conférence de presse à Kirkouk, à 240 km au nord de Bagdad.

Présent lors de la conférence de presse, le gouverneur de la province, Abdel Rahmane Moustafa, a quant à lui fait part de son intention de démis-

sionner "dans les prochains jours".

Rizkar Ali Hama est membre de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) du président irakien Jalal Talabani et Abdelrahmane Moustafa appartient, lui, au Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) du président de la région autonome, Massoud Barzani.

Objet d'un bras de fer entre Bagdad et les autorités kurdes qui veulent l'annexer à leur région autonome, la province de Kirkouk compte 900.000 habitants, appartenant à toutes les confessions et aux ethnies arabe, turcomane et kurde.

La province, riche en pétrole, se trouve sur une bande de territoire de 650 km de long, qui va de la Syrie à l'Iran.

Protests remind the US that a stable Iraq is not guaranteed

The National /UAE.

Henri Barkey and
Andrew Parasiliti

For the second Friday in a row, tens of thousands of protesters across Iraq took to the streets on March 4 demanding improved government services, better paying jobs, and end to corruption. Fourteen were killed during the "Day of Rage" on February 25. More demonstrations are likely, as Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki struggles to meet protesters' demands and hold his government together.

These events come as the United States is set to withdraw all of its military forces from Iraq at the end of 2011. Recently, however, the US secretary of defence Robert Gates said an "additional presence" may be required beyond December.

We were recently in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, also the scene of recent demonstrations, to assess the political climate. Our conclusion is that a stable, federal and democratic Iraq, allied with the United States, cannot be taken for granted - especially now. The US should consider a five-part, post-combat strategy for Iraq that places greater emphasis on governance and reform, redefines the security relationship, more effectively incorporates the Kurdistan region in its planning, resolves the dispute over hydrocarbons, and integrates Iraq into a regional security structure.

First, the US must work with Iraqi and Kurdish leaders to focus more urgently on reform. The nine-month pro-

cess that it took to form a government, a world record of slow progress, was mostly about dividing the spoils among Iraq's leaders, and not much if anything about governance. Iraqi protesters - Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds - are not seeking regime change, but are demanding accountability for the lack of security and services.

There is also concern that Mr al Maliki's centralisation of power could threaten Iraq's fragile democracy. The prime minister has met these protests with force, but has also taken notice of demands for reform and given his ministers 100 days to improve their performance.

Second, the US should approach the Kurdistan region as more of a strategic partner in support of good governance, federalism and regional security. There are demands for reform within the region, as there are throughout Iraq, that must be addressed. Demonstrations in Sulaimaniya since mid-February resulted in five protesters killed and 150 wounded.

The Kurdistan Regional Government is trying to seize the initiative for reform. Its success is critical, as the Kurds are key to Iraq's future as a federal, rather than highly centralised, state. The Kurdistan region is both a counterweight within Iraq to the ascendant power of radical religious parties, many with close ties to outsiders, and a reliable American ally in combatting terrorism.

Third, and related, the US should help settle the long-standing dispute between Baghdad and the Kurds over an oil law and the sharing of hydrocarbon revenues. This

issue has bedevilled Iraq's politics, fueled acrimony between Arabs and Kurds, and slowed Iraq's development of its energy resources.

Baghdad needs Kurdish exports to meet expectations for a substantial increase in exports above the current figure of approximately 1.8 million barrels per day. Months of haggling between Baghdad and Irbil only recently produced a stop-gap agreement allowing exports of 100,000 barrels per day from the Kurdistan region. Kurdish leaders say they could increase that to 300,000 barrels in a short time. Turkey and Kuwait also stand to benefit from Iraqi pipeline networks and infrastructure projects.

The recent discovery of a gas field in the region estimated at up to 12.3 trillion cubic feet (350 billion cubic metres) gives the matter further urgency; this find could render a number of pipeline projects feasible, including Nabucco also known as the Turkey-Austrian pipeline.

Fourth, and even more complicated for both Baghdad and Washington, is the question of a US military presence after December. Many Iraqi politicians believe a continued presence is necessary, but are unwilling to say so publicly. This needs to be handled with care; US bases are generally not a winning issue in populist Iraqi politics.

A small US force would continue the "transitional" mission in which US troops are currently engaged: advising and assisting Iraq's security forces, including in counterterrorism operations; providing air support; and protecting US civilians. The message that the US and

Iraq are partners in security would send a strong signal within Iraq and to the region.

Fifth, the US needs to intensify its efforts at regional diplomacy. Iraq cannot be separated from US interests in Iran, Syria, Turkey and the Gulf. Iraq can be either an opportunity for regional diplomacy and conflict resolution, or a zone for proxy warfare among Iraq's neighbours at Iraq's expense.

The country is not immune to the popular demands for change and reform sweeping the region. A stable Iraq showing some capacity for internal cohesion, self-governance and accountability, at peace with its neighbours, is vital to America's interests in the Middle East. Iraq cannot be the forgotten country.

The end of the US combat mission is good news, but Iraq's transition is incomplete, as the demonstrations show. Iraqi politicians must pivot from calculations of power to programmes for reform. The Obama administration also needs to partner with a sceptical Congress intent on budget cuts to ensure that the required assistance is forthcoming. It would be a tragedy if the US lost Iraq because of a lack of resources or if its attention was elsewhere.

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Henri Barkey is a visiting fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Andrew Parasiliti is executive director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies-US



Special Report: Risk, reward and Kurdistan oil

TAWKE, Iraq – March 10, 2011 (Reuters) By Tom Bergin

IN THIS part of Iraq, the hillsides sweat oil. Without any coaxing, the sticky black treasure oozes from the layered rock and gathers in pools that bubble as dissolved gases surface. Gradually, as the crude slips down the hillsides, it solidifies into a grey mass that resembles a hardened lava flow.

It's a good metaphor for the progress of oil from the semi-autonomous Iraqi region of Kurdistan over the past five years: big on promise, small on delivery.

Last month, after years of wrangling between Kurdistan's regional capital Erbil and Baghdad over revenues, exports finally started to flow. Foreign investors – among them Russian oligarchs, a British mercenary boss, U.S. politicians, a former diplomat, and funds controlled by the billionaire investor George Soros – who have sunk \$5 billion into Kurdistan's oil fields, hope they will finally begin to enjoy the rewards.

There's just one problem: Baghdad may have given the green light for exports, but it has yet to agree on how the companies who produce the oil should be paid. This has happened before. For a few months in 2009, oil companies exported their product without payment. When neither side could agree on the oil companies' cut, exports were turned off again.

This time, Baghdad says it is prepared to recognize the contracts the regional government has signed with foreign oil companies. But the central government is sticking to its line that the deals must be rewritten, in a way the companies oppose because it will cut into their profits.

So is Kurdistan on the brink of an oil bonanza, or will the promise end up hardening like the oil from its crude-leaching hills?

"The route to getting paid is looking good," says John Gerstenlauer, Chief Operating Officer of Gulf Keystone, which says it has discovered a field with up to 7 billion barrels of oil. "At the end of the day, none of us are working for a charity so everybody's going to want to get paid."

FIRST IN

It was that sort of optimism that prompted Norway's DNO to become the first western firm to drill for oil in Iraq after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. Oil companies typically use a complex array of tests – satellite imaging, seismic surveys, magnetic and aerial mapping – before deciding where to sink their multi-million dollar wells. But the Chief Executive of DNO had no such problem when he came to drill in Kurdistan.

"It wasn't really based on a lot of in-depth technical studies," says Helge Eide. "You could see the surface features ... the oil seeps. It was a little bit of the stomach feeling ... sometimes you have to base your decision on these simple things."

But if finding the oil was easy, getting paid for it has proved frustratingly difficult. Caught in the dispute between Baghdad and the regional government, DNO has spent more than seven years waiting for word to start exporting.

Late last year, just 20 feet from a spot where oil weeps from the hillside in the middle of one of the region's two main oilfields, DNO's production manager Eric Aillaud spoke of the long-building sense of anticipation. Nearby a red wellhead, its five-foot tall "Christmas tree" idle, sat unconnected to any pipeline that could ship the crude to market. But, said Aillaud, the company was just waiting on the word. "If I'm told to start exports, we are ready to start producing in 15 minutes," he told Reuters. "We have the capacity to produce over 50,000 barrels per day once we get the signal."

WEALTHY PROSPECT

Surrounded by maps, seismic charts and photographs of well sites in his office on a leafy residential street in the Christian quarter in northern Erbil, Adnam Samarrai illustrates the risk and reward of Kurdish oil. He's experienced both personally.

In 1962, while working as a geologist for Iraq's state oil company, he was abducted by Kurdish militia and held captive for six months. He was released with a message for his bosses: no more exploration in Kurdistan.

Forty seven years on, Samarrai returned to northern Iraq for Gulf Keystone Petroleum, a small producer listed on London's AIM exchange. This time, in what's called the Shaikan field, Samarrai had more luck, finding what Gulf Keystone says is at least 7 billion barrels and may prove more than double that – easily one of the world's largest oil discoveries in recent years.

"I always knew there was oil here," says Samarrai, 75, whose white mustache matches the few whiskers of hair on his head. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) estimates its territory holds reserves of 45 billion barrels. That figure has not been independently verified, but if it's right, it would mean Kurdistan has more oil than the North Sea has produced over the past 40 years.

Little wonder that oil producers have wanted to get into the region for so long. Foreign oil investment first reached Kurdistan in the Saddam era. Nine years ago, in the last days of the regime, Turkish construction magnate Mehmet Sepil agreed to develop the Taq Taq field, which now has a capacity of 60,000 barrels per day (bpd). Sepil joined forces with Turkish billionaire Mehmet Emin Karamehmet to form a company called Genel Enerji, of which he remains CEO.

"EVERY OIL COMPANY'S DREAM"

After the U.S.-led invasion, other firms from western Europe, Asia and the United States moved in. The quest for oil bosses from the United States and Europe over the past 30 years has involved taking on more political and geological risk to secure fresh reserves. Charged by Beijing with feeding China's energy-hungry economy, state-backed Chinese oil companies have joined that search. For many, Kurdistan – and Iraq more generally – is the great prize.

"There is no other place in the world where structures of this scale, in a known petroleum system, remain undrilled," says Alex Cranberg, CEO of Aspect Energy, which is drilling in northern Kurdistan.

Wolfgang Ruttendorfer, Chief Executive of Austria's OMV, the biggest European oil company active in the region, says Kurdistan is the answer to oil producers' biggest challenge: "reserves replacement and access."

One early entrant was British-based Heritage Oil, whose CEO and largest shareholder is Tony Buckingham, an ex-soldier who got into resources via companies he formed to supply mercenaries to fight in African conflicts. In May 2009, Heritage announced a 10 billion barrel find in the Miran block, in which Genel also has a stake. Dallas-based Hillwood International Energy, which is owned by the family of billionaire and former U.S. Presidential candidate Ross Perot, also won a license, as did Norbest, a unit of Alpha Access Renova, the investment vehicle held by four oligarchs who own half of BP's Russian unit, TNK-BP.

Other investors include Canada-based Longford Energy, which counts Soros Fund Management as its biggest shareholder, Korea's state oil company, and Chinese state-controlled Sinopec.

In all, the Kurdish government says it has signed deals with more than 40 companies. Numerically, Canada and the United States have the strongest representation, with the biggest cash investments coming from Britain, Turkey, Austria and Norway. Investors include such institutional names as Fidelity, Legal & General, JP Morgan and Elliott Management – one of the world's largest and most publicity-

shy hedge funds.

More recently, hopes for a breakthrough on the revenue impasse have attracted oil majors such as U.S.-based Marathon Oil and Murphy Oil, who have both signed contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars, including signature bonuses for the Kurdistan government worth tens of millions, in the past few months.

Like DNO, many have found the exploration phase a breeze. Genel's eight wells in Taq Taq have all struck oil -- the lightest, most gasoline-rich and valuable variety possible. "It's every oil company's dream," says production supervisor Victor Barkworth. But blocks in the southern part of Kurdistan have dangerous high-pressure reservoirs, as Canada's Western Zagros discovered when it suffered a well blow-out in May 2010. The blow-out took nine months and \$100 million to bring under control.

As producers have waited for an agreement between the Kurdistan government and Baghdad, some have pumped small amounts of oil and sold it at knock-down prices on the local market. It's hardly been lucrative. With so few high-value oil products extracted from the crude, companies make as little as \$20-\$25/barrel -- less than a quarter of current world prices.

According to local officials, surplus heavy fuel oil is also trucked over the border to Iran for onward export to complex refineries in Asia that can convert it into gasoline and diesel. The United States says it opposes such exports as they support the Iranian oil industry. But oil executives say opposition is weaker today than in the past. The U.S. State Department denies any change in policy, but oil executives believe the U.S. understands stopping the trade would hit Kurdistan's industry and political stability.

A BAD SMELL

Visitors to Taq Taq are warned of the danger of landmines and told what to do in case of an armed attack. The most obvious hint of risk, though, is the smell of rotten eggs around the central processing facility, which indicates the presence of toxic hydrogen sulphide gas. That must be treated with care, because besides burning eyes, nose and throat, it can cause blindness or paralyze the respiratory system.

Hydrogen sulphide is not the only bad smell to emanate from Kurdish oil. While companies have spent the last few years waiting for word to begin exports, the sector has been hit by a series of scandals.

In 2009 the Oslo Stock Exchange fined DNO nearly 1 million crowns (\$170,000) for not providing enough information about a deal on the sale of 44 million shares, or 4.8 percent of its stock, to the Kurdish Regional Government. The shares later ended up in the hands of DNO's rival and partner Genel Enerji, whose CEO is Mehmet Sepil. Investors were only told of the deal after DNO's shares had risen to double where they had traded when the deal was sealed. DNO said it was unaware who was purchasing the parcel of shares, and the Kurdish Regional Government denied it had profited from the transaction, releasing a statement saying the revelations had caused it "unjustifiable and incalculable harm."

Months later Sepil himself was in trouble, receiving the UK financial regulators' largest ever fine of 967,005 pounds (\$1.57 million) for insider dealing. Sepil and two Genel colleagues had bought shares in Heritage Oil, their partner in the Miran block, after Heritage told them of a major oil discovery at the block. Hours after the find was announced to the stock market, the executives sold their stock and made over a million pounds in profit.

Perhaps most damaging was DNO's disclosure last October that it would have to pay \$55-75 million to a former U.S. diplomat and a Yemeni company, for an interest in Tawke DNO had given to them in return for helping the company secure its license. The diplomat, Peter Galbraith, son of the famous economist John Kenneth Galbraith, had been on the staff of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee since 1979 where, according to his website, he uncovered and helped stop Saddam Hussein's genocide against the Kurds. He was also a U.S. ambassador in Europe in the early 1990s.

Galbraith maintained that because he had never served as a U.S. envoy in Iraq he was free to do a deal. But he was criticized in the

United States for having acted as a cheerleader for Kurdish autonomy after the Gulf War, penning columns in the U.S. media, without disclosing that he could benefit financially from this.

The whiff of scandal has weakened the Kurds' position in negotiations with Baghdad, proving a boon to those who argue for a centralized Iraq-wide system of awarding oil contracts. Among Kurds, it has also fueled concerns about corruption which in turn has helped build support for the opposition political party, Goran, in its bid to break what some Kurds see as a cozy political power-sharing cartel between the PUK and PDK political parties, which have dominated since the 1990s. Goran, which means 'change' in Kurdish, campaigned on a platform of fighting corruption in Kurdish parliamentary elections last year and won nearly a quarter of the seats.

"THE 17 PERCENT"

Still, oil money has already helped Kurdistan. Brightly painted new schools and all-weather sports grounds abound. The larger towns and cities sport shiny, aluminum-clad municipal buildings, wide roads with multilingual signage, and brand new traffic lights. In the countryside, criss-crossed with glistening new pylons, journeys are constantly interrupted by road works as brand new diggers carve their way through hillsides and rollers flatten the uneven earth.

The boom has attracted home exiles like Said Hemn Moustafa, 29, a civil servant who returned one and a half years ago after seven years in the United Kingdom. "When I left, my country was not safe. Now all is good. No one has any problem. Everyone has job," says Moustafa, out for an afternoon stroll among the fountains of the newly landscaped Shar Park, at the foot of the ancient, mud-brick walled Citadel which marks the center of Erbil.

Kurdistan's capital is packed with new high-rise buildings and shopping malls. The newly built ring roads and overpasses teem with recent-model Korean and Japanese compact cars and the occasional high-end off-roader. Hosts of foreign oil company offices give the sense of an emerging oil town. Ask people what's behind the new vehicles and buildings and the green lawns, rose beds, fountains and sculptures that occupy the roundabouts and traffic islands and the answer is always the same: "the 17 percent."

Signature bonuses have probably raised several hundred million dollars, according to executives in the region. But the real money comes from Kurdistan's share of Iraq's oil revenues, based on its population. This equates to 17 percent of the earnings from the 2.5 million barrels or so per day pumped from giant fields in the south of the country. Can Kurdistan -- and Iraq - boost these export earnings?

END TO THE STALEMATE?

In the compound ringed by blast walls that houses the Kurdish parliament and other government buildings, the Kurdish regional government's natural resources minister Ashti Hawrami sits in his office, dimmed by heavy drapes. The four-year-old building is clad in brick and boasts a grand entrance hall with an inlaid marble floor and curved staircase. That gives way to more modest decorations inside: inexpensive photographs of oil installations, mass-produced prints of flowers, faux-leather sofas.

Hawrami says there is "big excitement" in the oil industry. He expects the existing contracts agreed by the Kurdistan government will soon be recognized by Baghdad. But push him and even he cannot point to a fundamental change in Baghdad's position on the contracts. Put simply, Kurdistan says its contracts are in line with the constitution, while officials in Baghdad insist on central control over oil contracts. "In principle, it has been agreed that everything will be done according to the constitution, and we are not asking for anything outside the constitution, so therefore basically we have an agreement," Hawrami said in November.

Not quite. If Baghdad forces the Kurdistan government to redraft the contracts, explorers' returns could be hit hard. Kurdistan's deals with foreign oil companies are production sharing contracts (PSCs). But Baghdad wants the contracts to be rewritten along the lines of the service deals it has signed with BP and Exxon in the south. PSCs usually offer better returns and more control than service contracts. Analysts

at Deutsche Bank calculate the internal rate of return allowed under DNO's contract will be 50 percent. In comparison, Baghdad's \$2/barrel service contracts with Royal Dutch Shell yield only 17 percent.

Iraqi Oil Minister Abdul Kareem Luaibi has said the 2011 federal budget will include the expectation of shipments of 150,000 barrels per day from Kurdistan -- more than the Kurds say they can produce.

So even though exports resumed a few weeks ago, with no clarity on the revenue model companies like DNO are yet to be paid. That's not a problem for diversified investors like Marathon Oil and OMV who can afford to sit and wait. But smaller Kurdistan-focused companies will struggle.

Gulf Keystone, for instance, says it has enough cash to last until the second quarter of 2012. By then, it hopes to have a steady cash flow from exports, which will open up the option of debt financing. But if that doesn't happen, it will face a crunch. Analysts at Bernstein calculated that a two-year delay in an oil project's start up could halve its economic value. There have already been casualties.

U.S.-based Caliber Energy's plans for a \$100 million flotation failed to materialize, ending its hopes of being a major force in the region. Sterling Energy's shares soared to over 220 pence in late 2009, when it raised \$103 million to start drilling, only to fall to under 50 pence a year later, as it encountered drilling problems. The shares now trade around 66 pence.

News of a final deal on exports will please people like Norway-based private investor Eirik Amundsen, who holds 79,000 shares in DNO. "It's been some very tough years, but I have always firmly believed that common sense sooner or later will prevail, and thus give DNO the opportunity to fully develop the potential of its Iraqi assets," he says. "I have to admit, though, it has taken much longer than I anticipated." And while optimism is high, there's no guarantee the wait is over yet.

(Additional reporting by Andrew Quinn in Washington, Rania El Gamal in Baghdad and Shamal Aqrabi in Erbil; Editing by Sara Ledwith and Simon Robinson)

The Seattle Times March 9, 2011

Official: Kurd forces will remain near oil-rich Kirkuk, heightening tensions with Arabs, Kurds

By YAHYA BARZANJI /
Associated Press

SULAIMANIYAH, Iraq

Thousands of Kurd forces will remain in their new positions around the oil-rich Iraqi city of Kirkuk for now, a senior Kurdish official said Wednesday.

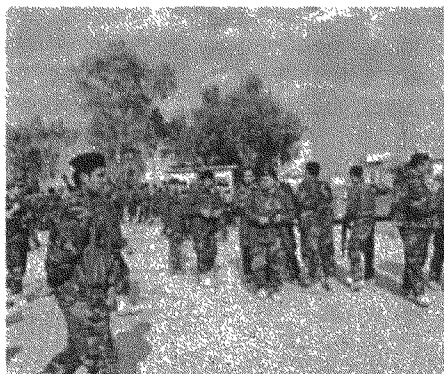
While the Kurds have described the move as temporary, the fighters' continued presence is seen by some as a gambit to bring the city under Kurdish control and is sure to increase tensions between the central government in Baghdad and the Kurds' self-ruled northern region.

The Kurdish government, which has a separate president and parliament, sent thousands of its troops into positions around Kirkuk on Feb. 24, saying it feared that demonstrations planned for the next day could turn violent.

Kirkuk, a multiethnic city just southwest of the Kurdish autonomous zone, is claimed by both Arabs and Kurds. Its future is considered one of the most potentially explosive issues facing the Iraqi government as U.S. troops prepare to leave at the end of this year.

"Our forces will leave when the troubles and tension end in Kirkuk and the city returns to its normal situation," said Jafaar Mustafa, the minister in charge of the Kurdish "peshmerga" fighting force. He did not give an exact date and said the Kurds were coordinating the fighters' presence with the Iraqi army in the area.

The Kurds have long had forces north of the city, working with U.S. and Iraqi troops in a series of combined



Kurdish Peshmerga forces in Kirkuk

checkpoints created at the behest of American forces as a way to foster cooperation and trust between Kurdish and Arab troops. But the additional forces sent in, and their move south of the city, increased their presence considerably.

"Kurds are now trying to see if they can encircle Kirkuk with a ring of Kurdish forces, which is something they've never had before," said Michael Knights from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

The Kurdish side says it needs to protect the city from al-Qaida, Arab groups and supporters of Saddam Hussein's former regime, acting on intelligence that those groups were planning to take over the city during protests.

"We are not strangers to Kirkuk. We are part of the defense mechanism to protect Kirkuk," said Maj. Gen. Shirko Fateh, the commander of the newly deployed peshmerga forces.

Fateh said his forces now control all five roads leading to Kirkuk from Iraqi

cities to the south.

Fateh said the move was coordinated with the central Iraqi government and U.S. forces, but a close ally of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki said the premier asked the Kurdish forces to pull back. U.S. military officials did not have an immediate response.

Hassan al-Sineed, the head of the parliament's security and defense committee, said al-Maliki asked President Massoud Barzani, a Kurd, to pull the forces back because there is no more need for them.

Al-Maliki is caught between standing tough on an issue that is considered central to his Arab constituency and not upsetting the Kurds, who are one of his key allies in his newly-formed government.

The peshmerga arrival in the city 180 miles (290 kilometers) north of Baghdad raised fears with Arab and Turkoman residents, who are afraid that the Kurdish forces will never leave and are instead trying to push for full Kurdish control of the city.

"The safety of Kirkuk people should be the responsibility of the central government only," said an Arab politician in the city, Ahmed al-Obeidi. "What we need here is useful solutions, not more troops sent by politicians who want to change the fate of the city."

He also suggested that the decision to deploy the troops was a way to deflect attention from ongoing protests in the Kurdish city of Sulaimaniyah. Thousands of demonstrators have been taking to the streets of the city, demanding political and economic reforms.

Kurdish intellectuals condemn PKK threats, intimidation



TODAY'S ZAMAN, ISTANBUL

Forty-one Kurdish intellectuals have issued a joint declaration condemning recent death threats by the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) against Kurdish writers Muhsin Kizilkaya and Mehmet Metiner and Kurdish singer Sivan Perwer for supporting the government's democratic initiative, which seeks to end separatist violence by expanding the cultural rights of Turkey's Kurds.

The declarations recalled that socialist Kurdish leader Kemal Burkay, who resides in Sweden where he was granted asylum, and journalist Orhan Mirolu had also received threats from the PKK. We, the signatures are below, see these threats as a major attack on the freedom of thought and strongly condemn them. We invite [PKK leader Abdullah] Ocalan and the administrators of the KCK [the Kurdistan Communities Union, the urban branch of the PKK] and the PKK to modify their approach.

The signers of the declaration also called on Kurdish politicians including the leaders of the Democratic Society Congress (DTK) and the deputies and mayors of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) to take a clear stance against the PKK's threats. The signers included 41 Kurdish public figures known for their intellectual contributions to society, including Celile Celil, SertaA Bucak and Firat Ceweri. The most recent intimidating PKK statements were made against Kizilkaya, Metiner and Perwer last week. A group calling itself the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK), affiliated with the PKK,

posted on its website a statement calling on the three men to keep silent, written in a threatening tone. It is largely believed that the statement was the outcome of words uttered by Abdullah Ocalan in a meeting with his lawyers on Feb. 18, 2011, on Omrali Island where he is serving a life sentence. Ocalan, according to the meeting minutes the lawyers brought back from the island, said, "Somebody should tell these people [naming some Kurdish intellectuals] to shut up. TAK's statement openly included the names of Perwer, Kizilkaya and Metiner. In addition, Ocalan has made statements critical of Burkay and Mirolu in recent months.

The declaration signers also said they were pleased to hear a recent statement from BDP leader Selahattin Demirtas, who referred to the threats against Kurdish intellectuals as unacceptable.

Declaration signer Firat Ceweri, a writer and a member of the Swedish PEN writers network's executive board, said death threats by Kurds against Kurdish intellectuals and artists for expressing their opinions was extremely dangerous. It is most frustrating for me that Kurds are being dragged into the whirlpool of totalitarian thought and are already devouring their own children.

Writer Abidin Parilti, who also signed the declaration, offered an analysis of the recent mood the PKK is in, saying: "The feeling of losing control lies at the core of fear. Threatening, on the other hand, is a method of forcing people to give up, making them toe the line or obey. It is ironic that intellectuals and writers are being silenced by the very same people who promise freedoms. You will either do

as we say, or you'll get killed. This is not at all different from the love it or leave it, approach. Parilti was referring to Love or Leave, a slogan used frequently by ultranationalists in the past against those critical of Turkey's official policies.

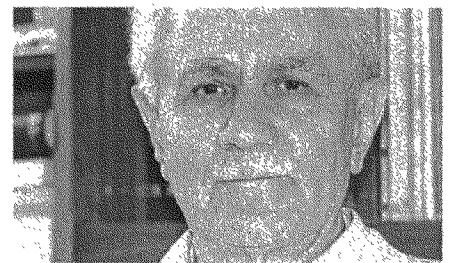
Hesene Mete, also a writer, said: "Threatening is uncivilized whether it is directed at a writer or an intellectual, or a farmer or a worker or anybody else. Today, in the year 2011, a force issuing threats against artists, writers or painters, is unacceptable.

Murad Ciwan, the editor in chief of the Netkurd news website, said, "A threat or attack that seeks to take a person's life, whether its source is the state, a political organization or any other group or individual, cannot be acceptable.

Burkay can return to Turkey

In related developments, a prosecutor's office yesterday announced that it was dismissing an investigation launched into socialist Kurdish politician Kemal Burkay, who has been in Sweden since the 1980 coup d'État, indicating that there are no legal obstacles for Burkay to end his Swedish exile.

Burkay last month spoke to a Turkish television channel, saying he wanted to return. Following Burkay's statement, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said the door is open for him and others who might want to return, but Burkay had told the



Kemal Burkay

press that Erdoğan's well-intentioned words would not be enough to make his return possible.

Burkay has also been a target of the PKK's anger, for his words that PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan is not the only one Turkish officials should negotiate with for a solution to the Kurdish problem. The PKK holds that Ocalan should be the only party in talks about the Kurdish issue.



Iraqi Kurds urge ouster of Pres. Barzani

March 12, 2011 / Press TV, Sulaymanieh

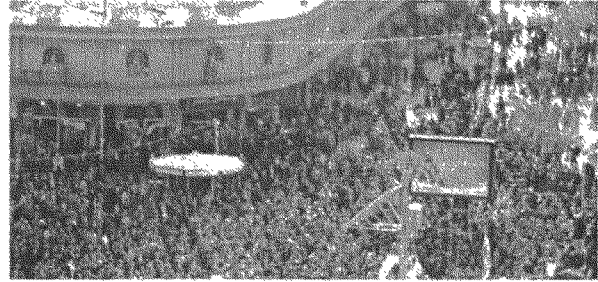
THOUSANDS of protesters have taken to the streets of Iraq's semi-autonomous northern Kurdish zone demanding the ouster of the President Massoud Barzani.

As 4,000 people were protesting in Sulaymanieh on Friday, one of the protesters tried to set himself on fire, but was held back by other demonstrators, UPI reported.

The protesters, angry over corruption and rising unemployment, called for the ouster of the Kurdistan Regional Government of (KRG) President Barzani.

But Barzani later described the protests as a minority with illegal demands.

The demonstrations came after KRG reported Thursday that the government has survived a vote of no-confidence from members of the regional parliament.



A scene of protests held in Sulaymanieh on March 12, 2011

"At its sixth emergency session in two weeks, the parliament rejected a vote of no-confidence in the current government by a majority of 67 to 28, in the 111-seat chamber," the KRG statement read.

Human Rights Watch said it documented accounts of masked men attacking protesters during the unrest in the Kurdish province of Sulaymanieh.



MARCH 12, 2011

Iraq's Kurdistan President charges opposition with exploiting demonstrations.

ARBIL / Aswat al-Iraq – North Iraq Kurdistan Region's President, Massoud Barzani, has charged the opposition forces in Kurdistan with "having exploited the demonstrations that took place in the Kurdish Sulaimaniya Province for their own interests."

"This (Kurdistan) authority did not come to power by force, but got the majority of votes in the democratic elections that took place in 2009.. We welcome the existence of an opposition watching the activity of the government..

But the opposition parties want to exploit the current situation in Kurdistan to achieve their own interests only," Barzani said in a speech on the anniversary of 11th March, 1971 manifesto that granted autonomy to the Kurds in northern Iraq.

The celebrations, that took place in Kurdistan Region on Friday, are also marking the 20th anniversary of the uprising that took place in Kurdistan against Iraq's former ruling Baath Party in 1991.

"The ruling parties in Kurdistan had come to power through the elections ballots and we won't leave power unless through the election ballots," Barzani said, promising to carry out reforms in the Region's government during the forthcoming four months.

Thousands of Arbil citizens took part in the celebrations that took place on



Friday close to the city's ancient fortress, carrying Kurdistan flags and the flags of the two main Kurdish ruling parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, as well as photos of Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani and Iraqi President, Jalal Talabani, the leaders of the two parties.

Noteworthy is that the Kurdish city of Sulaimaniya and areas close to it have witnessed demonstrations since February 17th last, demanding political reforms, improvement of public services and putting an end to corruption.



Iraqi Kurdistan economy in limbo amid protests

March 14, 2011 Tracey Shelton, Press TV, Sulaymanieh

As the protests in Sulaymanieh enter a third week, local businesses are beginning to feel the strain. Sales are down, many are afraid to shop in the town center and the tourism industry that was just finding its feet has ground to a halt.

Among government officials, there is a growing concern about the economic situation.

Sulaymanieh Palace Hotel has had to bear the extra burden of being located near the Kurdistan Democratic Party headquarters where the protests first turned violent. Guest numbers are down, foreign businessmen that once frequented the establishment are looking to invest elsewhere and restaurants within the establishment often remain closed due to lack of customers.

Economic expert Khalid Hayder said this unstable environment will have a negative effect on economy and capitalism in the region in

general, specifically Sulaymanieh. Looking at the possibility of prolonged protests Hayder said if investors continue to pull out, wages will begin to drop and unemployment will increase. As more shops close or reduce their work hours, fewer products will be available, resulting in a rise in prices.

While complaining of the current loss, many shop owners say if the protesters succeed the result will be worth it. Hayder added that he believed the government would reach an agreement with the protesters before the economic condition deteriorates further.

Meanwhile, as many industries suffer loss, some have found a way to multiply their profits in the current political climate. Many small businessmen are cashing in on the protest crowds by setting up small stalls like these in the town square to sell everything from snacks, drinks and trinkets to these spring flowers that have become a symbol of the peaceful demonstrations held in this area that has now been dubbed Freedom Square.

Kurdistan's Two Ruling Parties May Separate For Elections

By RUDAW

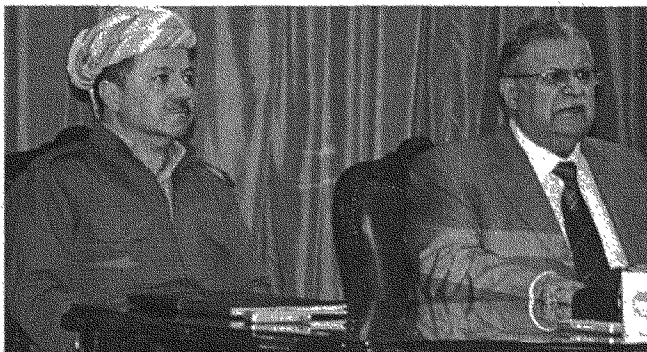
SULAIMANI, Iraqi Kurdistan: Leading members of Iraqi Kurdistan's two ruling parties have confirmed that their parties are looking into the possibility of running as separate lists in the general elections, which may take place as early as this year, after a recent request from Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani in response to recent mass anti-government protests.

Kurdistan has been governed by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), led by Barzani, for nearly two decades.

"Before, the PUK and KDP were fighting each other and were simply increasing the size of their cemeteries. Now they have a strategic alliance," said Sadi Ahmed Pira, a member of the PUK leadership. "We have left the door open regarding the question of the two parties participating together in the coming elections, and in the next joint meeting we will decide whether to have open or closed lists, and, in the case of open lists, whether the two parties should run separately or together."

However, Arif Tayfur, a member of the KDP's Leadership Council, told Rudaw that the KDP and PUK had been seriously discussing running in the elections as separate lists, so that each party would know how many votes it had won, but no final decision had yet been made.

"This will not affect the strategic agreements we have signed between us," said Tayfur. "This would mean running in separate lists for the early provincial



KDP leader Massoud Barzani (left) and PUK leader Jalal Talabani have dominated Kurdish politics for nearly two decades.----- Photo by Foreign Policy.

elections, which have been requested by the president."

The PUK's Pira also said that the PUK and KDP had never formed a joint political office before, but, because of the current situation in Kirkuk, Mosul and Diyala – areas which are disputed between the Arabs and Kurds – a joint command office had been created by the two parties, supervised by Kosrat Rasool, deputy leader of the PUK.

In regard to the ongoing anti-government protests in Sulaimani province, which are calling for reform, and, less consistently, the stepping down of the government, Pira said that the major opposition party, Gorran, had infiltrated the demonstrations and was seeking to control them.

"Now they want to change the course of the demonstrations for their own purposes," he said. "Gorran's demands [for the dissolution of the government] on January 29th are the mother of all these demonstrations in Kurdistan, which have been creating such chaos."

Gorran's main demands, announced

by its leader, Nawshirwan Mustafa, were the dissolution of the parliament and the government, then the forming of an interim government staffed by qualified technocrats, and finally, early governmental elections within three months. Elections are currently scheduled in Iraqi Kurdistan for 2013.

After Kurdistan's president announced that early elections would be the best solution for the political deadlock in Kurdistan, Gorran affirmed that they were still insisting on forming a government of "neutral technocrats" before any elections were held.

Pira said that, if an opposition was dissatisfied with a government, and chaos ensued, then there were only two paths that could be taken: early elections or a coup d'état.

"So, those who are discontent with the KDP and PUK's rule should ask for elections, which would be the easy way, but [Gorran] is inciting the people to destroy Sulaimani city," said Pira. "Now Gorran is trying to avoid early elections."

The Washington Post MARCH 15, 2011

Resignations of 2 Kurdish politicians in northern Iraq seen as challenge to Arabs for control

By YAHYA BARZANJI
Associated Press

SULAIMANIYAH, Iraq - Two top Kurdish politicians resigned Tuesday from local government in northern Iraq in what appears to be a political maneuver to challenge Arabs for control of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, one of the nation's most volatile fault lines.

The city is home to a mix of Arabs, Kurds and Turkomen, who all have competing claims. Kurds are seeking to incorporate Kirkuk into their autonomous region in Iraq's north - and out from under control of the Arab-dominated cen-



A protester arranges a poster depicting Iraqi President Jalal Talabani in Baghdad, Iraq, Monday, March 14, 2011. Iraqis converged Monday to Baghdad's Tahrir Square to decry what they called "provocative" statements made by Iraq's Kurdish president, Jalal Talabani in which he described the disputed city of Kirkuk as the "Jerusalem" of Kurds. (AP Photo/Khalid Mohammed)

tral government in Baghdad.

It is one of Iraq's most explosive disputes, and Kirkuk's Arabs and Turkomen

have long opposed the Kurds' goal.-

On Tuesday, officials said resigning provincial council chairman Rizkar Ali, a

Kurd, would be replaced with Turkoman Hassan Torhan, raising speculation that a deal was struck to strengthen ties between the two groups against the area's Arabs.

The other resigning Kurd is provincial Gov. Abdul-Rahman Mustafa. Both men stepped down during a public meeting in Kirkuk, said councilman Rebwar Talabani.

"I hope the man elected for this job will work for the best of Kirkuk, and keep friendly living conditions among all, and be representative of all people living in Kirkuk," Mustafa said in an interview.

He said he resigned for personal reasons after eight years on the job.

A Turkoman politician said the move is hoped to "lead to a closer approach between Turkomen and Kurds." He said the minority Turkomen, which are believed to make up about 12 percent of Kirkuk, have long felt sidelined by the

city's Kurds. He spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the delicate political situation.

Located 180 miles (290 kilometers) north of Baghdad, Kirkuk is the capital of Tamim province.

Tensions in the city have long been a top concern for U.S. diplomats and military officials who fear it could unravel Iraq's tenuous security should Kirkuk's fragile peace fall apart.

A day earlier, hundreds of Iraqis gathered in Baghdad to demand the resignation of President Jalal Talabani for comments he made last week describing Kirkuk as a Jerusalem for Kurds - suggesting they must fight to bring the city into the semiautonomous Kurdistan region. Talabani, a Kurd, later said he was speaking as a political leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan party and not as Iraq's twice-elected president.

And last month, Kurdish leaders sent thousands of their security forces, known

as peshmerga, to Kirkuk under the guise of protecting citizens from demonstrations that could turn violent. Arabs and Turkomen accused the Kurds of trying to bring the city under Kurdish control.

Kirkuk has become a symbol of continued instability in Iraq, where insurgents launch attacks on an almost daily basis despite lower overall levels of violence over the last few years.

Two attacks in Baghdad killed a policeman and wounded eight people on Tuesday, officials said.

The slain policeman was shot by gunmen with silenced pistols in the capital's central Karradah area, a relatively affluent neighborhood. Another policeman was wounded in the attack.

Earlier, a security patrol hit a roadside bomb in southern Baghdad, wounding three policemen and four passers-by.

TODAYS ZAMAN

17 March 2011

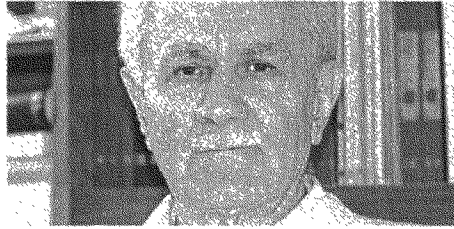
Kurdish intellectual Kemal Burkay to Ocalan: Have pride and dignity

RAMAZAN KERPETEN, ISTANBUL

Kurdish intellectual Kemal Burkay told jailed leader of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) Abdullah Ocalan to have pride and dignity, in a written statement he issued this week.

Earlier, Ocalan had implicitly threatened Burkay and famous Kurdish singer Sivan Perwer. Showing Leyla Kasim, a northern Iraq rebel who was executed for attempting to hijack a plane, as an example, Burkay sarcastically said: Ocalan, my dear, don't act like that. It is a shame for you and the people who believe in you. You are thinking about your own sweet life. But the destiny of the public is in question. Those who are leaders for the salvation of the Kurdish people must not disregard the honor of that public. Have pride and dignity like Kurdish girl Leyla Kasim.

Burkay, who resides in Sweden, where he was granted asylum, said



numerous reports claimed a court issued a verdict of non-prosecution about him concerning a criminal case of 37 years ago. There cannot be a 37-year-old case; it is not possible even in a country like Turkey. Even in case of murder, a case cannot run 37 years. It becomes subject to the statute of limitations, he said.

Stating that even when he had not yet spoken about the false reports, Burkay said Ocalan extended his baton like a maestro with lightning speed, and the terrorist leader claimed the government abolished the sentence of Burkay from 37 years ago overnight while apprehending thousands of people in the KCK (Kurdish Communities Union) case.

Speaking about the verdict of non-prosecution, Burkay said neither he nor the government has anything to do with the decision because prosecutors and judges are independent from him and the government.

Burkay earlier said on state-sponsored Kurdish channel TRT 6 that he will return to Turkey following the June 12 general elections. Speaking about the speculation over his decision to return, Burkay continued: My return has nothing to do with any bargains with the government. Being an addressee concerning the solution of the Kurdish problem, negotiations or similar things are not in question, either. Mr. Ocalan and his people should not panic. I want to return to my homeland after 30 years, that's it. The speculation over my return is ugly and shameful.

Le kémalisme a exclu « presque toutes les personnes vivant dans ce pays »

LOUISE BASTARD DE CRISNAY, PARIS

Quand Atatürk a pris le pouvoir, une refonte idéologique appuyée sur l'effacement du passé ottoman et la redéfinition de l'identité nationale, a été décidée. Dans ce deuxième volet de notre série consacrée à la rupture culturelle kémaliste, Hilal Kaplan, chroniqueuse au quotidien Taraf et journaliste à la télévision turque, nous dévoile les ressorts du projet de Mustafa Kémal.

Comment Mustafa Kemal a-t-il déconstruit le passé des peuples de Turquie et quelle nouvelle interprétation historique a-t-il imposé ?

Après avoir aboli le Califat et tous les symboles de la tradition islamique, Mustafa Kémal a dû légitimer sa nouvelle conception de l'état et sa nouvelle manière de gouverner. Il a renié ce qui l'avait précédé, à savoir un état islamique fondé sur la loi religieuse, tout au moins en ce qui concerne les affaires civiles. Pour jeter les bases d'une nouvelle identité turque moins religieuse, le citoyen turc idéal devait être musulman mais pas profondément et ostensiblement pratiquant. Dans une certaine mesure, cette politique a conduit au mensonge. Les historiens kémalistes ont ainsi produit toute une série de thèses peu vraisemblables sur l'origine du peuple turc dans la période pré-islamique. L'idéologie kémaliste a renié une partie de l'histoire et l'a largement manipulée pour accomplir ses vues et créer un citoyen idéal qui, selon elle, était nécessaire à l'évolution du pays. Pour donner la mesure du déni de l'histoire ottomane, il faut dire qu'en 1994, le Refah est le premier parti à inaugurer la commémoration de la conquête d'Istanbul et à tenir un discours se référant à la période ottomane de manière élogieuse. Depuis, cette commémoration a lieu chaque année le 29 mai mais c'est la seule date de l'histoire ottomane



Hilal Kaplan.

que le peuple turc, en tant que nation, célèbre aujourd'hui.

Suite à cette rupture identitaire, quel fut le visage du nouveau citoyen turc ?

Pour asseoir sa légitimité, la république kémaliste a construit une nouvelle identité pour les citoyens turcs, fondée sur trois principes : être turc, être musulman et être sunnite. Être turc signifiait que, dans la mesure où les gens étaient prêts à nier leurs origines ethniques et à accepter l'identité turque comme prévalant sur les autres, ils ne rencontreraient pas de difficultés. Un des pères de l'idéologie kémaliste a ainsi changé son nom d'origine juive, Moïse Cohen, et l'a remplacé par un nom turc, Tekin Alp, niant de cette façon tout lien avec son identité et sa religion d'origine. Le deuxième trait de cette nouvelle identité était d'être musulman. Dans l'Empire ottoman, il y avait une population non-musulmane très importante. Celle-ci a commencé à être persécutée à partir des événements de 1915 et cette politique a continué après l'avènement de la République avec des incidents dont on peut citer, entre autres, ceux de Thrace en 1934 et ceux du 6 et 7 septembre 1955. Il y avait aussi des lois discriminatoires comme celle qui imposait une taxe aux populations non-musulmanes faisant du commerce. De manière générale, ces populations ont été obligées d'immigrer et si elles décidaient de rester en Turquie, il leur était devenu beaucoup plus difficile de survivre. C'est une des raisons

pour lesquelles le nombre de minorités vivant aujourd'hui en Turquie est inférieur à celui de tous les pays du Moyen-Orient, y compris l'Arabie Saoudite et l'Iran. Enfin, être un musulman sunnite était la dernière particularité importante. Elle est à l'origine par exemple des persécutions subies par la population alévie durant l'histoire de la République turque, question que le gouvernement essaie aujourd'hui de soulever. Même si certains alévis, notamment ceux de la diaspora, ne se reconnaissent pas comme appartenant à l'islam, la majorité d'entre eux définissent leur croyance comme une école au sein de l'islam. L'idéologie kémaliste est donc une idéologie monolithique qui excluait à la fois les populations non turques, les populations non-musulmanes, les musulmans véritablement pratiquants, les musulmans d'une autre école que le sunnisme comme les alévis...et finalement presque toutes les personnes vivant dans ce pays.

Quand a-t-on commencé à remettre en cause les thèses kémalistes ?

Les fondements de ces thèses sont en train d'être profondément remis en cause. Prenons par exemple les événements de 1915, c'est à dire le premier déplacement de la population arménienne. Cette question était encore très récemment un tabou en Turquie et quiconque réfutait la thèse officielle en payait le prix. S'il y a une chose que l'AKP a réussi, c'est bien d'avoir levé les restrictions sur la liberté d'opinion et d'avoir ouvert un espace de discussion où les Turcs peuvent enfin s'exprimer. Le 24 avril 2010, pour la première fois dans l'histoire de la Turquie et 95 ans après les faits, des manifestants ont pu se rassembler librement pour commémorer la mémoire de tous ceux que nous avons perdus en 1915, ainsi que leur héritage historique et culturel. Un autre exemple significatif est le massacre des alévis kurdes de Tunceli en 1938. Près de 10.000 personnes ont été massacrées sur ordre du gouvernement. En réalité, l'ancien nom de Tunceli était Darsim mais un autre

moyen utilisé par l'idéologie kémaliste pour fonder cette nouvelle identité commune a été de changer les noms des villes et des villages, dans l'intention de détruire la mémoire collective remontant à la période ottomane, puisque certains noms étaient Arméniens ou Kurdes. Tunceli signifie littéralement « la main de bronze ». L'état a donc donné à cette ville un nom rappelant ce massacre et la suprématie du

kémalisme sur toute forme de particularisme. En 2009, lorsqu'il a été question au parlement du problème kurde, Onur Öymen du CHP s'est levé pour dire que les mères avaient aussi pleuré à Tunceli, demandant si nous devions aussi avoir pitié de leur sort, en réponse au discours d'Erdogan qui appelait à ne plus faire pleurer les mères et à traiter ouvertement la question kurde. Cet évènement a eu un écho très impor-

tant et une polémique a été ouverte sur cette question. Les historiens ont commencé à exprimer ce qu'ils n'avaient jamais eu le droit d'écrire. Les habitants de Tunceli se sont mis à parler et ainsi l'opinion publique a pu largement connaître les horreurs ayant été commises sous Mustafa Kemal.

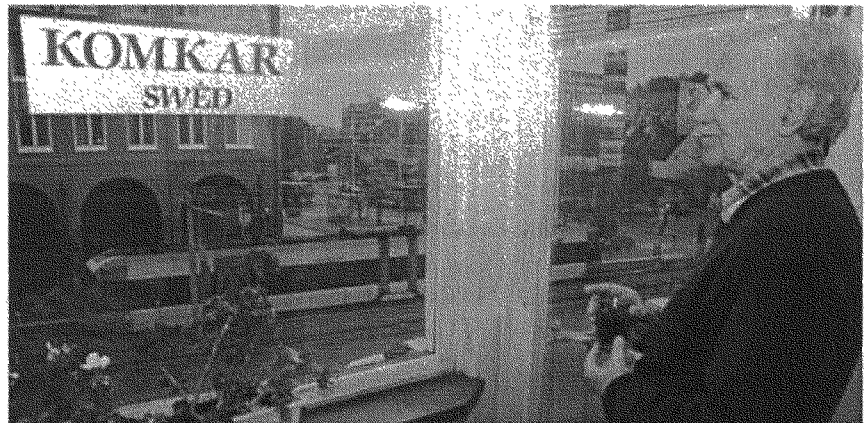
ZAMAN FRANCE
www.zamanfrance.fr

17 mars 2011

Le poète kurde Kemal Burkay pourra rentrer en Turquie

Une cour de Diyarbakir (sud-est) a décidé jeudi d'abandonner toute poursuite à l'encontre d'un célèbre poète et militant kurde, Kemal Burkay, qui pourra rentrer en Turquie après 31 ans d'exil, a-t-on indiqué de source judiciaire.

M. Burkay, âgé de 73 ans et très engagé dans la défense des droits de la minorité kurde de Turquie, était poursuivi depuis 37 ans dans le cadre d'une enquête sur un parti kurde, sanctionné par la justice, a-t-on souligné. M. Burkay, considéré comme un modéré et partisan d'une lutte politique pour les droits des Kurdes, sans recours à la violence, s'était exilé en Suède après le coup d'Etat militaire de 1980 en Turquie où il avait vécu de longues années, puis ensuite en Allemagne. Dans des récentes déclarations à la presse turque, M. Burkay avait affirmé



qu'il envisageait de retourner dans son pays d'origine même si la question kurde n'était pas réglée. « Même s'il reste encore beaucoup à faire, au moins, la question kurde fait désormais l'objet d'un débat public, on peut en parler ouvertement », grâce à des réformes entreprises il y a une dizaine d'années

pour favoriser notamment l'entrée de la Turquie dans le bloc européen, a-t-il souligné. En raison de ses positions pacifistes, il figure parmi les intellectuels kurdes qui ont été menacés il y a quelques jours par le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

AFP

Quatre rebelles kurdes tués lors de combats dans le sud-est de la Turquie

ANKARA, 19 mars 2011 (AFP)

QUATRE REBELLES kurdes ont été tués et deux membres des forces turques de sécurité ont été blessés lors de combats dans le sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes, a affirmé samedi l'état-major de l'armée turque sur son site internet.

L'accrochage s'est produit vendredi dans une zone montagneuse de la province de Bingöl, où l'armée a lancé une opération après avoir déposé un groupe de rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), a indiqué l'état-major dans un communiqué.

Les corps de quatre rebelles ont été retrouvés ainsi que leurs armes au terme de l'assaut, au cours duquel un officier et un membre d'une milice

auxiliaire de l'armée ont été blessés, a-t-il précisé.

Le PKK, qui a décrété en août 2010 une trêve unilatérale, a menacé le mois dernier d'y mettre fin, dénonçant le manque de dialogue du gouvernement turc. Trois rebelles ont déjà été tués mardi lors de combats dans la province de Simak (sud-est).

Le PKK n'a pas brandi à proprement parler la menace d'une reprise de ses attaques, mais a déclaré qu'il se défendrait "de manière plus efficace" contre les opérations des forces turques, sans les attaquer en premier.

Les combats dans le sud-est de l'Anatolie, théâtre de la rébellion du PKK, ont diminué considérablement depuis le début de la trêve.

Le PKK est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara et de nombreux pays. Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 45.000 morts depuis le début de l'insurrection du PKK, en 1984, selon l'armée.

Veteran Lawmaker Warns Of Current Danger For Kurdistan

By HEMIN BABAN and SAMAN BASHARATI

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan: A leading independent Kurdish lawmaker in the Iraqi parliament is warning of the increasing peril Iraqi Kurdistan is facing from the current unrest in Sulaimani province, and the pressing need for the major political parties to talk with each other. Meanwhile, the parties themselves are all claiming openness and blaming each other for the present hostile relationship among them.

"The danger will grow if the tensions are not resolved, especially since 40 percent of Kurdistan's territory is under the control of Baghdad, and Turkey and Iran are stabbing us in the back," said Mahmoud Osman, a veteran of Kurdish politics and an ex-peshmarga in the resistance against Saddam Hussein.

Osman cautioned that the current political and media warfare in Kurdistan was "more dangerous than a real war with weapons, because it provokes the people."

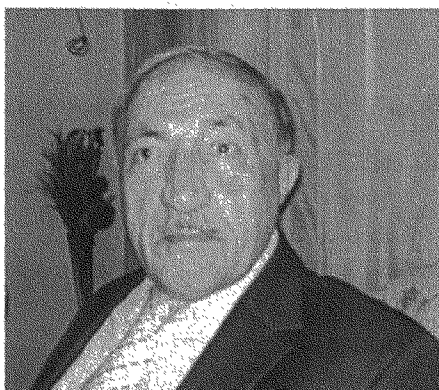
Sulaimani province has been the scene of ongoing protests for the past three weeks, leading to the death of eight people, including a policeman, and the injuring of dozens more.

Kurdistan's protests, initially asking for government reform and meant as a show of solidarity with the Egyptian and Tunisian anti-regime protestors, later turned violent as security forces at a KDP office in Sulaimani city opened fire on young men throwing stones at the building.

Osman said that, because of the anti-government protests, Erbil and Duhok provinces were now in a separate situation from Sulaimani province.

Erbil and Duhok provinces are the strongholds of the co-leading Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which is led by the Kurdistan region's president, Massoud Barzani. Sulaimani province is under the control of the other co-leading party – the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), headed by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani – although, in Iraqi Kurdistan's 2009 parliamentary elections, the majority of Sulaimani city's votes went to the Gorran opposition movement.

Osman said there were three



Mahmoud Osman, a leading independent Kurdish lawmaker.

necessary solutions to the current crisis that has emerged in the Kurdistan region.

First was the solving of what he termed "legal problems," which needed to be addressed by the Kurdish parliament through constitution, the demonstration law and the creation of a law that would ban political activity among armed forces.

Second, Osman said, was the solving of "political problems," over which political parties need to negotiate, such as the holding of elections, the forming of a new government, reforms and the combating of corruption.

The third solution, Osman believes, is the simple act of talking with protesters and carrying out their demands.

"Islamists and independent parties want to take advantage of the differences between Gorran and the KDP," said Osman.

Gorran is Iraqi Kurdistan's largest opposition party with 25 seats in the 111-member parliament.

The party's relations with the KDP have deeply deteriorated following the recent unrest. KDP officials have accused Gorran of playing a role in the attack on their office in Sulaimani, while Gorran has accused the KDP of being behind the recent attacks on its offices in Erbil province.

Osman added that the PUK and Gorran currently enjoyed good relations. He said that, during his recent meetings with the leaders of the KDP, PUK and Gorran, they had all expressed readiness for a meeting to

"resolve the current problems."

He rejected some media reports that Barzani and Gorran's leader, Nawshirwan Mustafa, had reservations about meeting each other.

Mustafa was the PUK's second-in-command for decades, but split from the group in 2006 and set up his political party. Many of Gorran's leadership are former PUK officials. The opposition party now has more popularity in Sulaimani city than the KDP and PUK combined.

Gorran released a statement in late January calling for the dissolution of the Kurdish government and parliament. When, last week, Kurdish President Barzani agreed to the holding of early elections, Gorran said elections would be meaningless under the present circumstances. The group has called for the forming of a technocratic and independent interim government, which would pave the way for holding elections that were free of fraud.

But, the Kurdish parliament yesterday renewed its vote of confidence for the current government, essentially putting a question mark over the holding of early elections.

Osman criticized the way Gorran was deprived of the trade portfolio in the Baghdad government, apparently directing his criticism at the KDP and PUK.

But, he also criticized Gorran's leader, saying he had previously said to Mustafa that he should have congratulated Barzani on his election as the president of the Kurdistan region in 2009.

"A top meeting between Barzani, Talabani and Mustafa will resolve many problems," he said.

PUK spokesman Azad Jundiyan told Rudaw that his party and the KDP were "seriously intending" to meet with Gorran. He pointed to recent meetings between the PUK and Gorran, which were conducted "with the KDP's knowledge." Jundiyan blamed Gorran for not initiating a trilateral meeting for the groups.

"Gorran should try to ease the current tensions, so that all three parties can meet at the same table," he said.

Gorran leaders accuse the KDP and PUK of trying to buy time and of not being serious about their promises for reform in Kurdistan's political system.

Faraydun Jwanroyi, a senior KDP official, expressed his party's willingness to talk to all parties, including Gorran, in order to "calm the current situation down."

He rejected that the KDP had any preconditions for talking with Gorran, adding that there was a "segment within Gorran that prefers talking with the KDP and PUK, and calming tensions down."

However, he said Gorran was not showing any initiative in easing the tensions.

But, Gorran spokesman

Mohammed Tofiq said he was not aware of any efforts to stage trilateral talks.

"If the KDP and PUK ever ask us to calm the situation down, then we will have something to say, but, so far, they have not made any such demands," he said.

Osman said that, because of the unrest in Sulaimani and the attacks on the KDP offices there, the KDP was "very worried about the strategic agreement between the [KDP and PUK]."

According to the agreement, the

two parties run in Kurdish and Iraqi elections on a joint ticket and divide the posts in Baghdad and Kurdistan equally between them.

Osman said the KDP felt the attacks in Sulaimani had been directed at it, without protection from the PUK, which has a much stronger peshmarga force in Sulaimani. He added that the two parties may now review their strategic agreement.



March 25, 2011

Kurds in Syria 'waiting to take to the streets,' academic says

By David Wilkinson, CNN

(CNN) -- The Kurdish people of Syria have not joined the current wave of unrest with any significant demonstrations against President Bashar al-Assad and his ruling Baath party. But that could change.

The Kurds, representing around 10% of the country's population, are "ready, watching and waiting to take to the streets, as their cause is the strongest," according to Robert Lowe, manager of the Middle East Centre at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Largely concentrated along the borders with Turkey and Iraq in the northeast of the country, the Kurds have long been described as a repressed minority in Syria. Since the break-up of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, they have fought for an independent Kurdistan with fellow Kurds in Iran, Iraq and Turkey. Their situation in Syria has been particularly difficult in the past five decades.

"They didn't have problems before this regime," said Obeida Nahas, director of the Levant Institute, a London-based Syrian think tank. "Now they are denied the right to speak or even write in their own language and are told to use Arab names."

The government has been regularly accused of sanctioning a heavy-handed and in some cases violent approach to controlling the annual Nowruz, or Kurdish new year celebrations, which have become increasingly politicized since the Baath party took office in 1963. That is, until this year.

On Sunday, Nowruz festivities across Syria passed without any major incidents and members of the Kurdish community noted that police allowed them an unusual level of freedom.

Nahas said this was a government attempt to "bribe" the Kurdish people into not following the example of the largely Sunni Muslim tribes demonstrating in the south of the country. Presidential advisor Buthaina Shaaban offered her greeting of "Nowruz Mubarak" or "happy new year," to the Kurdish people Thursday, when she told a news conference about the "wonderful coexistence" among Syrian people.

The political move won't work, though, according to Ribal al-Assad, the first cousin of President al-Assad now living in exile in London. "They can't suddenly give the Kurds freedom to celebrate Nowruz without expecting them to ask for their other rights, like owning an ID card or using their own language," al-Assad said. "The Syrian secret service and police are very good at dividing people, but most Kurds want to be part of Syria."

The Kurdish community is not expected to keep quiet.

"There has been a lack of trust from the Kurds since 2004," said



Unrest spreads in Syria
CNN/
Youtube

Khalaf Dahowd, co-chair of the International Support Kurds in Syria Association. Violence involving Kurds, Arabs and police broke out after a soccer match in Al-Qamishli in March 2004. Several people were killed and over a hundred were injured.

Dahowd, a Syrian Kurdish refugee now living in England, believes that the resentment felt by many Kurds toward Arabs after that event has also divided Kurdish people. He speculates that many will find it very difficult to join their Arab neighbors in protest against President al-Assad and his government.

As an activist for Kurdish rights and a united Syria, Dahowd argues that Kurds should put aside any bad feeling they have for other opposition factions. "Everybody in Syria needs to rise up. This regime needs to go," he said.

With several leading Kurds already imprisoned for speaking out and the Kurdish political movement divided between as many as 15 parties, the impetus to demonstrate will need to come from ordinary Kurds, many of them classed as "stateless" without Syrian citizenship.

"These people are desperately poor and weak, but ripe for protesting," Lowe said.

After a week of anti-regime protests in Syria, it has become clear that the opposition there is divided along lines of ethnicity, religion, tribes and families. Presidential advisor Shaaban may have stated the government's intention to avoid referring to Syrians based on their "religious, ethnic or sectarian identity" but, according to Lowe, "there is a weak sense of Syrian identity because the country is such an artificial creation."

However, the big challenge for Kurds and other minority groups according to, Ribal al-Assad, the president's cousin, is to show the overwhelming scale of feeling against the government. "Everybody is in opposition in Syria," he said.

AFP

Turquie: des centaines de milliers de Kurdes célèbrent leur nouvel an

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 20 mars 2011 (AFP)

DES CENTAINES de milliers de Kurdes ont célébré dimanche leur nouvel an, le Newroz, dans un calme relatif à travers la Turquie, ont constaté l'AFP et rapporté les médias.

A Diyarbakir, la principale ville du sud-est anatolien, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes, plusieurs dizaines de milliers de personnes se sont rassemblées pour fêter le Newroz, nombre d'entre elles arborant les couleurs vert, rouge et jaune des rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

La foule, encadrée par un imposant dispositif de sécurité, a scandé des slogans tels que "Vive Öcalan, vive le PKK, vive le Newroz", a constaté un correspondant de l'AFP.

Des politiciens du principal parti pro-kurde de Turquie, le Parti pour une société démocratique (BDP), ont par ailleurs appelé le gouvernement à prendre en compte les propositions d'Abdullah Öcalan, le leader emprisonné du PKK, pour une résolution de la question kurde.

En fin de journée, des heurts ont opposé des manifestants, équipés de pierres, de bâtons et de cocktails molotov, aux forces de sécurité, qui ont fait usage de grenades lacrymogènes et de canons à eau. Plusieurs personnes ont été arrêtées mais aucun blessé n'était à déplorer.

Des heurts sont survenus dans d'autres villes du sud-est: à Viransehir, où 25 personnes ont été placées en garde à vue après des jets de pierre contre la police et à Hakkari, où les unités anti-émeute ont utilisé des grenades lacrymogènes, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie, ainsi qu'à Batman, selon des sources locales de sécurité.

Les célébrations se sont en revanche déroulées sans incidents à Istanbul,



où des dizaines de milliers de personnes s'étaient réunies dans un quartier excentré de la ville.

Les célébrations du Newroz, qui coïncident avec l'arrivée du printemps, sont l'occasion pour la communauté kurde de revendiquer davantage de droits et d'afficher son soutien au PKK.

Des incidents meurtriers ont par le passé émaillé la fête du Newroz dans plusieurs villes turques, en particulier dans le sud-est. Le Newroz le plus sanglant s'est produit en 1992, avec quelque 50 personnes tuées par les forces de sécurité lors de heurts dans le sud-est.

AP Associated Press

Les Kurdes de Turquie lancent une campagne de désobéissance civile

ANKARA, Turquie - 26 mars 2011 - The Associated Press

LE PREMIER MINISTRE turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a accueilli favorablement les demandes de changement qui ont balayé le monde arabe, mais des protestataires affirment qu'il ignore de semblables appels de la part de la minorité kurde de son pays.

Des activistes pro-Kurdes l'accusent d'hypocrisie, et ont entamé une campagne de désobéissance civile pour demander des concessions culturelles et politiques destinées aux Kurdes, qui représentent environ 20 pour cent des 74 millions de Turcs.

Le chef du principal parti kurde turc, Selahattin Demirtas, a déclaré que le peuple kurde cherchait lui aussi sa place Tahrir, faisant référence à cet endroit du Caire où des semaines de manifestations ont forcé la démission du président égyptien Hosni Moubarak. M. Demirtas a également dénoncé le fait que le premier ministre avait envoyé des félicitations au Caire, mais des chars et des bombes au Kurdistan turc.

La Turquie est une démocratie en développement, et possède une histoire de réformes qu'on ne retrouve pas chez ses voisins, mais la question kurde continue d'être un obstacle majeur à l'harmonie nationale. La campagne a déjà mené à une série de manifestations ayant duré toute une nuit, une législatrice kurde frappant un policier au visage, un autre menaçant de lancer une pierre à des policiers et un maire sautant sur le toit d'un transport de troupes blindé.



Cette campagne risque fort d'envenimer la situation dans le sud-est du pays, une région volatile, au cours de la campagne menant aux élections du 12 juin, où le parti kurde Paix et Démocratie tentera d'empêcher la formation au pouvoir d'établir une tête de pont dans son château fort.

La campagne coïncide également avec une hausse de la violence entre l'armée turque et les rebelles kurdes après une accalmie de six mois au cours de l'un des conflits les plus anciens de la planète.

Cinéma

Critique

"Si tu meurs, je te tue" : comédie funèbre chez les Kurdes de Paris

On ne sait pratiquement rien de Philippe, le personnage interprété avec un charme intrigant par Jonathan Zaccai (est-il simplet, opportuniste, ou tout bêtement généreux), sinon qu'il sort de prison. C'est pourtant sur lui que repose l'intrigue du huitième film de ce cinéaste kurde installé à Paris après avoir fui le régime de Saddam Hussein à dix-sept ans.



Philippe est un français comme Hiner Saleem les aime, bras ouvert aux exilés. Sur le zinc d'un bistrot, Philippe rencontre Avdal, un Kurde qui lui confie traquer un criminel irakien. A la dérive, fauché, traqué par sa logeuse à cause de ses loyers impayés et de sa petite gueule d'amour, Philippe n'en héberge pas moins Avdal et entreprend de lui trouver un job. Mais Avdal meurt brutalement, d'une crise cardiaque, laissant Philippe dans la mouise.

Car outre la responsabilité de la gestion du cadavre d'Avnar et de ses funérailles, Philippe doit affronter deux épreuves : accueillir

Siba, la fiancée d'Avnar, et lui annoncer l'horrible nouvelle ; puis Cheto, le père éploré d'Avnar, un islamiste radical déterminé à ramener le corps de son fils et marier Siba au frère du défunt.

En quête de libération sociale, la féministe Siba n'entend pas repartir en Irak. Elle esquisse même une idylle avec Philippe. Muni d'une arme, Cheto traque bientôt les deux jeunes gens dans Paris. Son ex-future belle fille parce qu'elle se conduit comme une traînée, et l'ex-ami de son fils parce qu'outre l'infamie de séduire Siba, il a commis le crime de faire

incinérer Aznar, alors que les musulmans ne brûlent pas les morts...

C'est sur le ton de la comédie qu'Hiner Saleem orchestre une intrigue à la godille, lorgnant du côté du burlesque, de l'absurde, des histoires fantaisistes et décalées d'Otar Iosseliani. Il y a un zeste de naïveté dans Si tu meurs, je te tue, quelques gags convenus et des libertés avec la vraisemblance, mais surtout un ton résolument facétieux qui illustre ce qui habite le cinéaste : l'humour, le goût de la musique et de la liberté. "Nous sommes un peuple qui finit toujours par faire ce qu'il ne veut

pas", dit Cheto le père avec un rien de dérision.

De ce film voué à honorer un Paris populaire et des comédiens fétiches (Maurice Benichou, Mylène Demongeot, Jane Birkin et son "Jane B." diffusé en sourdine), on retient le meilleur : les dialogues cocasses du début, le dialogue de sourds avec l'employé municipal chargé des pompes funèbres, la présence récurrente d'œufs durs récalcitrants, la façon de dépeindre la diaspora kurde comme une bande de Dalton...



Iran: deux membres des forces de l'ordre tués dans deux attaques armées (agence)

TEHERAN, 25 mars 2011 (AFP)

DEUX MEMBRES des forces de l'ordre iraniennes ont été tués dans deux "actions armées" dans la ville de Sanandaj, chef lieu du Kurdistan iranien située à la frontière avec l'Irak, a rapporté vendredi l'agence Mehr.

Un simple appelé, identifié comme Morteza Vaziri Afshar, a été tué dans la ville de Sanandaj jeudi soir lors d'une attaque armée, selon Mehr.

Deux autres personnes ont été blessées dans cette attaque.

Un autre membre des forces de l'ordre a été tué deux heures plus tard dans une autre attaque, a rapporté l'agence Mehr, qui ajoute que des recherches ont été lancées pour retrouver les assaillants.

Les régions de l'ouest de l'Iran, où vit une importante minorité kurde, sont le théâtre d'affrontements périodiques entre les forces iraniennes et des mouvements rebelles armés kurdes.

March 22, 2011

Deputy from Turkey's BDP under political fire for slapping police officer

ANKARA -
Hürriyet Daily News

A deputy from Turkey's main pro-Kurdish party has caused a political uproar by slapping a police captain during a demonstration Monday in the southeastern province of Sirnak.

Following Nevruz celebrations marking the arrival of spring, 2,000 people sought to march to a Peace Tent, but were met with teargas and pressurized water from police forces. An altercation broke out during which Sebahat Tuncel, an Istanbul deputy for the Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, slapped police captain Murat Cetiner.

Tuncel's action drew a flood of political criticism Tuesday, with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan saying, "This tactless person must be called to account in the framework of the law."

Defending herself on

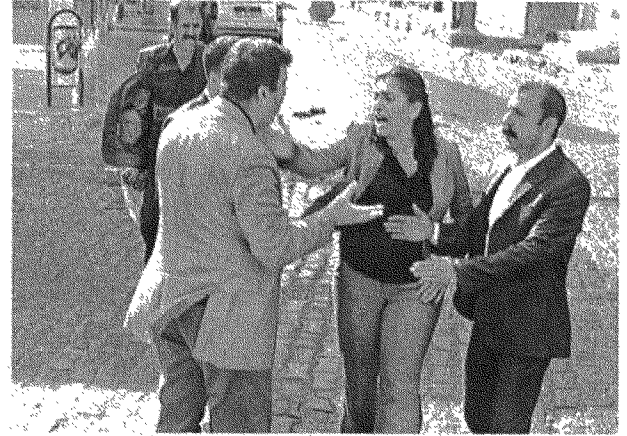
CNNTurk, Tuncel said the group was attacked by police from behind. She said she was shocked at the prime minister's comments, which she called a sign of Turkey's separatist politics.

"I wish the prime minister had said something when citizens were subjected to violence, the BDP deputy said. The prime minister, the Sirnak police and the interior minister need to apologize to the people."

She added that her anger during the incident was not directed personally toward the police captain, but was because of the politics against Kurdish people.

Former Interior Minister Be_ir Atalay also released a statement on the slapping incident, calling it a great injustice and saying "Shame on you!" to Tuncel.

Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Şahin said the incident was disappointing, adding that one



Sebahat Tuncel, an Istanbul deputy for the Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, slapped police captain Murat Cetiner.

of the responsibilities of a deputy is to set an example for the people.

In a separate event in the southeast province of Batman, BDP deputy Bengi Yıldız protested police interference by picking up a rock. "I was using my rights as a citizen against an administration that refused to talk to me as a deputy. I would have thrown the rock if the armored vehicles came

toward us," Yıldız told daily Milliyet.

After being called tactless by the prime minister, Yıldız said Erdoğan either had no idea what they went through or was being disrespectful on purpose.

"A police officer can use force against a deputy, but the deputy reacting to that is tactless?" asked Yıldız.

March 23, 2011

Civil disobedience call for Kurdish issue

ISTANBUL -
Hürriyet Daily News

Civil disobedience actions, starting with a 20,000-person sit-in strike in Batman on Wednesday, are being held to demand a solution to the longstanding Kurdish issue, key figures from the country's largest pro-Kurdish political party and civil-society group have announced.

The ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, has missed many chances to solve the issue during its eight years in power, Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, co-chair Selahattin Demirtas, said Wednesday in a joint press conference.

The government will not



solve this problem, Demirtas said, adding that the BDP and other pro-Kurdish groups will no longer accept the AKP's course of action because they intend to prevent deaths from occurring in future clashes.

We want the process to be

intervened in through civil politics, the democratic power of the people and civil-disobedience actions, the BDP co-chair said. He said the Batman actions would be followed by a sit-down strike in the southeastern province of Diyarbakır at noon Thursday and would conti-

nue until solid steps are taken on the groups' four main demands.

These demands are education in mother tongue, the release of political prisoners, an end to military and political operations [against Kurds] and the elimination of the 10 percent [election] threshold, Demirtas said.

The BDP co-chair made his statements at a joint press conference held by the party and the Democratic Society Congress, or DTK, an umbrella organization of pro-Kurdish figures and groups. BDP co-chair Gulden Kisanak and DTK co-heads Ahmet Turk and Aysel Tugluk also participated in the press conference in Diyarbakır, which was attended by

Mayor Osman Baydemir and other Kurdish politicians.

bers with the authority for political representation.

would be completely democratic and peaceful.

Türk said he believes Turkish democrats and intellectuals will support the civil disobedience actions. This is Turkey's problem too; this is an action and demand we brought forward for Turkey to live in peace, he said.

People will be out in the streets until the four demands are met, using completely democratic, peaceful methods in their actions, Demirtas said. He demanded that protesters be met not with security forces in the streets but Cabinet mem-

This is not a challenge. This is a demonstration of the determination of the people to not live with this problem in the year 2012 and to win their freedoms, he said.

Türk also said the actions

We will be very sensitive on this matter. We will not retaliate even if crushed by [armored vehicles], he said. These are the demands of a people. We want everybody to [perceive] it like this.

TODAY'S ZAMAN

22 MARCH 2011

Solution to Kurdish issue might be found after elections

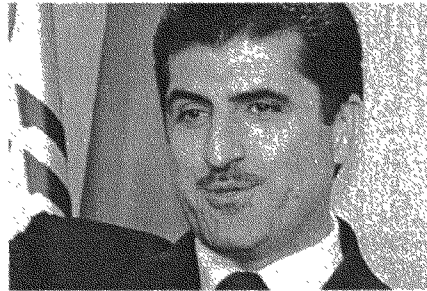
Today's Zaman

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government is definitely on the right track in their attempts to settle Turkey's decades-old Kurdish question, and they will get much closer to solving it completely, according to Nechirvan Barzani, the number two person in the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of northern Iraq and a former prime minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

An interview was published yesterday in the Turkish Taraf daily in which Barzani shared his opinions about Turkey's Kurds and the country's three-decade-old trouble with separatist violence. He said that recent riots in the Middle East have made it imperative that the issues facing Kurds be resolved.

Barzani praised the AK Party's democratic initiative, a program that seeks to expand the cultural rights enjoyed by Kurds in Turkey, launched nearly two years ago to end separatist terror. He told Taraf that the initiative process was obviously stalled for the moment but added that he had full confidence it would pick up again after the June 12 general elections in Turkey. Everyone should support the prime minister. The initiative must continue, he said.

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has been waging a separatist terrorism campaign in the southeast of Turkey since the early '80s. He



also said he didn't believe that violence could ever be a solution to the Kurdish question. The military method has been tried for the past 30 years. Both the PKK and the state have used weapons. If the PKK doesn't extend this cease-fire, it will be making a big mistake, he said referring to a unilateral cease-fire the PKK announced last summer but recently retracted, although it had promised to keep it in place until after the elections.

He said: Let's suppose the PKK stages 1,000 attacks. That's what it has been doing for the past 30 years. And the Turkish military has been conducting operations for the past 30 years. And what is the result? They should learn their lesson from this. The military option is no option at all. Barzani also said that the PKK, which is currently based in northern Iraq, won't be able to stay in that area forever.

He said the PKK's presence in the region also has implications for northern Iraq's Kurdish government. The PKK's presence in the region prevents us from rebuilding old villages [in the area in which they are based]. This is why the PKK doesn't

have a strong following in the Kurdistan region. People don't support the PKK at all.

He said that although previously the PKK was popular with the people of northern Iraq, this has changed radically in recent years. The PKK, when it started a meaningless war against the Kurdistan region, lost the approval and support of the Kurdish people completely. Today, all the Kurds of northern Iraq want the Kurdish problem in Turkey to be resolved. The Kurdish question in Turkey is not completely about the PKK. It is a two-part problem. With or without the PKK, you have a Kurdish population in Turkey, and there is this problem.

Barzani said it would be best for Turkey to solve the Kurdish question within the boundaries of Turkey and through democratic methods. For example, extend cultural rights. Really, does a people not have the right to use their own language? I do not know how the solution will be found, but it is wrong to leave it at an impasse. Plus the solution should not reflect negatively on Turkey's various ethnic communities. Other ethnic groups should also have their cultural rights.



AN UNEASY TRUCE IN KIRKUK

niqash | Azad Ghareeb

Kirkuk seems to be entering a period of political agreement, after all the tension and crisis in the city recently.

This has lessened the anger of the Turkmen population, but the Arabs are still unhappy about the way Kurds are 'engineering' the distribution of political posts.

In a ceremony on 7 March in Sulaymaniyah city to mark the anniversary of the 1991 Kurdish uprising against Saddam Hussein, President Jalal Talabani described the oil-rich province of Kirkuk as the "Jerusalem of Kurdistan" and said that it should be annexed into the Kurdish regions.

Azad Jandiyani, a spokesman for the Kurdistan Patriotic Union (KDP), said that Talabani was speaking in his capacity as Secretary General of the KDP and not in his capacity as President of the Republic.

But this explanation was not enough to appease the wrath of the Arab and Turkmen political forces in Kirkuk or Baghdad.

Politicians from both the Arab and Kurdish sides said that these statements had two implications. First they would reinforce Kurdish demands in Kirkuk; second, they would dilute Kurdish anger by rousing nationalistic feelings among the Kurdish people, especially in Sulaymaniyah province, which, since 17 February, has been witnessing continued protests calling for general reforms.

A statement issued by the Turkmen Front in Kirkuk accused Talabani of stirring the emotions of the people living in the Kurdish region.

Muhammad Khalil, the Arab member in the Kirkuk Provincial Council said that Talabani's statements were contradictory to his position as a President of Iraq.

A week after Talabani's statements, in a move that surprised people in Kirkuk, Kirkuk's Governor, Abdul Rahman Mustafa, and the Head of the Provincial Council, Rizgar Ali, who are both members of the Kurdistan Alliance, submitted their resignation.

They did so, they said, because of the current situation in Kirkuk province and because it was extremely difficult to satisfy all parties.

However, sources within the Provincial Council said that the resignations came after a deal was reached between the Kurdistan Alliance, which has 26 of the 41 Provincial Council seats, and the Turkmen Front, which has 9 seats.

A leading member of the Turkmen Front, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Niqash that the agreement was aimed at reconciling both parties. It would allow the Turkmen Front to hold the Presidency of the Provincial Council, while giving the Kurds the post of Governor, he said.

The Kurds then announced that they had nominated Najm ad-Din Kareem, from the Kurdistan Alliance and a member of the Iraqi parliament, for the Governor post.

Meanwhile, the Arab parties say that the agreement was reached at their expense. They are demanding that the Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen should each get 34% of the posts in the province, with the Christians getting 4%.

The Arab bloc has issued the following statement: "The mechanism by which the President of Kirkuk's Council, Rizgar Ali, and its Governor, Abdul Rahman Mustafa, were replaced was political and is a violation of the rules."

"The Arab bloc stands against such agreements which are decisive in determining the Province's fate."

But this so-called deal reached between the Turkmen and Kurds is not the only reason why the Arab political parties are angry. Another reason is that thousands of Kurdish Peshmerga forces have been deployed in the southern and western areas of Kirkuk city, which have an Arab majority.

They were brought in on 24 February, the eve of the Day of Rage demonstrations around Iraq, "in order to protect the city from the chauvinist Baathists, who want to destabilize security in the disputed areas, especially in Kirkuk," according to a statement by Sheik Jaafar Mustafa, Kurdistan's Minister for



Peshmerga Affairs.

Arabs say that the Region's government has taken advantage of the demonstrations in Kirkuk to strengthen the Kurdish military presence in Arab areas.

On 19 March, the Arab Political Council in the province issued a statement demanding the equal distribution of power among the three main constituents of Kirkuk, as well as the full withdrawal of the Kurdish forces.

It wants the Iraqi Army 12th Division to be deployed in Kirkuk and the security brief given to the Kirkuk Police Directorate, "which should handle security and bring stability to the Province."

Another demand is the release of detainees held by the Kurdish security forces since 2003.

The Kurds, who have not yet commented on the resignations, say that the presence of the Peshmerga forces in Kirkuk is legitimate.

Sheikh Jaafar Mustafa, the Region's Minister for Peshmerga Affairs, told Niqash that the Peshmerga entered Kirkuk Province with the consent of the Iraqi government and the US forces.

"Our duty is to protect all citizens without any discrimination whatsoever," he said.

None of the parties wanted to comment on the undeclared agreement reached between the Kurds and Turkmen, nor on the fate of the Peshmerga forces deployed in Kirkuk.

They all stressed that the resignation of the Governor and the President of the Council was aimed at bringing the different sides of the conflict closer to each other and promote stability in the city.

While some of the people of

Kirkuk are busy predicting the shape of future relations between the different political forces in the province, there are others, like Usama al-Nujaifi, the Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, who are demanding the creation of an autonomous Kirkuk region, independent of the governments of Kurdistan and Baghdad.

But the Kurds insist on the implementation of Article 140 of the Constitution, as the best solution to Kirkuk's crisis, as well as to the other disputed areas.

Article 140 stipulates the "normalization" of the demographic conditions in the Province to counter the effects of the policies of Saddam Hussein's regime, which led to the deportation of Kurds and their replacement by Arabs.

It also stipulates that a referendum should be held to allow the people of Kirkuk the right to self-determination and to decide whether they want to be part of the central government in Baghdad or join the Kurdistan region.

According to national and international observers, the problem of Kirkuk is among the most difficult issues yet to be resolved after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

According to the analyst and writer, Yahya Barzanji, the city is like "a gunpowder barrel that could explode at any minute and lead to a civil war in many areas of Iraq."

"Any agreement that does not involve all the constituents of Kirkuk, including the small minority of Christians, will bring the whole country back to square one," he said.

"With this in mind, it is not hard to predict the results of ignoring Arabs and excluding them!"

□ □ □



President Barzani hosts ambassadors for Newroz celebrations: “We are committed to freedom, democracy, justice”

Erbil, Kurdistan – Iraq (KRG.org) – President Masoud Barzani this week in Kurdistan hosted ambassadors and other diplomats to Iraq for three days of festivities to celebrate Newroz, the Kurdish New Year.

The Kurds have celebrated Newroz, which means New Day, for over 2,500 years. It falls on the spring equinox and thus it represents hope, unity and renewal. However, for the Kurds, the holiday also symbolises freedom from oppression. According to the myth, a Kurdish hero named Kawa the blacksmith defeated a tyrannical king on the eve of Newroz, and lit fires on the hilltops to announce his victory.

Referring to the myth, President Barzani said, “As human beings need food, water, and air to live, they also need freedom. Life is meaningless if people are not free.” Commenting on the current struggles that face the region, he said, “As Kawa laid this foundation over 2,500 years ago, we will stay committed to the principles of freedom, democracy and justice.”

Croatian Ambassador Jerko Vokas, the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps in Baghdad, in his speech talked of the struggles that the Kurds have witnessed. He said, “The Kurdish people in their long history have gone through many difficult challenges in the struggle for survival. However, today, when we celebrate Newroz in peace, we cannot help but notice how rapidly the Kurdistan Region is developing.”

Ambassador Vokas also commended President Barzani on his vision for the region and the positive role the Kurds continue to play in the Federal Republic of Iraq.

The visit by more than 36 ambassadors and representatives of foreign countries and international organizations from Baghdad and Erbil was arranged by the Federal Foreign Ministry in Baghdad, in collaboration with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Department of Foreign Relations. This was the second time that the KRG has hosted Iraq’s diplomatic community for Newroz celebrations.

Commenting on the increasing number of diplomatic guests at this year’s celebrations, Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir, the KRG’s Head of Foreign Relations, said, “We are delighted to have the diplomatic missions accredited to Iraq join us in celebrating Newroz. This event has been an opportunity for the diplomatic community to come together, witness this special yearly tradition, and take part in its jubilant celebrations. Moreover, this was another opportunity for the diplomatic community to experience Kurdish culture and its warm hospitality. The event shows our continued desire to foster stronger relations with the international community.”

The celebrations began on Sunday, the eve of Newroz. The visiting diplomats and several Iraqi and KRG ministers and officials enjoyed the lighting of a Newroz fire, a play, dinner, music, and dancing by renowned Kurdish, Arab, Turkoman, and Assyrian artists. Those attending included Speaker of the Kurdistan Parliament Dr Kamal Kirkuki, KRG Prime Minister Barham Salih, Iraq’s Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, Deputy Foreign Minister Labbed Abbawi, Chief of Staff to the President Dr Fuad Hussein, Minister Bakir, Minister of Culture and Youth Kawa Mahmoud, Education Minister Safeen Dizayee, Trade and Industry Minister Sinan Chalabi, and Transport & Communication Minister Anwar Jabali Sabo.

Several other KRG and Iraqi ministers and officials also participated, such as the Head of Kurdistan’s Intelligence Protection Agency Masrouf Barzani and Interior Minister Karim Sinjari.



Ambassador Ad Melkert, the Special Representative to the UN Secretary General, was among the 36 visiting ambassadors, foreign representatives and international organisations. There are 20 diplomatic missions based in Erbil; their consuls and staff also participated in the festivities.

On Monday, the day of Newroz, President Barzani and the guests visited Bekhal waterfall and saw tens of thousands of people picnicking in the countryside. They attended music and dance performances and a luncheon at Pank Resort in the hills of Rawanduz, where they were welcomed by the mayor and local representatives. At the resort, a children’s choir sang some national songs and nomadic goat-hair tents showed the international guests the traditional Kurdish way of life. At an evening banquet, some of the diplomats joined in traditional folk dances.

On Tuesday the guests toured Erbil citadel, which has been nominated as a UNESCO world heritage site and is the oldest continually inhabited fortress in the world. The governor of Erbil Nawzad Hadi informed the diplomats about the work of the High Commission for Erbil Citadel Revitalisation (HCECR), a joint programme with UNESCO to conserve and restore the area. The tour also included a brief visit to the town centre, local bazaars, a new shopping mall and Shanidar Park.

The ambassadors and representative of foreign countries and international organisations commended the Kurdistan Region Government for the Region’s rapid development, made possible by its stability and security.

The diplomats thanked President Barzani for his invitation and commended the work of the KRG Department of Foreign Relations and the Federal Foreign Ministry and others, including the protocol and logistics teams for delivering an enjoyable and memorable experience.

The ambassadors and foreign representatives of these countries and international organisations attended the Newroz celebrations: Croatia, China, United Arab Emirates, Russian Federation, France, Turkey, Germany, Netherlands, Egypt, UK, Bangladesh, South Korea, Jordan, US, Poland, Algeria, Armenia, Romania, Palestine, Lebanon, Pakistan, Morocco, Serbia, Yemen, Spain, Slovakia, Brazil, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Norway, Georgia, South Africa, Czech Republic, Kuwait, India, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, UN Secretary General’s Special Representative, and the EU.

NEWS ANALYSIS; Ready or Not, Iraq Ascends To Take Helm Of Arab Bloc

By TIM ARANGO

BAGHDAD -- After Libya was suspended from the Arab League last month, de facto leadership ended up coincidentally in the hands of Iraq, the Arab nation with the most experience -- much of it painful -- with a foreign-led military campaign against an unpopular dictator.

For all of that still unsettled pain, the foreign minister, Hoshiyar Zebari -- in his new capacity as head of the Arab League -- rushed off to Paris last Friday evening to join Western and Arab allies, where he argued passionately in favor of action against Libya, citing the American no-fly zone in northern Iraq that protected the Kurdish population from Saddam Hussein in the years before the American invasion here, according to a senior official who took part in the Paris deliberations.

And soon, Iraqi leaders, who are facing their own protest movement, plan to use their own troublesome democracy, still bloody and inchoate, as a showcase for Middle East countries. Iraq is taking on a larger diplomatic role in regional affairs as host of the group's annual summit meeting -- while assuming the rotating presidency of the league -- in May.

"If there's a political message, it's that Iraq is back to play a major and positive role in the Arab region," said Labid Abawi, the deputy foreign minister who has led a committee to prepare Baghdad for the summit meeting.

"We take pride in that Iraq has already exceeded all these other Arab countries in establishing a democratic regime," he said. "Now, we can say yes, we are on the right track, and other Arab countries can follow suit in establishing a democratic regime."

Before the democratic uprisings across the Middle East, the summit meeting had already been seen as an occasion of national pride. Now it represents something larger -- an opportunity, Iraqi leaders say, to showcase its fragile democracy. Some Iraqi diplomats envision emerging from the meeting with a so-called "Baghdad Declaration," a statement that would define the principles of modern Middle Eastern democracy.

But, even with all the gains here, any such declaration would be freighted with unintentional irony.

Iraq, with a democracy imposed by

American force, is still a volatile tableau from which to draw lessons about how to establish a democracy in the Middle East. Insurgent attacks occur daily. Its prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, has raised alarms recently with moves to consolidate power over the judiciary and the security forces. Transparency International ranked Iraq as the fourth most corrupt country in the world last year, just ahead of Afghanistan, Myanmar and Somalia. Iraq is still more violent for civilians than Afghanistan, and American soldiers still die here, as one did Sunday from a roadside bomb in the south.

"They have some of the institutions of democracy, and habits, but not the mentality," said one senior diplomat here, who spoke anonymously to maintain relationships with the Iraqi leadership. "Politics in Iraq is zero sum."

Last year more than 60 percent of Iraqis turned out to vote in parliamentary elections, which were largely deemed free and fair by international monitors. But many critics argue that in a nation where religion is intertwined with politics -- outside Parliament last week little green flags flew with the words "Muhammad is our leader" -- rights to assemble and express oneself, as well as press freedoms, are under increasing attack.

"Democracy is not just elections, of course," said Allaa Talabani, a Kurdish lawmaker. "Democracy is belief. It is practice. Elections are just a mechanism."

Iraq has faced widespread protests aimed not at upending the government, but at improving it. Still, as it takes its place on the stage of world affairs it does so at a time when its own version of democracy seems to many to be creeping backward toward authoritarianism.

The gulf between the Green Zone political elite and the Iraqi street remains vast, and the stirrings of Iraq's own youth-led movement, inspired partly by the events in Egypt and Tunisia, suggest an effort to articulate an indigenous version of democracy, different from the one imposed after the American invasion.

The summit meeting, earlier scheduled for March, has already been delayed by the region's tumult, and although Mr. Zebari has insisted it will go forward, lawmakers and diplomats privately express skepticism and wonder if Arab leaders will dare leave their countries for fear of being overthrown in their absence.

Meanwhile, on the Baghdad streets a face-lift is under way to prepare the city for Arab leaders, should they arrive, to accentuate the more hopeful features of Iraq's transition.

Hotels, many scarred from bombings, are being refurbished. Concrete blast walls that dominate the aesthetic of Baghdad will be dismantled, as will many checkpoints on the road leading from the airport to the city's center. One five-star hotel planned for the Green Zone remains a foundation and a honeycomb of scaffolding.

And on some of Baghdad's main thoroughfares shopkeepers have been busy painting and cleaning, per a dictum from the city government. The result on Zaydoon Street, a big shopping boulevard in the center of the city, has been garish bursts of bright colors and shiny buildings amid the urban war-zone blight of razor coils and thatches of electricity wires, the beginnings of a Potemkin city that suggest an economic boom that has yet to take hold.

Still, it suggests an everyday life that continues to emerge here slowly. On one recent afternoon, a television reporter conducted a stand-up spot on the median, while an amputee sold boxes of tissues to passing cars in front of a pharmacy newly painted a bright orange.

Over the last turbulent months in the Middle East, history has pivoted in lightning-quick fashion from the egomaniacal perversions of its leaders to the democratic aspirations of its people. With Arab leaders soon to descend on Iraq, its violent and lurching trajectory toward democracy, from foreign invasion to sectarian civil war to the low-grade insurgency that menaces this country to this day, will most likely be as much cautionary tale as road map for reform.

Iraq, still occupied by close to 50,000 American troops and reliant on United States advisers to defend its air space and protect against foreign threats, is not participating in the military action against Libya, which began last Saturday, the eighth anniversary of the American invasion that imposed a version of democracy still far from finished.

Steven Lee Myers contributed reporting from Paris, and Zaid Thaker from Baghdad.

Experts Say Barzani's NATO Award No Boost for Kurdish Independence

By MIRKO JOUMER

When Iraqi Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani received the Atlantic Award for Peace from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Parliamentary Assembly (PA) in Rome last week, he took the opportunity to emphasize the Kurds' right to independence. According to two Dutch experts in international relations, the award will not have any major political implications, largely due to resistance from Turkey to Kurdish autonomy.

In his acceptance speech for the award – presented by the Italian Atlantic Committee and the Italian Delegation to the NATO PA – Barzani said the Kurds believed in exercising the right to self-determination to create an independent state of their own

"In Sudan, people who have long suffered were recently given the opportunity to peacefully and freely choose a new course for their future through the right of self-determination," he said. "This outcome is reassuring to any who have faced tyranny in the past or fear that they may once again do so in the future. As such, we believe in the exercise of this right."

Professor Philip Everts, director of the Institute for International Studies at Leiden University in the Netherlands, says that granting the award to Barzani



"is largely a symbolic act," which will not have any "major political implications."

Everts also says that Turkey's membership of NATO has a strong influence on any support the Iraqi Kurdistan semi-autonomous region may receive from NATO member states for self-determination.

"NATO is not the actor that decides on the recognition of states," said Everts. "That is a matter for individual member states. Also, NATO can only make formal decisions unanimously, and it is not likely that Turkey will cooperate to strengthen the international position of Kurdistan."

Bertjan Verbeek, professor of International Relations at Radboud University in the Netherlands, also emphasizes the role of Turkey in the issue of Kurdish self-determination.

"I don't think Turkey is very much

pleased with the award for Barzani," he said. "Ultimately the Turks remain very suspicious towards a strong Kurdish province in Iraq, and especially towards a de facto independent safe haven [for Kurds] in northern Iraq."

"The [United States of America] will not allow the breaking up of Iraq," continued Verbeek. "An independent Iraqi Kurdistan will create more problems between Sunni and Shiite [Arabs]. Moreover, it will have a strong power of attraction on Kurdish Turkey. It would lead to a major dispute with Turkey, and Turkey is still essential for the USA [in regard to its] Middle East and Iran-Afghanistan policy."

Professor Verbeek said the decision to give Barzani the award was based on the overall sectarian violence in Iraq in the last couple of years, the breaking out of violence against Coptic Christians at the end of 2010 in Egypt, and, most importantly, the creation of a safe haven in Kurdistan for more than 10,000 Christian refugees from all over Iraq.

"The message NATO wants to give is a plea for religious tolerance and [a] peaceful settlement of disputes, which is something Barzani has contributed to," said Verbeek. "Especially during this period of time, it seems that religious tolerance and peaceful solutions to disputes are essential."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL MARCH 24, 2011

Turkish Kurds Call for Protest

By MARC CHAMPION And ERKAN OZ

Turkey's main ethnic Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party indicated that it wanted to spread the pro-democracy ferment roiling the Middle East to Eastern Turkey, the scene of a nearly 30-year-old conflict in which tens of thousands have died.

At a televised news conference in the regional capital Diyarbakir Wednesday, party leader Selahattin Demirtas said people had run out of patience with "stalling" by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government over initiatives to resolve the Kurdish question politically, and would follow

Egypt's model of civil disobedience. As of noon Thursday, he said, Kurds would begin sit-in protests in city centers and would not stop until their demands were met.

Those demands include Kurdish language education in schools, release of political prisoners and an end to military operations against Kurds; and removal of the threshold of 10% of the national vote for political parties to enter parliament. "We will not respond [with violence] even if tanks come to crush us," Mr. Demirtas said. A spokesman for the government said it would respond to the call until Thursday, but with elections set for June 12, it appears unlikely to compromise on an issue that is neuralgic to many Turkish voters, analysts said. Turkish TV channels were filled with discussions of the proposed protests Thursday evening, with some commentators asking whether Turkey would now be drawn into the circle of Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain and Libya.

Rebel PJAK Leader Says Iran and Syria Will Be Liberated Through Revolutions

By MIRKO JOUMER and WLADIMIR VAN WILGENBURG

The leader of the Iranian Kurdish rebel group, Party for the Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), whose militants are based in the mountains of Iraq's northern Kurdistan region, says that the Iranian and Syrian regimes will inevitably fall due to revolutions like those in Egypt and Tunisia, and that the United States of America supports the recent wave of revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa.

The PJAK is an offshoot of the rebel Turkish-based Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and is led by Abdul Rahman Haji Ahmadi, who lives in exile in Germany. The PJAK states it is striving for democratic confederalism within the state boundaries of Iran.

Haji Ahmadi spoke to Rudaw by email about the possible implications of the ongoing revolutions in the Middle East for the Kurds in general, and specifically for those under the Syrian and Iranian governments.

Revolutions are inevitable

Haji Ahmadi says the recent revolutions originating in North Africa will inevitably have a profound impact on all the dictatorships in the Middle East, and they "are not against the USA, but the USA supports them."

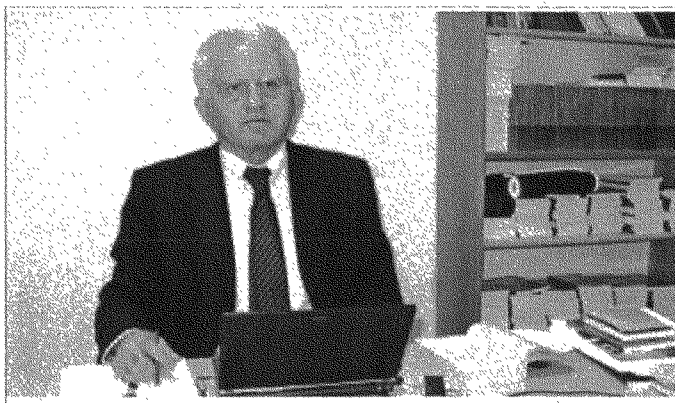
"Those peoples are revolting against dictators, lawlessness, poverty, greed and corruption," he said in the email.

The PJAK leader says he is convinced the various ethnic groups living in Iran and Syria will also be freed from the totalitarian regimes that govern them.

"This is the end of the era of the dictators," he said. "With their speeches, [Iranian President Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad and [Syrian President Bashar] Assad cannot change the path that the peoples in Iran and Syria are on."

Although Haji Ahmadi says the Iranian regime will eventually fall, he argues that cooperation is needed to make this happen.

"The Iranian government will not fall just by the Kurdish people revolting," he said. "But, if all the nations in Iran start a revolution together, then they will be able to bring the Iranian government down."



Abdul Rahman Haji Ahmadi, PJAK leader, says anti-government protests sweeping the Middle East and North Africa will reach Iran as well. ---- Photo by Ararat News Publishing (ANP).

Kurdistan region in Iraq

Reflecting the recent allegations by Iraqi Kurdistan's government-controlled media that Iran is supporting the ongoing anti-government protests in Iraqi Kurdistan's Sulaimani city, Haji Ahmadi says neighboring Iran could play a role in destabilizing the semiautonomous Kurdistan region.

"The Iranian government is a big enemy of the Kurdish nation," he said. "It is trying to undermine the prosperity and stability of the Kurds in the south of Kurdistan [Iraqi Kurdistan] by every means possible."

But, Haji Ahmadi says the Iraqi Kurdistan government bears an important responsibility to make sure it stays free from any unwanted meddling by other countries or powers.

"If the Kurdistan Regional Government considers its responsibility as a patriotic one, and they create a state of law, provide justice for the people, work for the people and fight corruption, then Iran or any other enemy of the Kurds will not be able to make our country [greater Kurdistan] an unsafe one," he said.

Talks between the PJAK and Iran

Asked if it would be possible for the PJAK to conduct unofficial secret dialogue with the Iranian regime, as the outlawed PKK had previously done with the Turkish government, Haji Ahmadi said he did not have any hope this could ever be possible, given the current political system in Iran.

"The political systems in Iran and Turkey are two totally different systems," he said. "Turkey is a semi-democratic country, and for such a country...it is not impossible to have dialo-

gue and correspondence and even to acknowledge the rights of other nations. But for a government that is a totalitarian dictatorship I can say that it is virtually impossible."

Jundallah and its executed leader

Jundallah is a militant group based in the part of greater Baluchistan that lies within the borders of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Its founder and leader, Abdolmalek Rigi, was captured and executed in Iran in 2010.

"We have no connection whatsoever with Jundallah," said Haji Ahmadi, when asked about the possible ties between the PJAK and Jundallah, and if Rigi's execution had made the Baluchi group powerless. "Until the Baluchi people achieve their right of self-determination, and while injustice and oppression is still being imposed on the Baluchi people, the Baluchi people will support Jundallah, and Jundallah will retain its strength."

Iranian nuclear scientists

In November 2010, a series of assassination attempts in the Iranian capital Teheran resulted in the injuring and killing of several Iranian nuclear scientists. Iranian authorities blamed agents of Israel and the US, and the PJAK is often accused by Iran of being such an agent, yet Haji Ahmadi denies any involvement.

"The PJAK is not involved in this and does not know who is involved in this matter," he said.

Army attacks mosque in Syria, killing protesters

DAMASCUS

FROM NEWS REPORTS

At least six people were killed early Wednesday when Syrian security forces attacked protesters who had taken refuge in a mosque in the center of the southern city of Daraa, news agencies reported.

But Syrian state television described a very different scene, showing guns, grenades and ammunition that it said had been taken from inside the Omari mosque. The television report acknowledged four dead, but said they had been killed when "an armed gang" attacked an ambulance, The Associated Press reported.

Why the accounts of violence and of the number killed differed was not immediately known.

Despite emergency laws that have banned public gatherings for nearly 50 years, protests have grown over the past week in several cities in Syria. The largest have been in Daraa, with thousands taking to the streets Friday and again on Sunday, when protesters burned government buildings and clashed with the police. Several people were reported to have died.

Anti-government protests continued on Tuesday for a fifth day in Daraa before hundreds of demonstrators sought protection from attacks in the Omari mosque, Reuters reported. The protesters were calling for political freedoms and an end to corruption, and they had said they would remain in the mosque until their demands were met.

"They are shooting," a person at the mosque said by telephone, referring to the soldiers and other security forces. "Killing and killing and more killing."

A doctor at the city's main hospital, Ali Nassab al-Mahameed, was shot and killed as he was trying to rescue others, the witness said. It was not known how many people were wounded.

"It seems that security forces may be trying to storm the complex," a resident told Reuters. "It is not clear because electricity has been cut off. Tear gas is also being used."

The mosque's preacher, Almad Siasneh, told Al Arabiya television on Tuesday that Syrian forces were close to the

building's grounds, where protesters had erected tents. The mosque has been a center of protests over the past few days, with thousands gathering there on Sunday.

The Daraa protests stemmed from outrage over the arrest of more than a dozen schoolchildren this month for writing graffiti that called for greater freedoms.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, Yemen's president on Wednesday offered to step down by the end of the year in a bid to appease mounting demands for his resignation, but opposition groups showed no sign of easing up on efforts to force him out.

Weeks of protests against the 32-year rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in the impoverished state has raised alarm in Western capitals at the prospect of an imploding country where Al Qaeda has entrenched itself.

In Cairo, the U.S. defense secretary, Robert M. Gates, said that it was too soon to determine the outcome of political turmoil in Yemen and that the United States had not planned for an era without Mr. Saleh in office.

"I think things are obviously, or evidently, very unsettled in Yemen," Mr. Gates said. "I think it's too soon to call an outcome. We've had a good working relationship with President Saleh. He's been an important ally in the counter-terrorism arena."

"But clearly there's a lot of unhappiness inside Yemen. And I think we will basically just continue to watch the situation. We haven't done any post-Saleh planning."

Mr. Saleh, whose opponents have been inspired by the fall of dictators in Tunisia and Egypt, has been an ally of the United States and of Saudi Arabia in the confrontation against Al Qaeda. But the killing of more than 50 demonstrators on Friday has accelerated a wave of defections to the opposition by the elite.

Having tried at first to fend off calls to quit by saying he would not seek a new term in 2013, Mr. Saleh has since made greater concessions and on Wednesday offered constitutional change and elections to replace Parliament and the head of state this year.

Opposition groups, which had earlier called for huge rallies in the capital, Sana, on Friday to force Mr. Saleh from power, said they were studying the offer. (HT, REUTERS)

The protesters in Daraa were calling for political freedoms.

MARCH 25, 2011

After deaths, Syrian leader vows greater freedoms

DAMASCUS

FROM NEWS REPORTS

President Bashar al-Assad issued an unprecedented pledge of greater freedom and more prosperity to Syrians on Thursday as anger grew following a crackdown on protesters that left several people dead.

In Daraa, the southern city where Syrian security forces have confronted demonstrators, thousands of people marched Thursday to mark the funerals of those killed.

The assault on the central mosque in the city early Wednesday, and subsequent attacks by security forces, led to an unknown number of deaths, some of which appeared to be documented in bloody videos posted on YouTube. An American official who would speak only on the condition of anonymity said that "about 15 people" were killed by forces loyal to Mr. Assad. An unidentified hospital official put the death toll at 37. Various Web sites were collecting names of those believed to have been killed.

No violence was reported Thursday in the huge marches, which had gathered around the funerals.

Announcing the sort of concessions that would have seemed almost unimaginable three months ago in Syria, Bouthaina Shaaban, an adviser to Mr. Assad, said at a news conference that the president had not ordered his forces to fire on protesters.

"I was a witness to the instructions of His Excellency that live ammunition should not be fired, even if the police, security forces or officers of the status were being killed," she said.

Mr. Assad, she said, would draft laws to provide for media freedoms and allow for political movements other than the Baath Party, which has ruled the country for half a century.

Ms. Shaaban said that the president — who assumed power after the death of his father and predecessor, Hafez al-Assad, in 2000 — had decreed the drafting of a law for political parties "to be presented for public debate" and would strive above all to raise living standards across the country.

She said another decree would look at "ending with great urgency the emergency law, along with issuing legislation

that assures the security of the nation and its citizens.”

Information has trickled out slowly and incompletely from Syria, which is one of the most closed and repressive nations in the Middle East, and is closely allied with Iran and the Lebanese mili-

“The regime is under serious pressure.”

tant group Hezbollah. But as the death toll from the Daraa crackdown rose, Mr. Assad faced growing pressure both internally, as the protests spread around the south, and from other nations.

Ms. Shaaban’s statements came after Britain, France, Germany and the United Nations condemned the violence.

Andrew J. Tabler of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and who spent a decade living in Syria, said six days of protests of this size were unknown in Syria since at least 1982. In

February of that year, forces loyal to Hafez al-Assad killed at least 10,000 people in an assault on the city of Hama to end an Islamist uprising.

“The regime is under serious pressure, and it’s hard to predict where this may lead,” Mr. Tabler said.

The protests are in a Sunni area and the turmoil threatens to “crack the Sunni veneer” of the government of Mr. Assad, who is of the Alawite religious minority, Mr. Tabler said. But he said the protests had not so far taken on a strong sectarian character and were mainly a response to years of broken promises and delays in carrying out political reforms.

The crackdown in Daraa began early Wednesday after the Syrian Army reinforced the police presence in the city, near the Jordanian border, and confronted a group of protesters who had gathered in and around the Omari mosque in the city center. Activists and news reports said five or six people were killed after the forces tried to dis-

perse the crowd with tear gas and then live ammunition.

Among the dead was Ali al-Mahameed, a doctor, who witnesses said was shot while tending to the wounded. At least one person was killed after Dr. Mahameed’s funeral Wednesday afternoon, attended by thousands of people, some of whom tried to return to the city center.

Syrian state television said Wednesday that it was not security forces who had killed people at the mosque but rather an “armed gang.” The broadcast showed guns, grenades, ammunition and money that was said to have been taken from the mosque after a police raid. The report acknowledged four dead.

The official SANA news agency said the “gang” had killed a doctor, a medical worker and a driver in an ambulance, and that “security forces faced down those aggressors and managed to shoot and wound a few of them.” (REUTERS, IHT)

LE FIGARO

25 mars 2011

L'INTERVENTION EN LIBYE

La Turquie s'engage à reculer dans les opérations

LAURE MARCHAND
ISTANBUL

LES DÉPUTÉS turcs ont donné hier soir leur feu vert à l'envoi en Méditerranée de cinq navires et d'un sous-marin pour participer aux opérations de contrôle de l'embargo sur les armes à destination de la Libye. Avec six bâtiments de guerre, la Turquie sera la plus grosse contributrice au dispositif au large des côtes libyennes. Mais ses revirements successifs sur les opérations militaires contre le régime du colonel Kadhafi et son opposition à des frappes aériennes illustrent l'embarras d'Ankara, tiraillé entre le pacte qui le lie à ses alliés de l'Otan et son souci de ne pas apparaître trop ouvertement du côté de la coalition pour ne pas se mettre à dos les populations arabes ou musulmanes de la région.

Depuis plusieurs jours, son désaccord sur les bombardements empêchait les 28 pays membres de l'Alliance de confier la mise en œuvre de la zone d'exclusion aérienne à l'Otan. Mais, hier soir, le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Ahmet Davutoglu, a annoncé qu'Ankara, qui réclamait un arrêt des frappes, levait son opposition.

« Les demandes et les inquiétudes de la Turquie ont été entendues », a-t-il assuré. Hier, l'amiral américain James Stavridis, commandant de l'Otan en Europe, se trouvait à Ankara pour discuter des conditions de la participation turque dans la coalition. Si la Turquie ne souhaite pas être visible sur le front, elle semble prête à assurer les arrières de la coalition. La base de l'Otan d'Izmir, dans l'ouest du pays, pourrait être intégrée au dispositif et superviser le dispositif de surveillance aérienne.



« Malheureusement, il est clair que certains pays versent dans l'opportunisme »

ABDALLAH GÜL, PRÉSIDENT DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE

Il y a peu, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, le premier ministre, qualifiait encore de « non-sens » une intervention de l'Otan en Libye. Mardi, devant son groupe parlementaire, il martelait que la Turquie « ne sera jamais celle qui pointera une arme contre le peuple libyen », une manière de se démarquer indirectement des pays engagés en

première ligne dans l'offensive militaire. Le président de la République, Abdullah Gül, a regretté : « Malheureusement, il est clair que certains pays versent dans l'opportunisme. » Sans en citer un nommément. Après les critiques du gouvernement contre le « rôle majeur de la France » dans le déclenchement des opérations, il ne fait guère de doute que la remarque du chef de l'État turc visait Paris.

Crainte d'une « irakisation »

Les réticences turques s'expliquent aussi par une crainte d'une « irakisation » du conflit et par ses importants intérêts économiques, concentrés dans le secteur de la construction, en Libye. Et plusieurs milliers de ressortissants turcs se trouvent encore sur le territoire libyen. Depuis le début de la rébellion, Ankara joue également un rôle d'intermédiaire entre le régime de Kadhafi et les Occidentaux. Sur place, c'est désormais la Turquie qui représente les intérêts américains, britanniques et australiens. Elle est intervenue dans la libération du reporter du *Guardian*, arrêté début mars, et a été remerciée par le *New York Times* pour celles de ses quatre journalistes, lundi. ■

En Syrie, Bachar el-Assad est confronté au défi de la rue

Les protestataires continuent d'exiger plus de libertés, la fin de la corruption et de meilleurs salaires.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

PROCHE-ORIENT Plus d'un millier de manifestants scandant des slogans contre le régime se sont rassemblés hier à Deraa, à 120 km au sud de Damas, où ils ont été encerclés par un grand nombre de membres des forces de l'ordre. Sur le plateau du Hauran, Deraa est depuis vendredi le théâtre de manifestations sans précédent contre le pouvoir, qui les a réprimées, faisant cinq morts et des dizaines de blessés. « *Les tribus ne sont pas contentes, explique un expert qui tient à rester anonyme. Les combattants qu'elles ont envoyés en Irak ont été emprisonnés à leur retour et sont toujours sous les verrous.* » Mais la contestation s'étend bien au-delà de Deraa. Ces dernières semaines, des rassemblements ont eu lieu à Damas, Lattaquieh, Banyas et Hassakeh.

« *Le plus inquiétant pour le régime, ajoute l'expert, c'est que la fronde n'est pas téléguidée par tel ou tel groupe d'opposants, mais par la population elle-même, qui réclame plus de libertés politiques, moins de corruption et de meilleurs salaires.* » Bref, les Syriens sont à l'unisson du reste du monde arabe, en quête

de justice et de démocratie. Et les spécialistes sont unanimes : en Syrie, tous les ingrédients sont réunis pour un changement. Mais, compte tenu du régime de fer à Damas, celui-ci ne pourra se faire en douceur.

Vague massive d'arrestations

Le parti Baas, au pouvoir depuis bientôt un demi-siècle, gouverne en vertu de l'état d'urgence. Depuis qu'il a succédé à son père en 2000, Bachar el-Assad a déçu ses compatriotes. Il s'est contenté d'une ouverture économique, sans libéraliser le moins du monde la sphère politique. Et encore cette ouverture économique est-elle dénoncée - à demi-mots, bien sûr - comme profitant surtout à certains barons du Baas ou à des membres de sa famille, en particulier son cousin germain, Rami Makhlouf, dont le nom est scandé par les manifestants à Deraa.

Parmi les autres griefs contre le régime figure la domination de la secte chiïte minoritaire des alaouites, dont fait

partie le clan Assad, sur la majorité sunnite. Un sujet tabou que le pouvoir a toujours masqué par une surenchère nationaliste contre Israël. Ce qui a encore permis à Assad d'affirmer récemment au *Wall Street Journal* qu'« *il n'y a aucun risque que la Syrie soit gagnée par la*

contestation puisque la population fait bloc autour des idéaux du Baas ». À voir... Certes, le jeune rais a su ouvrir la manne aux commerçants sunnites damascènes, qui n'ont pas intérêt à voir leur pays sombrer dans le chaos.

En Syrie, le pouvoir voit rouge au moindre frémissement. Ces derniers jours, il a répondu par une vague massive d'arrestations - 800 à Deraa, selon des ONG. Mais une répression comme celle qui fit des milliers de morts parmi les islamistes en 1982 à Hama n'est plus possible à l'ère de Facebook et d'Internet.

« *Il n'y a aucune raison que la grogne s'arrête* », assure l'expert. Comment Bachar el-Assad peut-il y répondre ? « *Il doit faire des concessions qui n'irritent pas trop son entourage familial, mais qui lui permettent de désamorcer la fronde.* » Un exercice bien délicat. ■



La petite phrase de...

BACHAR EL-ASSAD, PRÉSIDENT SYRIEN

« *Il n'y a aucun risque que la Syrie soit gagnée par la contestation puisque la population fait bloc autour des idéaux du Baas* »



Les Kurdes de Turquie lancent un mouvement de protestation pour leurs droits

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 24 mars 2011 (AFP)

QUELQUE 3.000 Kurdes avec des députés et des maires à leur tête ont investi jeudi les rues de Diyarbakir, la principale ville du sud-est anatolien, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes, pour réclamer d'avantages de droits et appeler à la fin du conflit avec le PKK.

La foule a tenté d'organiser un sit-in dans le centre de Diyarbakir, mais les autorités ont interdit la manifestation et déployé des blindés pour bloquer les manifestants, a constaté un correspondant de l'AFP.

Seules quelques dizaines de personnes, des élus locaux et des parlementaires du Parti pour une société démocratique (BDP, pro-kurde), ont été autorisées à s'asseoir au lieu prévu de la manifestation, la première d'une série de plusieurs actions programmées pour les prochains mois.

Le reste des manifestants ont occupé les rues avoisinantes en signe de protestation, bloqué le trafic et scandé "le Kurdistan sera le tombeau du fascisme" ainsi que d'autres slogans en faveur du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui lutte depuis 26 ans pour l'autonomie du Sud-Est.

Un petit groupe a jeté des pétards sur la police, qui a fait usage de gaz lacrymogène et arrêté cinq personnes.

A quelques mois d'élections législatives, prévues pour juin, le BDP a annoncé mercredi le lancement d'une série de manifestations en faveur d'une amélioration des droits des Kurdes.

Conspuant le gouvernement pour son incapacité à mettre un terme au conflit, il a revendiqué le droit à une éducation en langue kurde, la libération de militants emprisonnés, la fin des opérations contre le PKK et la suppression d'un seuil électoral de 10% de voix requis pour entrer au Parlement.

"Nous serons dans les rues jusqu'à ce que le gouvernement prenne des mesures concrètes concernant ces quatre demandes", a déclaré le président du BDP, Selahattin Demirtas.

Le PKK, considéré comme un groupe terroriste par de nombreux pays, a décrété un cessez-le-feu unilatéral en août 2010, mais a menacé d'y mettre fin le mois dernier, déplorant l'échec du gouvernement à dialoguer avec les Kurdes.

Damas réprime la contestation à Deraa dans le sang

Selon des ONG, quinze personnes ont été tuées par les forces de l'ordre dans le sud de la Syrie

Beyrouth
Correspondante

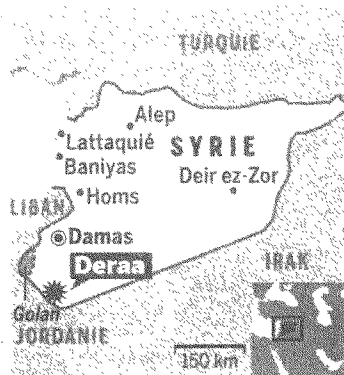
Excusez-moi, je ne peux pas, je ne veux pas parler au téléphone : cet interlocuteur syrien, joint à Damas, n'en dira pas plus. A Beyrouth, les travailleurs syriens, nombreux dans la capitale libanaise, n'obtiennent guère plus lorsqu'ils appellent le pays. Les informations sur la révolte et la répression à l'œuvre dans la ville de Deraa, au sud de la Syrie, parviennent au compte-gouttes.

Mercredi 23 mars, selon les récits de témoins anonymes, relayés par plusieurs agences de presse, les alentours de la mosquée Al-Omari, devenue lieu de ralliement de la contestation à Deraa, ont été le théâtre d'affrontements meurtriers avec les forces de l'ordre. Selon ces mêmes sources, d'autres violences ont éclaté lors des funérailles de deux des cinq victimes de la veille – une jeune fille et un médecin –, lorsque les forces de l'ordre ont tiré à balles réelles. « La ville est en état de

siège », a affirmé un autre témoin.

Le bilan, fourni par des militants des droits de l'homme, est invérifiable. Il serait de quinze morts. Les autorités de Damas ont dit avoir lancé un raid contre un « gang » qui avait stocké « armes et munitions à l'intérieur de la mosquée », expliquant que cette opération avait fait quatre morts. En fin d'après-midi, la télévision syrienne a annoncé le limogeage du gouverneur de Deraa, Fayçal Khalatoum.

Huit jours après le début du mouvement de contestation en Syrie, la situation est difficile à cerner. « Jamais je n'aurais cru que les révoltes arabes s'étendent à la Syrie », admet, perplexe, un diplomate occidental. Principal obstacle à la contestation : la répression systématique du régime. L'espoir d'un « printemps de Damas », caressé par l'opposition laïque et intellectuelle à l'arrivée de Bachar Al-Assad au pouvoir, à la mort de son père en 2000, s'était aussitôt envolé. Les promesses de réformes du jeune président – 34 ans à l'époque –



n'ont pas été suivies de l'ouverture politique escomptée.

Les activistes, religieux ou laïques, ont été emprisonnés ; toute forme d'opposition étouffée afin d'assurer la pérennité du régime. Avant Deraa, la Syrie de Bachar Al-Assad n'a connu qu'une rébellion, dans la région kurde de Hasaka, en 2004, écrasée au prix de plusieurs dizaines de morts. Mais c'est la ville de Hama, pilonnée à l'artillerie lourde en 1982 sur ordre de Hafez Al-Assad pour venir à bout des Frères musulmans, faisant plus de dix mille morts civils, qui hante encore les mémoires.

« Si le fils n'est pas le père, le régime baasiste n'a pas changé », résume un opposant syrien sous couvert d'anonymat. Les lourdes structures de l'Etat et ses armées d'agents de renseignement sont restées en place, exerçant un contrôle étroit et contraignant sur la société. La coercition et la peur sont les principaux outils de la « stabilité » syrienne.

« Deux grandes peurs »

Autre frein à la contestation, la guerre en Irak en 2003 a induit une nouvelle donne pour l'opposition

« tiraillée entre la dénonciation du régime syrien et celle de l'impérialisme américain ; entre sa mission critique et la défense de l'intérêt national », explique Caroline Donati, dans son ouvrage *L'Exception syrienne* (éd. La Découverte). Son action a été paralysée durant la présidence de George Bush, par le spectre d'une intervention américaine en Syrie.

Le président syrien a alors gagné en popularité en incarnant la « résistance arabe » face à l'Amérique et à l'ennemi israélien. Les guerres civiles en Irak ont aussi agi comme un repoussoir. A l'instar de son voisin, la Syrie est un Etat multiconfessionnel où se mêlent sunnites, alaouites, kurdes, chrétiens et druzes, et où la confiscation du pouvoir par une minorité (alaouite) a alimenté les rancœurs de la majorité (sunnite).

« Le peuple syrien vit avec deux grandes peurs – celle du régime et des tensions confessionnelles – qui freinent la mobilisation populaire », explique un dissident. « La peur n'a pas encore été balayée, poursuit-il. Et si la révolte de Deraa n'a pas encore fait tache d'huile, sa situation, à 100 km de la capitale, est stratégique. Les banlieues pauvres du sud de Damas sont en grande partie composées de gens originaires de cette région. Ils pourraient suivre le mouvement. Pour le moment, le régime déploie ses forces. Il y a des accrochages avec des jeunes – des suicidaires, tant le rapport de forces est démesuré. »

« Les analystes n'avaient pas prévu les révolutions tunisienne ou égyptienne, conclut-il, et nul ne peut prédire ce qui va se passer en Syrie. Et les Syriens ont appris que rien n'est impossible, quelle que soit la force des appareils sécuritaires. » ■

Cécile Hennion

Irak: plusieurs dizaines de barrages vont être construits au Kurdistan



ERBIL (Irak), 24 mars 2011 (AFP)

LE KURDISTAN IRAKIEN va se doter de plusieurs dizaines de barrages pour développer son secteur agricole et faire face aux épisodes de sécheresse, un projet qui pourrait aviver les tensions régionales relatives à la gestion de l'eau, a-t-on appris jeudi.

« Onze barrages avec des réservoirs d'une capacité d'un à dix millions de mètres cubes sont actuellement en construction et des études ont été faites pour en construire 28 autres », a déclaré à l'AFP le ministre de l'Agriculture et des Ressources hydriques de la région autonome du nord de l'Irak, Jamil Souleimane.

« Ces barrages visent à développer le secteur agricole et à faire des réserves d'eau car l'Irak a ces dernières années été frappé par la sécheresse », a-t-il indiqué.

Deux des barrages en construction se trouvent dans la province de Dohouk, quatre dans celle d'Erbil et cinq dans celle de Souleimaniyeh, a-t-il précisé.

La gestion de l'eau des deux grands fleuves qui arrosent l'Irak - le Tigre et

l'Euphrate - sont l'objet d'une dispute entre Bagdad, la Syrie et la Turquie, d'autant que les pluies se font de plus en plus rares en Irak, selon un rapport de l'ONU d'octobre 2010 qui notait qu'en 2009, les précipitations avaient été inférieures de 50% à la moyenne.

Les barrages érigés par les voisins de l'Irak ont en outre considérablement réduit les quantités d'eau disponibles dans le pays, qui a été jusqu'à la fin des années 1950 un grenier à blé pour le monde arabe.

De nombreux agriculteurs d'origine arabe de la province multiethnique de Kirkouk, frontalière du Kurdistan, avaient par ailleurs accusé en janvier les Kurdes de les ruiner en fermant les vannes du barrage de Doukan, l'un des plus grands de la région autonome.

M. Souleimane a indiqué que les barrages en construction étaient érigés sur des cours d'eau de faible débit et qu'il ne s'agissait pas de gros barrages sur le Tigre ou ses principaux affluents, le Grand Zab et le Petit Zab.

« Pour ce qui est des grands barrages, nous devons trouver un accord avec le gouvernement de Bagdad car ils s'inscrivent dans le cadre d'un plan stratégique du gouvernement fédéral en Irak », a-t-il dit.

Islamic Clerics Call Kurdish Protestors to “Jihad” Against Their Leaders

By WLADIMIR VAN WILGENBURG

The city of Sulaimani is known for its secular image in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, but now young religious clerics are taking a central role in the ongoing anti-government demonstrations there by leading the protest's Friday prayer sessions and speaking out against governmental corruption.

“We are especially inspired by the events in the Middle East and Egypt,” said Mullah Mohammed Nasrullah, one of the first clerics to lead the public prayers that have become a focal point of the Sulaimani protests.

Inspired by the revolution in Egypt, protestors have, since February 17th, continuously demonstrated against the Kurdish Regional Government in Sulaimani's central Bar Darki Sara Square, which they have renamed Maidani Azadi (“Liberation Square”) in tribute to Cairo's Tahrir (“Liberation”) Square. In addition, as in the Egyptian protests, religious clerics are now playing a central role in the political debate.

Jihad against corruption

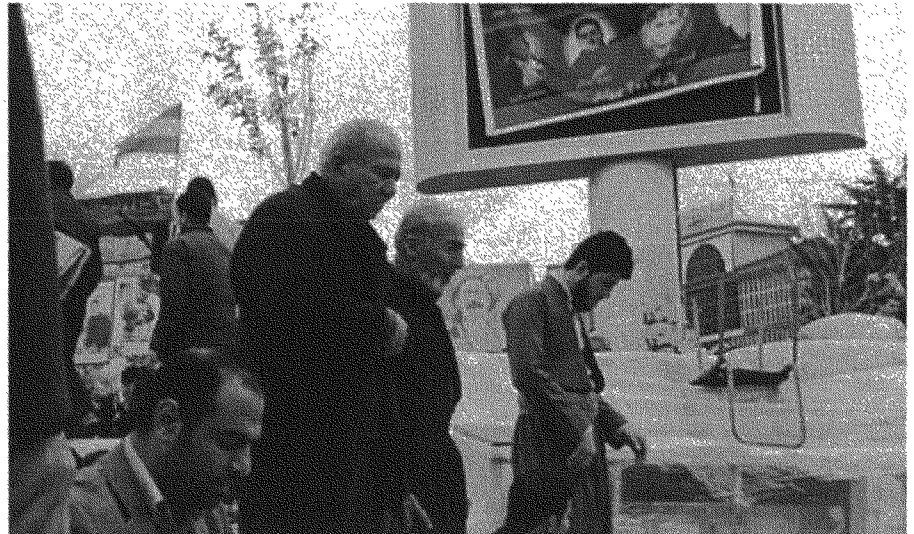
Nasrullah, an outspoken cleric, is playing an especially significant role in the anti-government demonstration by, for instance, calling it a “jihad” (“holy struggle”). Although protestors have generally been enthusiastic about this label, some fear this was a call for violence, which Nasrullah denies.

“I did not call for violence, but for demonstration and the solving of problems, for peace and tranquility,” the cleric said.

Nasrullah admits his actions have been inspired by theologian Sheikh Qaradawi, who led thousands of anti-government protestors in prayer in Egypt.

“In Egypt – a big Islamic country – we saw thousands of people come onto the streets to pray with imams,” said Nasrullah. “We want to support our people, who came out in support of the demonstrations. Our country needs us in these difficult times.”

Nasrullah, who studies religion in Baghdad, says the events in Maidani



Protesters pray in Sulaimani's Azadi Square on Friday, March 25th.----- Photo by Namu Abdulla.

Azadi are something new for the whole of Iraq.

“It never happened before that people prayed on the streets, but everything that's new also results in problems,” he said, referring to the threatening and temporary detention of some of the clerics who supported the protests.

Clerics are part of society

Demonstrators interviewed by Rudaw in the square welcomed the new role of religious clerics in the protests.

“We feel supported by them,” said Nian Farez Mohammed. “They have the right to express their opinions.”

Osman Ali Achmed, the uncle of 16-year-old Rezwan Ali, who was killed by security forces in the protests, agrees the clerics have a right to participate.

“They are a part of the society,” said Achmed. “If the people have problems, everybody participates, and so do the imams. Mullahs have the right to participate in protests.”

Faiyq Gulpi, one of the Kurdish intellectuals supporting the protest, emphasizes that the religious clerics want change.

“Mullahs who lead the prayers are calling on the government to listen to the rights of the people according to Islam,” said Gulpi. “They prohibited

[the government] from oppressing them and [encouraged it] to listen to them and solve their problems. This is a good and positive thing regarding the religious authorities.”

Bloodthirsty “khawarij” rebels

But, the protestors are not positive about all religious clerics, as some of them are not supporting the demonstrations and, through government-controlled media, have called for calm among the demonstrators.

“Mullah Bashaer is no Kurd,” screamed angry protestors in the square against Mullah Bashaer al-Haddad.

Al-Haddad, who is also a Kurdish lawmaker, allegedly compared the protestors to the “khawarij” (“seceders” or “rebels”), a designation for extremist Muslims who refuse to compromise. In Islamic history, the khawarij fought against the Islamic caliphs, because they considered them impious.

Protestor Barham Achmed Mahmud told Rudaw that he has “no words for him [al-Haddad].”

“He is a man who sells his words and he is no longer human,” said another protestor, Nian Farez Mohammed, who told Rudaw that al-Haddad was being bribed to make such statements. “We don't listen to him.”

But, al-Haddad denied comparing the protestors with khawarij and

condemned both the violence of the protestors and the government. He was also critical of the arrest of some pro-reform mullahs, and said he tried to warn people away from violence and to keep calm.

"Everyone knows that khawarij are...people who tried to impose their demands and caused bloodshed," said al-Haddad. "When I tried to use this example, my aim was not to say these people were khawarij."


Al-Haddad also said the events had been inspired by Egypt.

"Because of today's technology, anything that happens in the world will be copied in some way, and it has surely had an impact on Kurdistan as well," he said. "But our region has its own special character, and our demands are not the same as those of other countries."

Jotiar Mahmood, director of the Sareng Centre for Strategic Studies in Iraqi Kurdistan's capital, Erbil, says

the role of clerics in the protests is not something new to Kurdistan, although the demonstrations are clearly imitating Egypt's.

"When mullahs are talking about corruption or demonstration, it is normal," said Mahmood. "This is because Islam is a social phenomenon. In mosques [in Kurdistan] they always talk about these situations. They are a part of society."

 Rudaw.Net 26 March 2011

Public Investigation into Corruption to Begin in Kurdistan

By NAWZAD MAHMOUD

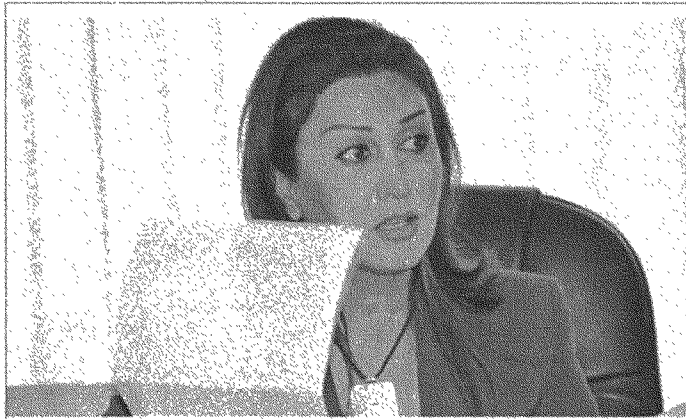
SULAIMANI, Iraqi Kurdistan: After complaints that official allegations of governmental corruption are not being taken seriously enough, Sulaimani province's public prosecutor has announced that the great number of reports involving corruption filed by the Financial Monitoring Office (FMO) would now be investigated after the Newroz vacation and that "all names mentioned would be submitted to the courts."

Just a few hours before Sulaimani's ongoing anti-government, anti-corruption demonstrations began on 17th February, Iraqi Kurdistan Prime Minister Barham Salih and a representative for Kurdistan's president held a meeting with the public prosecutors of Erbil, Sulaimani and Duhok provinces. At the meeting, Salih asked the public prosecutors to start an investigation into the reports from the FMO.

"I told the prime minister that these reports contained names of very high ranking officials and [so] you have to support us," Naz Noori Arif, public prosecutor for Sulaimani, told Rudaw. "Dr Salih said we were authorized to do whatever was necessary."

According to some sources, about 1200 of these FMO reports have been presented to Sulaimani's Public Prosecution Department. Ms Arif said the reports contained many names of high ranking governmental and party officials, including lawmakers, who had held office over the past 20 years.

"Some of them may have left their positions, and their sons or grandsons have taken over their posts," she said. "We are well authorized from the



Naz Noori Arif, public prosecutor for Sulaimani, says she has reports indicating the involvement of high ranking Iraqi Kurdish officials in corruption.-----
Photo by Rudaw.

government and will investigate all of them."

The announcement from the Sulaimani public prosecutor that the reports would be investigated came after many past complaints from Jalal Sam Agha, the previous head of the Sulaimani FMO, that the reports were being ignored.

"We told the prime minister that perhaps some of the high ranking officials would make trouble for us, because the reports were accusing them, but he said his door was always open to me if I had any trouble," she said. "The Kurdistan president's representative also told us that the president was very eager for us to start work on the FMO reports."

Ms Arif said that her department had asked that public prosecution be under the direct jurisdiction of the Kurdistan president's office, so that a higher authority would be supporting it and it could execute its duties with greater confidence, and that the prime minister had approved of the idea.

"The issue is about the whole of the Kurdistan region. The names mentioned

in the reports are not only governmental and party officials, but other individuals are involved as well. They should all be summoned before the court," she said, adding that her department also had further evidence from its own investigations and from the media that the prime minister had authorized to be used in the investigation, as the FMO reports were not sufficient on their own.

An anonymous FMO source said that, if the Public Prosecution Department investigated these reports, the source believed that "all those involved in corruption will be summoned before the court, and everything will be crystal clear."

Legal Experts say this will be an important step for public prosecution in Iraqi Kurdistan.

"When the public prosecution starts their investigation of these reports, we can say that the first step toward facing and fighting corruption has been made," said Rizgar Muhammed Amin, a leading Kurdish judge.



FEATURE - Protests revolutionise political culture of Iraq Kurds

March 25, 2011 - (Reuters) - By Namu Abdulla

SULAIMANIYA, Iraq - Protests sweeping North Africa and the Middle East have transformed Iraq's Kurdish region, where an angry public is awakening to political life beyond the authoritarian leaders once seen as heroic liberators.

In other parts of Iraq, protests inspired by the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia have tapered off over the past month.

In Kurdistan, where two political parties have jointly dominated public life for two decades, demonstrators have remained steadfast, camping out for more than a month in a square in the region's second-largest city, Sulaimaniya.

At least nine people have died, including two members of the "Peshmerga", the two ruling parties' former guerrilla armies which are now the region's official security forces.

Many Kurds say it is the first time they have been able to envisage a Kurdistan that does not revolve around the parties, whose epic struggle against dictator Saddam Hussein dominated Kurdish culture as much as their patronage dominated politics.

"What is happening now in Kurdistan is a radical change in the Kurdish political landscape," said Bachtyar Ali, whose 1992 poetry collection "Sin and the Carnival" and magical realist novels marked a Kurdish cultural renaissance that flourished after the region broke free of Saddam's grip in 1991.

"We are abandoning the classic form of 20th century governance which indoctrinated us with the notions that ideologies, parties and the president were all sacred," he told Reuters. "We will certainly never return to pre-February 17th Kurdistan," he added, referring to the first day of protests.

BOOM NOT SHARED

President Massoud Barzani's KDP party and its sometime rivals, the PUK of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, have been revered as founding national liberation movements since the U.S.-led Gulf War against Saddam in 1991, when their fighters secured de facto independence shielded by a Western no-fly zone.

It was the first time the Kurdish people -- who have also fought for autonomy in Turkey, Iran and Syria -- had ever secured control of the apparatus of a modern state.

The two parties' rival Peshmerga units fought each other in a civil war in the 1990s, but since Saddam was toppled in 2003 they have held to a deal dividing power between them.

The region has flourished as the only part of Iraq spared the ethnic and sectarian war of the last eight years. Sulaimaniya and regional capital Erbil have seen building booms.

Baghdad gives the Kurdish regional government near-total autonomy and 17 percent of Iraq's oil wealth, an annual budget of about \$11 billion for a region of some 4.5 million people.

Foreign investors have arrived en masse, including more than 40 oil companies negotiating deals with the Kurdish



authorities, even though rules have yet to be set for how to share export revenues from Kurdish oil with Baghdad.

But many Kurds complain that they have seen little of the new wealth. Far too much power has been concentrated in the hands of the parties, and their duopoly has allowed corruption to run rampant and dissent to be stifled, protesters say.

Sulaimaniya's protesters have been chanting "down, down, down with the authorities," echoing slogans heard across North Africa and the Middle East this year.

Protests have been more tense and bloodier in less-developed towns such as Chamchamal, Kalar and Halabja -- notorious site of a poison gas attack by Saddam's forces in 1988. At times they have taken on the character of a class struggle, with poor protesters demanding clean water, electricity and jobs.

Foreign investors complain too. Khalil Shocair, general manager of Green House, a Jordanian firm which has provided 70 percent of Sulaimaniya's greenhouses since 2003, said business deals require the blessing of one of the ruling parties.

"If you don't have the support of a political party here, you will never win," he said. "You will not get a work visa, for example."

Barzani has issued dire warnings to protesters about the perils of trying to overthrow the authorities from the streets, but, like other Middle East leaders caught in the tide of public anger, he has also acknowledged the validity of the discontent.

"Your demonstrations are a legitimate act... Meeting your demands is my obligation and the government's," he said in a speech this week promising "radical reforms" within four months.

Shukriya Mohammed Kareem, a 53-year-old housewife, said the government was not using its wealth to look after the poor.

"My husband is 31 years retired. But I only get 200,000 Iraqi dinars (\$170) a month. I have a son and six daughters. I have come here just to say I don't want this government," she said at protests this week in Sulaimaniya.

"What's the good of a government which does nothing for you and just fills its officials pockets up with money?"

Govt Says Iraqi Kurdistan Has 70 Years of Oil Reserves

By RUDAW

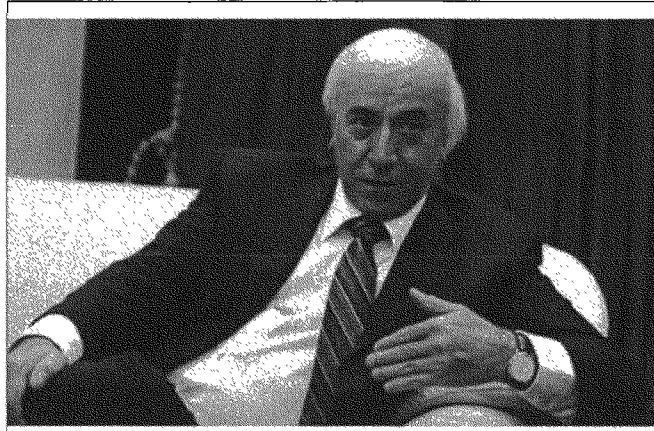
ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan: Iraqi Kurdistan's top natural resources official has affirmed that the semiautonomous region is "very wealthy," with present reserves of about 200 trillion cubic meters of natural gas and at least 70 years' worth of oil.

At a recent event to launch the ministry's annual publication, Oil and Gas Year, Natural Resources Minister Ashty Hawrami said he expected Iraqi Kurdistan to be producing 300,000 barrels of crude oil per day (bpd) by the year's end.

"We now have an agreement with the Baghdad government to export [at least] 100,000 bpd from Kurdistan, but this number could rise to 200,000 by the end of this year," said Hawrami, adding that Iraqi Kurdistan's total production by the year's end was planned to be at 300,000 bpd, a third of which would not be exported.

Hawrami did not seem concerned about ongoing disagreements over oil policies between the Kurdistan region and Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Husein Shahrستاني.

"The daily profit from the Kurdistan region's oil is now \$US10 million, and no one is going to refuse such money," said Hawrami. "We have an agreement with the Iraqi government and Prime Minister Nuri Maliki, so Shahrستاني is



Natural Resources Minister Ashty Hawrami says he expects Iraqi Kurdistan to be producing 300,000 barrels of crude oil per day (bpd) by the year's end.

free to say what he wishes. He cannot influence or cause any harm to the export of Kurdish oil."

The minister emphasized that Kurdistan was very wealthy in terms of oil and gas reserves.

"I can say that we now have around 70 billion barrels of oil reserves, which will be sufficient to cover the Kurdistan region's needs for the next 70 years," he said.

Furthermore, Hawrami said there were presently 200 trillion cubic meters of natural gas in the region, and this amount would easily supply the needs of all the factories and households in the region, including the cities bordering Iraqi Kurdistan.

He said the extra gas would be used

to produce a further 5000 megawatts of electricity within the next two years.

"The use of [natural gas] is an essential step towards eradicating the electricity problem in Kurdistan permanently," said Hawrami.

Every day, more foreign companies were arriving to exploit the oil and gas resources of the region, and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) had signed several agreements with such companies to assist in the development of this field, said Hawrami, adding that the problems between Baghdad and the KRG regarding foreign oil companies and their contracts and costs were on the way to being solved.

Second policeman killed in Halabja demonstrations

The Kurdish Globe

ONE POLICEMAN was killed and nearly 10 were injured in clashes with demonstrators in Halabja.

The local police are in the process of investigating the death. Local demonstrators took to the streets of the city on Tuesday afternoon, where they asked for the resignation of the mayor of Halabja alongside other requests.

For over a month now, continuous demonstrations have taken place in Suleimaniya province. Among the protestors' demands are increased

employment, an end to corruption and the monopoly of the two main political parties in the region, and a provision of basic services.

A day after the death of the policeman, Gorran members visited Halabja and renewed the demonstrations. This is the second death of a member of the police force in Halabja in recent demonstrations.

Under the rule and demand of the Hussein regime in Iraq, Halabja was sprayed with mustard gas and the nerve agents tabun, sarin and VX for five hours on March 16, 1988. It is estimated that 5,000 people died and more than 10,000



Halabja / File Photo

were injured. Locals complain that there is lack of attention and improvements in services in their city.

Addressing the nation in his Newroz speech, the region's

President, Massoud Barzani, elaborated on reforms, saying that the Regional Government will launch a comprehensive reform program that will fight corruption and improve the function of the government.

Turkey's Kurds Divided after Death Threats from Rogue Kurdish Group

By ROZH AHMAD

Kurdish support for the legendary rebel group, the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), has recently become more divided with the issuing of death threats against several of Turkey's leading Kurdish figures by the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK), considered by the Turkish government and many others to be a front for the PKK.

Although the PKK denies any connection to the militant TAK, the Kurds in Turkey now appear to be divided into pro-PKK and pro-government camps as a result of the threats, which have caused much outrage and disgust in the Kurdish community.

Those threatened by the TAK's recent controversial statement published on its website under the title "Treason and collaboration will not go unpunished," include renowned exiled Kurdish singer Shivan Perwer, and Kurdish writers Mehmet Metiner and Musin Kizilkaya, all of whose recent statements are believed by the TAK to betray the Kurdish cause.

"We see these threats as a major attack on freedom of thought [in Turkish Kurdistan] and strongly condemn them," said a recent joint statement against the TAK signed by 41 Kurdish intellectuals in Turkey.

Other prominent organizations and individuals are also voicing their support for those threatened, including the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), the Human Rights Association and Leyla Zana, who is a prominent Kurdish political activist in Turkey.

The Kurdish intellectuals' statement also claims the PKK has targeted Kemal Burkay, an exiled Kurdish politician who last week, in an interview with Turkish newspaper Vatan, compared PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan to beleaguered Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and the PKK to the genocidal Khmer Rouge communist rebels of Cambodia.

"We invite Ocalan, the PKK and the KCK [Kurdistan Communities Union] to modify their approach," read the joint statement.

"There is really no difference here. Gaddafi's regime is near dying, [former Egyptian leader Hosni] Mubarak has gone already. It is the same mentality: a one-man administration, a dictatorship," said Burkay, referring to Ocalan,



and adding that the PKK allowed no dissent from their own political agenda and that "these threats have always been the practice of the PKK."

Ocalan says he has "nothing to do with" the TAK's threats against Shivan Perwer and the others and blames the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government for instigating "physiological warfare" against the PKK and the Kurds.

"Turkey is turning Kurds against each other...similar to the physiological warfare against us in 1994," said the PKK's charismatic leader at his most recent meeting with his lawyer on March 11th at Imrali Prison in Turkey's Marmara Sea, where he is currently serving life imprisonment, after being arrested in Kenya in 1999 by the Turkish secret service.

Why blame the PKK?

The TAK's death threats are believed to have come minutes after a previous meeting between Ocalan and his lawyer on February 18th was made public. The minutes of the meeting disclose that Ocalan had said: "I don't want to utter their names. Somebody should tell them to shut their mouths."

The TAK is a banned Kurdish separatist organization, which claimed responsibility for the recent suicide bombings in Istanbul's Taksim Square, which, according to Turkish sources, killed 32 people and injured 15 police officers.

Although the PKK and its urban branch, the KCK, have strongly criticized the TAK for its terrorist activities within tourist areas in Turkey, and, early this year, called on the organization to "end its attacks," many in Turkey still view the TAK as a PKK-affiliated group.

The Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (KDSP), a PKK-affiliated organization in the semiautonomous Kurdistan region of Iraq, also denies that any connection exists between the

PKK and the TAK's threats to punish Kurdish public figures in Turkey.

Aram Karim, who is on the editorial board of the KDSP newspaper, Roje Welat, told Rudaw that the TAK is "an independent organization and there is no evidence to prove any links between the TAK and the PKK."

The Kurdish movement divided

These recent events are showing a division among Turkey's Kurds, who seem to now either support the PKK or the AKP government. The Turkish media has generally been providing widespread coverage of those supporting the AKP government over Kurdish issues, while blaming the PKK for the country's political discontent.

Burkay, who now resides in Sweden as a political refugee, was forced to leave Turkey just after the country's third military coup d'etat of the 1980s, because of his Kurdish nationalism. Recently, after reportedly being given the clear to return to the country by the Turkish government, he then announced he would return to Turkey in June this year, at the time of the 17th Turkish general elections.

Many PKK supporters and members of affiliated organizations consider Burkay's anti-Ocalan statements as "slandorous" and Perwer as an AKP supporter, since he appeared on TRT6 TV station, a government-sponsored Kurdish TV station in Turkey, which many Kurds believe is pro-AKP.

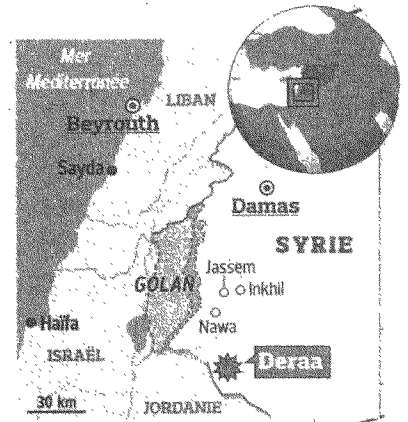
The KDSP's Karim told Rudaw that Burkay "has the right to criticize, but he has been dishing out insults, rather than criticism," adding that there was a hidden political agenda behind the Turkish government's close relations with Kurdish public figures.

"Turkey is a state of one nation and one language, and moreover, the Turkish constitution has made speaking Kurdish illegal. So, how would someone be able to legally speak about the Kurdish issue on a state TV station in the Kurdish language, if he is not clearly following the government line?" asked Karim.

The growing differences of opinion in the Kurdish movement in Turkey are expected to increase dramatically during the approach to the Turkish elections, scheduled for June 12th, highlighting the continued uncertainty of a political solution to the Kurdish question in Turkey.

Le « printemps syrien » fait vaciller Assad

Damas promet des réformes politiques tout en réprimant dans le sang la contestation à Deraa, faisant des dizaines de victimes.



SIBYLLE RIZK
BEYROUTH

SYRIE Sur Facebook, « The Syrian Revolution 2011 » appelle à des manifestations massives, ce vendredi, dans toutes les villes de Syrie contre le président Bachar al-Assad. Les mesures annoncées hier soir par le régime restent insuffisantes aux yeux de l'opposition. Dans la journée, des milliers de manifestants ont enterré les victimes de la répression à Deraa, une petite ville du sud, théâtre de violents affrontements depuis plusieurs jours.

Le rendez-vous d'aujourd'hui s'annonce comme un test pour le pouvoir, selon un observateur syrien qui, comme beaucoup de ses compatriotes, se demande si la vague des révolutions arabes emportera à son tour un régime en place depuis quarante ans. « Pour l'instant, aucune des grandes villes du pays n'est concernée et les manifestations sont très localisées », témoigne une habitante d'Alep. Alors que de petites manifestations rapidement dispersées se sont produites depuis le 15 mars dans plusieurs localités, dont la capitale Damas, le mouvement a subitement pris de l'ampleur à Deraa, 120 km au sud, où

tous les ingrédients du cocktail explosif des « printemps arabes » sont réunis : chômage, corruption, inflation, libéralisation économique incontrôlée, enrichissement éhonté des membres du « clan » au pouvoir, privation des libertés... C'est l'arrestation d'enfants, auteurs de graffitis antirégime, qui a mis le feu aux poudres. Le bilan de la répression se compte en dizaines de morts.

Confrontées à une contestation sans précédent depuis la sanglante répression de la révolte des Frères musulmans à Hama en 1982, les autorités syriennes

« La majorité des Syriens ne sait pas encore sur quel pied danser »

UN INTELLECTUEL DAMASCÈNE

cherchent à calmer le jeu. Leur stratégie énoncée hier par Bouthaina Chaaban, conseillère du président, se résume en trois points : les médias étrangers exagèrent ce qui se passe à Deraa ; des éléments « extérieurs » manipulent les manifestants - dont les demandes sont cepen-

dant qualifiées de « légitimes » - dans le but de « déstabiliser » la Syrie ; le président Assad va mettre en œuvre « immédiatement » une série de réformes. Après le limogeage du gouverneur de Deraa et la création d'une commission d'enquête pour sanctionner les responsables des tueries, Bouthaina Chaaban a annoncé un relèvement des salaires dans la fonction publique et des mécanismes « efficaces » de lutte contre la corruption. Elle a surtout indiqué que la levée de l'état d'urgence était « à l'étude ».

Par ces gestes, Bachar el-Assad se pose en président à l'écoute de son peuple. Car, contrairement à Moubarak, Ben Ali ou Kadhafi, le jeune dirigeant n'a pas entièrement épuisé son crédit auprès de la population. Une partie continue d'espérer qu'il peut être l'homme de la réforme, et dirige ses critiques vers des figures honnies comme son cousin Rami Makhlouf. Mais les morts de Deraa pourraient avoir entamé cette image. « La majorité des Syriens ne sait pas encore sur quel pied danser », témoigne un intellectuel damascène sous couvert d'anonymat. Rares sont les élites ouvertement en dissidence : les visages de l'opposition sont soit des anonymes - la jeunesse Twitter -, soit de vieilles figures militantes comme Riyad el-Turk, soit des exilés.

D'après un jeune Syrien dont le père a passé des années en prison, le régime est condamné à plus ou moins brève échéance : « C'est la fin de l'exception syrienne » théorisée par Assad, dit-il. Pour d'autres, le poids de la peur est plus complexe en Syrie qu'ailleurs : « Si la crainte de la répression s'est atténuée, les minorités communautaires (notamment les chrétiens), mais aussi la communauté des affaires, ont peur que le pays plonge dans le chaos et les violences confessionnelles à l'irakienne. Ce sentiment est savamment entretenu par le régime, qui est issu de la minorité alaouite dans un pays à majorité sunnite », note un analyste à Damas. ■



Des militants antigouvernementaux, mercredi, dans les rues de Deraa.

Les révoltes dans le monde arabe

En Syrie, la contestation gagne plusieurs villes en dépit de la répression

Les autorités, qui alternent promesses d'ouverture, mises en garde et arrestations, hésitent sur la conduite à tenir

Damas
Correspondance

A l'appel d'opposants syriens, vendredi 25 mars devait être une « journée de la colère » et de manifestations en solidarité avec la ville de Deraa, au sud du pays, cible d'une répression sanglante depuis plus d'une semaine.

Le vent de la révolte a soufflé sur l'ensemble du territoire syrien au cri de : « *Il n'y a que Dieu, la Syrie et la liberté!* » A Deraa, forces armées du régime et contestataires se sont de nouveau affrontés, faisant 20 morts, a affirmé au *Monde* Ammar Qurabi, président de l'Organisation nationale des droits de l'homme en Syrie (ONDHS).

Selon des témoins, la statue de Hafez Al-Assad, père de l'actuel président, mort en 2000, a été déboulonnée puis incendiée par la foule. L'agitation a gagné les villes côtières de Lattaquié et de Banhias, mais aussi Homs, As Sanameïn où il y aurait eu des morts (information non vérifiée) et, pour la première fois, Hama, théâtre d'une révolte écrasée dans le sang en 1982.

Damas, elle, continue de vivre au rythme de rumeurs et d'annonces contradictoires. Des heurts ont éclaté dans le faubourg de Mouadameh entre contestataires et un convoi de partisans de Bachar Al-Assad, mais le centre-ville est resté quasi désert. Seule présence visible, un cortège de plusieurs dizaines de véhicules, arborant drapeaux syriens et portraits du rais, a klaxonné aux abords de la banque centrale et du Parlement.

La capitale n'a pas été gagnée par la révolte, notamment en rai-

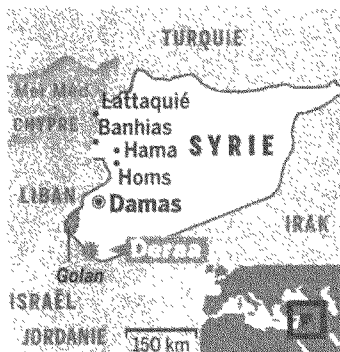
son d'un maillage de ses principaux points névralgiques par les forces de sécurité. Des incidents ont cependant troublé la prière hebdomadaire dans l'enceinte de la mosquée des Omeyyades. Pendant le prêche mettant en garde les fidèles contre les appels à manifester lancés sur Facebook, un mouvement de panique a provoqué une grande bousculade. L'imam, cheïkh Ramdan Al-Bouti, a interrompu son prêche et demandé aux fidèles de regagner leur place, tandis que des slogans à la gloire du régime étaient scandés par une cinquantaine d'hommes près du *minbar* (chaire).

A la fin de la prière, une foule inhabituelle mêlant badauds et manifestants s'est massée devant l'entrée centrale de la mosquée, mais l'imposant dispositif policier

Beaucoup estiment que le fort capital de sympathie dont jouit le président pourrait vite s'éroder si le sang continuait de couler

et le nombre de partisans du régime criant « *il n'y a que Dieu, la Syrie et Bachar!* » a dissuadé les plus téméraires d'exprimer leur colère.

Hassan, 24 ans, explique que son frère a été relâché la veille, après dix jours de détention au cours desquels il a été sévèrement battu pour avoir manifesté le 15 mars dans le souk Hamidieh de Damas. Vendredi, il est venu prier avec les fidèles sunnites, bien



qu'athée et de confession druze, espérant ainsi participer à la manifestation prévue à l'issue du prêche. Mais il s'est ravisé. « *J'étais tétanisé par la peur, dit-il, je n'avais jamais vu autant de policiers en civil.* » La veille, Hassan avait invité des amis pour fêter la libération de son frère. Tous s'étaient promis d'assister à la prière du vendredi en prévision des manifestations.

Mouna, chrétienne, était de la partie. Sensible à la question des droits de l'homme, elle a vécu les soulèvements du monde arabe avec jubilation et tristesse. Jubilation devant le spectacle de peuples en révolte contre leur régime et tristesse devant l'apathie de la jeunesse syrienne. Son frère et son père, fidèles partisans de Bachar Al-Assad, s'étaient montrés hostiles aux tentatives de mobilisation organisées début février, via Facebook. Mais aujourd'hui, dit-elle, « *ils n'hésitent plus à clamer leur solidarité et leur admiration pour les insurgés de Deraa.* »

Ailleurs à Damas, d'autres professent la prudence, comme Rasmoul, un ouvrier inquiet : « *Oui pour plus de liberté, mais dans le calme.* »

La voie empruntée par ces manifestants est pavée de sang et de morts. Pauvre peuple syrien! »

Devant cette vague de contestation sans précédent, les autorités semblent hésiter quant à la marche à suivre. En témoigne l'alternance de mesures d'apaisement et de libérations, aussitôt suivies d'arrestations. Signaux contradictoires qui sont peut-être l'expression de tensions et de désaccords au sein de la hiérarchie au pouvoir.

L'annonce de réformes (étude de l'abrogation de l'état d'urgence, pluralisme politique, ouverture médiatique), jeudi, par la conseillère du président, Boussaina Chaabane, n'a pas eu l'effet escompté. « *Quelques jours plus tôt, les autorités accusaient les manifestants d'être des agents de l'étranger et d'avoir reçu de l'argent... Nous ne pouvons plus faire confiance aux promesses du pouvoir, explique Amar Qurabi, président de l'ONDHS. Nous voulons une nouvelle Constitution, un gouvernement d'unité nationale, un Parlement élu par le peuple, une nouvelle loi électorale et une Syrie débarrassée de la torture et de la tyrannie.* »

La colère reste surtout dirigée contre le puissant appareil de sécurité et la corruption, incarnée par quelques affairistes proches du

palais. Les manifestants ne réclament pas encore le départ de Bachar Al-Assad. Hassan, par exemple, s'emporte à l'évocation de tous ceux qui arborent des portraits du président : « *S'ils veulent le soutenir, qu'ils sortent dans les rues pour revendiquer leurs droits. C'est le meilleur moyen de l'aider à mettre en place les réformes qu'il a promises!* » Hassan, comme beaucoup de Syriens, estime que le président n'a pas les coudées franches pour réformer le système. Il pense aussi que le fort capital de sympathie, dont il jouit encore, pourrait vite s'éroder si le sang continuait de couler. ■

Dominique Lucas

Clashes Fuel Debate Over U.S. Plan to Leave Iraq

By TIM ARANGO

KIRKUK, Iraq — Many in this divided city want American troops to stay longer than the Obama administration has said they will, and a tense standoff on the southern and western edges of town last week showed why. Here, on a bridge, behind the mud brick walls of an abandoned mill and inside a hospice, Kurdish troops from the north were in positions on the outskirts of Arab neighborhoods.

To calm the latest flare-up of the longstanding ethnic rivalries here has required a rush of high-level diplomacy, including phone calls from Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. to Kurdish leaders and, a rarity in Iraq today, the deployment of American troops.

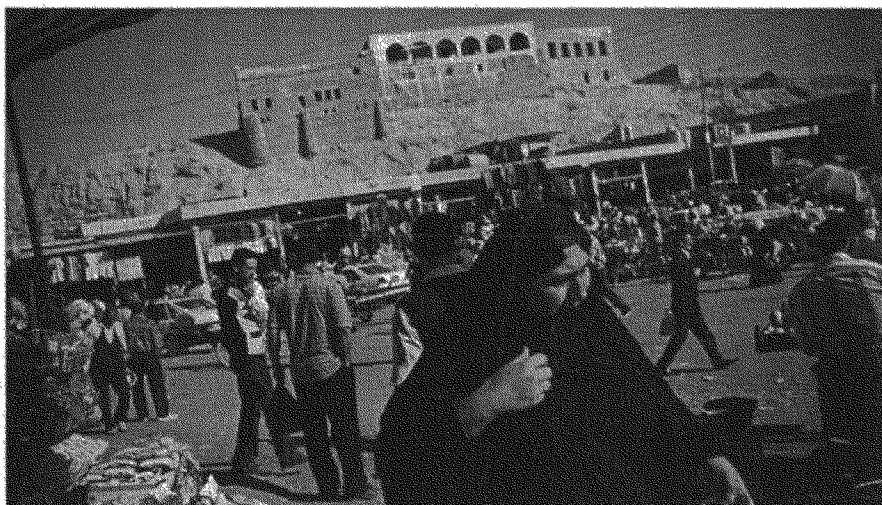
The confrontation did not turn violent — precisely, many believe, because of the presence of American troops. But they will leave by the end of the year, if the current schedule stands, and many here fear that could lead to ethnic strife, even civil war.

The Kurdish soldiers, known as the pesh merga, were deployed last month by leaders in the semiautonomous northern region worried about Sunni Arab insurgents attacking peaceful demonstrators in the streets. But the action was viewed by local Arabs, American diplomats and military officials and the Iraqi government as provocative and illegal.

Kurdish officials said Monday that the troops had withdrawn as part of a deal with the Americans and the central government, although a witness in Kirkuk reported seeing the troops in their same positions, and an Arab lawmaker in the local council said that only some soldiers had left.

Sheik Burhan Mizher, an Arab member of the provincial government who like many interviewed here worries about the prospect of civil war after the Americans leave, said some pesh merga forces were still positioned around Kirkuk on Monday. He said of the American troops, “Of course, we want them to stay.”

In the debates under way in Washington and Baghdad about where the American and Iraqi relationship heads after eight years of war, those who argue for a continued American



In Kirkuk, shown in December, fighting among Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens is under way. A recent flare-up led to the deployment of American troops there.

military presence beyond this year — and there are many among the diplomatic and military ranks of both countries — cite Kirkuk as the centerpiece of their case.

Perhaps the greatest unfinished chapter of America’s war in Iraq will be the status of Kirkuk, an ancient city that today is fought over by its three main ethnic groups, Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens, each making historical claims to the land and the oil that flows beneath.

“From my point of view, President Obama wants to win a second term and show that he keeps his promises to the American people,” said Hassan Toran, a Turkmen member of the council. “This will affect Kirkuk.”

If the Americans leave, Mr. Toran said, “Anything can happen.” In Iraq, Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki is hemmed in by a bloc of politicians loyal to the anti-American cleric Moktada al-Sadr, who is opposed to any delay in the American withdrawal and whose support Mr. Maliki relied on to secure a second term as premier. Any extension of the American troop presence would require the politically risky decision by Mr. Maliki to ask for it.

Not only do American diplomats and military leaders argue for troops to stay, but outside experts do as well. A recent book written by six Iraq experts, led by Kenneth M. Pollack of the Brookings Institution, called peacekeeping in Kirkuk “by far the most important U.S. military mission now” and

suggested that troops stay to “be a crucial substitute for the trust that undergirds stable societies.” A report published Monday by the International Crisis Group called the pesh merga deployment a “deeply troubling development.”

At their most pessimistic, those involved in trying to solve the Kirkuk problem compare it to Bosnia or Rwanda — two socially mixed but politically divided lands that erupted in tragic and historic violence. When more optimistic, they cite the difficult but peaceful coexistence today of the French and Flemish in Brussels.

At the Kirkuk Provincial Council building, where recently a column of American armored vehicles were parked outside, the ethnic groups try to settle their differences through politics. But if democracy has emerged slowly in Iraq, it has come even more slowly here. When the rest of the country held provincial elections in 2009, Kirkuk did not. A constitutional provision that mandated a referendum on Kirkuk’s status in 2007 has not been held.

“There is no dialogue at all,” Mr. Toran said. “We all just give speeches through the media and accuse each other.” On Monday, a rock-throwing brawl broke out between Kurds and Turkmens at a technical university in Kirkuk.

Recently, the provincial governor, a Kurd, resigned. He is to be replaced by another Kurd, an American-Iraqi who once lived in Silver Spring, Md. The provincial council head, a Kurd, also

recently resigned, and is expected to be replaced by Mr. Toran.

But a council session last week illustrated the layers of ethnic and religious divide here in Kirkuk. As the council considered Mr. Toran's appointment, a Shiite Turkmen rival to Mr. Toran, who is Sunni, spoke against it, and the Kurds walked out to protest the theatrical display of identity politics. From a back row of the gallery, an American diplomat and two soldiers watched the proceedings.

On Kirkuk's streets, insurgent attacks are still frequent. Recently, an Opel packed with explosives detonated outside a hospital, leaving two dead: a young mother and a baby girl, just 5 hours old. The father lost his right arm.

"Here I am without a wife and daughter and arm," Samir Mahmoud, 27, said in an interview. "What can I do and where can I go? It's our cala-

imity."

Across Iraq, the American invasion upended traditional notions of victimhood — the long oppressed Shiites became ascendant, while the Sunni ruling elite under Saddam Hussein's Baath Party found itself on the margins of power. In Kirkuk, the Kurds, who had been brutalized by the former government's policies and weapons, have the strongest grip on power. The Arabs, many of whom were moved to the area by Mr. Hussein in his campaign to alter the demographics of the area and dilute Kurdish influence, are fighting for their own stake in the new Iraq.

"Shame on the other side," said Mr. Mizher, the Arab lawmaker. "They say we are Saddam. We are not slaves for anyone, for Saddam or for Baathists. We are Iraqis."

Ahmed al-Askari, a Kurd and head

of the provincial council's security committee, speaks of reconciliation, but his choice of words betrays another agenda, as does a map on his wall that traces the Kurds' broader land claims, a line stretching in to Turkey, Syria and Iran. "Leave it to the original Kirkuki people and we will reach an agreement," he said.

Many in Iraq make a point of comparing America's historical shortcomings in race relations to their tortured present of ethnic and sectarian divide.

"Now, the president of America is black," Mr. Askari said. "We are working to learn democracy. Step by step, we will understand."

Duraid Adnan and an employee of The New York Times contributed reporting from Kirkuk.

Hurriyet
DailyNews.com

MARCH 27, 2011

Former agent who confessed to state murders released by court

ISTANBUL *Hürriyet Daily News*

Ayhan Carkin, a state agent who was detained after confessing to the alleged work of Turkey's deep state including a series of summary executions, was released by the court on Saturday.

A former special operative, Carkin was detained after he made a series of confessions to daily *Radikal* regarding his involvement in a number of unsolved political and mass murders from previous decades.

Carkin was questioned by the public prosecutor at the Besiktas courthouse for 10 hours on Friday. After the questioning, Carkin was referred to court with a request for his arrest by the public prosecutor on Saturday on charges of murder. After further questioning at the court, the court decided to release Carkin late Saturday.

The European Court of Human Rights has found Turkey at fault five times in the past for summary executions that took



place in the mid- 90s. Speaking of the incidents, Carkin said during his confessions, We committed a lot of murders.

Carkin's admissions referred to a number of unsolved political and mass murders.

We were all covered in blood. Such horrible things were done to people [in the Southeast], Carkin told *Radikal*, confessing to being part of state groups that committed criminal acts in the fight against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK.

Carkin spoke about a series of deep

state operations that included hundreds of deaths and said he would have revealed more to prosecutors if a formal case were opened.

During an interview on CNN Türk, Carkin was asked whether the people in the operations in which he participated had committed any summary executions. Carkin had replied, There were. If this blood was spilled, it was spilled by the hand of the state, he said.

Carkin, who was accused of killing 91 people, had said he was now listening to the voice of his conscience.

Carkin served as a special operative for 19 years. He first became known to the public with the Susurluk scandal, which exposed the links between the police, mafia and politicians and emerged after a car accident in the town of Susurluk, in the northwestern province of Balikesir, on Oct. 3, 1996. A former police chief, high-profile criminal Abdullah Catli and Sedat Bucak, a Kurdish landlord and deputy from the True Path Party, or DYP, were all found in the crashed car, along with several weapons and identity cards.

Buoyed by oil, a semblance of stability in Iraq

Thomas Donovan

As upheaval and political instability sweep across the Middle East, Iraq has quietly consolidated recent security gains against a backdrop of economic progress. As the recent rise of oil prices worldwide coincided with a petroleum industry that has reached its production targets, Iraq is now emerging from its civil wars and sectarian uncertainty with a new outlook and better prospects for lasting prosperity.

Although several demonstrations in the Kurdish north have recently occurred, demanding systemic political change, the early gains in 2011 cannot be ignored.

The ruling coalition, led by the prime minister Nouri al Maliki, has forged a transparent - albeit tenuous - unity government from two duelling political parties, curtailed nation-wide violence and helped to reduce long-simmering tensions.

More importantly, increased revenue from the petroleum sector has enabled the Iraqi government to revise its budget forecast and pay for many infrastructure-related investments. These developments are welcome and long overdue.

The crucial aspect in this development strategy is, of course, the stability of the petroleum and natural gas industry, and whether the electricity delivery system will function during the summer months.

Since June 2009, the Maliki government has secured over a dozen major oil field contracts with international oil companies, and has made these deals the cornerstone of Iraq's future economic development. The challenge now will be sustaining these impressive gains.

While the country's future oil production has been optimistically projected as high as 12 million barrels per day (bpd) by 2020, significant obstacles remain to increased output.

For one, the country's infrastructure and skilled labour supply are insufficient for the country's ambitious plans, and billions of dollars must be invested to facilitate a supporting infrastructure for oil field development and exports. Although Iraq has the second largest amount of reserves in the world, current output is similar to the level of Algeria, whose proven reserves are a fraction of those of Iraq.

Beyond capacity are more bureaucratic hurdles. For instance, much has also been discussed about the legality and constitutionality of the agreements awarded through the bid round processes. At the centre of the debate is the ambiguous legal framework that underlies Iraq's oil industry. The absence of any national hydrocarbon law leaves lawmakers and regional governments at odds and uncertain over the application of laws already in place.

The 2005 Iraqi National Constitution arguably

grants significant power to the regional semi-autonomous governments, such as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), when it comes to managing hydrocarbon resources, as well as negotiating their extraction. However, previous governments chose to negotiate these bid rounds in a centralised fashion, despite the lack of a comprehensive petroleum law.

One of the main challenges facing Iraq is the lingering dispute between Baghdad and the KRG over oil production and exports in Iraq's Kurdish region. Frustrated by stalled negotiations over a national oil law, the KRG passed its own hydrocarbon investment law in 2007, based on a contentious interpretation of the Iraqi constitution, and began independently entering into their own production sharing contracts (PSCs) with over three dozen independent oil companies.

At first, Baghdad condemned the PSCs, which have drawn international scrutiny over allegations of impropriety, and the central government blacklisted any oil company operating under agreement with the KRG. This early resistance, however, appears to be changing.

One of the first acts of the new federal Iraqi Minister of Oil, Abdul Karim al Luaibi, was to resume permission allowing the export of petroleum from the Kurdistan Region. This breakthrough was further supported by Mr al Maliki's assertion last month that federal Iraq will abide by the terms of the PSCs

signed by the KRG.

At the nexus of enacting a federal oil law and the dispute with the KRG rests the central legal and political issue of Iraq's political future: the long-running dispute over the ethnically-mixed and oil-rich area around Kirkuk against a backdrop of Kurdish demands for greater autonomy. Iraq's Kurds have repeatedly called for the area's energy resources to be placed under KRG administration.

The local Arab population is equally insistent that Kirkuk and its oil remain under the authority of Baghdad. This dispute will undoubtedly last well past the tenure of Mr al Maliki as prime minister, who has also stated publicly that he will not seek a third term in office past 2014.

Although the need to develop the electricity production and delivery system, increase petroleum production to required levels, political cleavages, and sectarian differences may seem daunting and insurmountable, the challenges which Iraq continues to face are relatively manageable compared to the progress it has already made.

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Thomas W Donovan is an attorney with the Iraq Law Alliance, PLLC

45 are killed in siege in Hussein's hometown

BAGHDAD

Gunmen wearing uniforms over explosives targeted Iraqi officials

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Gunmen wearing explosives belts under military uniforms took hostages at a local government headquarters in Saddam Hussein's hometown, killing 15 of them before blowing themselves up in a fiery end to a five-hour siege, Iraqi officials said. In all, 45 people were killed.

The attackers set fire to the bodies of three members of the Salahuddin Provincial Council at its headquarters in Tikrit, said the province's media adviser, Mohammed al-Asi. Among the lawmakers was an official who was known for his tough stance against Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, which some officials blamed for the attack. Another was an elderly politician who headed the council's committee on religion.

"He was just an old man — he did nothing," Mr. Asi said in an interview. "Why did they shoot him and set fire to his poor body?"

Gov. Ahmed Abdullah of Salahuddin Province called the attack "a tragic incident carried out by ruthless terrorists."

Also among the dead was Sabah al-Bazi, an Iraqi correspondent for the

satellite TV channel Al Arabiya who also worked for CNN and Reuters, according to the three news outlets.

Officials said the standoff in Tikrit, 130 kilometers, or 80 miles, north of Baghdad, began when the attackers blew up a car outside the council headquarters to create a diversion.

Wearing military uniforms — including one with a high rank — the gunmen identified themselves as Iraqi soldiers at a security checkpoint outside the government compound but opened fire on guards when they were told they had to be searched.

"The goal of the attackers was apparently to take hostages," said Ali al-Saleh, a spokesman for the provincial government. A number of officials and other government employees escaped before the gunmen could capture them, he said.

The provincial council meets at the headquarters every Tuesday, but a spokesman for the governor, Ali Abdul Rihman, said local lawmakers had ended their discussions early because there was little on their agenda. As a result, he said, most of the lawmakers had already left the headquarters when the assault began.

"The gunmen were armed with grenades and began their raid by firing at random at a reception room," Mr. Rihman said. "Then they opened fire inside."

The governor described a fierce shootout between at least eight gunmen, who took over the council headquarters' second floor, and Iraqi security forces who surrounded the building. He said the attackers hurled grenades at the Iraqi forces.

The health director of Salahuddin Province, Dr. Raied Ibrahim, said the attackers had killed 45 people and wounded 98 in an attack that lasted more than five hours.

Officials were quick to blame Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia for the siege,

saying that executions and suicide bombers are hallmarks of the terrorist group.

A senior intelligence official in Baghdad likened the attack to a raid Oct. 31 on a Catholic church in Baghdad that left 68 dead and stunned the nation.

A group linked to Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia claimed responsibility for that massacre, which drove thousands of Iraq's already dwindling Christian population from their homeland.

Tikrit, the burial place of Saddam Hussein, the executed former president, is mostly populated by Sunni Muslims. It was a hotbed of anti-American insurgents at the height of the Iraq war.

Police officers in Tikrit said U.S. troops were at the scene to assist Iraqi forces, but a spokesman for the U.S. military in Baghdad said he could not confirm this information.



AKO RASHREED/REUTERS

ONLINE: A CALMING PRESENCE IN KIRKUK

Many in the divided Iraqi city want U.S. troops to stay longer than the Obama administration has said they will, and a tense standoff on the edge of town last week showed why. To calm the latest flare-up of the longstanding rivalry between Kurds and Arabs has required a rush of diplomacy. global.nytimes.com/middleeast



Syrie: les autorités se penchent sur la question kurde vieille d'un demi-siècle

DAMAS, 31 mars 2011- RIA Novosti

LE PRÉSIDENT syrien Bachar el-Assad a signé jeudi un décret instituant une commission chargée d'organiser le recensement des Kurdes dans la province d'Al-Hasaka (nord-est du pays) où les membres de cette ethnie bénéficient du statut de réfugiés turcs depuis 1962, a annoncé l'agence SANA.

La province d'Al-Hasaka est peuplée principalement de Kurdes. Le problème que la nouvelle commission est appelée à résoudre

date de 1962. Les agents qui procédaient alors au recensement de la population ont jugé que les quelques milliers de Kurdes qui vivaient dans la province n'étaient pas des habitants autochtones, mais des réfugiés turcs et qu'ils n'avaient donc pas droit à la nationalité syrienne.

Depuis, le nombre d'apatrides Kurdes résidant à Al-Hasaka a atteint près de 300.000 personnes. Les représentants de ce peuple constituent environ 10% de la population de Syrie qui compte 23 millions d'habitants.

La commission doit achever son activité avant le 15 avril 2011, indique le communiqué de SANA, précisant qu'il s'agit d'aider les Kurdes à se faire naturaliser.

Selon l'agence, le décret présidentiel vise à "renforcer l'unité nationale de la Syrie". Ce document s'inscrit dans la logique des décisions adoptées jeudi par les dirigeants du pays en réaction aux troubles qui ont secoué le pays au cours des deux dernières semaines et fait des dizaines de victimes.

AFP

Irak: Erdogan à Erbil pour la première visite d'un Premier ministre turc

ERBIL (Irak), 29 mars 2011 (AFP)

LE PREMIER MINISTRE turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a eu mardi des entretiens avec des dirigeants kurdes irakiens lors d'une visite à Erbil, la première d'un chef de gouvernement d'Ankara dans la capitale de la région autonome du Kurdistan d'Irak.

M. Erdogan est arrivé en soirée à Erbil et s'est aussitôt entretenu avec le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan (nord d'Irak), Massoud Barzani, au terme d'une visite de deux jours en Irak.

Il devait évoquer l'épineuse question de la présence au Kurdistan de bases arrière des rebelles kurdes de Turquie du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Les relations du gouvernement turc avec la région du Kurdistan irakien d'Ankara étaient autrefois tumultueuses en raison du soutien, selon les Turcs, des Kurdes d'Irak au PKK.

Juste après son arrivée, M. Erdogan a inauguré le nouvel aéroport d'Erbil et annoncé que la compagnie aérienne turque Turkish Airlines commencerait le mois prochain à assurer des liaisons régulières avec cette ville à 320 km au nord de Bagdad.

Dans un discours au Parlement à Bagdad lundi soir, il avait exhorté les autorités irakiennes à coopérer avec son pays dans la lutte contre les rebelles kurdes.

"L'obstacle important qui empêche de renforcer la relation est l'organisation terroriste qui a une base dans le Nord (d'Irak). Je souhaite que nous combattions ensemble cette organisation terroriste", a déclaré M. Erdogan.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie et de nombreux pays, mène depuis 1984 une lutte armée pour la défense des droits des Kurdes. Le conflit a fait 45.000 morts, selon l'armée turque. Ankara évalue à environ 2.000 le nombre des rebelles retranchés en Irak.



L'aviation turque bombarde régulièrement les positions présumées des rebelles et l'armée turque a mené une série d'incursions terrestres dans le nord de l'Irak.

Mardi matin, M. Erdogan a rencontré à Najaf, au sud de Bagdad, le chef spirituel de la communauté chiite, le Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, avec lequel il devait évoquer la crise à Bahreïn. Rien n'a cependant filtré de cet entretien.

Les autorités sunnites de Bahreïn, un archipel à majorité chiite, ont violemment réprimé le 16 mars un mouvement de contestation dominé par des chiïtes qui exigeaient des réformes politiques. L'ayatollah Sistani avait alors appelé Bahreïn à cesser les violences en se disant "très préoccupé".

Le ministre turc des Affaires étrangères, Ahmet Davutoglu, qui accompagne M. Erdogan, avait appelé la semaine dernière les dirigeants du Bahreïn à empêcher que ces troubles ne se transforment en un "affrontement interconfessionnel".

AFP

Irak: Face à la contestation, le président kurde appelle à des réformes

ERBIL (Irak), 21 mars 2011 (AFP)

FACE À un mouvement de contestation, le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien Massoud Barzani s'est prononcé lundi pour une série de mesures contre le népotisme et la corruption.

Dans un communiqué, il a appelé à la tenue d'élections provinciales et la mise en place d'une commission pour l'intégrité pour s'attaquer à la corruption et au népotisme dans différents secteurs, notamment les contrats pétroliers.

"J'appelle le Parlement à fixer une date pour la tenue des élections provinciales au Kurdistan", a-t-il dit.

Il faisait allusion aux scrutins provinciaux qui se sont tenus en janvier 2009 en Irak, à l'exception des trois gouvernorats du Kurdistan et celui de Kirkouk. Dans la région autonome, les dernières élections provinciales ont eu lieu en 2005.

Le dirigeant kurde a également souhaité que les partis politiques et les médias déclarent leurs sources de financement, en insistant sur le fait

que seul le gouvernement du Kurdistan avait le droit d'entretenir des relations avec d'autres pays.

Massoud Barzani a également appelé les grandes compagnies privées à vendre au public une partie de leur capital, laissant entendre qu'actuellement celui-ci était aux mains d'un groupe restreint d'actionnaires bien en cour auprès des autorités kurdes.

Il a ajouté que les "contrats de pétrole et de gaz" au Kurdistan devraient être signés dans une plus grande transparence.

Dans le sillage de la Tunisie et de l'Egypte, des manifestations ont lieu depuis février pour protester contre l'omniprésence des deux formations traditionnelles, le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) de M. Barzani, et l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) du chef de l'Etat irakien Jalal Talabani.

Trois manifestants ont été tués et une centaine d'autres ont été blessés à Souleimaniyeh, la deuxième ville de la région.

En outre, l'opposition a affirmé avoir collecté 50.000 signatures appelant au départ de Massoud Barzani.



President Barzani and Prime Minister Erdogan open Erbil International Airport and Turkish Consulate

Erbil, Kurdistan - Iraq (KRG.org) - Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoan in a historic visit today became the first Turkish premier to visit the Kurdistan Region. Together with President Masoud Barzani, they officially opened Erbil International Airport (ELA) and Turkey's Consulate in Erbil.

After welcoming Prime Minister Erdoan and the rest of the distinguished guests, President Barzani said that he was very pleased that the Prime Minister joined him in launching the Erbil International Airport on this historic day. He said, This [airport] is the first step to building a strong infrastructure in all of Iraq, and especially in the Kurdistan Region, and it is a key to many large scale projects to develop the Kurdistan Region and Iraq as a whole.

Regarding Prime Minister Erdoan's visit, the President said, We consider this to be a very historic moment. We believe that this visit will build a very solid bridge in bilateral relations between Iraq and Turkey and between the Kurdistan Region and Turkey especially. The President commended Prime Minister Erdoan for his courageous policies in Turkey and the wider region. Due to the Prime Minister's wise decisions Turkey is playing a strategic role in the region, and the region wishes him success in the upcoming elections, he said.

Prime Minister Erdoan said We have historical and cultural bonds with Iraq, and with this beautiful region, now we'll be connected by airways. But, I don't want to call it airways, rather I want to call it the way of the citizens, and through this way of the citizens we will be connected to each other and connected to the rest of the world. He went on to say that Turkish Airlines would begin flights to the new airport on April 14th this year.

After the inauguration of the new airport, President Barzani joined the Turkish Prime Minister and his delegation at the opening ceremony for Turkey's new Consulate General in Erbil. The leaders marked the event as another significant step in the mutually beneficial commercial and political relationship between the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the Republic of Turkey

In his speech at the opening of the new consulate, Prime Minister Erdoan said, Last year Turkey did more than \$7 billion worth of business in Iraq, and more than half of that with the northern provinces. There are more than 20,000 Turkish workers currently holding permits to work in Erbil governorate, and more than 35,000 if Dohuk and Suleimaniah are included. As this demonstrates, there is a strong economic relationship between Turkey and this region, he said. The consulate already issues visas to Iraqi citizens, which has helped to strengthen ties.

Following the public events, President Barzani and Prime Minister Erdoan held a private meeting to discuss bilateral relations, economic ties and cooperation on energy. Prime Minister Erdoan's visit to the Kurdistan Region was part of a two-day trip to Iraq. His delegation included the Minister of State for Foreign Trade Zafer Caglayan, the Minister for Energy and Natural Resources Taner Yildiz, as well as Members of Parliament, advisers, and business leaders. He was also accompanied by the Ambassador to Iraq Murat Ozcelik, Consul General to Erbil Aydin Selcen, and Several MPs.

Turkey's Minister of State for Foreign Trade Zafer Caglayan also attended the opening ceremonies of a Turkish school and two Turkish banks. Turkey's Minister for Energy and Natural Resources Taner Yildiz met the Kurdistan Regional Government's Minister for Natural Resources Dr Ashti Hawrami to discuss



energy cooperation.

While the new Erbil International Airport has been operational for several months already, it was officially inaugurated today. It was built to serve as a gateway for Iraq to the world, and it currently supports almost fifty weekly flights to and from more than twenty international destinations, eight of these being major international hubs in Europe. The airport boasts the world's fifth longest civilian runway and the facilities are capable of serving up to three million passengers a year. It was designed by the British Scott Wilson Group, and was built by Turkey's Makyol Cengiz. Erbil International Airport has a contract with Seoul's Incheon International Airport Corporation for its management and operations.

The Turkish Prime Minister and his delegation were greeted at the airport by President Barzani, Speaker of the Kurdistan Parliament Kamal Kirkuki, Prime Minister Barham Salih, and many other KRG officials.

Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir, the KRG's Head of Foreign Relations, said, With this historic visit, we are entering a new phase in our relations with Turkey. We are optimistic because it paves the way for greater cooperation between Turkey and the Kurdistan Region as well as all of Iraq.

The ministers and officials who joined President Barzani and Prime Minister Erdoan at the airport ceremony included:

Speaker of the Kurdistan Parliament Dr Kamal Kirkuki
Prime Minister Barham Salih
Mr Kosrat Rasul Ali, Deputy Secretary General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
Former Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani
Minister of Peshmerga Affairs Jafar Mustafa Ali
Minister for the Interior Karim Sinjari
Head of the Security Protection Agency Masrour Barzani
The President's Chief of Staff Dr Fuad Hussein
Minister of Natural Resources Ashti Hawrami
Minister of Trade and Industry Sinan Chalabi
Minister of Education Safeen Dizayee
Higher Education Minister Dr Dlawer Ala'aldin
Head of Foreign Relations Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir
Chairman of the Investment Board Herish Muharam
Governor of Erbil Nawzad Hadi
Mr Falakaddin Kakaye, Head of the Kurdish-Turkish Friendship Association.

The ceremonies were also attended by many other regional and international officials and dignitaries.

Historical embracement of Iraqi Kurds



MEHMET ALI BIRAND

Since the beginning I have kept repeating the historical nature of this visit.

But what happened in northern Iraq on Tuesday left all historical emphasis in the shadow.

What happened in Arbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, proved how stunningly fast relations between Turks and Kurds develop.

Not too long ago, in 2008, we got upset about the sign at our border to northern Iraq that read Welcome to Kurdistan and Kurdish flags. Relations were tense. People believed that an independent Kurdish state would be established in northern Iraq and our Kurds with the same spirit would declare their independency to form a Great Kurdistan in the future.

They were criticized for supporting the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, and turning their backs on Ankara's demands.

Barzani too would get upset.

He would complain about Turkey not taking him seriously whereas, according to him, the real solution to the PKK issue was to be found within Turkey. But nobody would listen to him.

Take a look at what happened during Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit in Arbil.

There is a great difference.

Politics of denial is over and done with

Especially the approach and interest of the people proves how Turkey became a rising star in the region.

But the real player in this perception is Turkey.

It changed its basic politics.

It let go of pressuring Barzani and also of its approach of Get me the PKK's head first, and then we'll talk. Instead of fighting with security forces, instead of setting up conditions and rules, it preferred to cooperate on the PKK issue. It also cooperated in the Kurdish initiative.

Ankara gave priority to cooperating in economic and investment issues.

And Barzani changed his attitude.

The United States slowly retreating from Iraq starting next year and Iran's increasing influence on the region pushed the Kurds to lean their backs on



Turkey.

As interests merged we ended up at this point.

The most important message from the prime minister was to announce that Turkey has put an end to its politics of denial.

This message was not just meant to reach the Iraqi Kurds. It was also meant for Kurds in Turkey.

At the moment the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, administration may seem to be in conflict with the Kurdish issue because of its disinterested approach due to elections but it also shows that a lot of things will change after elections.

In this country as we are experiencing needless developments like the Omamin Ordu (The Imam's Army) book event, we recreated hopes when the prime minister visited Baghdad and Arbil.

We shouldn't be a country still arguing about capital punishment

On one side there is a Turkey that has put its mark on the region and everybody is curious about its reactions, with even the international media writing about how democracy in Turkey leads to it being the shining star in the region.

But on the other side there is a Turkey in which prosecutors go on a hunt for a book that hasn't even been published yet. Journalists are being arrested and the police behave boorishly. Each protest ends up with students being beaten up.

Turkey for the first time being able to trial coup attempts turns the Ergenekon episode into a monster.

As if that is not enough all of a sudden once more capital punishment is being discussed. Moreover the brightest people in the administration take it seriously.

The reason is a simple one &

To use the reaction of the public with respect to the killer of the three children to benefit in elections.

We expect a person like Professor Burhan Kuzu, who we consider an important and bright individual, to say, Let go of such nonsense, but he says he is in favor of capital punishment stating, We banned capital punishment only because the United States wanted us to do so. And someone else requests a referendum.

Incredible.

Turkey rid itself of the capital punishment shame nine years ago.

It was obvious that capital punishment had no deterrence effect. Besides, capital punishment was banned during a period in which people comprehended that real punishment was to put the criminal behind bars serving a life sentence instead of killing him.

Our understanding has always been, Hang him to set an example for others.

It didn't work. We hung the criminal but others still did as they pleased.

One last note: Turkey did not abandon capital punishment only because the United States wanted to. The PKK's jailed leader Abdullah Öcalan's death sentence was on the agenda and in that case there would have been a bloodbath all over Turkey, not only in the Southeast, thus capital punishment was abandoned.

It's worthwhile to know the truth.

Or are there some that would like to abandon the punishment and hang Öcalan just for the sake of a few million votes?

Please let's be serious.

The public has all the right to be upset but some decisions are made by leaders not the people.

Arbil visit harbinger of deeper cooperation with Iraqi Kurds

TODAY S ZAMAN, ISTANBUL

Turkey has vowed to further expand cooperation with a former adversary, the Iraqi Kurds, strengthening solidarity with the Kurdish administration ahead of June elections at home.

A strong Turkey means a strong Iraq and a strong Iraq means a strong Turkey. Our investments in this region shows how our hearts are united, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who became the first Turkish prime minister to visit the Kurdish region, said at a ceremony marking the opening of Arbil's new, Turkish-built airport on Tuesday. God willing, we will do more. We will see better days.

Erdoğan's visit to Arbil, the capital of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region, comes amid pre-election tensions at home as Turkey's main Kurdish party has launched a civil disobedience campaign in southeastern Anatolia, demanding, among other things, the release of outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan from prison.

Speaking at the ceremony, Erdoğan referred to his government's efforts to improve the situation in the Kurdish-populated Southeast. If there is no internal peace, if the mechanism of justice does not function, there can be no economic or social development either, Erdoğan said. We have ended the Turkey's old policy, which used to deny the humanity of the people. Decades of neglect and policies of denial have ended in areas dominated by our Kurdish citizens. Thus, state and nation are embracing each other more warmly, he went on.

Many Kurds in Turkey have long looked up to Kurdish-run northern Iraq, which has enjoyed an economic boom in recent years, and Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani is a respected figure for Turkey's Kurds as well. Barzani, who praised Erdoğan's visit as a historic event, appeared to announce his backing for Erdoğan's government. He said: Turkey now has a big position in the region and this is because of your wise policies.



Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani officially opened the Turkish Consulate in Arbil on Tuesday.

We hope that these developments will continue after the next Turkish elections in the service of peace and the service of the people of the region.

Barzani's remarks were primarily addressed to Turkey's Kurdish voters, Cengiz «andar, a columnist who accompanied Erdoğan on his visit, commented in the Radikal daily on Wednesday, noting that Barzani is widely seen as the national leader of the Kurds. Although he avoided the word Kurdistan during his speeches in Arbil, Erdoğan praised ties with Iraqi Kurds and called Barzani my brother.

We have a historic relationship with Iraq and with this beautiful region, he said. We have started to establish the basis for brotherhood between the peoples of Turkey, which was the basis for economic development, he added.

Turkish foreign policy was long marked by a deep suspicion of Iraq's Kurdish autonomous region, set up in the 1990s after the first Gulf War. Turkish troops have conducted operations in northern Iraq against the PKK, designated as a terrorist group by Turkey, the US and the EU. Iraqi Kurds were harshly criticized in the past by Turkish political and military leaders, who accused them of doing too little to shut down PKK bases operating on the Iraqi side of the border.

But those disputes have eased in

recent years with the creation of a joint US-Turkish-Iraqi intelligence body to fight the separatists. Economic ties between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds have also developed rapidly, with Turkey seeking to act as a conduit for Iraqi oil and gas, and Turkish firms investing in construction and other projects in the Kurdish zone.

Ending years of ignoring the Kurdish administration, Erdoğan officially opened the Turkish Consulate in Arbil. He also attended a ceremony to mark the opening of the first two Turkish banks in Arbil and announced that Turkish Airlines (THY) would begin direct flights to Arbil on April 14.

Highlighting the depth of ties, Erdoğan said there are about 35,000 Turkish nationals holding permanent residence permits issued by the Kurdish administration. A total of 20,000 of them are in Arbil, while the rest are based in two other Kurdish provinces, Dohuk and Sulaimaniya.

Erdoğan also said the government is planning a visa-free travel regime with Iraq. Today, our consulate in Arbil issues about 500 visas daily for our Iraqi brothers who want to visit Turkey, Erdoğan said. We are planning to abolish visas with Iraq, just as we already did with other countries.

Assad links unrest to foreign intrigue

DAMASCUS

In address to Syrians, he makes no reference to easing emergency law

FROM NEWS REPORTS

In his first address to the Syrian people after violent protests and calls for reform, President Bashar al-Assad on Wednesday blamed a broad conspiracy from beyond Syria for the turmoil and offered no concessions to ease his authoritarian regime's grip on public life.

To apparently choreographed cries of support and applause, Mr. Assad appeared only briefly before Parliament in Damascus for what had been billed as a major speech that would define his response to the biggest challenge facing the government's authority in decades.

The speech had been highly anticipated inside and outside Syria for signs that Mr. Assad would lift or ease the state of emergency that has underpinned his Baath Party's hold on power since 1963.

But he made no reference to any such action, and the speech seemed likely to dismay protesters who have been demanding reform.

Mr. Assad's appearance had been forecast as an attempt to calm tensions after government forces repeatedly opened fire on demonstrators in recent days, killing dozens of people as Syrians clamored for the same reforms that have become the rallying cry of many across the Arab world.

Smiling and looking relaxed, Mr. Assad spoke of "the plots that are being hatched against our country" and said they represented a "test of our unity."

"We are for reform and we are for meeting the people's demands," he said, referring to legislative changes under consideration for years but not carried out because of what he called a series of regional crises. "The first priority was to the stability of Syria, to maintain stability."

Mr. Assad added, "We are not in favor of chaos and destruction."

He acknowledged that "Syrian people have demands that have not been met" but said that those grievances were "used as a cover to dupe the people to go to the streets." He added, "Some of them had good intentions."

"It is not a secret now that Syria is being subject to a conspiracy," Mr. Assad said. "The timing and shape depends on what is happening in other Arab countries."

But he insisted that his regime would not be pressured into what he described as premature change.

"Implementing reforms is not a fad," Mr. Assad said. "When it is just a reflection of a wave that the region is living, it is destructive."

Before Mr. Assad spoke, tens of thousands poured into the streets of the southern town of Dara'a after mourners from four funerals joined into a large anti-government protest, one witness said in a telephone interview.

Then after the speech, about 3,000 people marched in a separate demonstration through the northwestern town of Latakia to voice their opposition to Mr. Assad, and security forces opened fire. A witness said at least two people had been killed and another wounded.

Mr. Assad's speech came a day after his cabinet resigned in what was seen as a significant, if primarily symbolic, gesture in a nation where the leadership rarely responds to public pressure and where decisions are made not by the cabinet but by the president and his inner circle, including multiple security services.

Ending emergency law, the main tool for suppressing dissent since it was imposed after the 1963 coup that elevated the Baath Party to power, has been a central demand of protesters.

They also want the release of political prisoners, and to know the fate of tens of thousands who disappeared in the 1980s.



LOUAI BESHARA/AFP

Supporters of President Bashar al-Assad at a rally in Damascus on Tuesday.

The protests have presented the gravest challenge to Mr. Assad's 11-year rule in Syria, which has an anti-Israel alliance with Iran and supports the militant groups Hezbollah and Hamas.

Mr. Assad also accused foreign news media, which operate under restriction in Syria, of misrepresenting the protests. The government has expelled three Reuters journalists in recent days.

Twitter and Facebook were flooded with messages of disappointment and anger at Mr. Assad's speech.

"What we understood from his speech is that it is imperative to bring down the regime," wrote a user on the Facebook page "The Syrian Revolution 2011," echoing slogans chanted in Tunisia and Egypt, where entrenched rulers gave up power.

The messages called for protests on Friday — "Friday of Martyrs" — but it is unclear how many people will turn out to a protest movement that has abated this week.

Emergency law has been used to stifle political opposition, justify arbitrary

"We are for reform and we are for meeting the people's demands. The first priority was to the stability of Syria."

arrest and give free rein to a pervasive security apparatus in Syria.

Arbitrary arrests have continued across the country in large numbers since a presidential adviser, Bouthaina Shaaban, said last week that Mr. Assad was considering scrapping the emergency law, according to lawyers and activists.

Mr. Assad gave no timetable for other reforms he has mentioned, including laws on political parties, news media freedoms and fighting corruption. He said the priority was improving living standards in a country of 22 million people, where many struggle with rising prices, low salaries and lack of jobs.

Maamoun al-Homsi, leading opposition figure, said he had the names of 105 people who had been killed in the last two weeks in Syria, and predicted the wave of protests would continue.

"The uprising won't stop because there are rights to be achieved," he said in a telephone interview from Canada.

Mr. Assad, 45, spoke a day after tens of thousands of Syrians joined government-organized demonstrations throughout the country in a show of loyalty to Mr. Assad, who became president in 2000 on the death of his father, Hafez al-Assad. (IHT, REUTERS)

Turkey sees Kurdish threat in Syria unrest

By Jacques N Couvas
Inter Press Service

ANKARA - A new week, a new campaign for Ankara's diplomacy. After a victorious arm-twisting on Saturday with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to divert the leadership of the aerial war against Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi from France to NATO, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has turned his attention to trouble closer to home, Syria.

Erdogan and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had daily phone calls during the weekend, and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu followed up with a teleconference with his Syrian counterpart Walid al-Mouellem to offer Turkey's assistance in the event of a reform process towards a democratic regime.

The head of the Turkish National Intelligence (MIT), Hakan Fidan, was dispatched on Sunday to Damascus to express his

government's concerns about spreading social unrest from Daraa, in Syria's southwest, to larger cities such as Latakia, a Mediterranean port nearer the Turkish border.

Close to 100 demonstrators have died and hundreds wounded in the clashes with the Syrian security and military forces since the rallies began two weeks ago.

Domestic problems in Syria are of particular sensitivity to Turkey. Although the two countries still have open territorial issues, upheaval in one may result in destabilizing the other. Their 800-kilometer common border provi-

des safe passage to political activists with mischievous intentions.

A major concern for Turkey is the Kurdish population in Syria of 1.4 million, which, in case of collapse of Assad's regime could collude with the estimated 15 million or more ethnic Kurds in Turkey, 7 million Iranian Kurds, and 6 million Northern Iraqi Kurds to claim an independent state.

In anticipation of such eventuality, Ankara and Damascus formed in 2009 a High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HSCC) and held in April 2010 their first joint military exercises.

Turkey has since 1978 been in armed conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a belligerent "independentista" organization classified as a terrorist group by Turkey, the European Union and the United States.

The hostilities have caused the death of at least 40,000 Turkish soldiers and gendarmes, PKK guerillas, and civilians, while the number of wounded has exceeded 30,000, and that of the missing is estimated at 17,000.

A study in 1998 by Brunswick University in the US reported that at least 3 million people had by that time been displaced in southeastern Turkey and the area bordering Iraq, for war operational reasons, while 3,000 villages were totally or partially destroyed.

Kurdish autonomy is a sensitive issue in public opinion in Turkey, Iran and Syria alike, where territorial integrity has ranked at the top of these countries' priorities since their respective independence from Western rule.

The current regimes in Tehran and Damascus are intransigent on Kurdish freedoms, while Erdogan's

government, in power since 2002, has begun a dialogue process with the Turkish ethnic Kurds to enable cultural autonomy, which, after this year's national elections, might evolve into devolution of some governance powers to the local administrations. The main opposition, nationalist parties and the military are, however, implacable in their hostility to such perspective.

The Turkish nervousness about the Syrian domestic situation is also influenced by economic and geopolitical concerns. After a long period of cold neighborhood relations, with occasional threats of armed confrontation, Assad and Erdogan have crossed the fence to develop a cosy relationship, building on the settlement in 1998 of old political disputes.

On the strategic plane, both countries see cooperation as being instrumental to maintain the geopolitical status quo of Iraq's territorial integrity, frustrate pan-Kurdish aspirations, and to keep Israel's and Iran's testosterone on check.

The Turkish premier, speaking on Monday to journalists, confirmed he had urged the Syrian president over the weekend to adopt a conciliatory spirit with his people.

"We advised Mr Assad that responding to the people's years-old demands positively, with a reformist approach, would help Syria overcome the problems more easily," said Erdogan. "I did not get a 'no' answer," he commented, adding that he expected reforms to be announced by Damascus this week.

Syria has a long record of iron-fist governance style, aimed at securing the survival of the ruling Ba'ath party. Hafez al-Assad, father of the

current president and leader of the coup which installed it in power in 1963, immediately imposed an emergency law, which suspended practically all civil liberties and is still in force today.

The Ba'ath party, dominated by Allawis, a tolerant religious Shi'ite Muslim denomination, has been at odds with the Sunni movement in Syria. Hafez al-Assad in 1982 violently crushed a Sunni Islamist Brotherhood revolt, killing 20,000 rebels. Tolerance and appetite for power did, obviously, not coexist.

Amnesty International has repeatedly ranked Syria as the country with the most repressive laws in the Middle East. In an attempt to calm the spirits, Bashar al-Assad offered last week to amend the emergency law and allow for new parties to be formed. The gesture was turned down by the demonstrators, who insist on full democratization of the system.

Turkish business executives and political observers have been recommending that Erdogan include in his prescription to al-Assad to also work on reducing corruption, clientelism and cronyism, which are endemic in the Syrian economy and sources of poverty for the population. They hamper foreign direct investment from Turkey to Syria.

But Turkey - a majority Sunni state with religious minorities that were "tamed" by the military in the 20th century - feels uncomfortable giving lessons to its neighbor, an increasingly important trading partner.

With ongoing domestic unrest next door, but also in Bahrain, Jordan, Yemen, and, to a lesser degree, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Morocco, Ankara's Middle Eastern and Northern African ambitious plans are poised to return to the drawing board.

La rébellion en Syrie, enjeu régional majeur

Des dizaines de morts déjà ; une rébellion qui s'étend aux quatre coins du pays ; un pouvoir dictatorial sur la défensive : à son tour, la Syrie est bousculée par le vent des révoltes arabes. L'enjeu est majeur : ce pays détient les clés de l'évolution stratégique de la région.

Défié depuis bientôt trois semaines, le président Bachar Al-Assad hésite, tergiverse. Tantôt il laisse la garde républicaine tirer à vue sur les manifestants. Tantôt il joue l'apaisement : augmentation du salaire des fonctionnaires ; annonce de la fin prochaine de l'état d'urgence (en vigueur depuis près d'un demi-siècle !); libéralisation de la presse. Rien n'y fait.

Le régime bénéficie d'un certain capital politique pour ses positions régionales. Il y a son intransigeance vis-à-vis d'Israël :

pas de négociation tant que Damas n'a pas la garantie de récupérer le plateau du Golan, saisi par l'Etat hébreu en 1967. Il y a son soutien aux organisations palestiniennes les plus radicales, le Hamas notamment. Il y a son alliance avec le Hezbollah libanais.

Mais le régime est jugé pour ce qu'il est à l'intérieur : un despotisme familial corrompu, l'habituel mélange d'affairisme et d'autoritarisme. C'est cela qui compte et qui est dénoncé dans un pays de

Editorial

22 millions d'habitants dont la plupart des jeunes sont en quête d'emplois. Dans la révolte syrienne, on retrouve les mêmes ingrédients qu'à Tunis et au Caire et les mêmes revendications.

Seulement, la situation y est

particulièrement explosive. Le pays est pluriconfessionnel, principalement gouverné par la minorité alaouite (une dissidence du chiisme, deuxième branche de l'islam), alors qu'il est majoritairement sunnite (la branche dominante de l'islam). Le risque existe d'affrontements confessionnels graves.

Ensuite, la Syrie est au cœur des équilibres – ou des déséquilibres – régionaux. Elle est l'unique grand allié arabe de l'Iran. Elle commande la situation au Liban : sans son appui, la République islamique iranienne ne peut plus approvisionner en armes le Hezbollah, qui s'affirme aujourd'hui – contre une majorité de Libanais – comme la puissance montante dans le pays du Cèdre.

Enfin, la Syrie est l'un des rares soutiens des islamistes du Hamas dans le territoire palestinien de

Gaza. Un changement de régime à Damas, une évolution même, serait un bouleversement majeur dans la région. L'enjeu syrien est une affaire stratégique.

Américains et Européens sont attentistes. Ils ne savent comment réagir face à la rébellion syrienne. La secrétaire d'Etat, Hillary Clinton, a qualifié M. Al-Assad de « réformateur ». Cela reste à prouver. On manifeste plus de compréhension à l'égard de la répression syrienne qu'on en a témoigné aux régimes tunisien et égyptien. La Ligue arabe n'entend aucunement exclure la Syrie de ses rangs, comme elle l'a fait de la Libye.

La ligne de conduite doit être claire. M. Al-Assad doit être encouragé à choisir la voie de la « réforme », mais dénoncé et isolé s'il choisit celle de la répression massive. ■

En Turquie, un livre sur les liens de la police avec un groupe islamiste secret est censuré avant parution

L'auteur de « L'Armée de l'Imam », le journaliste Ahmet Sik, a été placé en détention provisoire

Istanbul

Correspondance

Les éditeurs en Turquie sont familiers des tribunaux. Mais c'est la première fois que la justice censure un livre qui n'est pas encore achevé. Les descentes de police se sont multipliées il y a quelques jours en fin de semaine dernière dans les rédactions des journaux, dans les bureaux d'une maison d'édition, et même dans les cellules de la prison de Silivri, pour tenter de mettre la main sur les copies de *L'Armée de l'imam* : un livre que le journaliste d'investigation Ahmet Sik s'appretait à terminer, début mars, lorsqu'il a été arrêté et placé en détention provisoire.

La cour d'Istanbul a ordonné, jeudi 24 mars, la saisie de tous les travaux. « *L'opération Delete* », a été lancée, écrit Ertugrul Mavioglu, journaliste au quotidien *Radikal*. La police l'a obligé à effacer de son ordinateur un exemplaire du

manuscrit de son confrère et ami.

Le procureur accuse Ahmet Sik d'appartenir à la nébuleuse Ergenekon, une cellule militaro-nationaliste présumée, et d'avoir tenté de déstabiliser le gouvernement islamo-conservateur. Mais son arrestation, en même temps que

Le procureur accuse Ahmet Sik d'appartenir à la nébuleuse Ergenekon, une cellule militaro-nationaliste présumée

celle de Nedim Sener, un autre journaliste qui s'était attaqué à la police, a soulevé une volée de critiques parmi les démocrates turcs qui estiment que l'affaire Ergenekon vire au règlement de compte politique.

Des manifestations de soutien aux journalistes détenus ont été

organisées à Istanbul et à Ankara. « *Tous ceux qui touchent à Gülen brûlent* », avait crié Ahmet Sik, menotté, à ses amis, le jour de son arrestation.

L'Armée de l'imam, promettait d'éclairer les liaisons troubles entre la police et la confrérie religieuse de l'imam turc Fethullah Gülen, exilé aux Etats-Unis depuis 1999. Les adeptes de Gülen, contrôlent des pans entiers de l'économie turque, des centaines d'écoles à travers le monde, la santé, l'action humanitaire et les médias, avec le groupe Zaman.

Cette puissante organisation islamique, élitiste et secrète, qui a patiemment noyauté l'appareil d'Etat depuis vingt ans, est également soupçonnée de contrôler étroitement la police.

C'est ce que dénonçait déjà l'ancien commissaire Hanefi Avci, dans un ouvrage paru en 2010. Son livre était en tête des ventes lorsqu'il a lui aussi été emprisonné,

accusé d'avoir « *entretenu des liens avec une organisation terroriste* » intitulée Commandement révolutionnaire.

Hanefi Avci montrait comment les « gülenistes » avaient infiltré la police, et avaient été à l'origine des révélations de complots, telle l'affaire Ergenekon, qui ont éclaté depuis 2007. Avec des preuves reposant le plus souvent sur des écoutes téléphoniques douteuses.

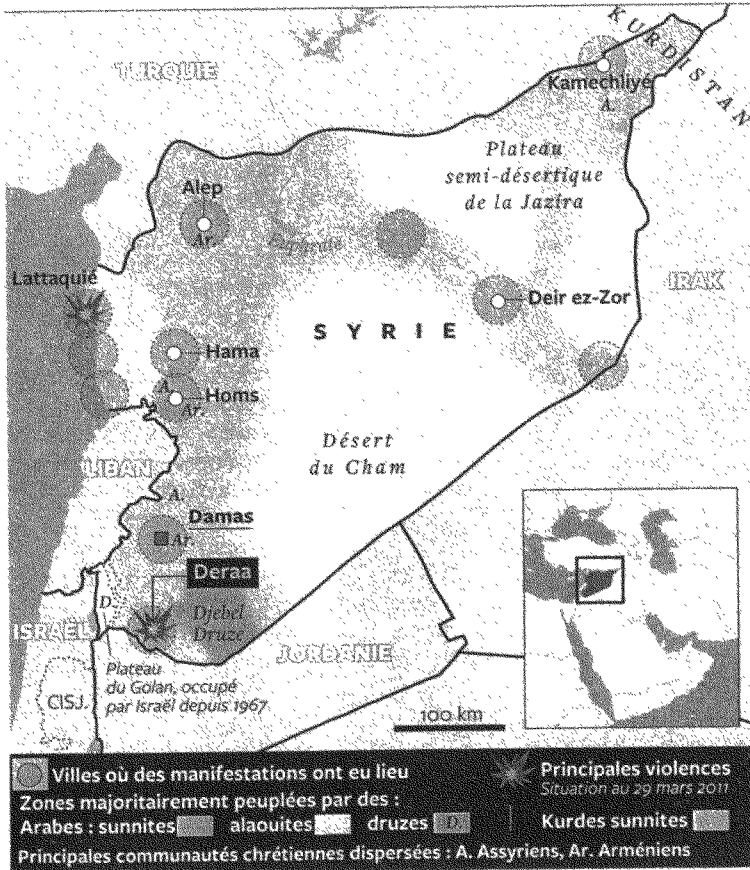
De son refuge en Pennsylvanie, Fethullah Gülen, 70 ans, a fait savoir lundi par son avocat, qu'il était étranger aux poursuites et qu'il n'avait déposé de plainte ni contre le livre, ni contre son auteur. « *Il me semble évident que publication d'atteindre son public et que cela va augmenter l'intérêt pour ce livre* » a-t-il ajouté.

C'est effectivement le cas. Le site imaminordusu.com annonce la sortie du livre sur Internet pour le 11 avril. ■

Guillaume Perrier

Syrie En couverture Un dictateur en sursis Trente ans de terreur

La diversité communautaire en Syrie



De 1970 à l'an 2000, date de son décès, le dictateur Hafez El-Assad, père de l'actuel président, a sévi sans la moindre pitié contre ses opposants.

The Independent (extraits) Londres

Peu avant le décès de Hafez El-Assad, en 2000, Ahmed Hariri avait prédit ce qui se passerait lorsque serait annoncée la nouvelle de la mort du président. Hariri, un de mes vieux amis syriens qui travaillait au ministère de l'Information, était originaire de la ville de Tadmor, à l'est de Damas. Appelée Palmyre par les Romains et les touristes actuels, Tadmor abritait, masquée par un rideau d'arbres le long de la route qui traverse le désert vers Bagdad, l'une des sinistres prisons du régime. Elle fut en 1980 le théâtre d'un massacre de détenus islamistes – peut-être un millier en tout – perpétré par Rifaat, le frère de Hafez El-Assad. On dit que les cadavres furent jetés de nuit dans une fosse commune au pied d'une colline proche et qu'ils y reposent depuis, sans que rien n'en marque l'emplacement.

Tandis que nous roulions vers Palmyre, Hariri fumait cigarette sur cigarette à l'arrière de ma voiture. "Quand notre président bien-aimé mourra, dit-il, tous les habitants de Palmyre se rendront à cette colline. Ils savent où ont été enterrés les morts – et pas seulement ceux que Rifaat a fait tuer. Et, quand ils seront sûrs que le président sera parti pour de bon, ils porteront des roses sur le site à la mémoire de ceux qui reposent sous la terre."

Pourtant, lorsque Assad mourut d'une crise cardiaque et que le parti Baas parvint à lui faire succéder sans heurt son fils Bachar, aucun habitant de Palmyre ne se rendit sur les fosses communes. Il n'y eut ni parent éploré, ni rose, ni la moindre reconnaissance de la violence qui avait sévi dans cette terrible prison au cours des trente années durant lesquelles Assad était resté au pouvoir, de 1970 à 2000.

Les Syriens furent tellement soulagés de voir que c'était le jeune optométriste Bachar, éduqué en Angleterre, un personnage plus sympathique que son féroce père, qui prenait les choses en main que personne ne voulut remuer le passé. Pourquoi mettre au jour une fosse commune à moins de vouloir y verser un peu plus de sang encore ? Pourtant, comme le démontre clairement un rapport publié en juin 2010 à Washington par le Transitional Justice in the Arab World Project, le régime que Bachar mit alors en place fut loin de faire éclore en Syrie ce "printemps"

Minorités

Diviser pour régner

"Pour la première fois dans l'histoire de la Syrie et dans l'histoire du parti Baas au pouvoir, les médias officiels ont parlé cette année de la célébration par les Kurdes, le 20 mars, de la fête de Norouz, le nouvel an kurde, en le qualifiant de 'fête du printemps', l'agence d'information du gouvernement, Sana, soulignant que la célébration de cette fête propre aux citoyens kurdes reflétait la profondeur de la diversité culturelle en Syrie", relève l'écrivain kurde Hosheng Broka dans **Elaph**. Comment croire à ce genre de commentaires dans un pays où les Kurdes ont toujours été brimés, où leur langue et leur culture sont interdites ? "Certes il y a quelques

Kurdes bien dressés par le régime qui ont considéré ces annonces officielles comme un 'pas historique' ou un 'grand accomplissement', 'une initiative montrant les bonnes intentions des dirigeants'. Mais, pour la grande majorité des Syriens, ce genre de manœuvre n'a plus aucun effet. Il n'y a qu'à voir la répression qui s'est abattue sur les manifestants à Deraa pendant la même période. Ce que souhaite le régime, c'est que les Kurdes, dans le nord du pays, soient occupés à organiser leur fête et à s'adonner à leur folklore, tandis que dans le sud les habitants de Deraa se voient interdire l'organisation de funérailles pour leurs morts."

démocratique que beaucoup d'intellectuels arabes attendaient de leurs vœux. Ce rapport intitulé *Years of Fear* [Les années de terreur] estime que jusqu'à 17 000 Syriens auront "disparu" au cours du règne de Hafez El-Assad ; le document de 117 pages contient des récits poignants de disparitions et d'exécutions sans procès, et explique comment des fils, femmes ou parents auront attendu en vain durant trente ans le retour d'hommes qui furent presque certainement tués dès le début des années 1980.

L'auteur du rapport, Radwan Ziadeh, est un exilé syrien établi depuis de longues années aux Etats-Unis. Il dirige le Centre de Damas pour les études sur les droits de l'homme. *Years of Fear* couvre les trente années de pouvoir de Hafez El-Assad, ancien commandant en chef des forces aériennes syriennes, dont le long combat pour maintenir la domination des Alaouites et la lutte féroce qu'il mena contre des adversaires islamistes peuplèrent les immondes prisons du

pays de milliers de prisonniers politiques. Utilisant des forces de sécurité souvent corrompues, il combattit un mouvement religieux de guérilla urbaine de plus en plus violent.

En 1980, le régime et ses opposants étaient engagés dans une guerre ouverte. La loi 49 du 7 juillet 1980 prévoyait la peine capitale pour ceux qui ne renonçaient pas par écrit à leur appartenance aux Frères musulmans, tandis qu'une campagne d'assassinat à la Kadhafi était lancée contre les opposants installés à l'étranger. Le soulèvement de la ville de Hama en février 1982, au cours duquel l'antique cité tenue par les rebelles fut presque entièrement détruite par les chars et l'artillerie, se solda, selon le rapport de Ziadeh, par la mort de 15 000 personnes – certains avancent le chiffre de 20 000 morts. Ziadeh omet toutefois de mentionner la lutte de résistance menée à Hama, qui vit de jeunes filles kamikazes se faire exploser au milieu des soldats syriens, ainsi que les actes

de violence précédemment perpétrés dans la ville par les islamistes, qui y avaient massacré des familles entières de responsables baasistes.

25 000 personnes auraient disparu

Ziadeh estime qu'à partir du début des années 1980 et au cours des années suivantes 25 000 hommes pourraient avoir disparu dans les différents centres d'interrogatoire et les prisons. *"La plupart de ces disparitions ont eu lieu avant l'an 2000, note le rapport. De nombreux détenus ont été libérés au cours des dernières années."* Cela est à porter au crédit de Bachar El-Assad. Mais, dans les années antérieures à cette date, une telle compassion était inconnue. Le rapport cite un ancien détenu de Palmyre. *"Chaque lundi et jeudi, ils sélectionnaient des groupes de Frères et les pendaient dans les cours de la prison de Palmyre."*

D'autres détenus syriens, pourtant condamnés à de courtes peines, pouvaient rester emprisonnés durant dix ans, tandis qu'on répétait à leurs familles qu'aucun des services de sécurité n'avait jamais entendu parler d'eux. *"A présent"*, remarque Ziadeh avec un sens impressionnant de la retenue, *"les familles sont autorisées à rendre visite au prisonnier après quelques années de détention."* Ziadeh décrit par ailleurs l'abondant dispositif juridique censé protéger les citoyens syriens de l'arrestation arbitraire, de la torture ou de l'exécution. Le paragraphe 3 de l'article 28 de la Constitution syrienne déclare que *"nul ne peut être torturé physiquement ni mentalement, ou être traité de manière humiliante"*. Une autre loi syrienne édicte que l'Etat doit *"prendre les mesures législatives, administratives et judiciaires nécessaires pour empêcher et faire cesser les actes de disparition forcée"*. Ziadeh reprend le témoignage connu d'Abdullah Al-Naji pour affirmer à nouveau que les impitoyables "tribunaux de campagne" institués par le régime – et prévus à l'origine pour être utilisés contre l'"ennemi" israélien, et non les

"ennemis" syriens du parti Baas – étaient dirigés par Ghazi Kanaan, qui, après avoir été le chef des services de renseignements militaires syriens au Liban, est devenu plus tard ministre de l'Intérieur. C'est alors qu'il occupait ce poste que Kanaan se suicida, après avoir, semble-t-il, comploté contre Bachar El-Assad.

Le droit de connaître la vérité

Il y a plus d'une quinzaine d'années, dans un hôtel de Boston, un autre Syrien qui avait été détenu à Palmyre m'a confié que tout le monde savait quand allait avoir lieu une nouvelle exécution. *"Il suffisait de se mettre à la fenêtre de nos cellules. Nous connaissions tous l'après-rasage préféré de Kanaan. Quand nous en sentions l'odeur, nous savions qu'un peloton d'exécution se préparait."* A propos de ces exécutions, le rapport souligne que *"personne ne sait où étaient inhumés ceux qui étaient exécutés ou mouraient sous la torture"*. Le rapport indique que ces disparitions pourraient indirectement affecter jusqu'à 1 million de Syriens (le pays compte 21 millions d'habitants). Amer, qui avait 8 ans lorsque son père fut arrêté, se souvient : *"Je ne pouvais parler de mon père à personne, car cela suscitait la peur et éveillait les soupçons... J'ai grandi comme un demi-orphelin, même si mon père n'est pas officiellement mort."*

Certains étaient déclarés morts, puis réapparaissaient, comme cet adolescent de 16 ans arrêté à Alep qui passa quatorze ans en prison. Le rapport de Ziadeh affirme avec force que *"les victimes et leurs familles [...] ont le droit inaliénable de connaître la vérité sur les circonstances dans lesquelles ces violations des droits de la personne ont été commises et sur le sort de la victime dans les cas de décès ou de disparition"*. Un militant des droits de l'homme a déclaré à Ziadeh qu'on a parfois édifié des bâtiments sur des cimetières clandestins. On dit qu'à Alep une grande mosquée a été construite sur le site d'une fosse commune. **Robert Fisk**

Histoire

Quarante-huit ans d'état d'urgence

En Syrie, l'exception est la règle. Et l'application de l'état d'urgence est particulièrement dure, explique le site de l'opposition syrienne.

En vigueur depuis le coup d'Etat militaire du 8 mars 1963, l'état d'urgence en Syrie – dont le président Assad aurait promis d'envisager l'abrogation – est le plus long de l'histoire moderne d'un pays. Selon un juriste, cet état d'urgence aurait dû être levé, comme prévu par la loi, mais cela n'a pas été appliqué. *"L'état d'urgence est décrété par le Conseil des ministres, présidé par le président de la République, à la majorité des deux tiers de ses membres et doit être soumis à la Chambre des députés dès sa première réunion."* Le juriste ajoute : *"Ce texte n'a nullement été respecté puisque l'état d'urgence a été imposé par un ordre militaire et non un décret, par un Conseil national de la révolution, et non le Conseil des ministres, et qu'il n'a jamais été soumis au Parlement."*

Le décret précise les restrictions et les mesures que le gouvernement d'exception peut imposer, comme suit :

- contrôle des correspondances, des publications et de tous les moyens d'expression avant leur diffusion ;
- évacuation ou isolation de certaines régions ;
- limitation des horaires d'ouverture des lieux publics ou leur fermeture ;
- confiscation de tout bien immobilier ou mobilier et imposition d'une surveillance temporaire des sociétés et des institutions ;
- restriction de la liberté de réunion, de résidence, de mouvement et de passage des personnes dans certains lieux et à certaines heures ;
- arrestation préventive de suspects ou d'individus menaçant la sécurité et l'ordre public ;
- autorisation d'enquêter sur toute personne ou tout lieu à tout moment et de charger toute personne de toute mission...

En complément, *"le Conseil des ministres est en droit d'étendre ces restrictions par un décret à soumettre à la Chambre des députés"*. L'examen de ces restrictions montre qu'elles ne laissent aucune place à des mesures supplémentaires. Notre juriste signale que, vu la multiplication des lieux de détention, il est devenu impossible de connaître le nombre de prisonniers qui s'y trouvent. Ces arrestations se sont généralisées à tel point que les arrestations normales sont devenues exceptionnelles. *"Il faut signaler que la durée de la détention préventive n'est pas déterminée et peut donc s'étendre sans limite dès qu'un ordre d'exception est émis, sans aucun contrôle de la justice ni aucun recours administratif ou juridique possible pour le détenu. Il est arrivé que les tribunaux jugent innocents certains accusés qui restent quand même détenus en vertu de l'état d'urgence."* L'une des conséquences les plus graves de l'état d'urgence est *"la multiplication*

des tribunaux d'exception au point que certains citoyens comparaissent devant des tribunaux dont ils ne connaissent ni le nom ni les juges, tout en étant privés de tout droit de se défendre ou de faire appel". Le pouvoir absolu des autorités d'exception, par le biais des services de sécurité et de renseignements,

a remplacé en fait tous les autres pouvoirs, législatif, exécutif ou judiciaire. Ainsi, l'ensemble des lois constitutionnelles et juridiques est suspendu. Notre juriste conclut : "Nous sommes soumis depuis plus de quarante ans à un état d'urgence contraire à la loi et à la Constitution. Cela constitue une atteinte à l'Etat en tant que tel."

Les sites Internet syriens ont indiqué que le député Abdel-Karim Al-Sayed avait proposé, avant le début des manifestations à Deraa, la formation d'une commission parlementaire pour examiner une levée partielle de l'état d'urgence en Syrie, mais l'ensemble des membres du Parlement avaient voté contre. **Al-Raee** Atlanta

L'Orient
LE JOUR
27 mars 2011

PLUS DE CENT MORTS DÉJÀ EN SYRIE, LE SIÈGE DU PARTI BAAS INCENDIÉ À DERAÄ

Louai Beshara - AFP

DAMAS - Des manifestants ont incendié un siège du parti Baas au pouvoir et des francs-tireurs ont tué deux passants samedi en Syrie, pays en proie depuis 12 jours à une contestation sans précédent contre le régime.

Ces violences interviennent en dépit des gestes d'apaisement des autorités qui ont libéré 260 détenus politiques ayant, dans leur majorité, purgé les trois quarts de leur peine, selon des organisations de défense des droits de l'Homme.

Alors que la contestation lancée le 15 mars contre le régime de Bachar al-Assad a fait 126 morts selon les organisations des droits de l'Homme, un appel à une "révolte populaire" s'inscrit dans toutes les provinces a été publié sur Facebook.

Dans la ville portuaire de Lattaquié, à 350 km au nord-ouest de Damas, "des francs-tireurs ont tiré sur des passants, tuant deux personnes et en blessant deux", a annoncé un haut responsable syrien sous couvert de l'anonymat. Il avait auparavant dit que des "hommes armés" avaient tiré à partir des toits.

A Tafas, un village au sud de Damas, des manifestants ont incendié un siège du parti Baas, au pouvoir depuis 1963, et un poste de police, a affirmé ce même responsable.

Ces incendies ne sont "pas des actes de gens qui cherchent des réformes. Est-ce qu'incendier des bâtiments peut être qualifié de manifestations pacifiques?", a-t-il demandé.

Selon un militant des droits de l'Homme à Tafas, plusieurs milliers d'habitants ont participé à l'enterrement de trois manifestants tués la veille par les forces de sécurité, et certains protestataires ont incendié les deux bâtiments dans ce village situé à 18 km au nord de Deraa.

Dans cette dernière ville, épicerie de la contestation à 100 km au sud de Damas, près de 300 jeunes sont montés, torse nu, sur les restes d'une statue de l'ex-président Hafez al-Assad, père de l'actuel président, déboulonnée la veille, en scandant des slogans hostiles au régime, selon des témoins.

Dans le même temps, des centaines de personnes ont défilé à Damas pour soutenir le chef de l'Etat. Des voitures ont circulé en klaxonnant et les passagers arboraient des drapeaux syriens et des photos du président.

Vendredi, les manifestations s'étaient étendues à plusieurs villes. Selon un responsable syrien, 15 personnes ont été tuées dont 10 manifestants, alors que des militants des droits de l'Homme ont fait état de 24 manifestants morts.

Selon un bilan officiel, 27 personnes ont péri depuis le 15 mars, dont 20 protestataires et 7 personnes tuées par des manifestants.



Alors que la contestation lancée le 15 mars contre le régime de Bachar el-Assad a fait 126 morts selon les organisations des droits de l'Homme, un appel à une "révolte populaire" dans toutes les provinces a été publié hier sur Facebook./ AFP

La journée la plus sanglante a été celle de mercredi, quand 100 personnes ont été tuées à Deraa, selon des militants syriens des droits de l'Homme.

Face à cette escalade, les autorités ont annoncé jeudi des libérations de détenus, des mesures anti-corruption et ont déclaré envisager d'annuler l'état d'urgence en vigueur depuis 1963.

Dans le cadre de ces promesses, 260 détenus, en grande majorité des islamistes mais également des Kurdes, ont été libérés, selon des associations syriennes de défense des droits de l'Homme. Le haut responsable syrien a démenti le nombre des libérations.

Selon Rami Abdelrahmane, directeur de l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme

(OSDH), il y a encore "plusieurs centaines de prisonniers politiques" en Syrie, dont une partie à la prison de Sednaya, qui compte 10.000 détenus.

Réaffirmant l'intention des autorités de répondre vite aux "revendications légitimes" du peuple, une conseillère du chef de l'Etat, Boussaïna Chaabane, a affirmé qu'il y avait "un plan pour semer les dissensions et porter atteinte à la coexistence" en Syrie.

Après les condamnations de Washington, Paris et Londres, l'Union européenne a dénoncé à son tour la "brutale" réponse syrienne aux "exigences légitimes" des contestataires.

LE FIGARO jeudi 31 mars 2011

L'étrange déni de réalité du président syrien

Dans son discours à la nation, Bachar el-Assad évoque une « conspiration » et n'annonce pas la moindre réforme concrète.



Bachar el-Assad recevant l'ovation des députés avant son discours, hier, devant le Parlement à Damas. AGENCE OFFICIELLE SYRIENNE SANA/AP

RENAUD GIRARD
ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL À BEYROUTH

PROCHE-ORIENT Il y a maintenant comme un rituel dans la manière dont le régime syrien réagit à ses crises les plus graves. La dernière remonte au mois de février 2005, après l'assassinat à Beyrouth de l'ancien premier ministre libanais Rafic Hariri. Le Liban avait été le théâtre de gigantesques manifestations antisyriniennes unissant les chrétiens, les Druzes et les sunnites. Confrontée à cette protestation populaire et à la réprobation internationale, la Syrie avait été obligée de retirer son armée du pays du Cèdre, qu'elle occupait depuis 1976. Pour annoncer cette décision un peu humiliante, le président Bachar el-Assad s'était rendu au Parlement de Damas où, follement applaudi par les députés, il avait prononcé un long discours télévisé.

Ce scénario bien rodé a été reproduit hier. En début d'après-midi, la télévision d'État de Damas diffusa en direct les images du raïs sortant de sa voiture devant le Parlement, saluant sans cérémonie les centaines de militants du Baas regroupés à l'entrée, puis recevant dans l'hémicycle l'ovation des parlementaires, un sourire modeste aux lèvres.

Ophtalmologue formé en Occident, homme aux moeurs simples, Bachar n'a jamais cultivé l'emphase héroïque d'un Nasser ou d'un Fidel Castro. Pas d'envolée lyrique dans ses discours, toujours pro-



« Les syriens aspirent à des changements. Mais une part importante de la population, qui craint le chaos, parie sur Bachar pour réaliser les réformes »

ROGER EDDÉ, PRÉSIDENT DU PARTI DE LA PAIX LIBANAISE

noncés sur le ton presque bonhomme d'une conversation. Hier, en s'adressant à son Parlement et à son peuple, Bachar, dont les traits ne portaient pas la moindre trace de fatigue, s'exprimait comme un père cherchant à expliquer à sa famille ce qui lui était arrivé au cours des deux dernières semaines.

Son aisance pouvait s'expliquer par le succès des marches organisées en sa faveur mardi. Des centaines de milliers de Syriens sont sortis dans la rue à Damas et à Alep, arborant des portraits de Bachar, dans une ambiance festive. « Comme partout dans le monde arabe, la population syrienne aspire à des changements et est lasse de la dictature du Baas, explique, à Beyrouth, Roger Eddé, président du Parti de la paix libanaise (libéral et pro-occidental). Mais une part importante de la population, qui craint le chaos, parie sur Bachar pour réaliser les réformes. »

La surprise vint du fond, non de la forme. Dans son discours, le président expliqua que la Syrie était la victime d'une « conspiration » internationale savam-

ment orchestrée. Hormis la référence obligée à l'adversaire israélien, les maîtres de ce grand complot visant à fracturer l'unité du pays ne furent pas nommés. En revanche, le président ne lésina pas sur les moyens employés par les ennemis de la Syrie pour la déstabiliser. En cause : les télévisions satellitaires, les SMS sur les téléphones portables, les réseaux sociaux sur Internet.

De nombreuses contradictions

C'est à travers ces nouvelles technologies - sur lesquelles les services de sécurité syriens sont impuissants à exercer le moindre contrôle - qu'une « minorité » de la jeunesse de Deraa (ville méridionale, proche de la frontière jordanienne) fut « incitée » à semer le chaos et la fitna (dissension confessionnelle). Mais la Syrie, « qui n'est pas une copie conforme des autres États du monde arabe », a su ne pas tomber dans le piège, comme elle avait su « déjouer les plans ourdis contre elle » par les néoconservateurs américains après leur invasion de l'Irak en 2003.

Dans un autre paragraphe de son discours, qui semblait en flagrante contradiction avec cette bonne vieille explication du complot de l'étranger, le président a affirmé que son gouvernement devait se tenir davantage à l'écoute

des revendications populaires. Il a avoué que l'État syrien n'avait pas su trouver des réponses à un grand nombre d'exigences légitimes de la population. Magnanime, Bachar a même reconnu que, parmi les manifestants de Deraa (où le siège du parti Baas fut incendié et la statue de son père Hafez el-Assad jetée à terre), il y avait eu des protestataires sincères, sans affiliation avec la conspiration internationale. Le raïs n'a bien sûr fait aucune allusion aux slogans hurlés par les manifestants de Deraa après qu'ils eurent subi leurs premiers morts : « Hezbollah, Iran, barra ! Surria hurra ! » (« Dehors le Hezbollah et les Iraniens ! Syrie libre ! »)

Curieusement, dans son discours, le président a précisé qu'il n'avait jamais donné d'ordre à sa police de tirer sur les manifestants. Il est vrai que, dans la famille Assad, ce n'est pas Bachar qui est chargé de la sécurité du territoire, mais son jeune frère Maher (chef de la garde républicaine) et son beau-frère Assaf Chawkat (patron des services secrets)...

« Si le peuple réclame des réformes, il est de notre devoir de les faire », a aussi proclamé le président. Mais il n'a rien annoncé de concret, se bornant à promettre que son gouvernement lutterait davantage contre la corruption et le chômage des jeunes. L'état d'urgence, en vigueur dans le pays depuis 1963, n'est toujours pas levé.

À la fin de ce discours riche en contradictions, on ne pouvait pas s'empêcher de se demander quel était le réel pilote de l'avion Syrie et quel plan de vol il avait dessiné pour traverser avec succès les turbulences actuelles du monde arabe... ■

'The Other Iraq' Has Its Own Problems

NPR(National Public Radio)

by Kelly McEvers

These days, it seems like there are two Iraqs.

There's the Iraq that we know, where Baghdad is the capital, and where low-level bombings and political infighting are the norm.

And then there's a place that four groups are calling "the other Iraq": the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan. There, the economy is booming, people are using iPhones, and violence is down. But at what cost?

'Heaven Compared To The Rest Of Iraq'

To know the other Iraq is to start in the city of Irbil. Literally many millennia old, it's modernizing fast. The latest development is the Irbil International Airport: It's clean. Flights are taking off and landing on time. There's cappuccino. On a recent day, people from probably a dozen different countries are arriving and departing.

One of the recent arrivals is Wassim Sh'eir, a Lebanese-American.

"I came here through a construction company, and they want to open a franchise here," he says.

Wassim says Irbil was tough to take at first, with its shoddy construction and intermittent electricity. But compared to the rest of Iraq?

"Heaven," he says. "Irbil is heaven compared to the rest of Iraq."

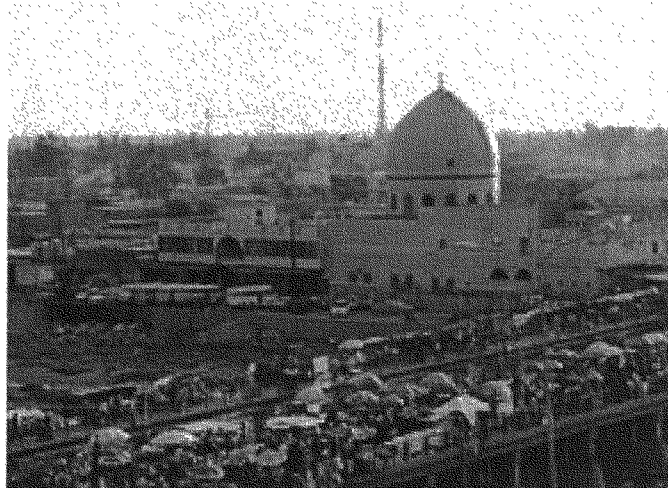
Even though he eventually wants to invest elsewhere in the country, Wassim says Irbil is fine for now.

"Irbil is definitely the starting point," he says. "They say Irbil is the gateway to the rest of Iraq."

A Myth Of Opportunity?



A young man goes bowling on the top floor of the newly built Majidi Mall in Irbil, Iraq.



Kamaran Najm/Metrography for NPR

The Khasa bridge in Kirkuk, Iraq, leads from the citadel into the city. The Khasa bridge is one of the landmarks of the ethnically diverse city of Kirkuk. It is used as a market and connects the Kurdish-dominated north side to the rest of the city.

The Kurds of northern Iraq have long struggled with the Arabs of the rest of Iraq, especially during the rule of Saddam Hussein.

After the first Gulf War, the United States and its allies provided the Kurds some protection by way of a no-fly zone. When Saddam fell in 2003, the oil-rich region reasserted its autonomy.

Two main Kurdish parties, led by two charismatic men, claim credit for this victory. But many Kurds say these men are now no better than dictators themselves — that much of Kurdistan's newfound wealth is being concentrated in the hands of a few.

Amid recent protests that were part of a larger wave of demonstrations around Iraq and the region, intellectuals like Farouk Rafiq said the Kurdish success story is a myth.

"This is a myth that there is economical opportunity. You know why? Because political parties, they captured the market," he said. "They have their own companies — for themselves, for politicians, for [those] who are on the top."

Boosting Economic Strength

So far, those politicians don't show any signs of relinquishing power. In fact, it's support from the Kurds that helped Iraq's incumbent prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, recently secure a second term.

In exchange for this support, the federal government in Baghdad recently agreed to let Kurdistan proceed with agreements to pump and sell its own oil.

Now, says analyst Jutiar Adel, the Kurdish leaders see economic growth as a way to continue asserting their autonomy.

"The economical presence, the economical strength is very important, and they

want to guarantee that there is an economical power for Kurdistan," he says through an interpreter.

That means in addition to ignoring protesters' demands for a bigger piece of the economic pie, other issues might be on the back burner — like who will control the area around the city of Kirkuk, where Kurds were the majority until Saddam sent Arabs to settle there.

At a recent conference, Kurdish President Massoud Barzani told followers it's likely his grandson will still be fighting for Kirkuk.

Reading between the lines, analysts suggested Barzani might be preparing his people to let go of their immediate claims to the region.

Emotional Issues

But Kurds in a village just outside the Kirkuk city limits don't want to hear that. While many parts of Kurdistan are booming, they are barely getting by.

The village appears to have no paved roads; sewer water pours out into the street and into a central ditch.

The Kurdish villagers were deported by Saddam back in the 1980s. When the dictator fell in 2003, they returned. But they're still not legal residents, say Ali Hussein Assaf and his aging father.

They say they have lived under these conditions for seven

years, and they don't know what their fate will be. But Kirkuk is their city, they say, and they are not going to give it up.

Mahmoud Othman, a Kurdish member of Iraq's Parliament, says issues like Kirkuk and ending corruption are emotional for the Kurds.

"You can't get rid of it. It's something which — you are a hostage to it," Othman says. "That's why the economy is very important, maybe quite important. But it's not — it couldn't be a substitute for that."

Othman says Kirkuk and corruption are problems that are not likely to be solved in the short term, no matter how prosperous "the other Iraq" becomes.



New Governor Elected in Iraq's Kirkuk, Arabs Enraged

31 March 2011

By Mustafa Mahmoud (Reuters)

KIRKUK, Iraq -- A new Kurdish governor and a Turkmen provincial council chief were elected on Tuesday in Iraq's northern Kirkuk, enraging Arab politicians in the disputed city who said they would boycott the council.

Kirkuk, an ethnic mix of Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen and others, lies just outside Iraq's semi-autonomous northern Kurdish region and its political future is one of the most hotly contested disputes in Iraq.

Kirkuk's provincial government has been led for years by the powerful Kurdish parties that control the northern zone. They want to incorporate the city into the Kurdish region, a move opposed by Turkmen and Arab residents.

The Kurdish governor and provincial council chief of Kirkuk stepped down earlier this month. Political opponents said the resignations were aimed at easing public discontent with the two main Kurdish political parties.

The provincial council elected Najimeldin Kareem, a Kurd, as the city's new governor and Hassan Toran, a member of the Turkmen ethnic minority, as provincial council head on Tuesday. The Arab bloc in the council boycotted the vote.

Abdullah Sami al-Aassi, an Arab provincial council member, said the bloc has complained to the government in Baghdad of what he called "a marginalisation of the Arab component".

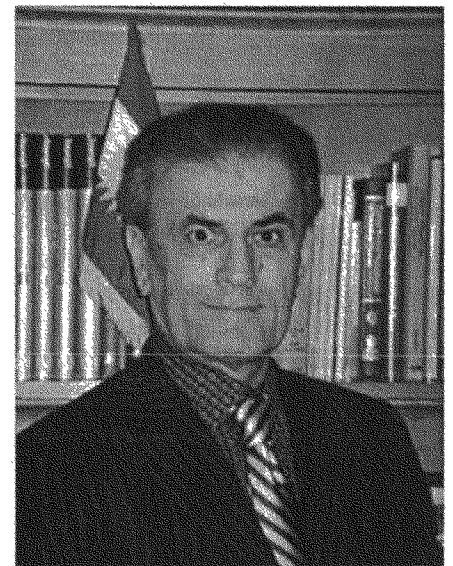
"We have suspended our membership in the council... We consider what happened today a marginalisation and elimination process of the Arab component," he said.

Kirkuk, which sits above large oil reserves, is a flashpoint of conflict at a time when Iraq is trying to shake off a legacy of violence and U.S. troops prepare to withdraw completely by the end of the year.

A referendum to determine if Kurds are the dominant ethnicity, which would enhance their claim to Kirkuk and its oil riches, has been repeatedly shelved after Arabs and Turkmen accused Kurds of flooding the city with their kin.

Kurds say dictator Saddam Hussein "Arabised" Kirkuk by encouraging Arabs to move there in the 1980s and 1990s.

Hundreds of Turkmen and Kurdish students clashed on Monday in Kirkuk after Turkmen students tried to hold a ceremony to mark the deaths of Turkmen killed under Saddam. Nine students and three policemen were



The provincial council elected Dr. Najmaldin Karim, a Kurd, as the city's new governor of Kirkuk.

wounded.

Overall violence has dropped sharply in Iraq from the peak of sectarian fighting between Sunnis and Shi'ites in 2006-07, but insurgents still launch scores of bomb and gun attacks each week, mainly against Iraqi security forces.