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KURDISTAN D' IRAK : LE SEPTIEME CABINET PRÊTE SERMENT

Le 6 avril, le nouveau cabinet du Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan a prêté serment au Parlement d'Erbil. Le nouveau Premier Ministre, Nêçirvan Barzanî et ses ministres ont ainsi officiellement commencé un mandat de deux ans. Nêçirvan Barzanî, a déjà occupé cette fonction deux fois, entre 1999 et 2009. Son adjoint est Imad Ahmad Sayfour, issu de l'UPK, qui était à ce même poste d'avril à octobre 2009.

Dans son discours d'inauguration, le Premier Ministre a d'abord souligné que ce gouvernement tirait sa seule légitimité du peuple du Kurdistan et de son Parlement et assuré qu'il continuerait les efforts nécessaires afin de poursuivre les

développements politique, social et économique déjà impressionnants qu'a connus la Région depuis 2003. Il a aussi félicité et remercié son prédécesseur, le Dr. Barham Salih, son adjoint Azad Barwarî et tous les membres du 6^{ème} cabinet pour « le travail important qu'ils ont accompli dans le temps qui leur avait été imparti », assurant que leurs efforts ont été appréciés « par nous-mêmes et le peuple du Kurdistan. »

Nêçirvan Barzanî a exposé au Parlement sa volonté d'appliquer un nouveau programme, avec « des stratégies et des initiatives qui tiendront compte des changements politiques, sociaux et économiques survenus ces dernières années. Récemment, des pays du Moyen-Orient et de

l'Afrique du nord ont commencé de voir l'émergence de la démocratie et de la justice. La Région du Kurdistan salue tout changement allant dans le sens de la démocratie, de la liberté et des droits de l'homme. Par contraste, le Printemps kurde a commencé il y a 20 ans, quand le peuple de Kurdistan s'est soulevé, avec le soutien des partis politiques du Kurdistan, et a fait en sorte de mettre fin à l'autorité d'un des plus dangereux dictateurs de l'époque dans notre pays, et a choisi d'instaurer un État de droit, la démocratie et la liberté, sans soutien des pays étrangers. »

Après avoir rappelé le rôle historique tenu dans ce processus démocratique par les deux dirigeants kurdes, Massoud Barzanî,

président de la Région du Kurdistan, et Jalal Talabani, président de l'Irak, le Premier Ministre s'est livré à une analyse et un bilan de la situation actuelle au Kurdistan, en insistant sur la nécessité d'une « évaluation objective » de cette situation, ainsi que sur celle de la préservation de l'unité des citoyens, faisant allusion aux conflits internes et alliances extérieures passés :

« Aujourd'hui, nous vivons une période historique et cruciale de notre histoire. Notre peuple n'a jamais autant espéré dans son avenir que de nos jours. Cependant il reste encore des défis à relever. L'unité parmi nous et une voix unie sur les questions nationales seront les facteurs principaux de notre réussite.

Nos relations politiques au temps de notre lutte armée ont été utiles pour instaurer la liberté dans ce pays. Cependant, aujourd'hui, ces relations doivent être révisées et renouvelées afin de les remettre en phase avec les réalités politiques de ce temps. L'adaptation n'est pas facile ni sans douleur, mais nous devons tirer les leçons du passé. »

Nêçirvan Barzanî s'est présenté comme le chef du gouvernement de tout le peuple du Kurdistan et comme un point de jonction entre les partis politiques » voulant ainsi écarter les suspicions de clientélisme qui ont constamment émaillé la vie politique du Kurdistan, longtemps partagée entre le PDK et l'UPK.

Après avoir résumé les différentes étapes de la construction politique et juridique de la Région du Kurdistan depuis 1992 à nos jours, en passant par 2003, le Premier Ministre a rappelé que les Kurdes avaient, à la chute du Ba'ath, décidé de parti-

ciper à la construction d'un Irak démocratique et fédéral, où leurs droits et leurs libertés seraient protégés par une constitution, mais qu'ils avaient, à présent, de nombreuses raisons de se demander si ce système pouvait ou non servir leurs intérêts.

« Malheureusement, l'Irak fait toujours face à la menace de l'instabilité politique. En tant que Région, nous avons toujours des problèmes importants qui ne sont pas résolus avec le gouvernement fédéral. Nous insistons sur le fait que le gouvernement fédéral doit répondre aux demandes du peuple du Kurdistan, de façon transparente et en accord avec la constitution de l'Irak. »

Parmi les points de litige importants entre Erbil et Bagdad, le Premier Ministre a cité l'Article 140 de la Constitution irakienne qui doit décider du rattachement de Kirkouk et d'autres régions kurdes au Gouvernement Régional par le processus d'un référendum, le budget alloué à la Région, la loi sur les hydrocarbures, c'est-à-dire la façon dont le Kurdistan est libre de gérer l'exploitation et la prospection de ses propres ressources, ainsi qu'un « partenariat réel dans le pouvoir », ce dernier point visant directement le Premier Ministre irakien Nouri Maliki, accusé par un large éventail politique de concentrer le pouvoir dans ses seules mains.

Nêçirvan Barzanî, sans nommer un parti d'opposition plus qu'un autre, a rappelé la nécessité pour tous les partis kurdes d'offrir « un front uni » devant le gouvernement fédéral, notamment au Parlement :

« Nous voulons mettre en place un front uni pour négocier avec le gouvernement fédéral. En ce moment, il n'y a aucun consen-

sus sur une position unifiée pour traiter avec Bagdad. La situation nécessite que nous nous hâtons de former un Haut-Conseil des négociations avec Bagdad. Participer à ce conseil sera du devoir de tous les partis politiques, tant ceux qui sont au gouvernement que ceux de l'opposition, afin qu'un consensus soit établi pour redémarrer les négociations avec le gouvernement fédéral. C'est un problème qui concerne tout le peuple du Kurdistan et nous avons la responsabilité historique d'y faire face. »

Revenant particulièrement sur la question des territoires dont la restitution est réclamée par les Kurdes, le Premier Ministre a appelé le Bloc kurde au parlement de Bagdad, tout comme les ministres kurdes du gouvernement irakien de coordonner étroitement leurs actions avec le Gouvernement Régional du Kurdistan.

Passant aux relations du GRK avec les États voisins, qu'il juge « bonnes », M. Barzanî assure de son intention de poursuivre le développement de ces relations « sur la base du respect mutuel et des intérêts bilatéraux. Nos relations avec les pays arabes et ceux du reste du monde se sont considérablement développées. Beaucoup de pays ont exprimé leur désir d'établir de bonnes relations avec le Kurdistan, et nous poursuivrons nos efforts pour bâtir des liens amicaux avec tous les pays du monde. »

Sur les réformes internes à la Région, le Premier Ministre a annoncé son intention de faire réexaminer la constitution provisoire du Kurdistan par « tous les partis politiques, les légistes, experts, et les composantes sociales et religieuses de notre société afin d'avoir une constitution qui rassemblera le peuple

du Kurdistan et développera un système pour l'avenir de notre peuple. Et parce que ce sera la première constitution du Kurdistan, elle devra être approuvée par référendum, et le peuple devra choisir librement de voter pour elle ou non. »

Autre réforme envisagée, un assouplissement de la centralisation en faveur d'une délégalation de certains pouvoirs et d'un budget aux conseils provinciaux, aux districts et sous-districts. Le Premier Ministre a promis de rencontrer les chefs des groupes parlementaires pour discuter de ce processus et de la rédaction d'un projet de loi qui instaurerait ces formes de décentralisation.

Abordant un des reproches majeurs et récurrents faits au GRK, celui de la corruption, Nêçirvan Barzanî rappelle que des audits et des enquêtes ont été réalisées par des organismes et institutions internationaux à la demande du gouvernement kurde : « Bien que la Région du Kurdistan ait été louée par les organisations internationales pour être bien meilleur que le reste de l'Irak, nous travaillerons à l'éliminer, sans l'ignorer : la corruption n'est pas si sérieuse que nous ne puissions y faire face et elle sera traitée. »

Un autre point fréquemment critiqué dans la vie politique est la puissance et l'influence des partis sur les institutions gouvernementales. Nêçirvan Barzanî promet « une politique claire » à ce sujet, indiquant que ces efforts avaient déjà été entrepris par les deux cabinets précédents. Il s'est aussi engagé à ce que le gouvernement n'interfère pas dans les décisions de justice et l'exercice de la loi en général, envisageant également une réforme des institutions judiciaires.

Répondant aussi aux plaintes de la population concernant l'aug-

mentation continue des prix et du coût de la vie, le Premier Ministre reconnaît que le secteur privé connaît des hausses de prix sans régulation, ni raison apparente, et promet de sévir si cela était le fait de spéculateurs, tout en rappelant que, deux ans auparavant, une loi sur les droits des consommateurs a été votée. Il s'engage à ce que son application soit effective, en collaboration avec le ministère de la Planification : « Nous allons travailler avec le ministère de la Planification pour mettre en place une commission, afin de surveiller les prix et la qualité des marchandises qui sont importées dans la région du Kurdistan. Nous devons travailler de sorte que les commerçants et les consommateurs tirent profit d'une politique de libre marché et que les gens puissent se permettre d'acheter les produits de nécessité à des prix équitables. »

Le gouvernement souhaite continuer aussi de fournir des crédits et des prêts hypothécaires à des personnes désirant se marier, construire une maison ou mener à bien divers projets, ainsi que, via son ministère des Finances, d'instaurer un système permettant un plus grand soutien financier aux retraités.

Sur les besoins croissants en fournitures de fuel ou l'électricité, les manquements sont surtout dus à la rapide croissance de la Région par rapport aux infrastructures en place. Mais tout en promettant de poursuivre les efforts dans ce domaine, M. Barzanî rappelle l'importance de protéger l'environnement et l'écologie de la Région. À cet effet, une commission pour l'Environnement devra contrôler si la protection de la nature au Kurdistan est conforme aux critères internationaux. Des réglementations concernant l'urbanis-

me, et celles concernant la construction et l'attribution de logements sociaux seront aussi mises en place. Le tourisme est aussi une des ressources prometteuses du Kurdistan, et devra être soutenu et amélioré.

Un des secteurs les plus sous-développés est celui de l'agro-alimentaire :

« Malheureusement, nous n'avons pas été jusqu'ici capables de garantir une sécurité alimentaire à notre peuple. Pourtant, le GRK considère que la reprise de l'agriculture est une tâche très importante, et nous ferons de notre mieux pour assurer une sécurité alimentaire, en encourageant la production domestique et moins dépendre des importations, pour arriver à une auto-suffisance dans ce domaine. »

Sur l'amélioration des droits de l'homme, la protection des enfants et les droits des femmes, sur le problème des violences domestiques, le Premier Ministre souhaite une plus grande participation féminine au sein du GRK.

Sur la cohabitation des différentes religions et ethnies au Kurdistan, le Gouvernement réitère sa volonté de tolérance et de liberté religieuse.

« Nous disons clairement que la majorité de notre peuple est musulmane. La religion de l'islam fait partie de nos précieuses traditions et nous ne permettrons pas un mauvais usage de la liberté afin d'attenter au respect de l'islam. Mais dans le même temps, nous ne permettrons à la religion d'être instrumentalisée à des fins politiques pour attaquer la démocratie. Pour nous, la religion est une force qui doit encourager la paix et la fraternité parmi les peuples, et non créer des inimitiés et des discriminations. Ainsi, nous ne

permettrons pas non plus que l'on manque de respect aux autres religions du Kurdistan.

Les Kurdes, les Turkmènes, les Arabes, les Chaldéens, les Syriaques, les Assyriens et les Arméniens doivent tous vivre ensemble pacifiquement dans la Région du Kurdistan et nous devons tous nous respecter mutuellement. L'Histoire témoigne de l'unité et de la fraternité entre les Kakai, les yézidis et les Kurdes fayli. L'identité kurde nous rassemble tous et pour toujours. Le GRK respecte toutes les composantes de la société du Kurdistan et soutenir les libertés de tous est du devoir de chacun. Le GRK appartient à tous et est fier de la riche mosaïque de notre société. »

Enfin, Nêçirvan Barzanî rappelle l'article 35 sur la liberté de la presse et des media et termine par une critique du ministre irakien des droits de l'homme pour son peu de zèle à faire toute la lumière sur les événements du génocide de l'Anfal, et notamment la découverte des fosses communes de localisation encore inconnue.

Le nouveau conseil des ministres garde la plupart des ministres du 6^{ème} cabinet, qui avaient été nommés après les législatives de 2009, hormis 9 nouveaux arrivants :

Composition du 7^{ème} Cabinet :

Premier Ministre : Nêçirvan Barzanî ;

Vice-Premier Ministre : Imad Ahmad Sayfour ;

Ministre de l'Agriculture et des ressources hydrauliques ;

Ministre de la Culture et de la Jeunesse : Kawa Mahmoud Shakir ;

Ministre de l'Éducation : Asmat Muhammad Khalid ;

Ministre de l'Électricité : Yasin Sheikh Abu Bakir Muhammad Mawati ;

Ministre des Dotations et des affaires religieuses : Kamil Ali Aziz ;

Ministre des Finances et de l'Économie : Bayiz Saeed Mohammad Talabani ;

Ministre de la Santé : Rekawt Hama Rasheed ;

Ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la recherche : Ali Saeed ;

Ministre du Logement et de la reconstruction : Kamaran Ahmed Abdullah ;

Ministre de la Justice : Sherwan Haidary ;

Ministre de l'Intérieur : Abdul Karim Sultan Sinjari ;

Ministre du Travail et des affaires sociales : Asos Najib Abdullaj ;

Ministre des Martyrs et de l'Anfal : Sabah Ahmad Mohamed (Mamoste Aram) ;

Ministre des Municipalités et du tourisme : Dilshad Shahab ;

Ministre des Ressources naturelles : Abdullah Abdulrahman Abdullah (Aştî Hawrami) ;

Ministre des Peshmergas : Jafar Mustafa Ali ;

Ministre de la Planification : Ali Sindi ;

Ministre du Commerce et de l'industrie : Sinan Abdulkhalq Ahmed Çelebi ;

Ministre des Transports et des communications : Jonson Siyaoosh ;

Président du Conseil des ministres : Fawzi Franso Toma Hariri ;

Secrétaire du Cabinet : Mohammad Qaradaghi ;

Chef du département des Relations étrangères Falah Mustafa Bakir

Président du Bureau des Investissements : Herish Muharam

IRAK :

TENSION ACCRUE ENTRE BAGDAD ET ERBIL

Les tensions politiques et économiques se durcissent entre l'Irak et la Région du Kurdistan. La compagnie française Total, avait, le mois dernier, laissé entendre la possibilité de signer des contrats pétroliers avec Erbil, ce qui a déclenché une fois de plus la colère du vice-président irakien Sharistani, tou-

jours en charge du dossier des ressources pétrolières, qui rappelle que les sanctions encourues par les sociétés étrangères qui choisiraient de se passer de l'aval de Bagdad, sont la rupture des contrats déjà signés avec l'Irak ou le blocage de futurs accords:

« Je n'ai pas parlé avec Total, mais j'ai noté que le ministre ou le ministère du Pétrole ont infor-

mé Total en termes très clairs de ce qu'il sera traité exactement de la même façon que les autres compagnies. S'il signe un contrat pour exploiter un gisement en Irak, où que ce soit dans le pays, sans l'approbation du gouvernement irakien, il sera considéré comme allant à l'encontre des lois irakiennes et traité en conséquence. » (Source AFP).

De son côté, le Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan avait menacé de cesser ses exportations pétrolières vers la capitale. Hussein Sharistani a de même lancé un avertissement aux dirigeants kurdes en les menaçant de couper les fonds budgétaires qu'ils reçoivent (17% du budget fédéral de l'Irak) : « Je leur conseillerais, avant de proférer des menaces, de prendre en compte le (montant de revenus du) pétrole qu'ils reçoivent du reste du pays, qui est beaucoup plus importante que ce qu'ils produisent. »

Le Vice Premier ministre a aussi accusé la Région kurde de ne pas fournir les 175 000 barils de brut, pour lesquels ils s'étaient engagés en 2012.

« Si ce niveau n'est pas atteint, ils en supporteront les conséquences et il devra y avoir une compensation financière au ministère des Finances. Le montant total en valeur du pétrole qui n'a pas été exporté en 2011 est de 3,547 milliards de dollars et celui du pétrole qui n'a pas été remis par la région en 2010 est de 2,102 milliards de dollars. C'est une grande somme d'argent qui va créer un déficit dans le budget si elle n'est pas versée. Le gouvernement doit examiner les procédures afin de protéger le patrimoine des Irakiens. L'unité de l'Irak, sa souveraineté et son argent ne peuvent pas (faire l'objet) de compromis. »

Car le Gouvernement Régional du Kurdistan a, dans une annonce officielle, averti que « les exportations de pétrole de la région du Kurdistan ont été réduites à 50.000 barils par jour (bj) et pourraient cesser d'ici un mois si le gouvernement fédéral à Bagdad continue de bloquer les paiements aux compagnies productrices. »

Le ministre du Pétrole, Abdel Karim al-Luaybi, a, de plus,

accusé les Kurdes de vendre « frauduleusement » la plus grande partie de leur pétrole brute à des pays voisins, notamment via l'Iran, et de là vers le Golfe et l'Afghanistan, où il est vendu à bas prix par rapport au cours officiel.

Autre dossier épineux entre Bagdad et Erbil, la présence au Kurdistan d'Irak du vice-président d'Irak, le sunnite Hachémi, accusé de complot et terrorisme par le Premier ministre et qui refuse d'être jugé à Bagdad. Le Kurdistan avait refusé de livrer le fugitif aux autorités centrales. Finalement, Tarek Hashémi a quitté la Région du Kurdistan le 1^{er} avril, pour trouver temporairement refuge au Qatar.

Dans le même temps, le président de la Région kurde, Massoud Barzani, était en visite aux Etats-Unis. Reçu à la Maison Blanche par le vice-président américain Joe Biden, il a également rencontré le secrétaire américain à la défense Leon Panetta. Il s'est aussi entretenu plus brièvement avec le président des Etats-Unis et si le contenu des entretiens n'a pas été rendu public, il est plus probable que les multiples crises politiques irakiennes ont été au centre des discussions. Mais la présidence américaine s'est simplement contentée d'un communiqué affirmant que « les Etats-Unis sont engagés par notre relation historique et de proximité avec le peuple kurde, dans le contexte de notre partenariat stratégique avec un Irak fédéral, démocratique et unifié. »

De retour au Kurdistan, le ton entre Massoud Barzani et Nouri Maliki ne s'est pas rasséréiné. Dans un entretien accordé au quotidien arabe international Al-Hayat, le président kurde a de nouveau accusé le Premier Ministre chiite de concentrer le

pouvoir dans ses mains (ce que lui reprochent beaucoup d'autres politiciens irakiens, sunnites, kurdes et même chiites) et de préparer un « retour à la dictature », en rappelant que le Premier Ministre est aussi ministre de la Défense, ministre de l'Intérieur, chef des renseignements et commandant en chef des forces armées.

Massoud Barzani a ajouté qu'il tenterait d'organiser une réunion des différents leaders irakiens à Erbil, « pour sauver l'Irak », mais a laissé entendre qu'en cas d'échec, le Kurdistan pourrait opter pour une séparation d'avec le reste de l'Irak : « Il ne s'agit pas là d'un chantage ou d'une menace. Je suis sérieux, je reviendrai au peuple kurde pour le sonder par référendum. Quel que soit le prix à payer, nous n'accepterons jamais un retour de la dictature en Irak. »

Les accusations de purge politique à l'encontre de Maliki ont pris une nouvelle ampleur avec l'arrestation de Faraj Haïdari, un Kurde chiite, qui est président de la Haute Commission électorale irakienne (IHEC) depuis 2007. Ce dernier a en effet été appréhendé par la police, dans un tribunal de Bagdad avec un de ses collègues, Karim Al-Tamimi. Du poste de police où il est maintenu en détention, Faraj Haïdari a pu répondre aux questions de l'AFP sur les raisons de cette arrestation surprise. Une députée de la formation l'État de droit, dirigée par Maliki, a porté plainte pour corruption : « L'affaire concerne trois ou quatre employés de l'IHEC auxquels ont été versées, de manière tout à fait normale, une prime de 100.000 dinars (83 dollars) pour des heures supplémentaires. J'ai déjà été interrogé au Parlement sur cette affaire par Mme Fatlawi. Le juge avait rejeté ses accusations mais elle a

de nouveau porté plainte et cette fois le juge a changé d'avis. Je ne pense pas que ce soit dirigé contre moi mais c'est contre l'IHEC, contre tout le processus démocratique. »

Mais interrogé sur cette affaire, le porte-parole du Conseil supérieur de la justice, Abdel Sattar Bayraqdar, parle, lui, de prévarication :

« Ils sont suspectés d'avoir payé avec l'argent de l'IHEC des employés du cadastre pour enregistrer des terrains en leurs noms. L'utilisation frauduleuse de l'argent public est punie de sept ans de prison. »

Faraj Haïdari, est considéré comme la « bête noire » de l'État de droit, depuis qu'il a refusé, aux dernières législatives de mars 2010, un nouveau décompte des voix réclamé par Maliki, alors que la liste de son rival, Iyad Allawi, était arrivée en tête du scrutin, avec 91 sièges contre 89 pour l'État de droit. Déjà, le 30 juillet 2011, la formation parlementaire du Premier ministre avait demandé un vote de défiance contre Faraj Haïdari, en invoquant des faits de corruption, mais s'était heurté à l'opposition des autres formations.

Le Gouvernement de la Région du Kurdistan, a publiquement qualifié ces arrestations de « violation claire du processus politique démocratique », visant à « remettre en cause l'indépendance de la Commission électorale et à tuer le processus politique en s'emparant d'une institution indépendante. Il semble que ceux qui contrôlent le gouvernement veulent poursuivre leur oeuvre entamée depuis longtemps: accroître la centralisation, violer la Constitution et détruire les bases sur lesquelles a été construit le nouvel Irak. »

Du côté d'al Iraqiya, la formation parlementaire sunnite, l'un de ses principaux représentants au parlement, Haïdar al-Mullah, a directement mis en cause Nouri Maliki : « C'est le chef de la formation de l'Etat de droit qui est derrière. Il veut faire passer le message que les élections doivent être truquées ou les autorités se vengeront contre la commission électorale. C'est aussi une indication que la justice est devenue un instrument entre les mains de Maliki. »

Enfin, dernier point de friction entre les Kurdes et le gouvernement Maliki, la vente de 36 F-16 à l'Irak par les États-Unis, conclue en décembre dernier, suscite la vive opposition de Massoud Barzani, tant que Nouri Maliki reste à la tête du pays : « Les F-16 ne doivent pas arriver dans les mains de cet homme. Nous devons empêcher qu'il possède ce type d'armes et s'il les obtient, il ne doit pas rester à son poste. » Le président kurde assure en effet que, lors d'une réunion avec des officiers de l'armée irakienne, Nouri Maliki aurait menacé d'utiliser ces avions pour bombarder le Kurdistan : « Ils ont parlé des problèmes entre Bagdad et Erbil et les officiers lui ont dit : 'Monsieur, donnez nous l'ordre et nous allons les chasser d'Erbil' et il (Maliki) a répondu: 'Attendez l'arrivée des F-16'.

Mais la personnalité et la ligne politique du Premier Ministre sont aussi contestées dans d'autres milieux chiites, notamment les cercles politico-religieux, des plus modérés aux plus radicaux, tel Moqtada Sadr, qui n'a cessé de s'opposer, parfois par les armes, aux gouvernements successifs de Bagdad, bien que sa liste se soit ralliée en 2010 à la grande coalition chiite de Maliki. Alors qu'il

réside actuellement en Iran, officiellement pour « études religieuses », il s'est rendu le 26 avril à Erbil, sur invitation du gouvernement kurde, pour discuter de la crise politique, dans une posture de médiateur entre le président kurde et le Premier ministre irakien. Le président de l'Irak, Jalal Talabani était aussi présent, ainsi que les deux leaders de la coalition laïque sunnite, Iyad Allawi et Oussama Noujaifi.

Au cours de leur entretien, Moqtada Sadr s'est montré opposé à une motion de censure au parlement pour renverser Nouri Maliki, comme le souhaiteraient les Kurdes et les sunnites, mais appuie le refus d'accorder que ce dernier puisse briguer un nouveau mandat en 2014, comme le Premier Ministre s'y était engagé au début de l'année 2011, avant d'adopter une position plus floue sur cette question. Un proche collaborateur de Sadr a d'ailleurs souligné que l'impossibilité pour le Premier Ministre d'obtenir un troisième mandat doit d'abord être votée par une loi au parlement.

Dr. Fouad Hussein, le directeur de cabinet de la présidence kurde, a, dans un communiqué, déclaré que tous les participants à cette réunion ont lancé « un appel pour activer les mécanismes démocratiques de gestion des affaires du pays afin de prévenir les dangers qui menacent la démocratie. La réunion a discuté de la nécessité de rechercher des solutions pour mettre fin à la crise qui met en danger l'intérêt supérieur du pays, en se conformant à l'accord d'Erbil, à la déclaration de Moqtada Sadr et aux articles de la Constitution définissant les règles de prises de décision. »

SYRIE : LES KURDES SE RETIRENT DU CONSEIL NATIONAL SYRIEN

Plus d'un an après le mouvement de révolte qui secoue durement la Syrie, les organisations et les partis politiques kurdes peinent à trouver leur place au sein de l'opposition syrienne, autant qu'à s'accorder entre eux sur la priorité ou la nature de leurs revendications, d'autant que le pays qui, avec le Qatar, soutient le plus activement les insurgés, est la Turquie, vue comme l'ennemi principal des aspirations kurdes.

Il s'ensuit une valse d'hésitations entre le ralliement de mouvements au Conseil national syrien, qui regroupe toute l'opposition arabe ou le refus de s'y joindre sans garantie claire que les droits des Kurdes seront enfin entérinés dans la « nouvelle Syrie ».

Ainsi, alors que le 1^{er} avril devait avoir lieu, à Istanbul, la deuxième rencontre des « Amis de la Syrie », un des principaux blocs de l'opposition kurde, le Conseil national kurde, s'est retiré du Conseil national syrien, en invoquant le refus des nationalistes arabes et des Frères musulman d'accepter les demandes des Kurdes dans leurs projets politiques, peut-être aussi encouragés discrètement en cela par la Turquie.

En effet, selon le chercheur Jordi Tejel Gorgas, spécialiste de la politique kurde en Syrie, la méfiance des Kurdes se porte autant à l'encontre du pan-arabisme que de l'activisme des Frères musulmans (les confréries soufies kurdes jouant, par contre, un rôle influent dans la politique pro-kurde), qu'envers la Turquie, de laquelle « ils n'attendent rien de bon ». L'échec des promesses et des espoirs que l'AKP avait suscités avec son

projet d'ouverture sur la question kurde, a, depuis 2009, persuadé la majorité des Kurdes qu'aucune solution ni détente politique ne pouvait être attendue de la part d'Ankara.

Les Kurdes de Syrie « ne voient en aucune façon la Turquie comme un acteur 'neutre' dans la région, ni comme un modèle de démocratisation. » De plus, les media comme les services de renseignement turcs pointent une possible alliance du PYD (branche syrienne du PKK) avec le régime alaouite, le PKK cherchant une base de repli au cas où tenir Qandil, au Kurdistan d'Irak ne serait plus possible en raison de l'évolution des relations diplomatiques entre la Turquie et le Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan d'Irak. Par contre, les responsables du PYD, tout comme ceux du PKK, ont affirmé clairement, et à plusieurs reprises, qu'en cas d'intervention militaire de la Turquie en Syrie, ils prendraient les armes contre les soldats turcs.

La position du PYD, qui proclame que son combat ne concerne pas seulement les Kurdes de Syrie mais englobe la question kurde dans sa totalité, est, au fond, une reprise du choix « stratégique » qu'avait fait le PKK dans les années 1990, alors qu'Öcalan, hôte de la Syrie, détournait les revendications des Kurdes syriens au profit du combat que le PKK menait tant en Turquie qu'au Kurdistan d'Irak, le tout dans une alliance ouverte avec Hafez Al-Assad. Les autres partis kurdes accusent à présent le PYD de jouer la même carte avec Bachar Al-Assad, et d'empêcher, voire d'attaquer physiquement les manifestations kurdes contre le régime.

« L'attitude du PYD/PKK en Syrie est très révélatrice, explique Jordi Tejel Gorgas. En fin de compte, le PKK espère que si le régime ne tombe pas, leur loyauté leur permettra d'imposer leur hégémonie politique dans les régions kurdes. »

Mais malgré leurs divisions et leur indécision politique, David W. Lesch, qui enseigne l'histoire du Moyen Orient à l'université de la Trinité de San Antonio, juge, lui, que les Kurdes de Syrie ont joué intelligemment leur partie depuis le début de la révolte : « Je les soupçonne d'attendre leur heure en observant ce qui se passe, afin d'être à même de jouer un rôle, qu'Assad soit renversé ou non. Ils peuvent aussi regarder du côté de leurs frères en Irak pour y trouver une orientation et s'inspirer de la façon dont ceux-ci ont pu s'assurer une existence prospère et indépendante au milieu d'un Irak chaotique après l'invasion de 2003.

La méfiance kurde à l'égard du Conseil national syrien s'est trouvée confortée dans une interview accordée au journal kurde Rudaw par son dirigeant Burhan Ghalioun, interview dans laquelle il nie l'existence d'un « Kurdistan syrien » : « Il n'existe pas de « Kurdistan syrien ». Les Kurdes syriens obtiendront leurs droits comme le reste des citoyens de Syrie. Burhan Ghalioun a aussi rejeté la possibilité d'un statut fédéral accordé aux Kurdes de Syrie, qualifiant « d'illusion » ce projet soutenu par plusieurs partis kurdes : « Appliquer le modèle irakien est une chose impossible en Syrie. »

L'émoi et les vives protestations que ces déclarations ont fait naître dans l'opposition kurde

syrienne ont amené le porte-parole officiel du Conseil national syrien, Ahmed Ramadan, à revenir sur les propos de Burhan Ghalioun, en tentant d'apaiser les craintes kurdes : « Les Kurdes syriens sont inséparables de leurs frères qui vivent hors de Syrie, que ce soit en Irak, en Turquie ou en Iran », a-t-il déclaré au même journal Rudaw, quelques jours plus tard. Le porte-parole a nuancé les positions du leader du CNS, en affirmant que, contrairement au régime actuel, l'opposition syrienne reconnaît l'existence d'un Kurdistan syrien, même si celui-

ci est inclus dans les frontières syriennes « Le régime syrien n'a pu nier l'existence d'un Kurdistan en tant que lieu géographique, mais il a toujours éradiqué les caractéristiques culturelles, historiques et démographiques de ce lieu. Mais les questions portant sur le fédéralisme et l'autonomie ne doivent pas être débattues pour le moment, en aucune façon, car les partis kurdes en Syrie ont des visées qui ne collent pas à la réalité de la Syrie. »

Ahmed Ramadan ajoute que l'actuel régime syrien a toujours

voulu se débarrasser de tous ses Kurdes (ce qui n'est pas tout à fait exact, la politique alouite ayant toujours voulu instrumentaliser ses minorités ethniques ou religieuses, afin de contenir la majorité sunnite) alors que l'opposition syrienne, selon Ramadan, tire fierté de l'identité du peuple kurde : « Le Conseil national syrien est fier des Kurdes syriens et de leur drapeau. »

La nouvelle constitution en Syrie incluerait « des articles qui feraient spécifiquement référence à la culture et à l'identité kurdes ».

TURQUIE : MOBILISATION CONTRE LES ARRESTATIONS D'ÉTUDIANTS ET DE CHERCHEURS

Le mardi 10 avril, l'éditeur Ragıp Zarakolu, qui avait été emprisonné en vertu de la loi anti-terreur a été libéré, ainsi que 14 autres prévenus, sur une décision de la 15^{ème} cour pénale d'Istanbul.

Ragıp Zarakolu était détenu dans la prison de haute sécurité de Kocaeli depuis le 28 octobre 2011, après un coup de filet qui avait inclut 49 personnes, dont la juriste Büşra Eranlı. Le 19 mars 2012, le Procureur public d'Istanbul, Adnan Çimen, avait requis respectivement 15 à 22,5 ans d'emprisonnement contre Büşra Eranlı, sous l'accusation d'être « responsable d'une organisation illégale » et 7,5 à 15 ans contre Ragıp Zarakolu pour avoir « soutenu et aidé une organisation illégale ». Le procureur avait transmis à la 15^{ème} cour pénale d'Istanbul un acte d'accusation de 2 400 pages, qui visaient en tout 193 personnes, dont 147 étaient en détention préventive.

Avec Ragıp Zarakolu, un journaliste du quotidien kurde

Özgür Gündem et 13 détenus ont été libérés, tandis qu'à Van, dans le même temps, six personnes dont une journaliste de l'agence DIHA ont été de même relâché par décision du tribunal.

Ces arrestations d'intellectuels, d'universitaires, de journalistes et d'éditeurs ont suscité une vague de protestation dans tout le pays, ainsi qu'aux États-Unis, en France, en Allemagne, en Grande-Bretagne, en Suisse, en Italie et en Grèce.

Mais beaucoup d'autres prisonniers d'opinion restent sous les verrous, dont Büşra Eranlı, Deniz Zarakolu, un chercheur en sciences politiques et de nombreux étudiants détenus en vertu d'une loi d'exception datant du coup d'Etat de 1980. Par ailleurs, ces libérations ne sont que conditionnelles et les charges sont maintenues contre les inculpés. Ragıp Zarakolu doit être ainsi jugé le 2 juillet à Silivri, malgré l'inconsistance des accusations portées contre lui.

De plus, ces libérations n'ont pas empêché d'autres arrestations

dans le milieu universitaire. Ainsi, la journaliste et anthropologue Müge Tuzcuoğlu a été arrêtée alors qu'elle donnait un cours sur « L'histoire des sociétés » à l'Académie de sciences politiques du Parti kurde (BDP). Ses travaux de recherches en sociologie, notamment ses enquêtes sur les conséquences des migrations forcées parmi les Kurdes n'ont sans doute pas non plus eu l'heure de plaire aux autorités judiciaires.

Des manifestations ont eu lieu pour la libération de nombreux étudiants et lycéens turcs, qui se trouvent derrière les barreaux. Leurs professeurs ont notamment organisé à deux reprises un cours sit-in devant la prison de « type F » (haute sécurité) de Tekirdag, où se trouvent le plus grand nombre d'étudiants emprisonnés, entourés de gendarmes et de barrières de sécurité. Malgré leur demande auprès du procureur, les enseignants n'ont pu rencontrer leurs élèves. Ils ont donc déployé des tables de cours et des chaises devant la prison, et ont brandi des pancartes avec leurs revendications.

Bediz Yilmaz, qui enseigne à l'université de Mersin, a fait l'appel des étudiants détenus à Tekirdag. Beyza Üstün, de l'université technique de Yildiz, a déclaré en commençant son « cours » : « Nous sommes venus pour nos étudiants qui sont emprisonnés ici. Leur place n'est pas ici, elle est en cours », avant d'enchaîner sur le thème de la transformation de l'eau en marchandise, et sur les dommages causés par les centrales hydro-électriques, dont les réserves d'eau ne sont pas restituées à la nature :

« En tout lieu, l'eau est entre les mains des entreprises pendant un bail de 49 ans. Elles ont mis la main sur les cours d'eau, malgré les lois, malgré les réglementations de protection. Où va cette eau ? Dans des canaux. Les conduites privent la vie, tant souterraine que de surface, des ressources en eau. La population anatolienne s'est élevée contre cet état de choses. Mais il reste tous ceux qui ne se révolteront pas : les oiseaux, les arbres, les plantes, les êtres vivants dans le sous-sol. A qui profite cette eau emprisonnée dans des conduites ? A d'autres entreprises qui l'achètent. Elle n'atteindra jamais ceux qui n'ont pas d'argent. » (...) Par ailleurs, 300 travailleurs ont perdu la vie dans ce processus de marchandisation de l'eau, sans que la presse ne s'en émeuve. »

Ali Saysel, enseignant à l'université du Bosphore, a lui aussi qualifié le XXI^e siècle de « siècle de crise écologique ».

À la fin de ces cours-manifestations, les participants ont rédigé des cartes postales pour les étudiants emprisonnés à Tekirdag. Cette campagne est soutenue par un grand nombre d'enseignants syndicalistes (Egitim-Sen) de Tekirdag. Un autre cours, où Nükhet Sirman (Université du

Bosphore) et Ayten Alkan (Université d'Istanbul) avaient parlé du genre social, avait été organisé devant la prison de Bakirköy.

L'équipe de coordination de la campagne « Öğrencime Dokunma ! » (Touche pas à mon étudiant) a, le 5 avril à 17 heures, lu un communiqué de presse devant les grilles du célèbre lycée Galatasaray d'Istanbul :

« Nous assistons ces derniers temps à des mises en garde à vue, des arrestations et des procès qui dérangent nos consciences. Une partie importante de ces pressions, devenues particulièrement alarmantes au cours de cette dernière année, s'est concentrée sur les étudiant(e)s d'université.

Le nombre d'étudiant(e)s arrêté(e)s augmente de jour en jour en Turquie. Il est très difficile d'obtenir des informations fiables et actualisées du fait des nouvelles arrestations, des mises en liberté et des exclusions universitaires suite aux enquêtes disciplinaires. Si celle-ci reste préoccupante, c'est moins la fréquence de ces pressions que la stratégie à l'œuvre derrière ces agissements qu'il convient de souligner, à savoir la volonté de discipliner et, à défaut, éliminer les étudiant(e)s. La plupart des crimes imputés aux étudiant(e)s sont regroupés sous le terme-épouvantail de « terrorisme ». Présenter comme éléments probatoires non seulement le fait de s'adonner à des activités « normales » dans le cadre de la liberté d'expression et d'association (rédiger un communiqué de presse, protester contre les décisions du Conseil de l'Enseignement Supérieur (YÖK), participer à une manifestation ou une commémoration...), mais également des notes de cours, des livres, des factures d'eau ou même des activités quotidiennes comme se faire couper les cheveux, porter un parapluie, danser le *halay* ou vendre

des billets de concert tend à noircir le tableau. .

Les étudiant(e)s – pour la plupart détenu(e)s depuis plusieurs années dans des prisons de haute sécurité – luttent, en plus, pour pouvoir continuer leur formation universitaire, accéder à leurs livres et notes de cours et participer aux examens.

Le « règlement disciplinaire pour les étudiant(e)s de l'enseignement supérieur », produit du coup d'État militaire du 12 Septembre 1980, est utilisé comme instrument d'oppression complémentaire contre les étudiant(e)s arrêté(e)s. Plusieurs autorités universitaires s'illustrent par leur volontarisme et leur impatience à sanctionner ces étudiant(e)s – dont les agissements supposés ne font parfois même pas l'objet d'un procès public - en les éloignant ou en les excluant de l'enseignement supérieur, par le biais d'enquêtes disciplinaires. »

« Il est parfaitement inacceptable de transformer des étudiant(e)s qui protestent ou interrogent les schèmes imposés par l'Etat en des suspects de « terrorisme » sans présenter de motif afin d'étayer le dispositif du jugement ni aucune preuve, que l'on essaie de discipliner ces étudiant(e)s par la violence étatique et de les égarer dans des procédures juridictionnelles interminables. »

« La responsabilité principale des universités, en tant que lieux de production scientifique basée sur la liberté de pensée et d'expression, est avant tout de protéger leurs étudiant(e)s. Nous, universitaires de toute la Turquie, déclarons que nous n'allons pas nous taire alors que nos étudiant(e)s - dont les gardes à vue et les arrestations vont croissantes - deviennent des cibles, qu'on les prive de leur liberté et qu'on les arrache à leur université et à leur vie. »

LITTÉRATURE :
« LES PLUMES », UN ROMAN DE SALIM BARAKAT
SALUÉ PAR LA CRITIQUE FRANCOPHONE

Les Plumes, » le dernier roman traduit en français par Emmanuel Varlet (douze ans après sa parution en arabe), aux éditions Actes Sud, de Salim Barakat, a été salué très élogieusement par la critique.

Né en 1951 à Qamishlo, au Kurdistan de Syrie, Salim Barakat est un écrivain kurde d'expression arabe, bien que presque tout l'imaginaire, la trame et les lieux de son œuvre romanesque concernent le monde kurde, et principalement sa région natale.

Salim Barakat vit en Europe, après un parcours mouvementé, qui l'a amené du Liban, où il avait rejoint les rangs des Palestiniens, à Chypre et finalement en Suède. Il a écrit plus de 35 livres, romans ou recueils de poésie, dont seulement 5 d'entre eux ont été traduits en français : *Le Criquet de fer* (1993, Babel 2012) et *Sonne du cor* (1995), qui s'inspirent de façon romancée de son enfance et de son adolescence ; *Les Seigneurs de la nuit* (1999), un roman fantastique et surréaliste, dont l'action se déroule dans un village kurde ; *Les Grottes de Haydradahus* (2008), un conte féérique se déroulant cette fois dans un monde imaginaire, proche du genre de la Fantasy.

« Avec « Les Plumes ou : Les preuves qui échappèrent à Mem Azad durant sa lointaine et drolatique escapade », Salim Barakat renoue avec sa veine « kurde », faite de reminiscences autobiographiques passées à la moulinette de l'épopée mi-poétique mi-fantastique : « Mem, un jeune Kurde de Syrie, est envoyé par son père à Chypre, où il doit entrer en contact avec un person-

nage mystérieux, le "Grand Homme". Six ans plus tard, il n'a pas réussi à remplir sa mission. Usé par sa quête improbable, en proie aux affres de l'exil, il envisage d'abrégier ses jours. Défilent alors dans sa mémoire les souvenirs de Qamishli, sa ville natale, des anecdotes sur sa famille haute en couleur, les vicissitudes de son peuple dupé par l'histoire, les légendes véhiculées par son père au sujet d'un âge d'or où les Kurdes auraient vécu libres et prospères...

Six ans plus tôt. Mem vit à Qamishli avec Dino, son frère jumeau. Etrangers dans leur propre pays, le régime syrien leur ayant toujours dénié le droit d'être kurdes, ils mènent une existence précaire et désespérée. Un beau jour, Mem s'évanouit mystérieusement dans la nature et, peu à peu, le doute s'installe : Mem est-il parti à Chypre ?

Serait-ce plutôt Dino ? La vie de Mem ne serait-elle pas le rêve de son frère ? Dans une prose somptueuse portée par un souffle épique qui mêle figures de l'histoire et héros légendaires, qui fait dialoguer oiseaux, plantes, anges et cours d'eau, Salim Barakat a peut-être offert aux Kurdes – en langue arabe, paradoxalement – le roman le plus puissant sur leur quête de liberté et de dignité. » (Actes Sud).

Dans son blog de chroniques, Rebecca Benhamou, qui fut notamment journaliste à Arte et assistante aux éditions Héloïse d'Ormesson, loue la puissance « sans complaisance » du roman et la dignité d'un « curieux hommage, un hommage qui se lit comme un conte », qui est fait à « l'âme kurde via une kyrielle de métaphores, de rencontres,

d'images, de légendes d'un peuple mille fois humiliés », dans un récit qui « des allers-retours entre ce Kurdistan mille fois rêvé et aimé et une pâle réalité à Chypre. »

Dans « Le Monde des livres », Catherine Simon parle de « mélodramatique kafkaïenne » dont « les grandes dates de l'histoire du peuple kurde, mille fois révolté, mille fois écrasé, soumis à la domination des puissants (les Turcs, les Syriens, les Iraniens, les Irakiens...) forment le motif obsédant ». Le tout écrit dans « une prose déroutante, touffue comme un taillis de ronces, légère comme cette « petite plume cendrée » surgie de la valise de Mem, qui s'élève soudain dans l'air en tournoyant, avant de redescendre en se balançant et de se poser de nouveau tout au fond, sur les faux plis grossiers de la doublure », et de son écriture « puissante et raffinée ».

Incipit :

« Je sortais tous mes vêtements de leur valise de cuir quand, soudain, une petite plume cendrée, surgie des entrailles du bagage, s'est élevée dans l'air en tournoyant, avant de redescendre en se balançant et de se poser de nouveau tout au fond, sur les faux plis grossiers de la doublure. Le maroquinier n'avait visiblement pas pensé que je pourrais examiner son ouvrage d'aussi près, en portant mon attention sur ces gros fils entrecroisés qui s'effilocheaient parce qu'il les avait arrachés à la main, d'un coup sec, et non coupés avec des ciseaux.

J'ai plongé la main au fond du bagage et remonté la plume en pleine lumière, en constatant alors qu'elle n'était pas vraiment cendrée, finalement. J'en ai observé l'endroit et l'envers. Un panachage de gris et de blanc. Toute petite. Ébouriffée.

J'étais sur le point de m'en débarrasser et puis, me ravisant, j'ai desserré les doigts pour la laisser retomber à l'intérieur de la valise.

Au lieu de me demander qui avait pu la jeter au milieu de mes vête-

ments, je me suis laissé captiver par son lent balancement vers le fond sombre du bagage et par ses couleurs tour à tour ambiguës et évidentes, selon la lumière – ce qui m'a amené à la laisser retomber une autre fois

sur le cuir de la doublure à gros sur-fils.

Comment une simple plume pouvait-elle susciter chez moi autant de questionnements ?

CINÉMA :

SORTIE DU « TEMPS DURE LONGTEMPS » D'ÖZCAN ALPER

Le Temps dure long-temps » (Gelecek Uzun Süre,) un film d'Özcan Alper, avec Gaye Gürsel, Durukan Ordu et Sarkis Seropyan est sorti dans les salles françaises le 18 avril.

« Sumru prépare un master d'ethnomusicologie à l'Université d'Istanbul. Elle s'installe au Sud-Est de Turquie [Kurdistan] pour quelques mois afin d'y étudier les élégies anatoliennes et leur histoire. A Diyarbakır, elle rencontre Ahmet, vendeur de DVD pirates ayant filmé des témoignages de survivants kurdes. Sumru est hantée par le souvenir douloureux de son premier amour, un Kurde mystérieusement disparu. Aux côtés d'Ahmet, dans le contexte tragique de cette guerre non reconnue à ce jour, elle va devoir affronter son passé et l'histoire de son pays. »

« L'une des principales motivations de ce film, explique son réalisateur, est d'essayer de donner un sens au présent et au passé à travers ces poèmes [les élégies] qui sont au cœur de l'histoire. Alors que Sumru traque ces élégies pour appréhender la souffrance d'un peuple, elle ouvre une blessure personnelle liée à son passé. Cette histoire est importante car elle permet de présenter la diversité de ces sociétés mais aussi parce qu'elle montre comment l'expérience collective se reflète dans la vie

des individus. A travers cette guerre sans nom [contre les Kurdes] qui se poursuit depuis les trente dernières années, au cours de laquelle 17 500 assassinats politiques ont été commis sous le nom de « cas non résolus », je tiens à regarder la Turquie d'aujourd'hui en face. »

Jean Roy, dans L'Humanité, juge l'œuvre « d'une grande pudeur » : « Cela commence par un plan magnifique. Un cheval galope dans la nature de toute sa fierté de pur-sang indompté. Un coup de feu retentit venu dont on ne sait où et l'animal s'effondre au sol, achevé. Qui peut faire preuve d'une telle absence de sentiment ? On le saura d'autant moins qu'un unique cheval, peut-être le même, ne réapparaîtra furtivement que dans les tout derniers instants du film. Il y a donc là métaphore. Cette œuvre s'ouvre sous le signe du malheur, de la cruauté, de l'ignominie. »

Jacques Morice, dans Télérama, qualifie ce film « d'allusif et sensible. L'amplitude des paysages, le sens de l'existence comme suspendu, tout cela rappelle, en mineur, le cinéma de Nuri Bilge Ceylan, de Wim Wenders et de Theo Angelopoulos (ces deux derniers sont d'ailleurs cités dans le film). Özcan Alper, qui signe son second long métrage, ne dissocie pas la contemplation et l'engagement. Rien que pour cela, il est précieux. »

La première mondiale du film a eu au Festival international du film de Toronto. Il a aussi remporté de nombreuses récompenses en Turquie, notamment au Festival d'Adana (Prix Yılmaz Güney du Meilleur Film, Prix de la Critique du Meilleur Film, Prix du Meilleur Acteur, Prix de la Meilleure Musique, Prix de la Meilleure Image) et a participé au Festival de Berlin.

Né en 1975 à Artvin, en Turquie, Özcan Alper a la particularité d'être issu d'une minorité dans la minorité, car il fait partie de ces Arméniens de mer Noire dits « Hamchin », qui se sont convertis à l'islam et ne sont donc guère appréciés des autres Arméniens, tout en conservant leur langue et certains traits culturels. Après avoir étudié au lycée de Trabzon, Özcan Alper est entré à l'université d'Istanbul. D'abord au département de physique et puis pour étudier l'histoire des sciences jusqu'en 2003.

Parallèlement à ses études, il a pris part à des ateliers de cinéma organisé par le centre culturel kurde Mezopotamya d'Istanbul et par la Maison culturelle Nâzım Hikmet. En 2000, il obtient un poste d'assistant auprès de la cinéaste Yeşim Ustaoglu. « Le Temps dure long-temps » est son second long métrage, après « Sonbahar » (Automne, 2008) qui racontait l'histoire d'un jeune étudiant prisonnier politique.



2 avril 2012

Irak: le Kurdistan n'exporte plus de pétrole à cause d'un conflit financier avec Bagdad

Par RFI, Avec notre correspondante à Bagdad, Fatma Kizilboga

En Irak, les autorités kurdes ont annoncé dimanche 1er avril qu'elles suspendaient leurs exportations de pétrole. Raison invoquée : un contentieux financier avec le gouvernement central. Bagdad, qui ne reconnaît pas les contrats accordés par Erbil, refuse tout simplement de payer les compagnies pétrolières qui opèrent dans le nord du pays.

Une crise qui ne risque pas de bouleverser l'équilibre du pays dont 95% des revenus proviennent du pétrole. Car le Kurdistan ne représente à lui seul qu'à peine plus de 2% de la production totale de l'or noir irakien. Mais le refus de Bagdad d'honorer ces règle-



ments illustre bien l'interminable bras de fer qui se poursuit avec l'autonomie kurde au succès économique parfois agaçant, alors que le processus de reconstruction peine toujours à décoller dans le reste du pays.

UNE FACTURE DE PRÈS DE 750 MILLIONS D'EUROS

Depuis plus de dix mois maintenant, aucune des compagnies pétrolières étrangères basées dans le nord de l'Irak n'a été payée

par le gouvernement fédéral. Une facture qui s'élève au total à près de 750 millions d'euros.

Un véritable défi lancé aux géants pétroliers qui s'appêtent à signer des contrats avec Erbil, la capitale du gouvernement régional kurde. Bagdad, qui ne reconnaît que les accords passés avec son ministère du Pétrole, interdit aux compagnies opérant au Kurdistan de participer aux appels d'offres dans le reste du pays.

Une menace qui n'effraie plus certaines holdings, vraisemblablement lassées par les contraintes administratives et sécuritaires imposées dans le sud du pays. Après l'Américain Exxon Mobil, le groupe Total a également fait part de son intérêt pour l'exploration de champs pétroliers dans la région kurde. □



3 avril 2012

Nouveau contentieux pétrolier entre l'Irak et sa région autonome kurde

Le vice-Premier ministre irakien Hussein Chahristani accuse le Kurdistan de vendre son pétrole en contrebande via la frontière iranienne.

L'Irak a accusé hier sa Région autonome kurde de se livrer à la contrebande de pétrole, un nouveau grief qui vient attiser le conflit déjà vif les opposant sur une série de sujets territoriaux, pétroliers et politiques.

Le ton ne cesse de monter depuis quelques semaines entre le Kurdistan, doté d'une large autonomie et de ses propres institutions, et le gouvernement central de Bagdad. Les points de contentieux sont anciens et nombreux, notamment les problèmes de souveraineté sur des zones entières du pays, mais deux sujets apparaissent actuellement particulièrement sensibles : le pétrole et le sort du vice-président Tarek el-Hachémi, recherché par la justice irakienne mais qui bénéficie de la protection des autorités kurdes. M. Hachémi se trouve à présent au Qatar et Bagdad réclame son extradition.



Le vice-Premier ministre irakien, Hussein Chahristani (à droite), et le ministre du Pétrole, Abdel Karim al-Luaybi, ont tenu hier une conférence de presse sur la situation. Saad Shalash/Reuters

Le vice-Premier ministre irakien Hussein Chahristani a accusé hier le Kurdistan de vendre son pétrole en contrebande via la frontière iranienne, privant ainsi l'Irak et ses citoyens de milliards de dollars de recettes pétrolières. « Le Kurdistan n'a pas de raffineries et donc la plus grande partie (du pétrole) est vendue frauduleusement hors d'Irak, en particulier via la frontière iranienne », a-t-il lancé lors d'une conférence de presse. Selon le ministre du Pétrole, Abdel Karim al-Luaybi, le pétrole transite en fraude via l'Iran vers le Golfe, où il est vendu à des prix inférieurs à ceux du marché, ainsi que vers l'Afghanistan. Un haut responsable afghan a admis en octobre 2011 lors d'une visite à Bagdad que son pays achetait

du pétrole kurde. « Le montant total en valeur du pétrole qui n'a pas été exporté en 2011 est de 3,547 milliards de dollars et celui du pétrole qui n'a pas été remis par la région en 2010 est de 2,102 milliards de dollars », selon M. Chahristani. « C'est une importante somme d'argent qui crée un déficit dans le budget si elle n'est pas versée. Le gouvernement doit examiner les procédures afin de protéger le patrimoine des Irakiens », a-t-il affirmé, soulignant que « l'unité de l'Irak, sa souveraineté et son argent ne peuvent pas (faire l'objet) de compromis ».

Le Kurdistan réclame de son côté quelque 1,5 milliard de dollars d'arriérés de paiement au gouvernement et a indiqué dimanche avoir cessé ses exportations de pétrole en

signe de protestation. Bagdad et Erbil se disputent aussi au sujet de la major pétrolière américaine ExxonMobil qui veut s'implanter au Kurdistan. Même chose au sujet du groupe français Total qui envisage également d'y faire affaires.

M. Chahristani s'en est aussi pris aux autorités kurdes qui ont assuré des mois durant leur protection au vice-président Hachémi, avant qu'il ne quitte la région dimanche pour le Qatar. « Le fait que la région du Kurdistan lui ait permis de partir est considéré comme un clair défi à la loi et à la justice », a-t-il lancé.

Erbil et Bagdad s'opposent également sur la souveraineté d'une bande longue de 650 km, riche en hydrocarbures, à cheval sur quatre provinces et comprenant la ville multiethnique de Kirkouk. Cet épineux dossier est considéré comme l'une des principales menaces pour la stabilité de l'Irak à terme, en particulier si le Kurdistan décidait de déclarer unilatéralement son indépendance.■

(Source : AFP)

Syrie: Bachar sous pression internationale

70 pays réunis à Istanbul soutiennent le plan de paix de Kofi Annan alors que la répression se poursuit sans répit.

ALAIN BARLUET
ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL À ISTANBUL

PROCHE-ORIENT «Bachar el-Assad nous mène en bateau. Il y a un risque d'enlèvement et on voit bien la tactique du régime qui est de gagner du temps. La mission de Kofi Annan ne peut s'éterniser» : Alain Juppé a été très clair, en marge de la deuxième conférence des « amis du peuple syrien » qui s'est tenue dimanche à Istanbul sous le double signe de l'impuissance et de l'urgence. Impuissance, parce que Damas reste sourd à toute initiative, poursuit implacablement la répression et continue à « vomir le sang et les morts », comme l'a dit avec force le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, hôte de cette réunion qui rassemblait quelque 70 pays. Le seuil des dix mille tués est désormais atteint et chaque jour qui passe « allonge la liste des promesses non tenues », selon l'expression d'Hillary Clinton, alourdissant le bilan de plusieurs dizaines de victimes. Urgence aussi, car l'initiative de l'ex-secrétaire général de l'ONU - un plan en six points prévoyant notamment le retrait des armes lourdes, l'acheminement de l'aide humanitaire et l'amorce d'un dialogue politique - ne saurait rester viable si elle ne se concrétise pas très rapidement sur le terrain.

À défaut, c'est une autre piste qu'il faudra explorer. En l'occurrence, le retour à la voie, bien étroite, du Conseil de sécurité.

Coordonner les sanctions

On n'en était pas encore là, dimanche, à Istanbul. Dans sa déclaration finale, le groupe des « amis de la Syrie » a apporté son soutien à la mission de Kofi Annan, décidé un renforcement des sanctions contre le régime de Damas et appuyé les efforts de l'opposition à se rassembler « sous le para-

pluie » du Conseil national syrien (CNS), désormais reconnu comme interlocuteur principal. Parmi les mesures décidées dimanche, un groupe de travail sur les sanctions, présidé par la France, a été créé et devrait se réunir à Paris dans une dizaine de jours. Il aura pour tâche de coordonner les sanctions européennes, américaines et arabes décrétées contre la Syrie. Il devra aussi travailler à rassurer les pays de la région (Irak, Liban, Jordanie) qui redoutent les conséquences de telles mesures sur leur économie. D'autres types de sanctions vont être examinés : la France qui a fermé son ambassade à Damas envisage une réduction de la représentation di-

plomatique syrienne à Paris.

Et ensuite ? L'hypothèse d'un échec de la mission Annan était ouvertement envisagée, si rien ne se passait au terme du « délai d'application » réclamé dimanche par le « groupe des amis » dans leur communiqué final. « Nous sommes tous d'accord là-dessus, il faut fixer une limite dans le temps à l'action » de Kofi Annan, a dit Alain Juppé. Le chef de la diplomatie française s'est refusé à évoquer une échéance précise, indiquant toutefois qu'il ne s'agirait « pas de mois, pas de semaines, mais de quelques jours »...

Un geste syrien étant peu probable, un nouveau passage par la case Conseil de sécurité est plausible. Une perspective qui n'a rien d'évident. Côté français, on mise sur une « voie politique ».

La Russie et la Chine ayant approuvé la déclaration présidentielle à l'ONU, le 21 mars, c'est toute la communauté internationale qui se trouverait engagée par l'échec de la mission Annan, estime-t-on au Quai d'Orsay. L'enjeu serait alors de maintenir Moscou et Pékin « à bord » d'un projet de résolution.

Autre défi, les pressions en faveur d'une militarisation des opposants syriens à qui la conférence d'Istanbul a reconnu le droit de prendre des « mesures légitimes » pour se défendre. Paris et Washington ont redit leur refus de fournir des armes, ce qu'a réclamé une nouvelle fois à Istanbul le président du CNS, Burhan Ghalioun. Il a annoncé dimanche que son mouvement verserait désormais leur solde aux combattants de l'Armée syrienne libre (ALS), grâce à l'argent des pays du Golfe. ■

10 000
Syriens
sont morts en un an
de révolte



Le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, entouré de dirigeants arabes à Istanbul, dimanche. ALTAN/AFP



Manifestation kurde pour la libération d'Öcalan

STRASBOURG (Reuters) - 4 avril 2012

PLUS D'UN MILLIER de Kurdes ont manifesté mercredi à Strasbourg devant le Conseil de l'Europe pour demander la libération d'Abdullah Öcalan, ancien chef du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui purge une peine de prison à vie en Turquie.

Quinze d'entre eux observent une grève de la faim depuis le 1er mars à Strasbourg pour alerter la communauté internationale sur "la situation alarmante du peuple kurde" et l'isolement selon eux imposé à Abdullah Öcalan sur son île-prison d'Imrali.

Le prisonnier n'aurait plus de visites de sa famille depuis huit mois ni accès à ses avocats, incarcérés dans le cadre d'enquêtes antiterroristes, a déclaré à Reuters Yurtseven Tekiner, la porte-parole de la communauté kurde de Strasbourg.

Sur leurs pancartes, des manifestants dénonçaient un "génocide culturel au Kurdistan", d'autres demandaient au Comité de prévention de la torture (CPT), une instance du Conseil de l'Europe, de rendre visite à Abdullah Öcalan pour vérifier la conformité aux droits de l'homme de ses conditions de détention.



Photo par VINCENT KESSLER/Reuters, 4 avril 2012

Le CPT s'est refusé à tout commentaire sur un dossier "très sensible, autant humainement que politiquement", selon son secrétaire exécutif adjoint Fabrice Kellens.

Lors de sa dernière visite à Abdullah Öcalan, en janvier 2010, le CPT s'était félicité que cinq autres détenus l'aient rejoint dans sa prison depuis quelques mois, mettant fin à son isolement, dix ans après sa condamnation en 1999 à la réclusion criminelle à perpétuité pour menées terroristes et séparatistes.

Assises sur un trottoir face au Palais de l'Europe, un groupe de femmes en costumes traditionnels exprimaient leur espoir sur une banderole : "Hier Mandela, aujourd'hui Öcalan". ♦



Le leader kurde irakien reçu à la Maison Blanche, voit brièvement Obama

WASHINGTON, 05 avril 2012 (AFP)

LE PRÉSIDENT AMÉRICAIN Barack Obama a brièvement rencontré mercredi le dirigeant kurde irakien Massoud Barzani, qui était reçu à la Maison Blanche par le vice-président américain Joe Biden, a annoncé la présidence américaine.

M. Barzani a également rencontré le secrétaire américain à la défense Leon Panetta, selon le Pentagone.

Ni la Maison Blanche ni le Pentagone n'ont précisé le contenu des discussions, mais selon un communiqué de la présidence, "les Etats-Unis sont engagés par notre relation historique et de proximité avec le peuple kurde, dans le contexte de notre partenariat stratégique avec un Irak fédéral, démocratique et unifié".

La visite à Washington de M. Barzani intervient alors que l'Irak est plongé dans une crise politique entre chiites et sunnites, qui a éclaté peu après le départ des dernières forces américaines à la

mi-décembre, et a fait planer un temps la crainte d'un nouveau conflit confessionnel.

Le président irakien Jalal Talabani avait appelé, il y a une semaine, à la tenue le 5 avril d'une conférence nationale pour tenter de résoudre cette crise, mais celle-ci a été repoussée.

Le conflit avait été aggravé par l'émission au même moment d'un mandat d'arrêt à l'encontre du vice-président sunnite Tarek al-Hachémi, qui s'est réfugié des mois durant au Kurdistan irakien, avant de gagner le Qatar cette semaine. Le vice-Premier ministre Saleh Moutlak est pour sa part menacé de limogeage.

M. Barzani avait de son côté lancé en mars une vive attaque contre M. Maliki, l'accusant de monopoliser le pouvoir et de vouloir se constituer une armée à ses ordres. ○



Irak: un responsable kurde soupçonné de corruption se pend en prison

SOULEIMANIYEH (Irak), 14 avr 2012 (AFP)

UN RESPONSABLE kurde soupçonné d'être impliqué dans une affaire de corruption s'est pendu samedi dans la cellule où il était incarcéré depuis six jours, a annoncé à l'AFP un haut responsable des services de sécurité irakiens qui a refusé d'être identifié.

"Le sous-préfet de Souleimaniyeh, Zanah Hama Saleh, s'est suicidé par pendaison dans la prison" de cette ville, la deuxième du Kurdistan, dans le nord de l'Irak, a annoncé ce responsable.

Dans un communiqué publié samedi soir, les services de sécurité kurdes ont confirmé le suicide du sous-préfet, "détenu depuis dimanche sous ordre du juge d'instruction, conformément à l'article 307 du code pénal irakien", relatif à la corruption.

Selon une source judiciaire, Zanah Saleh, 40 ans, membre de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK, parti du président Jalal Talabani) était soupçonné de recevoir des pots-de-vin de la part d'agriculteurs pour enregistrer leurs terrains au cadastre, des faits qu'il avait nié.

Quatre autres personnes, dont un lieutenant-colonel, ont également été arrêtés dans cette affaire. ○



Baghdad, Kurdish oil clash deepens rift

April 2, 2012 - By Ahmed Rasheed and Serena Chaudhry

- * *Shahristani charges Kurdish oil goes to Iran*
- * *Baghdad locked in dispute over oil, land, autonomy*
- * *Kurdistan says Baghdad failing to pay companies*

BAGHDAD - A dispute between Iraq's central government and its autonomous Kurdish region over oil exports has worsened in recent days, exposing a dysfunctional relationship that is holding back a long awaited post-war investment boom.

Iraq's Kurdistan region announced on Sunday it was halting its exports of about 50,000 barrels of oil per day because firms operating there were not getting paid by the central government.

The central government responded on Monday by accusing the Kurds of smuggling their oil abroad, mainly to Iran, and wrecking the central budget by denying it revenue.

The amounts involved are slight so far - Kurdish oil now accounts for barely 2 percent of Iraq's 2.3 million barrels of exports per day.

But the dispute over who has the right to exploit Kurdish oil in the future could effect far bigger deals involving billions of dollars in investment from companies like Exxon Mobil - and the political stability of Iraq itself.

The Arab-led central government has long-running disputes with the Kurds over oil rights, political autonomy and contested territories. Those quarrels have intensified since the last U.S. troops withdrew last year, and now threaten to disrupt investment that Iraq hopes can more than double its oil output in the next few years, turning it into an energy superpower.

The latest exchange erupted on Sunday after Kurdistan said it was halting its oil shipments in protest against what it said was the central government's failure to make payments to oil companies working there.

"There is an agreement. You take and pay. They want to take but not to pay. How can that be?" Kurdistan's Energy Minister Ashti Hawrami told Reuters in a telephone interview on Monday.

Iraq's deputy prime minister for energy, Hussain al-Shahristani, said the loss of Kurdish exports "will cause a budget deficit, and the government should act to preserve Iraqi resources".

"Most of the crude produced in the region is being smuggled though the borders, and mainly to Iran," he told reporters.

Hawrami dismissed smuggling claims.

REGION FLOURISHING

The Kurdish region has flourished as the only part of Iraq spared the extreme violence since the U.S.-led invasion of 2003. It runs its own internal affairs with its own security services, receiving 17 percent of Iraq's total oil revenues from Baghdad.

In return for its share of Iraqi income, the Kurds are required to sell any oil exports through Baghdad. But Iraq's lawmakers have been deadlocked for years over an oil law that would explain how that

would work.

Kurdistan claims the right to negotiate its own contracts with foreign oil firms, and has offered production-sharing deals that many firms consider more attractive than the terms offered by Baghdad.

But the central government considers such deals illegal, and long barred firms that operate in the Kurdish region from legally exporting their oil, forcing them to sell oil on the domestic market at a low price.

An interim deal reached last year allowed Kurdish exports of 175,000 barrels per day with Baghdad collecting the proceeds and reimbursing the foreign firms their costs. But the two sides have disputed the amount of oil that was being sold and the amount of payments due to the firms.

Sunday's export halt appears to scupper that deal.

Shares of Norway's DNO, which is active in Kurdistan, dropped 1 percent on Monday.

EXXON LETTERS

Baghdad and the Kurds also traded claims on Monday over Exxon, the only oil major to sign oil deals with both sides.

The central government was furious last year when Exxon announced an exploration agreement with the Kurds, and has threatened to bar it from future deals and even reconsider its role in a huge project in southern Iraq. It says Exxon has frozen its work in the Kurdish region.

Iraq's oil minister Abdul Kareem Luaibi told reporters on Monday Exxon had written two letters since March 5 confirming it had halted work in the Kurdish region. But Kurdish Energy Minister Hawrami told Reuters Exxon was still operating there.

"Exxon Mobil are maintaining their contract in Kurdistan, nothing has changed,...Exxon is active," Hawrami said.

With violence easing from its long war, Iraq wants to ramp up oil production. In March it reached crude output of 3 million bpd, its highest level since before the 2003 invasion that toppled Sunni dictator Saddam Hussein.

Major companies have signed service contracts with the central government to develop vast oilfields in the south.

But Kurdistan's profit-sharing contracts are tempting for firms that complain of red tape and infrastructure bottlenecks in the south. In addition to Exxon, France's Total has discussed Kurdish deals.

The oil dispute feeds into growing political discord between Baghdad and the Kurdish capital of Arbil, where Kurdish President Masoud Barzani has steadily stepped up criticism Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, a Shi'ite Arab.

Barzani's Kurds are part of the power-sharing coalition with Shi'ite and Sunni Arabs that kept Maliki in office in Baghdad after an inconclusive election in 2009.

Since U.S. troops left in December, the coalition faced a crisis when Maliki's government sought the arrest of the top Sunni politician, vice president Tareq al-Hashemi, accused of running death squads.

Hashemi fled to the Kurdish region, where Barzani refused to send him back to Baghdad to stand trial. Hashemi left the Kurdish region on Sunday for Qatar, prompting Baghdad to demand that the Gulf country extradite him to face trial.

In a speech last month, Barzani accused Maliki of consolidating power under his personal control, and threatened to consult the Kurdish public over ties with Baghdad.○

Aid to Syrian rebels is backed

ISTANBUL

Arab states vow to give \$100 million to fighters; U.S. pledges equipment

BY STEVEN LEE MYERS

The United States and dozens of other countries moved closer on Sunday to direct intervention in the fighting in Syria, with Arab nations pledging \$100 million to pay opposition fighters and the Obama administration agreeing to send communications equipment to help rebels organize and evade Syria's military, according to participants gathered here.

The moves reflected a growing consensus, at least among the officials who met here this weekend under the rubric "Friends of Syria," that mediation efforts by the United Nations' peace envoy, Kofi Annan, were failing to halt the violence in Syria and that more forceful action was needed. With Russia and China blocking measures that could open the way for military action by the United Nations, the countries lined up against the government of President Bashar al-Assad have sought to bolster Syria's opposition through means that seemed to stretch the definition of humanitarian assistance.

The offer to provide salaries and communications equipment to rebel fighters known as the Free Syrian Army — with hopes that the money might encourage government soldiers to defect, officials said — is bringing the loose Friends of Syria coalition to the edge of a proxy war against Mr. Assad's government and its international supporters, principally Iran and Russia.

Direct assistance to the rebel fighters, even as Mr. Assad's loyalists press on with a brutal crackdown, risked worsening a conflict that has already led to about 9,000 deaths and could plunge Syria into a protracted civil war.

"We would like to see a stronger Free Syrian Army," Burhan Ghaloum, the leader of the Syrian National Council, a loose affiliation of exiled opposition leaders, told hundreds of world leaders and other officials gathered here. "All of these responsibilities should be borne by the international community."

Mr. Ghaloum did not directly address the financial assistance from the Arab countries — including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates — but he added, "This is high noon for action."

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told the conference that Mr. Assad had defied Mr. Annan's efforts to broker an end to the fighting and begin a political transition. She said that new assaults began in Idlib and Aleppo



Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and the Bulgarian foreign minister, Nikolay Mladenov, in Istanbul on Sunday.

provinces even after Mr. Assad publicly accepted the plan a week ago, which called for an immediate cease-fire followed by negotiations with the opposition.

"The world must judge Assad by what he does, not by what he says," Mrs. Clinton said in a statement to officials who sat around an enormous rectangular table. "And we cannot sit back and wait any longer."

The question of arming the rebels — as countries like Saudi Arabia and some members of Congress have called for — remain divisive because of the uncertainty of who exactly would receive them. Paying salaries to fighters blurs the line between lethal and nonlethal support.

Molham al-Drobi, a member of the Syrian National Council, said the opposition had pledged of \$176 million in humanitarian assistance and \$100 million in salaries over three months for the fighters inside Syria. He said some money was already flowing into the fighters, including \$500,000 last week through "a mechanism that I cannot disclose now."

He expressed dismay that the international community was not doing more to provide weapons that might even the odds against the Syrian government's security forces.

"Our people are killed in the streets," he said on the sidelines of the conference. "If the international community prefers not to do it themselves, they should at least help us doing it by giving us the green light, by providing us the arms, or anything else that needs to be done."

Even so, as the fighting in Syria drags into a second year, the international involvement on behalf of Syria's rebels, inside and outside the country, appears to be deepening.

Mrs. Clinton announced an additional \$12 million in humanitarian assistance for international organizations aiding the Syrians, bringing the American total so far to \$25 million, according to the U.S. State Department. She also confirmed for the first time that the United States was providing satellite communications equipment to help those inside Syria "organize, evade attacks by the regime," and stay in contact with the outside world. And according to the Syrian National Council, the U.S. aid will include night-vision goggles.

"We are discussing with our international partners how best to expand this support," Mrs. Clinton said.

The countries providing most of the money for salaries — Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates — have long been the fiercest opponents of Mr. Assad's rule, reflecting the sectarian split in the Arab world between Sunnis and Shiites. Mr. Assad and his inner circle are Alawites, a Shiite minority offshoot in Syria that has nonetheless dominated political and economic life in a country with a majority Sunni population, as well as Christian and other smaller sectarian groups.

Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the host of Sunday's meeting, called on the U.N. Security Council to act after the failure of Mr. Annan's efforts,

"The world must judge Assad by what he does, not by what he says. And we cannot sit back and wait any longer."

saying that Syria's government was using the initiative to buy time.

"If the Security Council hesitates," Mr. Erdogan said, "there will be no option left except to support the legitimate right of the Syrian people to defend themselves."

Mr. Annan is scheduled to brief the council's 15 members in New York on Monday.

Mr. Erdogan emphasized that Turkey had no intention of interfering in Syria, once a close ally, but that the world could not stand idly by as the opposition withered in a lopsided confrontation with the government's modern weaponry.

"They are not alone," he thundered. "They will never be alone."

A final statement from Sunday's meeting called on Mr. Annan to "determine a timeline" for the next steps in Syria. What those steps might be remains as uncertain as it has been since Mr. Assad's government began its crackdown on popular dissent more than a year ago.

In Syria on Sunday, violence contin-

ued with shelling of the Khalidiyeh neighborhood in Homs and other areas of the city for what activists said was the 21st consecutive day. Clashes were reported in many areas of the Damascus suburbs, and activists reported government troops firing with heavy machine guns on several areas of the southern province of Dara'a. The local coordinating committees, a coalition of activist groups in Syria, claimed overnight that 18 people has been summarily executed by government forces in the province. The group also posted video of a demonstration on Khalid Ibn al-Waleed street in central Damascus.

It was impossible to confirm the reports in part because of Syrian restrictions on journalists.

The U.S. State Department's stated goals for the meeting in Istanbul reflected the constraints facing the United States and other nations without broader international support for military intervention like that in Libya last year.

Proposals to create buffer zones and humanitarian corridors have won little support, in part because of the lack of United Nations authorization and logistical difficulties.

The United States and other nations agreed on Sunday to set up a "working group" within the nations gathered here to monitor countries that continue to arm or otherwise support Mr. Assad's government — "to basically name and shame those entities, individuals, countries, who are evading the sanctions," as a senior U.S. official put it.

They also agreed to support efforts to document acts of violence by Syrian forces that could later be used as evidence in prosecutions, presuming that Mr. Assad's government ultimately falls.

Sebnem Arsu contributed reporting from Istanbul, and Anne Barnard from Beirut.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

MONDAY, APRIL 2, 2012

BAGHDAD

Trip is called diplomatic, but premier's aide asks Interpol to arrest official

BY JACK HEALY
AND DURAIM ADNAN

Iraq's fugitive Sunni vice president left the country on Sunday for a diplomatic trip to the Gulf state of Qatar, his office announced, a development that threatened to stir new tensions just days after officials in Baghdad hosted a lavish meeting to repair ties with other Arab nations.

In a statement, the office of the Sunni vice president, Tariq al-Hashimi, characterized his trip as a normal diplomatic mission to meet Qatar's emir and prime minister, followed by visits to a few other unspecified countries and then a return home. The Qatar News Agency said he would stay in Qatar for several days.

But Mr. Hashimi is a lightning rod for Shiite leaders in Baghdad, who have grown increasingly frustrated over the past three months as he has flouted their attempts to prosecute him on terrorism charges.

In late December, Mr. Hashimi fled to Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish region after the government accused him of using his bodyguards as a personal death squad and issued an arrest warrant. Since then, he has lived under the protection of Kurdish officials, who refuse to turn him over for a trial in Baghdad.

"How could they let him leave?" said Ali al-Moussawi, an adviser to Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki. "He is prevented from traveling. This is a violation. And receiving him in Qatar is a violation."

Mr. Moussawi called on Interpol, the international police organization, to ar-

Fugitive Iraqi vice president visits Qatar



Tariq al-Hashimi, the Sunni vice president in Iraq, fled to its Kurdish region in December after Baghdad accused him of using his bodyguards as a personal death squad.

rest the vice president.

Mr. Hashimi has denied all of the charges and says he is the victim of a political witch hunt.

Iraqi leaders used the Arab League summit meeting as an opportunity to present Iraq as a functioning, stable country and to mend rifts with powerful Sunni Arab neighbors.

But Qatar sent only a low-level envoy to the gathering; the Qatari prime minister called it a message to Shiite leaders in Baghdad about the growing sectarianism in Iraq and the disenfranchisement of the country's Sunni minority.

Although Mr. Hashimi is a polarizing figure even among Iraq's Sunnis, the accusations against him, unveiled in a televised news conference complete with grainy videotaped confessions, created an uproar at a tenuous moment last year, just one day after the last

American forces departed.

The case deepened a rift between Mr. Maliki and his largely Sunni political opponents and cast light on a growing sectarian divide in Iraqi politics. Although the immediate political crisis has eased, Iraq's government is still a welter of enmity, bitterness and dysfunction. Leaders are hoping that a national meeting on Thursday will smooth over the worst problems.

Mr. Hashimi's office said he would return to his temporary headquarters in Iraqi Kurdistan, but any attempt to re-enter Iraq could set off a struggle between the Iraqi authorities in Baghdad and Kurdish officials who run the airport in the region's northern capital, Erbil.

Mr. Maliki declared on Sunday that Iraq's central government was the only entity that controlled the country's airports, borders and airspace.

Shiites and Sunnis in post-US Iraq: separate and unequal; some predict dissolution of country

By HAMZA HENDAWI (AP)

BAGHDAD — Now that U.S. forces are gone, Iraq's ruling Shiites are moving quickly to keep the two Muslim sects separate — and unequal.

Sunnis are locked out of key jobs at universities and in government, their leaders banned from Cabinet meetings or even marked as fugitives. Sunnis cannot get help finding the body of loved ones killed in the war. And Shiite banners are everywhere in Baghdad.

With the Americans no longer here to play peacemakers and Sunni-ruled Gulf Arab nations moving to isolate Iraq, it's a development that could lead to an effective breakup of the country.

"The sectarian war has moved away from violence to a soft conflict fought in the state institutions, government ministries and on the street," said political analyst Hadi Jalo. "What was once an armed conflict has turned into territorial, institutionalized and psychological segregation."

Despite occasional large-scale bombings, March recorded the lowest monthly toll for violent deaths since the 2003 U.S. invasion. A total of 112 Iraqis were killed last month, compared to 122 in November 2009, the previous lowest.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite hard-liner in office for nearly six years, does not tire from telling anyone who cares to listen that it was he who defeated "terrorism," the word he uses to refer to the Sunni insurgency.

Critics charge that al-Maliki is suspicious of all Sunnis, even those who never joined the insurgency or later abandoned it, and is punishing a community that lost its protectors when the Americans left Iraq in December, ending eight years of occupation.

On Tuesday, U.S. President Barack Obama called al-Maliki to express Washington's "firm commitment to a unified, democratic Iraq as defined by Iraq's constitution." A White House statement also said that Obama stated his support for the prime minister's participation in a national dialogue hosted by President Jalal Talabani to reconcile Iraqi political blocs. The dialogue formally opens Thursday.

Al-Maliki has denied allegations that his government is harassing or discriminating against Sunnis. He even bragged to Arab leaders gathered for a summit meeting in Baghdad last week that "it is not an exaggeration to say that our success in

national reconciliation can be an example to follow in Arab nations suffering from acts of violence and conflict."

But Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi, the administration's top Sunni official, is a fugitive wanted by prosecutors on terror charges. He fled to the self-ruled Kurdish region in northern Iraq to escape what he said would certainly be a politically motivated trial and left this week for Qatar, which has publicly criticized what the Gulf nation's prime minister called the marginalization of Sunnis.

Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq, a Sunni, has been banned from attending Cabinet meetings because he called al-Maliki a dictator.

Ordinary Sunnis complain of discrimination in almost all aspects of life, including housing, education, employment and security.

Formerly mixed neighborhoods of Baghdad, such as Hurriyah, are now predominantly Shiite and protected by concrete barrier walls and checkpoints; with Shiite militias effectively policing many areas, hardly any Sunnis dare to return.

Baghdad now has the appearance of an exclusively Shiite city, with streets and bridges renamed after Shiite saints, Shiite green, black and red banners flying almost everywhere and giant posters of Shiite saints towering over all else on major squares.

Flaunting Shiite strength in Baghdad, a city of some seven million, is apparently a priority for the sect's clerical leadership.

"I always say that one Shiite from Baghdad is worth five Shiites like me from Najaf," Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the nation's most revered Shiite cleric, was quoted as telling Shiites who visited him at his home in Najaf, a city south of Baghdad.

"You are the majority and your enemies are trying to reduce your numbers," al-Sistani said, according to one of the 30 men who attended the seven-minute meeting last November. "Go out and perform your rituals."

The men took al-Sistani's words to heart and swung into action when the next religious occasion arrived in January — the Arbæen, which marks the passing of 40 days after the seventh century martyrdom of Imam Hussein, a much revered saint.

The district known for its well-to-do professionals and businessmen took on a

religious ambiance of the kind found in Baghdad's poor Shiite areas or those hosting religious shrines.

Residents practiced the ritual of self-flagellation on the streets, hoisted hundreds of Shiite banners on trees and lamp posts and served meat and rice from tents pitched on street corners.

In the Baghdad district of Azamiyah, for years a bastion of Sunni resistance to Shiite domination, the government is ignoring repeated demands by Sunni residents to remove Ali al-Saadi, a Shiite who heads the local council. They also want to replace Hadi al-Jubouri, another Shiite who is the district's mayor. Both men were appointed by the U.S. military authorities in July 2003, when the Sunni insurgency against the American occupation was starting.

Among other perceived injustices, the Sunnis say Health Ministry officials stonewall them when they seek help locating the remains of loved ones killed during the sectarian violence of the last decade and that, unlike Shiites living in the district, they are not allowed to keep a firearm at home for self-defense.

Sunnis who apply for government jobs also complain of stalling tactics.

A young university graduate from Azamiyah who wanted to be identified as Umm Omar, or the mother of Omar, said she was among 150 candidates selected last year for jobs in the public affairs departments in Cabinet ministries. When she goes to the ministry to find out when she can start work, she is told to come back another time for an update.

"All the Shiites I know who applied with me started work," said Umm Omar, who did not want to identify herself or the ministry because she feared reprisals. "I think it is because I am a Sunni from Azamiyah, but I will not give up. Jobs must never be given based on sect."

Higher Education Minister Ali al-Adeeb, a close al-Maliki ally, is accused of implementing sectarian policies thinly concealed behind his goal of purging members of Saddam Hussein's now-outlawed Baath Party from academic institutions.

He has ordered candidates for senior positions in universities and the ministry to submit declarations on their possible links with the Baath Party or security agencies.

Those found out to have withheld such information are banned from assuming the

positions for which they applied, according to an aide to the minister who agreed to talk about the subject only on condition of anonymity.

Sunnis have long maintained that Shiite authorities use Baath ties as an excuse to purge the civil service and academic institutions of members of their community.

Al-Adeeb has fired nearly 200 academic and administrative staff from the state university in the mainly Sunni Salaheddin province north of Baghdad, according to local tribal leaders and officials. The campus is in Tikrit, Saddam's hometown.

Most if not all university directors in Baghdad are Shiites, according to staff members.

"Sectarian discrimination has become more manifest since al-Adeeb took over the

ministry. Several deans and heads of departments have been removed because they belong to the other sect," said university lecturer Ali Abu-Zeid, himself a Shiite. "Even enrollment for postgraduate studies is subtly decided on sectarian basis. We all know that," said Abu-Zeid, who declined to name the university that employs him because he feared reprisals.

Fed up with Shiite domination, the mainly Sunni provinces of Diyala, Salaheddin and al-Anbar have recently announced their intention to become semi-autonomous regions, a move provided for by the constitution. Their plans have been stymied by al-Maliki, who argues that granting them autonomy would break up Iraq.

In Diyala, the provincial council voted

Dec. 12 to establish a self-ruled region, with 18 members in favor and five against. The next day, protesters widely suspected to be Shiite militiamen loyal to al-Maliki attacked the offices of the provincial government as well as the home of Sunni governor Abdul-Naser al-Mahdawi, as police and army troops stood by and watched.

Fearing for their lives, al-Mahdawi and several council members fled the provincial capital, Baqouba, and found sanctuary in the mainly Kurdish town of Khanaqin to the north.

Last month, al-Maliki gave al-Mahdawi 72 hours to return to Baqouba or resign. He resigned. ■

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL APRIL 2, 2012

Iraq Lashes Out at Kurds for Halting Oil Exports

By HASSAN HAFIDH And ALI NABHAN

BAGHDAD—Iraq's deputy prime minister for energy, Hussein al-Shahristani, lashed out at Iraq's Kurdistan authorities for halting crude oil exports, accusing them of separately allowing billions of dollars worth of oil-smuggling over its northern borders, mainly to Iran.

The new charges further escalate an impasse between Baghdad and the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan in northern Iraq.

The Kurdistan regional government is embroiled in a long dispute with Iraq's central government over the rights to control the oil resources in the region. The dispute has periodically caused disruption of oil exports from the

Kurdish region.

The Kurdistan government decided Sunday to halt oil exports from the region of around 90,000 to 100,000 barrels a day, accusing the central government in Baghdad of failing to make payments to companies working in Kurdistan.

The Kurdistan government produced from its oil fields some 68.1 million barrels of oil in 2011, but only 33.64 million barrels were received and exported via the Iraqi central government's oil marketing arm, the State Oil Marketing Organization, Mr. Shahristani said at a news conference in Baghdad. He expects the figure in 2012 to be more than that.

Crude-oil produced in Kurdistan and not exported via the central government's marketing company in 2010 and 2011 was worth up to \$6.65 billion, Mr. Shahristani told reporters in Baghdad. He expects the figure in 2012 to be more than that.

"Most of these barrels not received but produced by Kurdistan ... are being smuggled outside Iraq via the Iranian borders," he said, adding: "This will cause a budget deficit, and our government should act to preserve Iraqi resources."

Mr. Shahristani also said that his government had talked to Iran and Turkey to prevent smuggling of Kurdish oil via their territories.

Meantime, the federal oil minister, Abdul Kareem Luaiby, said that his government has detailed evidence that the Kurdish oil is being smuggled to Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan and being sold there at lower prices.

Kurdish government officials weren't immediately available to comment.

A Middle East shipping agent and Iraqi oil officials confirmed that the Kurds have halted exports. Iraq's crude exports from northern oil fields dropped to 300,000 barrels a day Sunday, from 370,000 to 400,000 barrels a day, a day after the autonomous region in Kurdistan decided to halt exports from their oil fields, the shipping agent said.

The Kurds say they halted the flow because the central government is delaying due payments. Baghdad, however, says it has already approved payment of \$560 million to oil producers in Kurdistan and it is awaiting final audits to issue the money. The Kurds say that Baghdad owes them some \$1.5 billion. □

Les nouvelles cibles des rebelles syriens

L'insurrection privilégie désormais les kidnappings et les attaques contre des symboles du pouvoir.



Le 17 mars dernier, un bâtiment des services secrets de l'armée de l'air syrienne a été détruit par un attentat à la voiture piégée.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

PROCHE-ORIENT Guérilla urbaine, attaques ciblées, attentats : après leur défaite à Homs et Idlib, les insurgés sont à la recherche de nouveaux modes d'action contre l'appareil sécuritaire syrien, qui ne montre pas de signe de faiblesse, un an après le début de la révolte contre le régime de Bachar el-Assad.

Sans intervention militaire extérieure, ni création d'une « zone libérée » aux frontières turque ou jordanienne, les rebelles en sont réduits à espérer d'hypothétiques livraisons d'armes par l'Arabie saoudite ou le Qatar. À l'avenir, « nous devrions assister à davantage d'attaques ciblées contre des casernes de l'armée ou des barrages militaires, afin d'inciter les soldats encore loyaux à rejoindre la rébellion », estime un diplomate occidental, qui s'attend également à d'autres attentats à la voiture piégée contre des symboles du pouvoir, marque de l'influence grandissante des djihadistes parvenus sur le sol syrien, depuis le Liban et l'Irak, notamment.

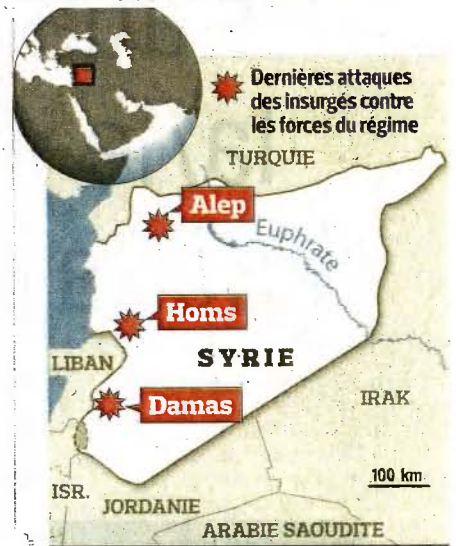
Les signes d'une intensification des opérations contre des membres des forces de sécurité se multiplient. La semaine dernière, le général Mohammed Omar al-Derbas, pilote de l'armée de l'air, a été kidnappé près de Damas, tandis que non loin d'Alep, quatre hommes en armes à bord de leur véhicule ont tué en plein jour les colonels Abdel Karim al-Raei et Fouad Shaaban. Deux opérations ciblées

Depuis le début de la révolte, plus de 2 000 membres des forces de sécurité ont été tués par les révolutionnaires

destinées à montrer que les fidèles du régime doivent réfléchir à deux fois avant de continuer à le soutenir. En réaction, Damas a accusé ses opposants de viser « des experts ». Depuis le début de la révolte, plus de 2 000 membres des forces de sécurité ont été tués par les révolutionnaires, soit 20 % des pertes totales. Et la tendance s'est renforcée ces derniers mois. « Je viens de recevoir une liste de vingt officiers qui ont été liquidés par les insurgés », affirme le général Akel Hachem, proche des déserteurs de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL).

Sécuriser les déplacements

Sans le dire ouvertement, de peur de renforcer les craintes parmi la masse des indécis, de nombreux activistes militent pour un glissement vers une guérilla urbaine. Les deux heures de combat nocturne à l'arme automatique, il y a trois semaines, dans le quartier résidentiel de Mezzeh, à Damas, pourraient préfigurer ce type d'affrontements face à l'armée régulière. « L'erreur de concentrer (de très nombreux insurgés, NDLR) dans un seul endroit, comme Baba Amro à Homs,



ne sera plus commise », assurait récemment au *Journal du dimanche* Basma Kodmani, l'une des principales dirigeantes du Conseil national syrien (CNS), la vitrine de l'opposition en exil.

Priorité est désormais donnée aux déplacements de petites unités pour attaquer les forces de sécurité qui devraient se redéployer à la périphérie des villes et des villages, si le plan Annan (voir encadré) est appliqué par le régime. D'où les besoins des insurgés en système de communication sécurisée, que les Occidentaux ont promis de leur fournir. Mais, en face, l'armée syrienne a elle aussi tiré les leçons des récentes pertes de ses hommes. Elle vient de recevoir de son allié iranien du matériel lui permettant de sé-

curiser les communications de ses unités déployées dans le Nord, où des soldats imprudents avaient trop parlé de leurs mouvements, affirme une source en contact avec le régime à Damas.

Vers un pourrissement

Jusqu'à maintenant, les déserteurs de l'ASL se concentraient dans les villes, permettant à leurs habitants de continuer à y vivre. À la périphérie, les soldats et miliciens forment un cordon, et c'est là qu'ont lieu la plupart des affrontements. Mais pour infliger des pertes conséquentes à leurs ennemis, « les combattants ont besoin d'armes lourdes », ajoutait M^{me} Kodmani, toujours favorable à la militarisation du mouvement de contestation, malgré les critiques américaines et françaises.

Pour d'autres, ce virage n'est qu'un choix par défaut. « Les généraux syriens sont très bien protégés derrière leurs gardes du corps et leurs véhicules blindés, ce n'est pas facile de les kidnapper ou de les abattre », constate le général Hachem. D'autre part, le déploiement de l'armée syrienne à travers le pays rend difficile l'organisation de la révolte sous un commandement unique, l'une des priorités, pourtant, de l'opposition. « C'est pourquoi il nous faut absolument une mini-intervention extérieure qui établirait une zone protégée où les insurgés se regrouperaient et formeraient un commandement, insiste le général Hachem. Hélas, les circonstances nous restent très défavorables. »

Et une guérilla urbaine ne constitue-

ra pas une menace existentielle pour le pouvoir, regrette un diplomate à Damas, qui craint un pourrissement de la situation avec l'arrivée d'armes du Liban et surtout d'Irak. « Il sera difficile ensuite de s'en débarrasser. Il rentre beaucoup de matériels américain et britannique d'Irak, des équipements neufs laissés sur place », note ce diplomate.

Des trafics facilités par la désorganisation de l'armée irakienne, après le retrait américain. Selon lui, « la Syrie risque de revivre les mêmes heures qu'au début des années 1980 avec des attentats islamistes contre le régime d'Hafez el-Assad, et des assassinats ciblés ». Avec une répression généralisée en prime. ■

Le Monde
Jeudi 5 avril 2012

Les alaouites de Turquie craignent que le conflit syrien attise les tensions religieuses

Dans le sud de la Turquie, des manifestations dénoncent les ingérences étrangères en Syrie

Hatay (Turquie)
Envoyé spécial

Les portraits de Bachar Al-Assad ont été remisés au fond des boutiques. Autour des cascades de Harbiye, un site habituellement prisé des touristes syriens et des habitants de la région de Hatay, dans le sud de la Turquie, les vendeurs de souvenirs ont fait le ménage sur leurs présentoirs. Mais quand on lui demande son avis sur la situation politique en Syrie, dont la frontière se situe à une vingtaine de kilomètres, Metin ne cache pas ses sympathies pour le dirigeant de Damas : « Vive Bachar ! Ces manifestants ne se battent pas pour la démocratie, ce sont des terroristes. »

Il n'est pas rare de rencontrer de telles réactions dans la province de Hatay. « Ce sont des traîtres. Qu'ils rentrent chez eux ! », s'énerve Ahmet, dont la maison, dans le village de Bohsin, donne directement sur le camp de réfugiés de la Croix-Rouge, où s'entassent plusieurs milliers de personnes.

L'ancien sandjak d'Alexandrette, qui était rattaché à la Syrie jusqu'à ce que la France, en 1939, le cède à la Turquie, est resté intimement lié au voisin syrien. La population turque y est majoritairement arabophone et de confes-

sion alaouite, une branche de l'islam chiite également présente en Syrie. La famille Assad appartient aussi à cette minorité religieuse, dans un pays à majorité sunnite.

Des manifestations rassemblent régulièrement quelques centaines de personnes dans les grandes villes du sud de la Turquie, à Iskenderun, Adana. La dernière, organisée à Antakya (Antioche) le 26 février, entendait dénoncer le « projet impérialiste américain au Moyen-Orient » et s'élever contre toute forme d'intervention étrangère dans les affaires intérieures du voisin syrien. « Nous n'ouvrons pas la porte à une occupation », « touche pas à mon voisin »,

Les vendeurs de souvenirs ont retiré les portraits de Bachar Al-Assad

scandaient ainsi les militants du Parti pour la liberté et la solidarité (ÖDP), un groupuscule d'extrême gauche. « Nous sommes avec le peuple syrien, qui est sous la pression des attaques des pays impérialistes : les Etats-Unis et les pays islamistes qui les soutiennent, estime Naime Turunç, la porte-parole de l'ÖDP. Cette insurrection vient de

l'étranger. Ils veulent faire de Hatay la porte d'entrée de l'invasion pour mettre la main sur les richesses, en se cachant derrière les droits de l'homme et la démocratie. » Cette organisation projette même d'organiser une « chaîne humaine » symbolique le long de la frontière.

Les mêmes craintes sont perceptibles au siège local du Parti républicain du peuple (CHP), le parti kémaliste. « Jusqu'à hier, notre premier ministre appelait Bachar Al-Assad "mon frère", et les gens vivaient ensemble sans problème, fait remarquer son dirigeant Ertugrul Gün. Mais aujourd'hui, il fait courir un danger à toute la Turquie. Les faiseurs de crise ont toujours utilisé les divisions ethniques et religieuses dans cette région. »

De confession alaouite, il met également en garde contre le risque d'extension du conflit au territoire turc : « C'est comme un feu de forêt. Si les différents groupes s'affrontent de l'autre côté de la frontière, cela viendra de ce côté-ci. Les gens sont inquiets. » Le CHP, qui bénéficie d'une large part des votes de la communauté alaouite de Turquie, s'est opposé ces derniers mois à la politique syrienne du gouvernement, dépêchant plusieurs délégations à Damas et maintenant un contact avec le régime.

Les divisions confessionnelles qui se dessinent de l'autre côté de la frontière réactivent des craintes récurrentes en Turquie. « Certains essayent de créer une atmosphère de division », accuse Dogan Bermek, le président de la Fédération des fondations alevies. Les Alevi bektachi forment avec les alaouites arabophones une communauté d'environ 12 millions de personnes. « Il y a eu par le passé des affrontements entre sunnites et Alevi en Turquie, à Maras, à Corum et à Sivas. Il y a une peur que la situation en Syrie ne crée des tensions interconfessionnelles. Nous essayons d'avertir le gouvernement de l'AKP », précise M. Bermek.

Le 13 mars, la justice turque a refermé le dossier de la tragédie de Sivas, où 35 intellectuels alevi avaient péri en 1993 dans un incendie criminel provoqué par une foule hostile. La période de prescription a expiré pour les auteurs présumés de cet attentat, toujours en cavale. Les associations alevi soupçonnent des protections en haut lieu. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

La délicate position de la Turquie face à la Syrie et l'Iran

Comment être à la fois l'ami de Washington et de Téhéran? Comment condamner le régime syrien que soutient l'Iran? L'ambitieuse diplomatie turque fait le grand écart, une posture qui peut être risquée.

Les prises de position de la Turquie face au problème de la répression en Syrie ainsi que sur le programme nucléaire très controversé iranien, mettent le pays dans une situation très délicate.

L'Iran a fait savoir mercredi qu'il souhaite tenir en Irak, et non plus à Istanbul, les discussions prévues mi-avril avec les grandes puissances sur son programme nucléaire controversé.

"La Turquie est désormais exclue (par) le Parlement et le gouvernement (iraniens). Nous avons proposé Bagdad et si l'autre partie l'accepte, ce sera Bagdad", a déclaré le chef de la Commission des Affaires étrangères au Parlement iranien, Allaeddine Boroujerdi.

Le choix d'Istanbul avait été annoncé par la secrétaire d'Etat américaine Hillary Clinton, pour ces discussions entre l'Iran et le groupe 5+1 (Etats-Unis, Russie, Chine, France, Grande-Bretagne et Allemagne).

Honnête courtier

La Turquie, puissance économique émergente, pays musulman membre de l'Otan, mène une diplomatie hyper-active que certains qualifient de "néo-ottomane".

Le pays avait accueilli les précédentes discussions sur le nucléaire iranien, en janvier 2011, montrant sa disposition à agir en honnête courtier entre son voisin iranien et les



Le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan entretient de bonnes relations avec Téhéran.

Occidentaux, qui soupçonnent l'Iran de préparer l'arme nucléaire.

Les Iraniens, qui défendaient il y a encore une semaine Istanbul comme le meilleur endroit pour renouer ces discussions, veulent-ils punir la Turquie pour avoir accueilli dimanche, dans la même ville d'Istanbul, la Conférence des Amis de la Syrie, qui a apporté son soutien à l'opposition syrienne?

"On ne peut pas fermer les yeux sur les demandes légitimes de la population de Bahreïn et du Yémen et prétendre défendre les demandes de la population syrienne", a déclaré le porte-parole des Affaires étrangères iraniennes, Ramin Mehmanparast, au quotidien gouvernemental Iran.

L'Iran soutient le régime du président Bachar al-Assad, qui poursuit une répression sanglante contre ses opposants, tandis que la Turquie a de nouveau condamné le régime de Damas, lors de la réunion d'Istanbul, aux côtés des Américains.

En visite à Téhéran

Iran et Turquie ne cessent de réaffirmer leur bonne entente, et le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan était de nouveau en visite à Téhéran la semaine dernière.

Mais les récentes décisions turques ne sont pas toutes pour plaire à l'Iran.

La Turquie a rejeté les sanctions imposées à l'Iran par l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis, qui tentent de bloquer les exportations du pétrole iranien.

Mais elle a aussi été félicitée par Washington, pour avoir réduit de 20% ses importations de brut iranien.

Ankara a aussi accepté l'an dernier sur son sol un radar d'alerte avancée du bouclier antimissile de l'Otan, installation qui vise l'Iran.

Téhéran a protesté à plusieurs reprises à ce sujet contre la Turquie, provoquant les explications embarrassées d'Ankara.

Epine dans le pied depuis 1984

Allié traditionnel des Etats-Unis, la Turquie, aujourd'hui dirigée par un régime islamiste modéré, bénéficie du soutien militaire de Washington, dans la lutte contre les rebelles kurdes, épine dans le pied de tous les gouvernements turcs depuis 1984.

Un sondage a montré fin mars les craintes de l'opinion turque à l'égard des projets nucléaires iraniens.

Ainsi 54% des Turcs estiment que leur pays devrait se doter de l'arme nucléaire, plutôt que de compter sur la protection de l'Otan, si l'Iran se dotait de cette technologie, selon ce sondage commandé par le Centre d'études économiques et de politique internationale ■



Une explosion interrompt le transit du brut d'Irak en Turquie

ANKARA (Reuters) - 5 avril 2012

UNE EXPLOSION a touché l'un des deux oléoducs reliant Kirkouk en Irak au port de Ceyhan en Turquie, provoquant un incendie et obligeant l'arrêt momentané de l'acheminement du pétrole brut, rapporte un responsable turc de l'énergie.

La cause de l'explosion n'a pas été immédiatement établie mais les actes de sabotage visant les oléoducs et gazoducs sont fréquents dans cette région où opèrent les séparatistes kurdes turcs. L'explosion s'est

produite dans la région d'Idil dans la province de Sirnak, près de la frontière irakienne.

"Des pompiers dépêchés sur place sont parvenus à éteindre le feu", a ajouté le responsable. "Une inspection est en cours pour entamer les réparations". Un officiel des services de sécurité turcs a fait état de trois explosions qui seraient intervenues presque simultanément.

Un porte-parole du ministère irakien du Pétrole a indiqué que l'approvisionnement avait pu reprendre ensuite. On précise auprès de la compagnie nationale irakienne que les exportations n'ont pas été affectées. ◆

Iraq's relations with Arab world deteriorating days after Baghdad summit

By Liz Sly

BAGHDAD — Iraq's fugitive vice president, Tariq al-Hashimi, flew to Saudi Arabia on Wednesday as the goodwill generated between Iraq and its Arab neighbors by an extravagant summit in Baghdad last week began unraveling.

The visit by Hashimi, who is wanted by Baghdad authorities on charges of terrorism, came as Iraqi officials announced they had called off a national reconciliation conference planned for Thursday that was supposed to ease tensions between Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and the Sunni and Kurdish factions in his coalition government.

Parliament speaker Osama al-Nujaifi told reporters that the meeting had been postponed indefinitely because of "mounting differences" on a range of issues, just one of which is the arrest warrant that the Shiite-led government has issued for Hashimi, a Sunni.

Hashimi's visit to Saudi Arabia and the cancellation of the conference highlighted the danger that the increasingly intractable political crisis in Iraq will draw in the country's neighbors at a time of increasing polarization in the region over how to address the unrest in Syria.

Maliki had agreed to hold the reconciliation conference as a last-minute concession to the Sunnis and Kurds ahead of the Baghdad summit, which the government hoped would showcase Iraq as stable, safe and assuming its rightful place in the firmament of Arab nations after the withdrawal of U.S. troops late last year.

But relations with Arab states have since been deteriorating fast, along with any hopes that Iraq will soon be able to resolve its own internal problems. On Sunday, Maliki issued a forceful defense of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, saying his ouster would destabilize the region. On the same day, at a U.S.-backed gathering of "Friends of Syria" in Istanbul, Saudi Arabia endorsed a plan to fund and equip Syrian rebels.

Maliki's comments triggered blistering attacks in Saudi newspapers, which often reflect official thinking.



Karim Kadim/AP - Arab leaders gathered for the annual Arab League summit in Baghdad last week.

In an editorial in the Saudi-owned al-Sharq al-Awsat, editor Tariq Alhomayed called for sanctions on Maliki "to prevent the emergence of a new Saddam or another Bashar."

"What al-Maliki is doing is a sign that the current Iraqi government cannot be trusted, under any circumstances," he wrote.

Other Saudi dailies revived long-standing Saudi accusations that Maliki is an agent of Iran, Syria's closest ally. "Is Maliki a voice for Iran or the ruler of Iraq?" asked the daily al-Riyadh.

Also Sunday, Hashimi flew from northern Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish region, where he had taken refuge, to Qatar, which is a staunch supporter of the Syrian uprising and which sent only a junior representative to the Baghdad summit.

Kamal al-Saedi, a senior official with Maliki's Dawa party, told Iraq's al-Sharqiya TV channel that by hosting Hashimi, "Qatar and Saudi Arabia are undermining the Iraqi courts."

"Receiving a criminal is not good for diplomatic relations," Saedi said.

The official Saudi news agency reported Wednesday that Hashimi had been met by the Saudi foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, high-level reco-

gnition for an official facing terrorism charges at home.

In addition to the charges against Hashimi, disputes over oil production, exports and contracts have also put Iraq's Kurds at odds with the Maliki government.

Underpinning all the differences are Sunni and Kurdish concerns that Maliki is accumulating power for himself at their expense and in defiance of a power-sharing agreement reached in the Kurdish capital, Irbil, before the formation of the government in 2010.

The Sunnis and the Kurds want Maliki to recommit to upholding the Irbil agreement, but his State of Law alliance appears unwilling even to promise to put it on the agenda of the postponed reconciliation conference. Nujaifi, in announcing that the meeting would be delayed, indicated that relations are so tense that any gathering of leaders could be counterproductive.

"It is better to postpone the conference until we reach a way out of the standoff," he said. ■

Kurdish leader: No to arming the Syrian opposition

By Josh Rogin

The international community should support a transition to democracy in Syria, but shouldn't arm the rebel fighters, Kurdistan regional President Massoud Barzani said in Washington Thursday.

"It's important that the future government of Syria be a democratic coalition that protects the rights of Kurds and all other Syrians," Barzani said at a Thursday speaking event at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

He said the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) supports whatever dialogue and negotiations that the Syrian regime and the Syrian opposition may enter into and said that the safety and security of Syrian Kurds was a high priority. As for the Kurdistan National Council of Syria, a recently formed umbrella group representing Kurdish opposition to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Barzani said the KRG would help, but not with weapons.

"We are ready to support them, but not with military support or providing ammunition ... It could be moral support, political support, financial support. And we will use our influence to help solve their problems," he said. "It would be good for them to enter into talks and negotiations so they can reach an agreement with the other groups of the opposition."

"What we see right now, neither the current government nor the opposition have anything decreed to provide for the Kurdish people," he said. "But that issue is left to them, so whichever way they conduct their negotiations, we will support the outcome of their negotiations."

Barzani's comments were starkly different than those of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who said this week that Assad "will not fall" and said he was against any process that led to the overthrow of the Syrian regime.

Barzani said he met with President Barack Obama twice and also met with Vice President Joseph Biden on Wednesday, and told them that Maliki is consolidating power in a dictatorial way. He said Obama and Biden reassured him that the United States would



The President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq Massoud Barzani was officially received by President Obama and Vice President Biden at the White House on Wednesday April 4, 2012.

remain committed to cooperation with Kurdistan and committed to helping Iraqi solve its serious internal political problems.

"Iraq is facing a serious crisis ... it's coming towards one-man rule," Barzani said. "We have a situation in Baghdad where one man is the prime minister and at the same time he is the commander in chief of the armed forces, he is the minister of defense, he is the minister of the interior, and he is the chief of intelligence. And lately, he has been communicating to the head of the Central Bank that that should also come under the power of the prime minister. Where in the world can you find such an example?"

Barzani called for a multiparty, multiethnic process to address the issue of power sharing in Iraq. If that process fails, Barzani said he would hold a referendum in Kurdistan to determine the way forward. He implied, but didn't say explicitly, that that referendum would be for Kurdish independence.

"The current status quo in Baghdad is in no way our option and we will not accept that as an option," he said. "Otherwise, we will be obliged to go back to the people and have the people make their decisions."

The Maliki government is reneging on its agreements that allow Kurdistan to sign its own oil contracts and is taking total control of Iraq's armed forces, according to Barzani.

"The new Iraqi army needs to be formed on the basis of being an army of the country, not the army of an individual," he said.

Barzani said he disagreed with former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's decision to publicly denounce Obama's selection of former NSC staffer Brett McGurk to replace Jim Jeffrey as U.S. ambassador to Iraq. Allawi said McGurk was too close to Maliki to be objective.

"Had Allawi consulted with me, I would have told him not to issue that statement. He has been nominated to be the U.S. ambassador to Iraq and he will implement U.S. policy," Barzani said.

Barzani also staunchly defended the innocence of fugitive Iraqi Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, against whom Maliki's government has brought charges. Hashemi had been evading those charges in Kurdistan and is now in Saudi Arabia, though he has pledged to return to Iraq.

"He is still the vice president of Iraq. He has not been convicted, and this issue has been politicized," Barzani said, adding that Maliki had told him to help Hashemi escape Iraq, revealing the politicization of the issue.

"Why does Maliki send me a message so we should help him sneak out of the country? If he's a criminal, why should he be given that opportunity to sneak out? They wanted to show that everybody wants to respect the judicial system except for us." □

TURKEY'S DIPLOMACY RISE: HOW TO STAY FRIENDS WITH BOTH US, IRAN?

Turkey has hyperactive diplomatic programme some observers call 'neo-Ottoman' for sprawling empire that preceded modern Turkey.

By Michel Sailhan - ISTANBUL / Middle East Online

How does a country stay friends with both Washington and Tehran? How does it condemn the Syrian regime without alienating Iran?

These are the headaches troubling Turkish diplomats as Iran's nuclear programme and the bloodshed in Syria put them in an increasingly awkward position with neighbours Iran and Syria and traditional ally the United States.

Tehran said Wednesday it wants to ditch Istanbul as the venue for crucial nuclear talks due to take place next week between Iran and six world powers.

The move comes after Istanbul hosted a "Friends of Syria" conference on Sunday that was sympathetic to Syrian rebels, but was sharply criticised by Tehran.

"Taking into account the extremist and illogical position of Turkey on Syria and the recent conference on Syria, Turkey has de facto lost any competence to host the meeting," Aladin Borujerdi, head of the Iranian parliament's foreign affairs commission, told Iranian TV.

In an escalating diplomatic spat, Turkey's foreign ministry summoned the Iranian ambassador Wednesday over Borujerdi's remarks.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu also said he had contacted his Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Salehi to express Ankara's dismay at the comments that "obviously contradicted the deep-rooted relations" between the two countries.

Iran has asked Baghdad to take Istanbul's place as host of the April 13-14 talks with the P5+1 group -- the permanent UN Security Council members Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States plus Germany.

Turkey hosted the last round of talks in January 2011, showing its readiness to act as a broker between its neighbour and Western countries accusing Tehran of trying to build a nuclear bomb.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had announced that Istanbul was to be host of the next round, and Iran was still referring to the city a week ago as the best place to hold the talks.

But Wednesday Iran looked bent on punishing Turkey's



Iran suspicion grows over Turkey's regional role

stance on close ally Syria.

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast accused Turkey of diplomatic double-standards in the region.

"You can't close your eyes to the legitimate demands of the people of Bahrain and Yemen and pretend to defend the demands of the Syrian people," he told a government daily newspaper.

Iran and Turkey have insisted they continue to have good relations. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan paid a two-day visit to Tehran last week, where he voiced his country's unwavering support for Iran's nuclear ambitions, which Tehran says are for peaceful purposes.

But not all of Turkey's recent moves have pleased Iran.

"Don't try to follow Turkey's foreign policy too closely, you risk straining your neck," said a blog post by Jean Marcou, a French expert on Turkey.

Turkey, an emerging economic power that is the only Muslim-majority country in NATO, has a hyperactive diplomatic programme some observers call "neo-Ottoman" for the sprawling empire that preceded modern Turkey.

It has rejected EU and US sanctions on Iran to block its oil exports.

But it has also won praise from Washington for cutting its own imports of Iranian crude by 20 percent.

Ankara also agreed last year to let NATO install an early-warning radar system in its southeast as part of a missile shield that Washington says is aimed at thwarting threats from the Middle East, particularly Iran.

Turkey, a traditional ally of the US, currently has an Islamist government, but still gets military support from Washington in its fight against Kurdish separatist rebels that have plagued every Turkish administration since 1984.

A late-March poll by the Istanbul-based Centre for Economic and Foreign Policy Studies found 54 percent of Turks think if Iran develops nuclear weapons, their country should have a nuclear arsenal of its own rather than count on NATO's protection

□ □ □

Syrian Arab Opposition Fear Kurdish Demands



Kurds in the city of Qamishli take to the streets against the regime of Bashar Assad in their hundreds March 21. Photo AFP.

By **WLADIMIR van WILGENBURG**
rudaw.net

LONDON, United Kingdom – In a press conference last Tuesday, the Syrian National Council (SNC) failed to convince Syrian Kurds that they would grant them equal rights.

“They have to do more to convince us,” says Kawa Rashid, a representative of a Kurdish youth group in Syria.

Kurds angrily walked out of a Syrian opposition conference in Istanbul on March 27, and later left the SNC because, they say, there was no mention of Kurdish demands for decentralization in their national covenant.

On March 31, SNC founding member, Haitham al-Maleh told Al Arabiya television that Kurdish demands are illegitimate. Haitham also said Turkey had suggested the Kurdish National Council be excluded from the Friends of Syria conference. This angered Syrian Kurds and raised suspicions about Turkey’s intention.

Cengiz Candar, a highly respected political analyst and journalist in Turkey, wrote in the Turkish newspaper Radikal that Turkey’s “fingerprints” are prominently visible within the Syrian opposition.

“One can immediately sense that Turkey’s basic approach to the Kurdish problem has been exported to the national pact of the

Syrian opposition,” he wrote.

Heyam Aqil, the London representative of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria, which is prominent in the Kurdish National Council, told Rudaw that Turkey’s influence on Syria’s opposition was very clear. “The Turkish government will never allow Kurds to be recognized in Syria’s new constitution.” She added that the comments of Maleh “reflect both his Arab nationalism and Turkish agenda.”

The SNC released a document on April 3 for opposition groups to sign. “That document is the very first that they drafted months ago at the beginning of their negotiations with the KNC. The KNC does not agree to that document because it doesn’t recognize the Kurds’ right to self-determination or a politically decentralized government,” Aqil told Rudaw.

Omar Hossino, author of a report on Syria’s Kurdish opposition for the Henry Jackson Society, claims Turkey is a main stumbling block for an agreement between the SNC and the KNC. “Turkey fears a federal region for Kurds on its border -- especially after Iraqi Kurds have achieved their own autonomous region -- because it will put pressure on them to do the same with the Kurdish population in Turkey,” he concluded.

But Turkey is not the only stumbling block. Arab opposition leaders in Syria are also upset over Kurdish demands. “Saying

that the main demand should be to overthrow the Assad regime, many have called the KNC’s demand for some sort of federalism odd and farfetched and claim that Syrian Kurds want secession from Syria or that federalism in Syria will break up the country,” he added.

This also explains the comments of Haitham Maleh, who traditionally held a hostile stance towards Kurdish demands. “(They) reflect a stance that sees the Kurds as ‘freeloaders’ who are attempting to exploit the revolution for their own narrow interests,” says Hossino.

Kawa Rashid, a spokesperson for the new Kurdish youth group the Syrian Kurdistan Movement, says that the Syrian National Council follows a Turkish Islamist agenda, and adds that there are plans to arm the opposition by Saudi Arabia and Qatar. “Kurds are against arming the opposition. We want peace.”

Rashid emphasizes that the Kurds will not accept just language rights. “We want federalism. The Arabs do not want federalism. That is why we cannot agree. There cannot be a just solution without solving the Kurdish issue.”

Qubad Talabani, the representative of the Kurdistan Regional Government to the U.S., speaking at the conference of the Atlantic Council in Washington last February, suggested that the Kurds are in a difficult situation. “It’s unlikely that an Assad-led government will be good to the Kurds. But at the same time, the opposition is not talking about Kurdish issues, is not talking about the need to protect Kurdish rights or to have the Kurdish identity as part of any new Syria.”

He added that there are fears among Kurds of the Muslim Brotherhood. “The Muslim Brotherhood basically said ... Kurds have no issues in Syria ... Kurds haven’t been oppressed in Syria. And that just highlights for us that there is still a real chauvinist trend within certain elements of the Syrian opposition.”

Syria expert Hossino thinks that that perhaps the best player in the attempt to get the two parties to reconcile has been the United States, which has met frequently with both groups. “The U.S. has both pushed the SNC to compromise more on KNC demands -- and the SNC has made some steps in that regard -- and it has also pushed the KNC to compromise on their demands as well and join the SNC.”

He warns that if the KNC isn’t pushed

→ towards the SNC, “it may drift towards the PYD, an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which will not be in Turkey or the SNC’s interests.”

The PKK already seized control of cities such as Qamishli and Amude, to Turkey’s discomfort.

Talabani concludes that if “people want the Kurds to participate, there really has to be a complete rethink of how to reach out to them. And again, we’ll (KRG) continue to be a voice of counsel and try to guide them through this process. But others will probably need to do that as well.”

Talabani suggests that political organizations in the region must accept Kurdish demands. “There must no longer be the fear of this Kurdish national identity. It’s a reality, whether it’s in Iraq, whether it’s in Syria, whether it’s in Turkey.” ○



Kurdistan Regional Government
5 April 2012

Kurdistan Parliament approves new KRG Cabinet; New Prime Minister calls for united front in Baghdad

Erbil - Kurdistan, Iraq (KRG.org) – The Kurdistan Parliament today approved the new Kurdistan Regional Government cabinet. Incoming Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani and his ministers were sworn in to begin their two-year term.

While many of the ministers remain in their previous positions, nine new ministers were sworn into the 7th cabinet.

Announcing the agenda of the new cabinet, Prime Minister Barzani said that Kurdistan needs a collective effort to maintain progress and promote national unity, in spite of individual political and ideological differences. “We must begin a national dialogue to build a consensus on how we can improve our society,” he said.

“We also must have a united front in our negotiations with Baghdad, and at present the mechanism does not exist to create this united view. We must move ahead quickly with the formation of a High Council for Negotiations to oversee these discussions. All parties – government and opposition – must participate in this Council so that we can develop a meaningful consensus among ourselves on how to approach these difficult issues,” he added.

The new Prime Minister went on to describe plans to increase government transparency and to implement a policy to help separate the functions of political parties from the operations of the government as a whole, as well as initiatives to deliver better services to the people of Kurdistan and make better provision for the disadvantaged and poor.

The new cabinet was approved in keeping with the legal timeframe set by President Masoud Barzani’s call to form the new cabinet, on March 7. The members of the 7th Cabinet sworn into posts today are:

Prime Minister - Nechirvan Idris Barzani*

Deputy Prime Minister - Imad Ahmad Sayfour*

Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources - Serwan Baban*

Minister of Culture and Youth - Kawa Mahmoud Shakir

Minister of Education - Asmat Muhamad Khalid*

Minister of Electricity - Yasin Sheikh Abu Bakir Muhammad Mawati

Minister of Endowment & Religious Affairs - Kamil Ali Aziz

Minister of Finance & the Economy - Bayiz Saeed Mohammad Talabani

New Kurdistan PM Nechirvan Barzani, gave a speech at the Kurdish parliament, on April 5, 2012. Photo: KRG



Minister of Health - Rekawt Hama Rasheed*

Minister of Higher Education & Scientific Research - Ali Saeed*

Minister of Housing and Reconstruction - Kamaran Ahmed Abdullah

Minister of Justice - Sherwan Haidary*

Minister for the Interior - Abdul Karim Sultan Sinjari

Minister of Labour and Social Affairs - Ms Asos Najib Abdullah

Minister of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs - Sabah Ahmed Mohamed (Mamosta Aram)

Minister of Municipalities and Tourism - Dilshad Shahab*

Minister of Natural Resources - Abdullah Abdulrahman Abdullah (Ashti Hawrami)

Minister of Peshmerga Affairs - Jafar Mustafa Ali

Minister of Planning - Ali Sindi

Minister of Trade and Industry - Sinan Abdulkhalq Ahmed Çelebi

Minister of Transport and Communications - Jonson Siyaoosh*

Other senior officials with ministerial rank

President, Divan of the Council of Ministers - Fawzi Franso Toma Hariri

Secretary of the Cabinet - Mohammad Qaradaghi

Head of the Department of Foreign Relations - Falah Mustafa Bakir

Chairman of the Investment Board - Herish Muharam

* Denotes a newly appointed minister.

La Turquie règle ses comptes avec son armée

Les responsables du putsch sanglant de 1980 sont jugés. Une première.

LAURE MARCHAND
ISTANBUL

ASIE MINEURE Les journées du général à la retraite Kenan Evren se sont longtemps écoulées paisiblement dans un village de la province de la mer Égée. Le vieillard y peignait des nus et des natures mortes, son passe-temps favori. Cette retraite bucolique est révélatrice du statut dont a bénéficié l'auteur du coup d'État du 12 septembre 1980. Dans un pays qui avait pour réflexe de se mettre au garde-à-vous devant l'institution militaire, il était intouchable.

Mais les temps ont changé. Kenan Evren, qui fut ensuite président de la République, ainsi que Tahsin Sahinkaya, ancien chef de l'armée de l'air, sont jugés depuis hier par une Haute Cour criminelle à Ankara. Respectivement âgés de 94 et 86 ans, les deux hommes, les seuls putschistes encore en vie, risquent une peine de prison à perpétuité pour avoir « ren-

versé l'ordre constitutionnel par la force ». D'une santé chancelante, ils n'étaient pas sur le banc des accusés et ont été autorisés à témoigner depuis leur domicile, via un système de vidéoconférence.

Inimaginable il y a peu, ce procès

rendue à son frère depuis le 13 septembre 1980. Ce jour-là, Cemil, militant d'une organisation marxiste, est emmené à la caserne militaire de Kars, à l'extrémité orientale de la Turquie. On ne le reverra jamais. « Le jugement des auteurs du coup est une consolation, dit Mikail Kirbayir. Mais je lutterai jusqu'à la fin pour la restitution de sa dépouille et l'arrestation de ses meurtriers toujours en liberté. »

De nombreux intellectuels, ONG et familles de victimes réclament que l'ensemble des acteurs - policiers, médecins, militaires ou ministres - ren-

dent des comptes. « Ce procès est largement insuffisant, il doit être élargi, réclame Engin Cirmen, avocat qui fait circuler une pétition en ce sens. Mais

confronte les Turcs à un passé récent toujours à vif et s'inscrit dans le cadre d'une démilitarisation accrue du pays. Sa tenue montre à quel point le pouvoir a basculé ces dernières années vers les civils au détriment des « pachas ».

Après le Chili, l'Argentine, la Grèce et l'Espagne

La courte histoire de la République turque, fondée en 1923, est jalonnée de coups d'État. Il y en a eu quatre ces cinquante dernières années. Celui du 12 septembre 1980 fut le plus brutal. 650 000 personnes ont été arrêtées, 50 ont été exécutées à l'issue de procès politiques, 299 sont mortes sous la torture en prison et des milliers ont dû s'exiler. Les Turcs ont toujours vu la main de la CIA derrière cette intervention militaire. À l'époque, la junte a justifié son coup de force par le chaos né des affrontements entre l'extrême gauche et l'extrême droite qui faisaient régner une atmosphère de guerre civile. Mais l'armée elle-même est soupçonnée d'avoir fomenté massacres et assassinats pour préparer le terrain à l'établissement de l'état d'urgence.

Mikail Kirbayir attend que justice soit

c'est tout de même primordial qu'il ait lieu, cela montre que l'ère des coups d'État est terminée. »

Après le Chili, l'Argentine, la Grèce ou l'Espagne, la Turquie commence à affronter son passé en jugeant les putschistes. Les mentalités ont évolué. En 1980, la population, les hommes d'affaires, les politiques, les médias... tout le monde réclamait l'intervention de l'armée, souligne l'éditorialiste Mehmet Ali Birand : « La majorité du pays est aussi responsable. » Trente ans plus tard, en 2010, les Turcs se sont prononcés lors d'un référendum pour la suppression d'un amendement à la Constitution assurant l'immunité des artisans du coup d'État.

Depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir en 2003 des islam-conservateurs du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), les militaires ont fini par être renvoyés dans leurs casernes. Mais les procès en cours pour tentatives de renversement du gouvernement de Recep Tayyip Erdogan par l'armée, au cours de cette décennie, montrent une similitude avec le 12 septembre 1980 : c'est également au nom de la sauvegarde des principes fondateurs de la République turque, dont les militaires s'estiment les gardiens, qu'ils ont été échafaudés.

La prochaine étape, pour que la Turquie se débarrasse de la tutelle militaire, consiste à se doter d'une nouvelle Constitution. L'actuelle, bien que remaniée, a été rédigée par les putschistes. ■

299 personnes sont mortes torturées en prison lors du coup d'État de 1980



Brandissant des portraits de personnes torturées pendant le putsch du 12 septembre 1980, des Turcs ont manifesté, hier à Ankara, devant le tribunal où est jugé l'un des auteurs du coup d'État, l'ancien président et général à la retraite, Kenan Evren (ci-dessus).

ADEM ALTAN/AFP

SYRIE • Les Kurdes font cavalier seul dans l'opposition

Muhammad Ismaïl, membre du bureau politique du Conseil national kurde, explique, dans un entretien à Courrier international, pourquoi les Kurdes n'ont pas pu s'entendre avec le Conseil national syrien, principal organe représentatif de l'opposition à Bachar El-Assad.

Hamdam Mostafavi
Courrier international

COURRIER INTERNATIONAL : Quel a été le rôle des Kurdes syriens depuis le début du soulèvement contre Bachar El-Assad, sur le plan politique ?

MUHAMMAD ISMAÏL : Les Kurdes, en tant qu'opposants de longue date, constituaient un mouvement déjà organisé, mais divisé. La première tâche a été de réunir l'opposition kurde sous une seule bannière. Nous avons réuni l'an dernier un congrès national kurde, où se sont retrouvés les partis politiques, mais aussi les représentants de la société civile, des ONG et des personnalités indépendantes. Je pense qu'il était très représentatif de la société kurde syrienne. Ce congrès a permis de définir les principaux objectifs des Kurdes, à savoir déterminer ce que nous voulons pour l'avenir du pays, et avec quel côté de l'opposition syrienne nous allions nous allier.

Justement, plusieurs dirigeants kurdes ont rencontré à Istanbul les membres du Conseil national syrien (CNS), qui vient d'être reconnu comme principal représentant de l'opposition syrienne lors de la conférence des Amis de la Syrie. Pourtant, vous n'avez pas réussi à former d'alliance avec le CNS. Pourquoi ?

Nous ne sommes pas parvenus à un accord, mais je tiens à dire que le dialogue continue. Le CNS n'a pas accepté nos propositions, à la fois sur la question kurde et sur l'avenir de la Syrie. Le CNS a une vision à très court terme, il est absorbé par



▲ Une jeune Kurde de Syrie lors d'une manifestation contre le régime de Bachar El-Assad, le 25 décembre 2011 à Beyrouth (Liban).

les événements actuels et n'a pas de vision pour l'avenir. Nous, nous savons que nous voulons une Syrie laïque, pluraliste, décentralisée, parlementaire et démocratique. Mais le CNS ne veut pas aborder ces questions pour l'instant. Par ailleurs, il faut savoir qu'avant la réunion d'Istanbul, nous avons eu avec le CNS une réunion à Tunis où nous avons mis en avant nos revendications. Nous demandions un droit à l'autodétermination pour les différentes composantes de la société syrienne. Mais le mot autodétermination a fait peur au CNS. Nous avons accepté de le retirer, et nous avons fait d'autres concessions, notamment sur les droits à l'égalité hommes-femmes, que nous voulions voir inscrit dans un accord, mais malgré tout nous n'avons pas pu trouver de compro-

mis. Le CNS a souhaité qu'aucune mention du "peuple" kurde ne soit faite, ce qui n'était pas acceptable pour nous. Nous n'étions pas non plus d'accord sur le concept de décentralisation : nous souhaitons une décentralisation politique, alors que le CNS ne parle que de décentralisation administrative. Or c'est aussi ce que propose Bachar El-Assad, c'est purement superficiel et ce n'est pas satisfaisant.

Sur le terrain, des combattants kurdes se battent-ils avec l'armée syrienne libre ?

Non ce n'est pas le cas, ou alors uniquement des éléments isolés. Notre mouvement est pacifique et nous ne voulons pas prendre les armes. Bachar El-Assad n'a pas attaqué les régions kurdes pour l'instant, et nous ne voulons pas nous sacrifier comme nous l'avons fait à plusieurs reprises par le passé sans que cela donne de résultats.

Pourtant, les seuls Kurdes qui ont obtenu l'autonomie sont les Irakiens, qui ont pris les armes aux côtés des Américains contre Saddam Hussein. De plus, Bachar El-Assad n'hésite pas à faire parler les armes...

Oui mais la révolution doit rester pacifique. Nous ne voulons pas de scénario à l'irakienne et nous ne souhaitons pas la partition du pays. Certains éléments kurdes comme le PYD ou le PKK souhaitent l'autonomie ou l'indépendance, mais ce n'est pas le cas du conseil national kurde. Nous faisons partie des vingt-deux millions de Syriens.

Les Kurdes ne sont pour l'instant pas massivement descendus dans la rue.

Nos jeunes sont descendus dans la rue. Et politiquement, nous agissons depuis le début. Nous n'avons jamais été à l'écart.

Comment faire pour sortir de l'impasse actuelle en Syrie et que se passera-t-il si Bachar El-Assad ne part pas ?

Il faut imaginer un projet politique fort pour que la population ait envie de continuer à se battre, pour qu'elle sache dans quelle direction va le pays. Mais, même si Bachar El-Assad refuse de partir, même si le régime ne tombe pas, la Syrie ne sera plus jamais comme avant, ce modèle de dictature absolue a expiré en Syrie et dans la région. ♦

CONTEXTE La crainte d'un Etat kurde

Les Kurdes syriens représentent 10 % de la population du pays. Mais ils font également partie d'un peuple transfrontalier, dont d'importantes populations vivent en Turquie (13 millions), en Iran (6 millions) et en Irak (6 millions). Depuis l'instauration d'une réelle autonomie pour les Kurdes irakiens après la chute de Saddam Hussein en 2003, les pays de la région craignent une contagion.

La méfiance de la Turquie, qui tente de régler la question kurde dans son pays et qui est aux prises avec le PKK [groupe armé souhaitant la libération du Kurdistan], à l'égard des Kurdes syriens est forte. Et réciproquement : les Kurdes syriens ne sont pas prêts à s'allier avec le Conseil national syrien, notamment en raison de sa proximité avec Ankara, qui s'opposera à toute velléité de reconnaissance de l'existence d'un peuple kurde. ♦

Ankara hausse le ton contre le régime syrien

Le premier ministre turc menace Damas de prendre des « mesures », alors qu'un incident frontalier a fait 4 morts ce lundi.

LAURE MARCHAND
ISTANBUL

PROCHE-ORIENT Le conflit syrien débordant sur son territoire : le scénario que redoutait Ankara depuis le début de l'insurrection chez son voisin a fini par se produire. Hier, deux Syriens et deux Turcs ont été blessés dans le nouveau camp de réfugiés de Kilis, une ville proche de la frontière, par des tirs en provenance du territoire syrien. Plusieurs personnes auraient également été atteintes par des coups de feu alors qu'elles tentaient de venir en aide à un groupe de réfugiés, dont certains, blessés, cherchaient à entrer en Turquie. C'est la première fois que

giés, se retrouve donc en première ligne et brandit la menace de « nouvelles démarches » après le cessez-le-feu censé intervenir aujourd'hui. Il est « évident » qu'il ne sera de toute façon « pas appliqué », a réagi à la suite de l'attaque contre le camp Naci Koru, vice-ministre des Affaires étrangères. Ces derniers jours, le gouvernement turc a durci sa rhétorique contre Damas, son ancien allié. Avant de s'enlever pour une visite en Chine, le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan a parlé « de mesures » supplémentaires si la violence ne cessait pas à la date butoir du 10 avril, sans donner plus de détails.

Hier, les médias turcs évoquaient, de sources officielles anonymes, le possible établissement par l'armée turque de corridors humanitaires ou d'une zone tampon côté syrien afin de protéger les civils. Ce plan pourrait être actionné si le nombre de réfugiés dépassait les 50 000, selon le quotidien

Milliyet. « Nous devons être prêts à agir en fonction de tous les scénarios possibles », expliquait-il y a peu un officiel du ministère des Affaires étrangères, en ajoutant qu'une zone tampon constituait « une option » si la Turquie était débordée par une vague de réfugiés.

En moins d'une semaine, 4 000 Syriens sont passés du côté turc, portant le nombre total de réfugiés dans les camps gérés par le Croissant Rouge turc à près de 25 000. Ahmet Davutoğlu, le ministre des Affaires étrangères, s'est entretenu avec Ban Ki-moon, le secrétaire général de l'ONU, pour lui faire part de son inquiétude. Après s'y être opposé, Ankara se dit prêt à accepter une aide extérieure pour gérer l'augmentation des arrivées. Kofi Annan, l'émissaire international sur le dossier syrien, est attendu aujourd'hui pour une visite dans les camps. Les tirs essayés par celui de Kilis mettent au jour les problèmes de sécurité de ces centres établis le long de la frontière. Des spécialistes de l'aide humanitaire avaient averti de ce risque dès qu'ils ont été construits. ■

Le plan Annan piétiné jusqu'au bout par Damas

FACE à la poursuite des violences, qui ont encore fait lundi 35 morts dans la province de Hama, le plan de paix de Kofi Annan, dont la mise en place devait commencer mardi, semble nul et non avenu. D'après le projet mis au point par l'envoyé des Nations unies et de la Ligue arabe et accepté par toutes les parties, l'armée de Bachar el-Assad devait commencer à se retirer des zones urbaines avant la date butoir de mardi, les forces de l'opposition s'étant engagées à observer un cessez-le-feu dans les quarante-huit heures qui suivront. Mais les autorités de Damas ont exigé des « garanties écrites » des « groupes terroristes armés », des conditions jugées « inacceptables » par la porte-parole de la diplomatie européenne, Catherine Ashton. Même la Chine a appelé, lundi, Damas à respecter ses engagements. Après les incidents survenus sur la frontière turco-syrienne, le vice-ministre turc des Affaires étrangères, Naci Koru, a estimé que l'échéance fixée initialement n'avait « plus de sens ». La Maison-Blanche a considéré, pour sa part, n'avoir vu « aucun signe jusqu'ici du fait que le régime Assad respecte ses engagements ». Kofi Annan est attendu mardi en Turquie où il visitera un camp de réfugiés syriens. Il doit ensuite se rendre à Téhéran pour rendre compte, jeudi, de sa mission au Conseil de sécurité. Se posera alors l'éventualité d'un nouveau vote, une perspective conditionnée par l'attitude de la Russie.

A. BA.



ce type d'incident se produit. Il fait suite, semble-t-il, aux violents combats qui ont eu lieu à l'aube dans le village de Salama, tout proche, entre des rebelles et l'armée régulière syrienne. Ils ont fait au moins six morts parmi les forces de l'ordre, selon l'Observatoire syrien de droits de l'homme. Deux ressortissants syriens ont par ailleurs succombé à leurs blessures au cours de leur transport dans un hôpital turc.

Corridors humanitaires

Alors que les combats font rage dans le nord de la Syrie, près de sa frontière, la Turquie, alarmée par un afflux de réfu-

The squeeze on Iraq's Kurds



Jackson Diehl

Massoud Barzani, the president of Iraqi Kurdistan, knows trouble: His movement has endured multiple wars, diplomatic betrayals and even chemical weapons attacks on its civilian population in its struggle to survive in the tough territory between Baghdad, Damascus, Tehran and Ankara.

Maybe that's why Barzani is grimly unsparing in his description of what the region currently looks like from his capital in Irbil, 14 months into the misnamed "Arab Spring."

"The more you look at it, the more you see the situation going toward conflict and chaos," he said Tuesday.

To the south, in Baghdad, Barzani sees Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki "concentrating power," having driven the leader of Iraq's Sunni population to seek de facto asylum in Kurdistan. "Iraq right now is facing a crisis," he told me and The Post's Jim Hoagland during a visit to Washington. "There may be some people who do not want to call it a crisis, but it is a crisis. This is not the Iraq we struggled for: We are seeing the consolidation of power under one party and one ruler."

To the southwest, meanwhile, Syria appears to be spiraling into a civil war that imperils a Kurdish minority population of 3 million — while compounding the tensions between the Sunni and Shiite camps in Iraq. "It's a fight between two forces" in Syria, "the Alawites and the Sunnis,

and it's a fight for survival," Barzani said. "I'm not optimistic. I don't see much room for understanding between the opposition and the regime. It is going to go on for some time."

The Kurds are literally caught in the middle of these twin crises, which have begun to feed on each other. In the past, the Kurds have brokered deals between the Iraqi factions — but their efforts so far to patch the rift between Maliki, a Shiite, and Sunni leader Tariq al-Hashimi have failed. In Syria, the Kurds have turned against President Bashar al-Assad's regime but are reluctant to embrace the Sunni-dominated opposition until it offers more guarantees of minority rights.

"The Syrian situation has a very direct and negative effect on the situation in Iraq," Barzani said. Maliki, he added "has his fears" about what the fall of the Assad would mean for the Sunni-Shiite competition in Iraq — fears that may explain his campaign against Sunni leaders.

At the same time, Barzani said, "this Syrian regime was responsible for 80 percent of the bloodshed in Iraq because of terrorism. Maliki has to be responsive to the Iraqis who have not forgotten all of that blood" — most of whom are Sunnis.

Barzani's presence in Washington, where he is being hosted by Vice President Biden and expects to meet President Obama, is part of his answer to these dilemmas. He is hoping for a more active U.S. policy. "When I last met Obama, I said I hoped withdrawals of American forces, which was natural, would not mean the withdrawal of American interest and American commitment to Iraq," Barzani said.



"That question is still on the table. In fact, the American position has to be very public and very clear, so that the Iraqi people can see that the United States will not allow and will not support another dictatorship in Iraq."

In Syria, Barzani said, "the United States should support the aspirations of the Syrian people." But he added: "It doesn't look like the United States and Europe have the will to intervene like they have done in Libya." The Kurds are consequently expecting a prolonged civil war.

Barzani did have one positive reflection: A decade or two ago, he pointed out, Kurdish leaders such as himself would have counted themselves lucky to capture the attention of a stray journalist or congressman while visiting Washington. "Now I am meeting with the vice president and the president. So the Kurdish reality is different."

Barzani's movement has indeed gained much in the last decade. Irbil, Barzani's capital, and much of the self-governing region around it, is booming. The challenge now will be trying to preserve that space between two conflicts — in Iraq and Syria — which may well get worse before they get better. □

Exxon Mobil dispute deepens Arab-Kurd split in Iraq

By Alice Fordham and Dan Morse,

BAGHDAD — A controversy over oil deals in Iraq is inflaming a bitter political divide between Kurdish and Arab leaders, bringing long-running arguments over autonomy and control of resources to the fore in this oil-rich coun-

try.

The dispute's most contested issue is a deal signed last year in which authorities in northern Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region gave Exxon Mobil permission to explore six tracts of land. The contract infuriated leaders in Baghdad, who have never agreed on a means by which the Kurdish region can develop its resources.

A proposed hydrocarbon law regula-

ting drilling and sales has been stalled since 2007, as Iraq's political blocs wrestle over its terms. With improved security in Iraq since 2009, it has become increasingly possible for foreign oil companies to work here. The government in Baghdad has struck deals with international oil companies, including Exxon Mobil, that have been concentrated on oil fields in the country's south, far from the Kurdish areas of the north.

Generally the Kurdish authorities have sold the oil and gas from their land through the government in Baghdad in exchange for an annual chunk of Iraq's budget. But problems with the arrangement are com-

mon, and this week, the Kurdish government announced that it would suspend its exports because the government in Baghdad has not been fulfilling its obligations to pay oil companies working in Kurdish areas.

Meanwhile, there are several small companies, including the Norwegian firm DNO, that have ignored the shaky legal framework and signed deals directly with the Kurdistan regional government. The arrangements have thus far been tolerated by leaders in Baghdad. But Baghdad's tolerance reached its limit in October when Exxon Mobil became the first company working in the south to also sign a deal with Kurdish authorities.

Adding to the sense of grievance in Baghdad, three of the six areas Exxon Mobil is set to develop are in disputed territory, which the administrations in Baghdad and the Kurdish capital of Erbil both claim.

The Exxon Mobil deal reportedly infuriated Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and left his government with a dilemma: to allow the deal to go ahead and lend legitimacy to an independent Kurdish oil market, or to expel Exxon Mobil from the giant West Qurna oil field in the south and risk

losing a flagship deal.

Exxon Mobil has declined to comment on the situation.

"Exxon Mobil thought that they would do it, that the Iraqi government would decide they were too big to take on, and that a new normal would be established," said Ali al-Saffar, an energy expert. "But given just how explosive the territories they signed on are, it was always going to be very difficult."

Late last year, the government informed Exxon Mobil that its deal with Kurdistan violated the terms of the company's agreement to develop West Qurna, according to Deputy Prime Minister Hussain al-Shahristani. But the only formal action the government has taken thus far is to prohibit the firm from participating in next month's bidding on gas fields.

Oil ministry officials in Baghdad say Exxon Mobil informed them last month that the company was suspending its operations in the Kurdish area. But Fouad Hussein, a top Kurdish official, insisted that the company is setting up an office in Erbil and planning its operations.

Relations between Erbil and Baghdad were strained even before the controversy over the Exxon Mobil deal flared anew.

Kurdish President Massoud Barzani delivered a stinging speech on Thursday in Washington that ripped into Maliki as an autocrat.

"Iraq is facing a serious crisis," he said. He insisted that oil deals struck in the autonomous Kurdish region were legal.

For his part, Maliki has been angered by the refusal of Kurdish authorities to hand over Tariq al-Hashimi, a vice president who fled to the Kurdish region after a warrant was issued for his arrest. Hashimi, who is wanted on terrorism charges that he denies, flew to Saudi Arabia on Wednesday.

The oil and gas fields in the Kurdish area represent a small fraction of Iraq's vast hydrocarbon wealth. But some in Baghdad fear it could one day provide enough profit to encourage separatist forces in Kurdistan.

Shahristani, the deputy prime minister, said he is determined not to let that happen.

"If the oil is managed by different regions and will be a source of conflict and war among Iraqis, not only the country will be destroyed, none of them will really benefit from all these resources," Shahristani said. ■

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میدل ایست اونلاین

Barzani joins other leaders in accusing Maliki of dictatorship

Kurdish leader Massud Barzani says Maliki is monopolising power, preparing ground for return to dictatorship.

Middle East Online

DUBAI - Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is monopolising power and preparing the ground for a return to dictatorship, Kurdish leader Massud Barzani charged in an interview published on Sunday.

"Iraq is moving towards a catastrophe, a return to dictatorship," said Barzani in the interview published in pan-Arab newspaper, Al-Hayat, adding that it was "unacceptable" that Maliki was also Iraq's "defence minister, interior minister, intelligence chief and commander of the armed forces."

Barzani, who was received at the White House on Wednesday, said on his return to Arbil he would call a meeting of Iraqi leaders to "save" Iraq which is facing a political crisis.

In Baghdad, Maliki's spokesman, Ali Mussawi, sharply criticised Barzani's remarks.

"There is an incomprehensible escalation from Mr Massud Barzani and it is rejected, and no one among the Iraqi people or



'Iraq is moving towards a catastrophe'

others accepts it," he said.

"Many different Kurdish leaders called us and informed us of their rejection of such tendencies, which could be useful to some factions that do not carry good intentions to the Iraqi and the Kurdish people," he said.

Iraq's political woes deepened after the central government in Baghdad issued in December an arrest warrant against Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi, a Sunni, accused of running a death squad.

Hashemi sought shelter in the autonomous Kurdistan region run by Barzani.

Barzani said the meeting he would call must come up with "radical solutions... specific timeframe to exit the crisis," and if it failed "we will take another decision" -- a reference to the possible secession of Kurdistan.

► "This is not blackmail or a threat. I'm serious. I will put a referendum to the Kurdish people. Whatever the price, we will never accept a return to dictatorship in Iraq," Barzani said, referring to Saddam Hussein's rule.

Tensions have been running high between Maliki's Shiite National Alliance coalition, Iraqi Kurds and the Sunni-backed Iraqiya bloc to which Hashemi belongs, mainly over the distribution of the country's oil wealth.

Barzani said he refused to hand over Hashemi to the Baghdad authorities and would not ask him to leave Kurdistan, if he decides to return there after his current regional tour.

"I will not ask him to leave Kurdistan and I am not opposed to his return if he decides to return," he told Al-Hayat.

Hashemi arrived in the Sunni heavyweight kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Wednesday from Qatar, after a controversial four-day

visit that sparked criticism from Iraq's Shiite-led government and demands that Doha hand him over.

Qatar refused those demands, saying they violated "diplomatic norms."

Elsewhere Al-Hayat quoted Barzani as saying an agreement with US energy giant ExxonMobil -- considered null and void by the Baghdad authorities -- was still valid.

"Rumours of the contract being cancelled are unfounded and were made under threat of the Iraqi government," he said.

ExxonMobil in mid-October signed an agreement for oil exploration with the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan, earning the wrath of the Iraqi central government in Baghdad.

Baghdad does not recognise such agreements and so far has prevented any oil company having a contract with Kurdistan to participate in tenders in rest of the country.□

Mr A - the oil lynchpin of Iraqi Kurdistan

The oil lynchpin of Iraqi Kurdistan Ashti Hawrami is the oil minister of Kurdistan. He is the architect of the boom that has seen production rise from 2,000 barrels a day five years ago to 250,000 today in this once overlooked part of Iraq. He is also Mr A.

The Financial Services Authority's decision last week to fine Ian Hannam for market abuse was littered with mentions of a mystery man who received the two emails that snared JP Morgan Cazenove's star dealmaker.

The fact that it was Hawrami raises questions about the FSA's interpretation of the law. He is not a fund manager or any kind of "market participant" in the traditional sense. He is, though, a revered figure in his homeland.

Hawrami was born in 1948 in Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan's second city, but has spent most of his career in Britain.

After leaving Baghdad University with a degree in oil engineering, he worked for the national oil company before moving to Scotland in 1975, where he spent seven years with British National Oil Corporation.

He gained a PhD in oil engineering



while in Scotland, and then had a series of jobs at consultancies and engineering firms during the 1980s and 1990s.

In 1999, he was appointed chief executive of ECL Group, which he ran for several years. A quiet retirement at his mansion in Henley-on-Thames, Berkshire, was not to be. In 2006, the regional authorities in Kurdistan asked him to become the oil minister.

His task? Build an industry from scratch.

When he took control, there was one 1970s oil well in Kurdistan producing just 2,000 barrels a day.

He offered generous terms to entice explorers to the region, which had been ignored for decades. More than 40 signed up.

Many have since found oil, including Genel Energy, now run by Tony Hayward, the former BP boss. Gulf Keystone, another London-listed group, has seen its shares soar after it made a big find. At £1.9 billion, it is the largest

company on AIM, the junior market.

Baghdad says, however, that the contracts Hawrami struck were illegal because they were not done through the federal ministry in Iraq.

The dispute between Baghdad and Kurdistan is worsening -- this month the Kurds shut down exports to the rest of Iraq.

Under the constitution, all oil revenues must be booked through the federal ministry in Baghdad and then redistributed. The Kurds are entitled to 17%, which is their proportion of the overall population.

They claim that Baghdad has withheld at least \$1.5 billion (£720m) that is rightfully theirs. The regional government has raised tensions further by giving refuge to Tariq al-Hashimi, the Iraqi vice-president who fled after the prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, accused him of running death squads. Maliki has demanded the Kurds hand him over. They have refused.

Hawrami, meanwhile, has continued to draw in billions of investment. His biggest coup came in November, when he announced that Exxon Mobil, then the world's biggest oil company, had bought the rights to six exploration zones.

It was the first time one of the industry's giants had dared to cross Baghdad by dealing with the Kurds. And the oil minister may be about to bag another big name -- Total, the French group, is also close to signing an exploration deal.

Hawrami has set a target of producing 1m barrels a day within three years. Some dismiss that as fanciful. Even if it is, the boom he has engineered is extraordinary.□

Kurdish opposition quits Syrian National Council

By Lauren Williams

www.dailystar.com.lb

ISTANBUL: The Syrian Kurdish opposition bloc has walked away from the Syrian National Council, exposing deep and problematic rifts within the umbrella opposition group just days after international leaders granted the body extra recognition after attempts to unify.

Syrian Kurdish opposition leader Abdul-Baki Yousef, a leading member of the Kurdish Yakiti party in Syria and former member of the Kurdish National Council, charged host country Turkey with “pressuring the SNC” to omit the demands of the Kurdish opposition members in the final constitution document outlining a transition plan for Syria.

The fiercely divided SNC pulled the document together at the last minute under pressure to unite from the “Friends of Syria” group.

The Friends group – which includes Turkey, the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Gulf states – recognized the SNC as “a legitimate representative of the Syrian people,” falling well short of the recognition as the legal government in exile they had hoped for after the first Friends of Syria meeting in Tunis in February.

“Our goal was to unify with the opposition and come up with a patriotic agreement that makes an umbrella for the whole opposition, but unfortunately the Turkish sponsor was very sensitive toward the

Kurdish issue,” Yousef told The Daily Star. “We accuse the Turkish government of putting pressure on the council.”

Yousef said that negotiations ahead of the conference had outlined recognition of the Kurds, but claimed that those points had been removed in the final covenant.

“There was nothing clear about our nationalistic issues. It’s clear that the Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood are the majority of the council so they play a main role in the council.

“The Muslim Brotherhood has an old relationship with Turkey, they are allies of the Turkish government,” he said.

“Of course we welcome the Brotherhood’s effective contribution to the revolution and support of individual freedoms and pluralism in Syria ... but their attitude is highly influenced by the Turks, and that’s what we saw clearly char-

ter.”
Kurdish representatives had earlier walked out of unity talks days ahead of the Friends of Syria meeting.

Yousef said in the absence of adequate recognition from the SNC that the Kurdish bloc would continue to negotiate with separatist group the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and other nationalist entities to secure their demands.

“Of course we are negotiating with the PKK and other Kurdish personnel in the SNC because there is neglect and ignorance toward the Kurdish issues ... This is our land we are part of the Syrian people. We are not refugees here.”

Turkey – home to between 11 and 15 million Kurds, most of whom reside in southeastern provinces – is engaged in a decades-long military conflict with the PKK, resulting in the deaths of over 40,000 people.

Late last month PKK com-

manders threatened to transform Kurdish areas into a “war zone” if Turkey followed through on threats to establish militarily protected buffer zones in the country. This prompted fears the PKK may capitalize on the hostility they share with Damascus toward Turkey to stir strife in the country.

Ammar Qurabi, a leading negotiator and head of a breakaway Syrian opposition bloc, the National Coalition for Change, pressured the SNC to back military assistance for the Syrian opposition. He struck out at the Kurdish claims, denying Turkey had pressured the council.

“The Kurds need to stop talking about being Kurds and talk about being Syrian. This is not about any kind of sectarianism. We need to act all as Syrians.”○



Kurds protest in Qamishli, a predominantly Kurdish city in Syria.

CENT MILLIONS DE DOLLARS POUR LA RÉBELLION

Syrie : la stratégie de l'impuissance

Le soutien financier des Amis de la Syrie aux insurgés... n'a pas réussi jusque-là à faire reculer Al-Assad

Il ponctue ses phrases de rires amers. Il se raccroche à un ultime espoir, celui de voir appliquer le plan de paix proposé par Kofi Annan. Au lendemain de la conférence des Amis de la Syrie qui s'est tenue dimanche dernier à Istanbul, cet opposant syrien qui préfère garder l'anonymat dénonce la double hypocrisie de cet énième grand raout inter-

mée du régime utilise des civils comme boucliers humains dans les zones insurgées, allant jusqu'à placer des enfants sur les chars dans la ville d'Idlib? Le cynisme du tortionnaire de Damas qui déclarait, il y a quelques jours, que les opérations de pacification étaient enfin terminées a encore atteint un degré supplémentaire. Reste la Russie. L'opposant s'attache,



Conférence des Amis de la Syrie à Istanbul, le 1^{er} avril

national. Hypocrisie de la part de l'opposition, qui fait mine de croire que le Conseil national syrien (CNS) peut la représenter dans son intégralité alors qu'elle n'a jamais été aussi divisée. Hypocrisie de la communauté internationale qui dit soutenir les négociations politiques conduites par l'ancien représentant de l'ONU tout en laissant des pays comme le Qatar ou l'Arabie saoudite financer la lutte armée.

Le plan onusien est la dernière chance, selon cet homme, d'éviter la guerre civile. Certes, il ne croit plus depuis longtemps aux fausses promesses de Bachar al-Assad qui a affirmé une fois encore qu'il se conformerait aux propositions de Kofi Annan et ferait taire les armes avant le 10 avril. L'organisation non gouvernementale Human Rights Watch n'aurait pas apporté la preuve que l'ar-

sans trop y croire, aux affirmations de Sergueï Lavrov, le ministre des Affaires étrangères du Kremlin, qui l'a assuré que Moscou était déterminé à en finir avec le despotisme du régime de Damas. Ces mêmes Russes, qui affirment que toutes les parties doivent cesser les combats alors qu'ils n'ont pas renoncé à livrer des armes au régime, sont le « seul espoir qui nous reste », dit-il d'un ton désespéré.

En attendant, c'est le scénario du pire qui s'impose. A défaut d'avoir reconnu le Conseil national syrien comme gouvernement de l'opposition en exil, la conférence d'Istanbul a amorcé une étape vers ce soutien militaire que l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) appelle de ses vœux. Alors que les Etats-Unis ont reconnu fournir déjà du matériel de renseignement et de communication à l'opposition

syrienne, l'Arabie saoudite, le Qatar et les Emirats arabes unis vont établir un fonds pour payer les salaires des soldats de l'Armée syrienne libre. Cette enveloppe dotée de 100 millions de dollars destinés à encourager les défections dans les rangs de l'armée régulière va aussi servir au CNS pour conforter sa position vis-à-vis d'une opposition de l'intérieur qui ne cesse de dénoncer son illégitimité. Avec ce financement, Burhan Ghalioun, le président du CNS, va pouvoir établir un bureau d'aide aux blessés, comme l'OLP l'avait fait avec les Palestiniens. « C'est un geste plus politique que militaire », commente Haytham al-Manna, représentant des *tanzikiyat*, les comités de coordination à l'extérieur de la Syrie. « Et qui exactement le général Burhan Ghalioun va-t-il rémunérer? », persifle Al-Manna qui a quitté le Conseil national syrien parce que l'organisation faisait la part trop belle aux Frères musulmans, pour fonder le Comité national pour le Changement démocratique. Al-Manna, qui est originaire de Deraa, explique que, dans cette seule ville, on compte trente groupes armés différents. « La réunion d'Istanbul aura permis à l'argent du Golfe de se déverser sur mon pays. Vous verrez qu'il y aura bientôt une branche de l'Armée libre d'Al-Qaida... La militarisation de la révolte est une vraie catastrophe pour la Syrie. » Mais pour un autre membre des comités de coordination, un chrétien professeur de mathématiques d'Alep, la manne du Qatar et de l'Arabie saoudite permettra peut-être enfin d'unifier les rangs de l'Armée libre.

Sur la chaîne Al-Arabiya, il a écouté en direct d'Istanbul les propos des Frères musulmans syriens, Ali Sadreddin al-Bayanouni et Mohammed Riad al-Shaqfa, qui dirigent la confrérie depuis Londres, et de Mohammed Farouk Tayfour, leur représentant au sein du CNS. Tous les trois ont assuré que le droit d'expression et de religion serait garanti dans la Syrie de demain. Ils se sont engagés à combattre le terrorisme et à respecter les traités internationaux. Comme beaucoup de Syriens aujourd'hui, cet opposant a choisi de croire à leur discours apaisant, non par naïveté, mais pour ne pas sombrer dans le désespoir.

SARA DANIEL

LE PLAN DE L'ONU

- Mise en place d'un « processus politique ouvert, dirigé par les Syriens ».
- Cessation de toutes les formes de violence armée par toutes les parties.
- Acheminement de l'aide humanitaire dans toutes les zones touchées par les combats.
- Libération des personnes arbitrairement détenues.
- Liberté de circulation pour les journalistes dans tout le pays.
- Respect du droit d'association et de manifestation.

Le destin de deux frères, l'un en exil, l'autre resté en famille dans une ville du nord de la Syrie – dont est originaire l'auteur, Salim Barakat

Mythique Kurdistan

CATHERINE SIMON

Parmi la trentaine de romans de Salim Barakat, *Les Plumes* est le cinquième seulement à avoir été traduit en français. C'est à Chypre, côté grec, où l'auteur a vécu, qu'il a d'abord été publié, en arabe. L'île aux deux drapeaux, peuplée de touristes et de casques bleus, est la destination finale du narrateur, un jeune Kurde de Syrie prénommé Mem, envoyé « en mission » par son père. Mem est censé prendre contact avec un mystérieux « Grand Homme ». Il ne sait pas pourquoi.

Six années ont passé quand débute le roman, six longues années d'attente. Et rien n'est advenu. Mem est brisé, l'échelec mine. Il n'a rencontré personne, sinon ses « accompagnateurs », quatre hommes taciturnes supposés le conduire à son rendez-vous, et qui, chaque fois, échouent. Les voisins de Mem sont bizarres. Le jeune homme est seul, désemparé. Il songe au suicide, un acte « tonitruant », qui lui permettrait de « ne plus rien ressentir ».

Le passé lui revient, comme en rêve. C'est la seule langue qu'il possède. Par vagues secrètes et bouleversantes, les mots et les images affluent : voici le quartier de son enfance, à Qamishli, en Syrie ; voici le père, Hamdi Azad, marchand de

tissus, bourru et volubile, hanté par la tragédie kurde, ses perdants magnifiques, ses espoirs de résurrection ; voici la mère, Kaspo, si rude et délicate, qui converse avec ses abeilles et les fleurs de son minuscule lopin ; voici enfin la nombreuse fratrie : six sœurs batailleuses, caquetantes, et puis Dino, le frère jumeau, le rival aux yeux verts, pareils, à en croire les voisins, « à ceux des djinns ». Bien entendu, cette triste histoire d'exil finit mal.

Ainsi pourrait se résumer, de manière rationnelle, l'argument de ce drôle de roman oriental, écrit il y a plus de douze ans. Mais alors on n'aurait rien dit. Rien dit de cette prose déroutante, touffue comme un taillis de ronces, légère comme cette « petite plume cendrée » surgie de la valise de Mem, qui s'élève soudain dans l'air « en tournoyant, avant de redescendre en se balançant et de se poser de nouveau tout au fond, sur les faux plis grossiers de la doublure ». Salim Barakat parle une langue profuse, difficile, décochant ici un trait net – « la douleur se couvrait d'un duvet, comme la fleur de menthe » –, étirant là des volutes de mots incompréhensibles, de métaphores obscures, forgeant son temps intérieur, celui d'une écriture puissante et raffinée qui agit sur l'esprit comme les images, pareillement étranges ou incongrues, d'un rêve dont on s'éveille, et qui, longtemps après, vous poursuit de ses lueurs inarticulées.

La première partie du roman est le récit de Mem à Chypre, « cette île dont l'unité a éclaté comme un grand rire » et où l'on parle grec. « Homme de l'attente »,

comme il se définit lui-même, le jeune exilé passe ses journées à épier un couple d'oiseaux et à tourner/penser en rond, mêlant légendes et souvenirs personnels, réalisme et fantastique. Son voisin est-il un humain ? Il « nage dans son manteau » et sa main, découvre Mem avec effroi, se termine « non par des doigts, mais par une petite aile ». Les grandes dates de l'histoire du peuple kurde, mille fois révolté, mille fois écrasé, soumis à la domination des puissants (les Turcs, les Syriens, les Iraniens, les Irakiens...), forment le motif obsédant de cette mélopée kafkaïenne. Mem, le fils sacrifié, revit les moments où, en Syrie, un soir, il a fui le village et s'est métamorphosé en chacal, rejoignant la horde animale et « faisant claquer ses mâchoires comme s'il s'apprêtait à dévorer la nuit ».

Les grandes dates de l'histoire du peuple kurde forment le motif obsédant de cette mélopée kafkaïenne

La seconde partie place Dino, le frère jumeau, « sur le devant de la scène ». Nous voici en Syrie, dans le nord du pays. Dino et Mem ont fini leurs études secondaires, mais n'arrivent pas à monter leur dossier d'inscription pour l'université : leur père étant kurde, sa nationalité syrienne est « encore à l'étude ». Les deux frères n'ont pas d'autre avenir professionnel que des jobs saisonniers et la boutique du père. Mythique, le Kurdistan, « c'est-à-dire nulle part et partout », inonde et nourrit le destin des deux frères, comme il l'a fait du père.

Hamdi Azad, le patriarche, s'est dit qu'il suffisait de « mettre dans les mains de Mem une grosse aiguille et de la ficelle de chanvre (...), puis de lui dire : "Allez ! Raccommode l'air, mon fils !" pour que celui-ci se mit aussitôt à ravauder l'horizon paternel, déchiré comme un vieux rideau ». De ce legs ambigu, qui est aussi le sien, Salim Barakat fait une tragédie vagabonde, d'une rare richesse. ■

LES PLUMES (Al-Rish), de Salim Barakat, traduit de l'arabe (Syrie) par Emmanuel Varlet, Actes Sud, 344 p., 23,50 €.

Extrait

« Dino intervenait sans cesse dans les récits et dans les tirades de mon père, pour les rectifier ou en changer le cours, quitte à ce qu'ils finissent par ne plus rien vouloir dire. Maintenant, cela me fait sourire, avec un léger regret toutefois, celui de n'avoir jamais trouvé ma place dans cette relation d'affinité qui rapprochait mon père et mon frère. Comme si j'étais muet. Je restais coi devant l'image de mon frère, fasciné par ses longs doigts fins qu'il levait devant lui et qu'il remuait en parlant calmement, comme s'il avait

voulu se débarrasser d'une toile d'araignée. Si, pendant qu'il dissertait devant les visiteurs de mon père, il venait à poser son regard sur moi, le doute m'assaillait, les pores de mon épiderme s'ouvraient pour laisser surgir un petit duvet d'oiseau, et une irrépressible envie de voler me gagnait. Combien de fois, sous le regard vert et froid de mon frère, j'ai eu la sensation de m'envoler, sans pourtant m'élever d'un pied au-dessus du sol ! »

LES PLUMES, PAGE 153

Irak: le dirigeant kurde Barzani accuse Maliki de préparer une dictature

DUBAI, (AFP) — Le dirigeant kurde irakien Massoud Barzani a accusé le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki de monopoliser le pouvoir et de préparer un retour à la dictature, dans un entretien publié dimanche par le journal panarabe Al-Hayat.

"L'Irak s'oriente vers une catastrophe, un retour à la dictature", a déclaré M. Barzani, qualifiant d'"inacceptable" le monopole du pouvoir par M. Maliki qui est à la fois Premier ministre, "ministre de la Défense, ministre de l'Intérieur, chef des renseignements et commandant en chef des forces armées".

Le dirigeant kurde, qui a été reçu mercredi à la Maison blanche, a ajouté qu'il devait appeler à son retour à Erbil à une réunion de "tous" les dirigeants irakiens pour "sauver l'Irak", engagé dans une crise politique accentuée par le mandat d'arrêt lancé en décembre contre le vice-président Tarek al-Hachémi, un sunnite, accusé de diriger un gang de tueurs.

La réunion doit parvenir à "des solutions radicales (...), suivant un calendrier précis pour sortir de la crise", a-t-il ajouté, avertissant que si une telle réunion ne pouvait se tenir, "nous prendrons une autre décision", faisant allusion à une possible scission du Kurdistan.

"Il ne s'agit pas là d'un chantage ou d'une menace. Je suis sérieux, je reviendrai au peuple kurde pour le sonder par référendum", a-t-il dit.

"Quel que soit le prix à payer, nous n'accepterons jamais un retour de la dictature en Irak", a-t-il ajouté, faisant allusion au régime de Saddam Hussein, très



Massoud Barzani © epa.



Le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki.

décrié par les Kurdes irakiens.

Il a en outre affirmé son refus de livrer Tarek al-Hachémi, en tournée régionale après s'être réfugié au Kurdistan. "Je ne lui demanderai pas de quitter le Kurdistan. Je ne l'arrêterai pas et je ne refuse pas son retour au Kurdistan s'il décide d'y revenir", a-t-il dit à Al-Hayat.

Réagissant à ces propos, le conseiller de M. Maliki, Ali Moussawi, a estimé que les remarques de M. Massoud Barzani sur la concentration des pouvoirs de M. Maliki représentent "une escalade incompréhensible qui est rejetée par les Irakiens".

"Beaucoup de dirigeants kurdes nous ont appelés pour nous dire qu'ils rejetaient cette escalade", a-t-il dit à l'AFP.

Les tensions sont vives entre le bloc laïque Iraquiya, auquel appartient M. Hachémi, et les Kurdes d'une part, et M. Maliki, un chiite, de l'autre, au sujet notamment de la répartition des richesses pétrolières.

Interrogé par ailleurs sur le

contrat pétrolier passé par les dirigeants kurdes avec le groupe américain ExxonMobil, considéré par Bagdad comme nul et non avenu, M. Barzani a confirmé le maintien du contrat après un entretien avec le chef d'ExxonMobil à Washington.

"J'ai rencontré le président de cette compagnie, laquelle est engagée par l'accord passé avec nous", a-t-il dit, jugeant "infondées les rumeurs sur une annulation du contrat, sous la menace du gouvernement irakien".

ExxonMobil avait signé à la mi-octobre un accord d'exploration pétrolière avec la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, s'attirant les foudres du gouvernement central irakien.

Le gouvernement de Bagdad ne reconnaît que les accords signés avec le ministère du Pétrole, et a jusqu'à présent interdit à toute compagnie pétrolière ayant un contrat avec le Kurdistan de participer à des appels d'offres dans le reste du pays.

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Turquie: Un soldat tué lors de combats avec les rebelles kurdes

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 4 avr 2012 (AFP)

UN SOLDAT TURC a été tué et un autre blessé mercredi lors de combats avec des rebelles kurdes dans le sud-est de la Turquie peuplé en majorité de Kurdes, selon des sources locales de sécurité.

L'accrochage avec les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) est survenu près du village de Yesilova (province de Hakkari), aux confins de l'Iran et de l'Irak, ont indiqué ces sources. L'armée poursuit ses opérations dans le secteur avec un soutien aérien.

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

Iraq In 'Serious Crisis,' Says Kurdish Leader; Oil Ambitions Complicate Ethnic Tensions

By Pierre Bertrand
www.ibtimes.co.uk

War-torn Iraq, with the fourth-largest proved reserves of oil in the world, is trying to take bold steps to develop them. But it's hobbled by dissent and ethnic strife, as well as a loose constitution that gives rise to conflict between local and national governments.

Development, if it comes at all, looks likely to advance at a very slow pace.

Prominent companies such as Royal Dutch Shell (NYSE: RDS.A) and the Exxon Mobil Corp. (NYSE: XOM), the biggest U.S.-based major integrated oil-and-gas company, are trying to tap into Iraq's oil, most notably in Kurdistan, the semiautonomous region in the north.

The problem: they don't know who deal with. Both Kurdish regional and Iraqi central-government officials claim ownership of the roughly 20 percent of Iraq's oil reserves near Kirkuk.

Iraq has roughly 115 billion barrels of oil in proved reserves -- and just recently produced more than 3 million barrels of oil a day, for the first time in several decades. The Kurdistan Regional Government, based in Kirkuk, has 2 billion barrels in such reserves, according to U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates.

Former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein oppressed the Kurds, a non-Arab but Muslim people who also constitute considerable minorities in Iran, Syria, and Turkey and have long sought an independent Kurdistan.

Iraq, with a land mass slightly more than twice the size of Idaho, is home to peoples who don't like each other. Between Kurds and Arabs, tensions run deep. An estimated 4 million Kurds live in Iraq out of a total population of roughly 32 million.

Relations between Sunni and Shiite groups, both Muslims, throughout Iraq have deteriorated since the country's prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite, issued an arrest warrant for its vice president, Tariq al-Hashemi, a Sunni, on charges of inciting terrorism.

Kurdish officials granted Hashemi asylum and allowed him to escape the country via a chartered flight.

Meanwhile, Iraq's president, Jalal Talabani, is a Kurd.

Power-Sharing Goals Fail

At the heart of the Kurdish-Arab dispute is a constitutional provision that Kurdistan Regional Government President Massoud Barzani said last week hasn't been implemented by Baghdad. Speaking in Washington, he said the provision is designed to set governing and power-sharing agreements between the two governments. The law would also repatriate strategic oil-rich parts of Iraq to Kurdistan.

The constitution was cobbled out between the administration of U.S. President George W. Bush, who invaded Iraq in 2003, and representatives of the interim government. It was finally ratified in 2005.

Barzani's comments came as tensions between Iraq and



Kurdistan intensified, and followed an announcement that a reconciliatory meeting between Kurdish, Shiite, and Sunni groups had been canceled.

"We cannot anymore wait for unfulfilled promises and undelivered promises. There has to be a specific and a certain timeline for this to be delivered," Barzani said. "Therefore, what we will do is we will work on the preferred option: to [work] with the other Iraqi groups to find a solution. If not, then we go back to our people and put all of these realities in front of the people for the people to be free to make their own decision."

In effect, Barzani, the son of one of Saddam Hussein's most bitter enemies, the late Mustafa Barzani, issued a general threat to Iraq's central government. In Iraq, history keeps repeating itself.

'The Big Problem Is Kirkuk'

Now that Kurdistan is targeting fast exploitation of its oil reserves, Iraq's northern oil fields could become prime flash points between the Kurdistan Regional Government and Baghdad, warned Najim Abed Al-Jabouri, a retired major general in the Iraqi army and international fellow in the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies at the National Defense University in Washington.

"The big problem is Kirkuk and the disputed areas," Al-Jabouri said. He forecast "big problems" in the future regarding the ownership of that city and its resources.

Al-Jabouri said Kurdistan claims oil-rich and valuable parts of northern Iraq, like Kirkuk, as part of its sovereign territory.

Kurdish regional authorities don't have a close relationship with Iraq's prime minister. Relations are so bad that certain communities and mayors in the region don't observe the central government's laws, Al-Jabouri added.

Kurdistan and Iraq are at odds over oil revenue and mineral rights. Regional ethnic differences have been the source of violent tensions in the past.

Since 2003 and Saddam Hussein's demise, Kurdistan has become an active player in the shaping of a new Iraq. Old tensions die hard, and Iraq's central government doesn't want to lose control over the country's energy resources.

During the height of Saddam Hussein's rule, he ousted Kurds from major urban areas like Kirkuk so that Sunni Arabs could

move in, recalled Marvin Zonis, professor emeritus at the Booth School of Business at the University of Chicago and an expert on Middle Eastern politics.

Iraqi History Repeats Itself

Under Saddam Hussein, the intent was to consolidate Arab rule over the country's resources. Now that his regime is gone, Kurdish officials worry that Prime Minister al-Maliki may follow in his predecessor's footsteps.

"Al-Maliki has become as authoritarian without the violence that is characteristic of Saddam Hussein," Zonis said, who added the prime minister is "squeezing out Sunnis" from the government.

Zonis said al-Maliki has won the loyalty of the country's armed forces, and essentially has his own militia.

Barzani, the Kurdish boss, said al-Maliki is guiding Iraq toward another dictatorship.

Despite the tensions, Zonis doesn't think they will escalate to violence. Both sides have shed enough blood, he said, and he suspects they will be wary of further fighting. They prefer the profits from oil.

In Washington last week, Barzani said he's still willing to iron over ongoing differences, and reaffirmed his government's commitment to upholding the country's current constitution -- but with a warning.

"This government is one that came into being as a result of the blood we have shed, and we will not leave it for any other," the

Kurdish leader said. He added: "If we were able to address the problems and solve them, that is the most preferred option. Otherwise, the current status quo in Baghdad is in no way our option, and we will not accept that as an option."

Last week, the Kurdistan government halted the import of crude oil, originally developed in Kurdistan, to Iraq pending Baghdad's payment to oil companies working there.

The halt prompted Iraqi ministers to accuse Kurdistan of smuggling oil to Iraq's archenemy -- Iran.

Barzani called the rising tensions a "serious crisis."

Iraqi ministers last week championed a minor success over the Kurdish government by announcing Exxon Mobil had frozen its oil exploration deal with the Kurds -- a claim disputed by Kurdish officials.

Kurdistan is trying to bring in outside companies to help boost its oil production, but Iraq doesn't recognize contracts drafted without the approval of Baghdad.

The Kurds are also considering building an oil pipeline to Turkey, which, if completed, would be seen as a slight to the country's sovereignty by Iraqi officials.

"It's really dicey," Zonis said, who added the U.S. tried -- and failed -- to create a democratic, peaceful, and unified country. "This is all testimony that we have lost the war in Iraq."

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Kurdish groups want autonomy from the SNC

ISTANBUL - *Hürriyet Daily News*
İpek Yezdani

Syan Kurds want federalism and an autonomous government in the future Syria, and they won't join the Syrian National Council (SNC) until their right to autonomy is recognized, a prominent member of the "National Kurdish Council" said.

"Most of the Syrian Kurdish parties are united under the roof of our council, we believe the Kurds who joined the SNC will quit soon, because the SNC calls the Kurds 'Syrian people' and this is unacceptable.

They are in denial of the Kurdistan territory," Kendal Efrini, a member of Syrian opposition group the "National Kurdish Council," told the *Hürriyet Daily News* in a recent interview.

Seventeen Syrian opposition Kurdish parties have announced the formation of their own "National Kurdish Council" in the northern Iraqi



Syrian Kurds hold up Kurdish flags, bottom, and a Syrian revolution flag, top, chant slogans against the Syrian regime. AP photo

capital of Arbil at the end of January. Dr. Abdul Hakim Bashar, secretary-general of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria, led the National Kurdish Council, which became the second national council established by opposition forces after the establish-

ment of the SNC.

Syrian Kurdish parties involved in the Kurdish National Council did not join the meetings organized in Istanbul in an effort to unite the Syrian opposition ahead of the "Friends of the Syrian People" meeting.

"The Syrian Arabs in the SNC claim the territorial integrity of Syria and they call all the ethnic groups 'Syrian.' We believe this is very dangerous rhetoric. Because with this wording, they are in denial of groups like the Kurds, Turkmens, etc," Efrini said. The National Kurdish Council, which is also supported by the leader of the Kurdish regional government, Masoud Barzani, would only join the SNC with the condition of recognizing the right to "federalism" in the future Syria, he added.

"The number of Kurdish groups in the Kurdish council is increasing day by day. Now there are 17 Syrian Kurdish parties in the council. There are a couple of Kurdish groups in the SNC too, but I believe they will also quit the SNC soon. If not, they would be recognized as traitors by the Kurdish people," Efrini said. ■

Turkey's Shiites Fear Contagion

As Hostilities Worsen Between Ankara and Damascus, Minority Sects Worry the Tensions Next Door Will Spread

By **AYLA ALBAYRAK** and **JOE PARKINSON**

ANTAKYA, Turkey—As violent clashes continue to boil in Syria and its government is increasingly alienated from neighbors and allies, shopkeeper Ferit Kilic is worried about his own fate over the border in Turkey.

Mr. Kilic is an Alawi, a Turkish offshoot Shiite sect similar to the Alawite sect of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his Alawite-dominated government that rules over a Sunni majority. He is one of hundreds of thousands of Arabic-speaking Turkish Alawis, most living near the Syrian border, and fears the sectarian conflict next door could open the same fault lines in Turkey—especially as relations between the two former allies become increasingly hostile.

"For now, we live in harmony with Sunnis here," said Mr. Kilic, as he tallied the cost of sweets a mother was buying for her child. "But in the past there were provocations to get the Sunni and Alawites to fight each other."

Turkey's Arabic-speaking Alawis haven't been silent. In early February, thousands organized two marches here to protest the government's changing attitude toward Damascus, with some openly voicing support for Mr. Assad.

Later that month, more than 20 homes in Turkey's southeast were mysteriously marked by red paint. They all belonged to Alevis, a Turkish and Kurdish-speaking Shiite offshoot who vastly outnumber Arabic-speaking Alawis. Together the two groups constitute an estimated 15 million, or one fifth of a national population of 75 million.

The events have raised concern that Syria's sectarian conflict could drive a wedge between Turkey's Sunni majority and the country's Shiite sects. As record numbers of Syrian refugees have poured into Turkey in recent days, fleeing attacks from pro-government forces ahead of Tuesday's United Nations-backed ceasefire deadline, the spectre of sectarian tensions also has stoked fears that this border city could see a replay of the violence that left hundreds dead in the region in the aftermath of a 1980 military coup.

There are marked cultural and religious differences between Turkey's Alawis and the more numerous Alevis—including language and religious rituals, where Alevis place more prominence on the role of music and dance. Turkish and Kurdish-speaking Alevis also share less affiliation and family ties with the Syrian regime than do the Arabic-speaking Alawis—but people from both groups have become unsettled by Ankara's increasingly hawkish Syria policy.

Last month, sectarian barbs appeared to infect Turkey's domestic debate on Syria. In a speech, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a Sunni, accused the leader of the country's opposition, an Alevi, of being in sympathy with Syria's president. "Don't forget that a person's religion is the religion of his friend," the prime minister said of Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the opposition leader, who like many of his sect, is a member of Turkey's secular Republican People's party.

The prime minister and other top officials have stressed that if the swell of Syrians seeking refuge in Turkey continues to rise, Ankara could be forced to take harsher steps, including opening a buffer zone on Syrian territory, to protect civilians and ensure national security.

Representatives of Turkish Alevis have repeatedly criticized the Assad regime's crackdown but are also unnerved by the prime minister's increasingly bellicose stance.

"As Turkish Alevis, we do not support an antidemocratic, an antihumanist regime, but we cannot understand why the prime minister so suddenly became an enemy of the Syrian administration," said Selahattin Ozel, chairman of the federation of Alevi associations in Turkey.

The breakdown of relations between the neighbors has been swift and severe.

Ankara and Damascus were close allies until the summer, when Turkish officials said President Assad's refusal to end a bloody crackdown forced a shift. Turkey has sheltered thousands of Syrian refugees, including members of the rebel army; the opposition Syrian National Council in December opened an office in Istanbul.

As Mr. Assad ignored Ankara, Mr. Erdogan's attacks have grown increasingly personal. He likened Mr. Assad's crackdown to the tactics of Hitler's dictatorship, in some of the strongest language of any leader on Syria.

For some Alawis and Alevis, Mr. Erdogan's rhetoric reflects a religious divide that runs below the surface of Turkish politics and society. "In Turkey, we have not solved our ethnic questions, and democracy has not yet taken hold," said Mehmet Guzelyurt, an Alawite dentist from Antakya. "This is why we know that violence could spark at any time."

Mr. Erdogan has taken some steps to widen minority rights, and in November reached out by apologizing for a 1937 massacre in the city of Dersim which killed some 13,000.

Turkey's government acknowledges Alawis' and Alevis' concerns, but stresses that the Prime Minister's apology for the Dersim massacre was historic and that Turkish foreign policy would never be based on a religious or sectarian calculation. "Our Foreign Minister rejected meeting with the Syrian National Council until they widened their base to include different religions and sects," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

Some analysts say the government needs to deliver on its promise to pass a new constitution, granting greater freedom for minorities, if it is to offset that perception—and the political momentum for constitutional change has eased.

"This tension could be dangerous. ...If the Turkish government does not give very wide rights to Alevis during this period when Sunni-Shia tensions are rising in the region, it may regret it later," said Kerem Oktem, a fellow of the European Studies Centre at Oxford University. Alevis have demanded official recognition as a separate religious minority and recognition for their places of worship, which would enable their religious authorities to get financial support from the Turkish state. ■

Barzani Suggests Baghdad Might Use F-16s Against Kurds

By WLADIMIR van WILGENBURG
rudaw.net

EXETER, England -- After increased tensions between the Iraqi and the Kurdish governments, Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani told Alhurra TV last Thursday that Baghdad is considering the use of F-16 fighter planes against the Kurds.

In the interview, Barzani says the issue with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is not personal, but it is about his dictatorial policies. "I still consider him a brother and a friend," he said. According to Barzani, division commanders in the Iraqi army are supposed to be approved by parliament, but this hasn't happened.

Barzani told Alhurra that he has confronted the Iraqi PM many times and been told by Maliki that he will act, but he hasn't, and suggested there is talk of a "military solution" to confront the Kurds in Baghdad. Barzani said that in an official meeting with Iraqi military commanders, it was stated that they should wait for F-16s to arrive to help push back the Kurds.

Alhurra asked Barzani if PM Maliki was the person suggesting the use of F-16s against the Kurds, but Barzani did not answer the question. "I know who said it, but forgive me, I can't give more details," he said, adding that Kurds are becoming strangers in the Iraqi army, and are being fought from within. Barzani emphasized that there can never be a military solution to deal with the Kurds.

Kurdish officials had earlier expressed worries over Iraq's estimated \$3 billion deal to buy 18 fighter jets from the United States, and the marginalization of Kurds within the Iraqi army, despite the fact that both the Iraqi chief of staff and the air force commander are Kurds.

Iraqi Kurds fear a repeat of the mass killings by the Iraqi regime. In the 1980s, the Iraqi army killed between 50,000 and 180,000 Kurds in the notorious Anfal campaign. But Iraqi officials have tried to reassure Kurds that the F-16s are meant to protect the borders of Iraq.

On the April 4, Izzat al-Shahbandar,



Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani with US President Barak Obama during his recent visit to Washington. Photo courtesy of Falah Mustafa.

member of Maliki's State of Law Coalition, claimed on Al-Jazeera that the Kurds were trying to weaken the government and deprive them of heavy weapons. "There is a Kurdish effort to prevent a strong Iraqi state in terms of weapons, funds and Arab relations. We were deprived of our right to write in the constitution that Iraq is an Arab country."

Kamran Karadaghi, former chief of staff of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, told Rudaw that it remains a possibility that Baghdad will use the Iraqi army against the Kurds. "To my knowledge, Barzani's comments are based on solid information straight from the horse's mouth. Why do you think Shia rulers turned from committed federalists to staunch centralists? I always warned that we should expect that when they have a strong army. Soon they will have F-16s."

But other analysts rule out the possible use of F-16s against Kurds. Reidar Visser, research fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, known for his frequent commentary on Iraqi affairs, suggests that, "The only scenario in which the use of military force by Baghdad would be probable is in the case of a formal, unilateral annexation of Kirkuk by the Kurds."

He added that, when Barzani mentioned the F-16s, "It sounded more like fully fledged warfare than skirmishes and clashes. There can be similar episodes to Khanaqin, etc., absolutely. But I think they will stay within certain boundaries unless the KRG moves to formally annex

areas."

In 2008, the disputed city of Khanaqin was the center of a face-off between Kurdish and Iraqi armed forces. According to the Christian Science Monitor, there was threat of a much wider conflict along the 300-mile fault line that divides the Kurds from the Arab parts of Iraq. In the past, U.S. forces established joint patrols and acted as peacemakers to prevent tensions from erupting in territories claimed by Baghdad and Erbil, but now the U.S. army isn't in Iraq.

In November 2011, the handover of the Kirkuk airport to Iraqi authorities by U.S. forces sparked tensions between local Kurdish authorities and the Iraqi army over who should control it. Eventually, the Iraqi PM turned it into a civilian airport rather than one controlled by the Iraqi army. After the decision, there have been no tensions in Kirkuk between Kurdish and Iraqi security forces.

Hayder al-Khoei, a researcher at the London-based Centre for Academic Shi'a Studies, agrees that renewed tensions in the disputed areas are possible. "Some minor skirmishes possibly and maybe a few Mexican standoffs that go wrong. But no major military clashes. It's far too costly for both sides and eventually they will sit down in secret and negotiate a new division of the cake."

He added that it is "nonsense" to consider that Baghdad would use F-16s against the Kurds. "Turkey has far more advanced fighter jets than Iraq could hope to have

and cannot solve the PKK problem with military power. Even if the threat of pushing back the Kurds with F-16s was meant in the context of deploying gunboat diplomacy, it is highly unlikely the Kurds will be intimidated.”

Ben van Heuvelen, managing editor of Iraq Oil Report, based in Iraq, says the long-standing disputes between Kurdistan and Baghdad escalated into a full-blown crisis last week amidst the postponement of the national conference meant to recon-

cile the factions. “It began when the Kurds shut off oil exports. Then, Shahrastani threatened to make cuts to Kurdistan's share of the federal budget.”

Van Heuvelen thinks Barzani's statement has to do with his recent visit to the United States to request they form a “special partnership” with the Kurds. “The Obama administration's response seems to have been, ‘We support you, but within the context of a unified, federal Iraq.’ In other words, the U.S. seems to have rebuffed

Barzani's request and reaffirmed its support of Maliki,” van Heuvelen added.

The American journalist thinks Barzani wants to send a message to Washington. “When Barzani talks about a 'military solution' from Baghdad, I read those statements as a message to Washington. I think he is warning the Obama administration that they can't give Maliki a carte blanche, otherwise it will endanger the Kurds.”

Rudaw

9 April 2012

An Encounter with Barzani



By KANI XULAM
rudaw.net

The announcement arrived via Facebook and email. It said: President of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), His Excellency Massoud Barzani, would address a gathering of Kurds at Marriott Hotel in Tysons Corner. The meeting was going to take place on Saturday, and the President had been in the Washington, DC area since Monday, April 2, 2012. I marked my calendar accordingly. I wanted to see what my President was going to say about his meeting with the President of the United States.

Because the President of Kurdistan uses some Arabic words in his Kurdish, and because I use some Turkish ones in mine, I can't say I understood him fully. Suffice it to note that when I left the hotel I thought I had understood him at least 80 percent. I need to get rid of the Turkish words from my Kurdish and start watching Kurdistan TV to better understand Berez Barzani. In the meantime, I want to, with these musings of mine, give you a sense of what transpired at the Kurdish gathering.

Berez Barzani is much more forceful in Kurdish than when he talks to foreigners through his able translator. In Kurdish, you see him raising his voice when it is needed and lowering it when that is appropriate. Gracious, compassionate, kind, animated and direct were some of the descriptions

that crossed my mind when I saw him interacting with the Kurds. He had a piece of paper in front of him. He was apparently following some talking points, but the occasional use of his glasses to see the written word made me feel sad for the old Peshmerga. Historians tell us George Washington did the same when he talked to his soldiers and later colleagues.

The overall news was good from the little Kurdistan, but not so from the countries surrounding it. In 2003, the income of an average Kurdish family was 275 dollars per year. Today, it is 5,000.00. In the year of Saddam's toppling, our illiteracy rate was at 56 percent. Today, we have reduced it to 16 percent. And right after saying so, President Barzani raised his voice, and

“I wanted to see what my President was going to say about his meeting with the President of the United States.”

added: our goal is 0 percent illiteracy in Kurdistan. Needless to say, I was reminded of an encomium to a teacher by Cicero in his beautiful address, Pro Archia. It was the most sublime use of a raised voice I had ever witnessed in my entire life. And I am an old man by Kurdish standards.

There were other tidbits about little Kurdistan, but I am going to be picky for the purposes of this report. In America, he said, he was happy to meet with the likes of President Obama and conveyed to him our people's unswerving commitment to the constitution of Iraq, which recognizes Kurdistan as a federal state. But, he added, there were unmistakable signs of trouble in the city on the Tigris. The source of that

concern was Nouri Maliki. He was concentrating power in his hands, he was like five ministers at once, and now, again, Mr. Barzani raised his voice: “He also wants to be head of the Central Bank of Iraq.”

I like it when politicians speak from the heart. But when deceit is the coin of the realm, especially in the Middle East, I worry and become very protective of truth. The region is full of politicians who will sell their mothers for power and dealing with them is not exactly a game of logic. I guess, what I am saying is this: Kak MaSsoud Barzani, you have to work with the likes of Nouri Maliki. He, after all, represents 80 percent of Arab Iraq compared to your 20 percent Kurds in little Kurdistan. The one time seller of worry-beads is not exactly a Kurdish farmer who, even if he tried, wouldn't know how to lie. Had I been asked, I would have cautioned Berez Barzani to be a bit more circumspect for the sake of the Kurds and Kurdistan.

The best part of the gathering was the Q&A session. Kurds were alone with their leader. They talked to him as a friend.

“Mr. Barzani has become a peace activist. He doesn't believe wars can win the Kurds anything.”

They appealed to him as a leader. They tickled him with words of reverence. They questioned him about the unfolding struggle in Syria, the ongoing war of Turks on Kurds everywhere, and the ceasefire between PJAK and Iran. Yours truly joined the questioners as well and asked him about term limits. Suffice it to note, I was surprised by his answer. You will have to read a bit more to find out what he said. →

⇒ Mr. Barzani has become a peace activist. He doesn't believe wars can win the Kurds anything. When I fought, or my dad did, ours was to assert our very existence. The existential war is won now. No one, not even the most implacable Turk, questions the existence of the Kurds. What we need to do from now on is to sharpen our pens and our tongues, and make use of all the tools of forensic science to win the world to our side. A genuinely fearless and proud Peshmarga paying homage to peace is beyond me to put into words. You should have been there to witness it, or perhaps called on Shakespeare to write it out for you.

I told you about the Kurds who wanted to tickle Kak Massoud. One stood next to me where I was sitting and waited patiently for his turn. I had a chance to study his demeanor. He was like a Buddha. Peaceful within and without. "What is he going to ask a wartime president?" I murmured to myself. His question was as good as his disposition. He said he was from a village called Rezan inside Iranian Kurdistan. He had seen Kak Massoud as a small child. Upon hearing the news that he was in Washington, he drove here to see him again and thank him for his leadership. If you were President Barzani, what could you possibly say to this fellow? While I was thinking of that, Kak Massoud said, "Thank you. Next time you talk to the folks in Rezan, please tell them I greet them all, warmly, through you." It was a presidential response. He knew how to tickle back. I was impressed.

Then there was another fellow, a bit on the melancholic side. Very slowly and very politely, he told Kak Massoud of his late father's death wish. The old man had been a Peshmarga. The room went into total silence. It was that the son should kiss Kak Massoud on the eye, as we say in Kurdish, when fate brought them together. I was witnessing live drama at a political event. Again, Kak Massoud handled the situation well. First, you could tell, his facial expressions said that he knew of the old fighter and ached after the remembrance of his memory. He then told the son, your dad was a great man. The room went electric. It was, again, an unforgettable moment.

Then I caused a bit of a stir as well, even though that was the last thing on my mind. I introduced myself like other Kurds and added: I was asking my question as a Kurdish intellectual. I said Americans, those who pass as our

friends, often complain about one thing about the Middle Eastern leaders and I wanted to express it today. George Washington, I went on, was the first president of the United States. He served eight years. He strengthened the national institutions of his country and relinquished power voluntarily. Boris Yeltsin of Russia did the same. "Kurdistan," I said, "I know, is not exactly free. Dark clouds still hover over its skies, but if it were and its institutions strong, would

"After the gathering, I got a few more Barzani loyalists telling me I had overstepped the boundaries of what was proper."

you, Berez Barzani, be willing to tell this Kurdish audience that you too would consider relinquishing power voluntarily, just like they did?"

"You have to put up with me for a year and a half more," he said. At least 500 hundred Kurds were in the room. I am hoping he will not renege on his word.

But my question apparently did not sit well with everybody in the room. A Kurd from Iranian Kurdistan used his time to criticize me and another Kurd -- instead of asking his question -- for voicing impertinent concerns. He wanted to know if I would dare to ask other, some useless, Kurdish leaders the same question? To his credit, Kak Massoud said the questions should be voiced.

After the gathering, I got a few more Barzani loyalists telling me I had overstepped the boundaries of what was proper. This time, I wanted to act like a Buddha myself and patiently listened to the elaboration of their views. But many other Kurds approached me as well and thought I had asked a fair question, some called it a right one, but added, the practice in the Middle East was that those who hold onto power often go through the motions of wanting to grow cabbages like Cincinnatus, but use every ounce of their energy to stay in the presidential palace, just like Bashar Assad.

I will end these musings with an email that I received from a friend who was also at the meeting. Although I don't like to blow my own horn, this email speaks of a longing for transparency, for accountability, and for fairness. It also sums up the sentiments of those who thanked me for my question. Author's permission granted, I am sub-

mitting to your perusal as a sample of what our youth are thinking about term limits.

"Sir, today, you did something few people have the guts to even think about doing. Those who oppose President Barzani go on the streets and use signs and demand what they want, but they would never have the guts to speak to him face to face... Not that I think you oppose him; I'm sure you're a supporter of the KRG. But I just want to commend your courage in standing up in front of a political figure and icon and respectfully asking him how much longer he plans on staying in the office. Like I said before, there was a lot of opposition to what you said at the hall and that, as you know, is because there were a lot of brown-nosers, Barzani worshipers and KDP loyalists. But don't be daunted, the other speaker's response, to your comment and question, was out of place and completely disrespectful, and as you saw even President Barzani didn't agree with his comments... Keep your head up and remember that today you did something that most are too afraid to even imagine doing."

I thanked the fellow Kurd for his kind words. Competing in bravery with a battle-tested Peshmarga was not my motivation; inviting him to measure himself next to the other great leaders of the world was. 235 years later, George Washington is honored in America voluntarily. In three hundred years, will Kurds equate Kak Massoud to Boris Yeltsin or Hosni Mubarak? I want to be proud of my leader(s). I want my American friends to feel good about associating with the Kurds and Kurdistan. Please, Kak Barzani, drink from a cup called humility; it will add luster to your family name and elevate us, as a people, for introducing a new concept, term limits, at the highest levels of the government, in the Middle East.○

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DE RIYAD À TÉHÉRAN

Onde de choc syrienne

Malgré une répression d'une terrible brutalité, les manifestants syriens continuent de défier le régime. Leurs revendications rejoignent celles exprimées à Bahreïn ou en Jordanie ; mais les divisions de l'opposition et les ingérences étrangères risquent de déboucher sur des conflits confessionnels qui menaceraient toute la région.

PAR ALAIN GRESH

CE LIVRE est un classique. Écrit en 1965 par le journaliste britannique Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria* raconte l'affrontement, après la seconde guerre mondiale, pour le contrôle de la Syrie (1). Cette lutte s'inscrivait à la fois dans le contexte de la guerre froide opposant les États-Unis à l'Union soviétique et dans celui de la « guerre froide arabe » : l'Égypte du président Gamal Abdel Nasser et l'Arabie saoudite étaient alors aux prises pour l'hégémonie régionale – jusque dans les montagnes yéménites, où les troupes égyptiennes soutenaient la jeune république contre les tribus royalistes armées et financées par Riyad.

Des années 1950 à la guerre de juin 1967 avec Israël, la Syrie fut au cœur des équilibres (ou plutôt des déséquilibres) régionaux, les coups d'État et les juntes militaires se succédant à Damas. Elle fut également l'un des hauts lieux de l'impétueux bouillonnement des années 1950 et 1960, qui visait à l'indépendance politique, au développement économique, à l'avènement d'un ordre social plus juste et plus égalitaire. À la pointe des mobilisations : les nationalistes arabes, la gauche et les marxistes.

quatre décennies. La totalité des régimes, qu'ils soient républicains ou monarchiques, renoncèrent à la moindre réforme. Ils se caractérisèrent par leur autoritarisme, par la concentration des richesses aux mains d'une petite clique s'élevant au-dessus de l'État et par une corruption endémique. Si, durant cette période, les explosions populaires expriment de manière sporadique un mécontentement diffus, c'est, pour l'essentiel, autour des enjeux géopolitiques que s'affrontent les

régimes arabes, divisés par leurs positions à l'égard des États-Unis et d'Israël. La volonté de changement et de transformation sociale passe à la trappe.

Les contours des alliances fluctuent au cours du temps. Lors de la première guerre du Golfe, en 1990-1991, on a pu voir la Syrie de Hafez Al-Assad s'allier à Washington, tandis que la Jordanie du roi Hussein soutenait Saddam Hussein. À la veille des révolutions arabes de 2011, le clivage oppose un camp pro-américain (Égypte et Arabie saoudite, principalement) et un camp dit de la « résistance » (Iran, Syrie, Hamas en Palestine et Hezbollah au Liban).

Damas occupe une position privilégiée, notamment grâce à son alliance avec la République islamique ; une alliance que rien n'a ébranlée durant trente ans, pas même les divergences de vues entre les deux pays sur la paix avec Israël, dont l'Iran rejette le principe et que la Syrie accepte à certaines conditions, notamment la restitution du plateau du Golan, occupé par l'État hébreu depuis juin 1967.

Après l'assassinat, le 14 février 2005, de l'ancien premier ministre libanais Rafic Hariri et le départ précipité de ses troupes du Liban, le régime syrien a vécu une phase d'isolement dont le président Bachar Al-Assad a finalement réussi à s'extirper. Son inflexibilité face aux pressions de l'administration de M. George W. Bush, qui rêvait de le renverser, son soutien au Hezbollah durant la guerre menée par Israël au Liban, à l'été 2006, puis son appui au Hamas lors de l'invasion israélienne de décembre 2008-janvier 2009 ont conforté son image de « pôle de la résistance ». Au point que les Frères musulmans syriens ont mis un terme – provisoire – à leur opposition.

Ce prestige a fait croire au clan Assad que le pays resterait à l'abri du mouvement qui submerge la région depuis l'année 2011. Dans le monde, il amène aussi certains mouvements anti-impérialistes, qui ne prennent pas la mesure des changements provoqués par les révolutions arabes, à réduire l'affrontement autour de la Syrie à sa seule dimension géopolitique (2).

Fausse analyses, faux calculs. Le régime est miné par les mêmes tares que celles qui affectaient l'ensemble de la région : autoritarisme et arbitraire du pouvoir ; pillage des richesses et libéralisation économique qui aggrave les inégalités ; incapacité à répondre aux aspirations d'une jeunesse plus nombreuse et mieux formée que ses aînés.

Le refus de prendre en compte ces espérances, la brutalité inouïe de la répression ont accéléré l'escalade de la violence et favorisé la militarisation d'une partie de l'insurrection qui, au départ, se réclamait dans son écrasante majorité, comme en Égypte, de la non-violence. Le risque de voir les affrontements prendre un tour confessionnel s'est accru, le régime n'hésitant pas à utiliser cette carte pour effrayer alaouites (3) et chrétiens.

L'opposition se montre cependant incapable d'offrir des garanties sérieuses pour l'avenir. Elle a même vu certains de ses appuis se détourner d'elle. Les Kurdes, qui furent parmi les premiers à manifester (notamment pour obtenir les cartes d'identité nationale dont ils avaient été privés), se tiennent désormais à l'écart, choqués par le refus du Conseil national syrien (CNS) de reconnaître leurs droits. Pour sa part, le régime a relancé, non sans succès, les activités du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qu'il avait déjà utilisé lors de son affrontement avec la Turquie dans les années 1990 et qui reste populaire parmi les Kurdes de Syrie (4).

L'épouvantail chiite

UNE nouvelle scission vient de s'opérer au sein du CNS, à l'initiative de personnalités comme MM. Haytham Al-Maleh et Kamal Labouani, anciens prisonniers politiques, qui dénoncent sans alignement sur l'étranger. M. Ammar Qourabi, ancien président de l'Organisation syrienne pour la défense des droits humains et dirigeant du Mouvement national pour le changement, reproche au CNS de marginaliser les militants alaouites ou turkmènes (5). Quant aux chrétiens, qui ont vu se réfugier en Syrie des dizaines de milliers de leurs

coreligionnaires irakiens, ils observent dans l'angoisse la montée des djihadistes, ainsi que les slogans antichrétiens et anti-alaoouites de certains manifestants.

Contesté par nombre d'opposants – notamment par la Coordination nationale pour le changement démocratique, qui refuse la confessionnalisation et la militarisation du soulèvement, ainsi que l'intervention militaire étrangère –, déchiré par les scissions successives, rejeté par les comités locaux, le CNS est dominé par les islamistes, avec, en façade, quelques figures libérales. Sa dépendance à l'égard des pays occidentaux et des monarchies du Golfe est mal reçue.

Le blocage est total. L'opposition est incapable de provoquer la chute du régime, et celui-ci est incapable de venir à bout d'une révolte qui surprend par sa détermination et par son courage devant le sacrifice. Le retour au *statu quo ante* est impossible, et le contrôle du pouvoir sur les esprits et sur les corps, sur une société qui s'est politisée au cours des mois, ne pourra jamais se rétablir. Les réformes adoptées par Damas (nouvelle Constitution, amnisties successives, etc.) n'ont aucune portée, les services secrets et l'armée ayant carte blanche pour liquider, bombarder et torturer qui bon leur semble.

Dans le même temps, les risques de guerre civile sont réels, avec de possibles débordements au Liban et en Irak. Une intervention militaire étrangère accentuerait la radicalisation des affrontements communautaires et ferait du fusil le seul arbitre des clivages confessionnels. Elle pourrait porter un coup fatal aux espoirs de démocratisation dans la région.

Les choix ne se réduisent cependant pas à l'option militaire. Les pressions économiques sur la Syrie (qui peuvent être renforcées, à condition de cibler les dirigeants et pas la population) amènent déjà une partie de la bourgeoisie qui soutient le régime à s'interroger. D'autre part, les premières missions d'observateurs de la Ligue arabe, malgré les difficultés, avaient permis de réduire la violence; c'est l'Arabie saoudite qui a obtenu leur retrait et l'enterrement de leur rapport, qui ne correspondait pas aux simplifications médiatiques. Leur retour en Syrie et l'extension de leur mission seraient un pas en avant. Enfin, il faudrait associer la Russie et la Chine à une tentative de négocier une transition. Avec un régime assasin, objectent certains? En Amérique latine, la transition vers la démocratie s'est faite en accordant aux militaires une amnistie, même si on peut regretter qu'ils en aient profité pendant trente ans.

Cette voie étroite et escarpée n'est pas celle privilégiée par la plupart des acteurs extérieurs, qui réduisent la situation à un

affrontement titanesque entre dictature et démocratie. Pourtant, qui peut croire que le régime saoudien cherche à instaurer la démocratie à Damas, lui qui ne reconnaît aucune assemblée élue? Lui dont le ministère de l'intérieur a déclaré que les manifestations chiites dans l'est du pays étaient une « nouvelle forme de terrorisme (6) »? Lui qui a réprimé violemment, début mars, à Abha – capitale de la région du Asir, à majorité sunnite –, les étudiantes mobilisées contre la médiocrité de l'enseignement dans les universités?

Inquiète de l'affaiblissement des Etats-Unis dans la région, hostile au « pouvoir chiite » qui s'est instauré en Irak, l'Arabie saoudite a pris la tête de la contre-révolution régionale, écrasée, sans en venir à bout, la rébellion à Bahreïn. Elle arme les insurgés en Syrie, agitant désormais l'épouvantail chiite pour rallier à elle la majorité sunnite, en tablant sur une double hostilité aux chiites et aux « Perses ».

Résilience des populations

LA RELANCE par Riyad d'un discours de la « solidarité sunnite » veut s'appuyer sur l'arrivée au gouvernement des Frères musulmans à Tunis, au Caire, à Rabat et peut-être demain en Libye – même si, cette dernière décennie, les relations entre les Frères et Riyad ont été détestables. Mais la donne reste incertaine, la confrérie étant divisée sur les choix à faire, comme l'indique le refus du gouvernement tunisien de toute intervention étrangère en Syrie ou la lutte au sein du Hamas, qui a abandonné son quartier général de Damas.

Un membre du bureau politique de l'organisation, M. Salah Al-Bardaoui, a même affirmé que, en cas de guerre entre l'Irak et Israël, « le Hamas n'interviendrait pas »; une position réfutée par un autre dirigeant important, M. Mahmoud Al-Zahar (7). Car l'idée d'une grande alliance sunnite contre l'Irak et la Syrie vient buter, une nouvelle fois, sur la situation en Palestine. Qui pourra remplacer Damas et Téhéran dans la résistance à la stratégie israélienne?

Washington, pour sa part, cherche à ébranler l'un des piliers de l'« axe du Mal » et, au-delà, l'Irak, que le premier ministre israélien Benyamin Netanyahu rêve de bombarder. Ayant déjà quitté l'Irak sans gloire, acculés en Afghanistan, dont ils partiront bientôt honnis non seulement par les talibans mais par une population que leurs « bavures » exaspèrent, les Etats-Unis semblent réticents à une nouvelle aventure militaire en Syrie, tout en voyant dans la chute du président Assad un moyen de

reconquérir des positions dans la région. Se rallieront-ils, comme en Libye, à une intervention militaire? Risqueront-ils une déstabilisation de ce pays où affluent déjà djihadistes et combattants d'Al-Qaïda?

Quant aux autorités israéliennes, leur position a peut-être été exprimée par M. Efraim Halevy, ancien directeur du Mossad et ancien conseiller national à la sécurité, qui explique que le renversement du régime de Damas, en affaiblissant Téhéran de manière décisive, permettrait d'éviter de bombarder l'Irak (8). Mais toute position publique en ce sens, Tel-Aviv le sait, ne peut que se retourner contre l'opposition syrienne. Et certaines voix en Israël s'inquiètent des conséquences d'une guerre civile en Syrie, qui pourrait mettre un terme à la tranquillité régnant à la frontière entre les deux pays.

Enfin, la Russie et la Chine, pour leur part, redoutent la montée en puissance des islamistes et de l'unilatéralisme européen et américain. Après avoir mis leur veto aux résolutions du Conseil de sécurité de l'Organisation des Nations unies (ONU) sur la Syrie, elles ont approuvé, le 21 mars, une déclaration commune en faveur d'une transition démocratique négociée.

Toutes ces manœuvres se déroulent dans un Proche-Orient déjà profondément déstabilisé après les guerres menées par les Etats-Unis (Afghanistan, Irak) et Israël (Liban, Palestine) : Etats affaiblis; rôle croissant des milices (Irak, Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Liban, Palestine), souvent armées de puissants moyens conventionnels, notamment des missiles; tensions communautaires qui menacent les minorités, etc.

C'est dans ce contexte qu'ont éclaté les révoltes arabes. Elles revendiquent la liberté, la dignité (*karama*), la démocratie et la justice sociale. Bien qu'elles aient renversé des présidents à Tunis et en Egypte, en Libye et au Yémen, on sent poindre une déception dans l'opinion occidentale. Comme le fait remarquer Peter Harling, directeur des activités de l'International Crisis Group en Egypte, en Syrie et au Liban, il n'y a pourtant « rien d'étonnant à ce que le moment fulgurant des révolutions éclair, en Tunisie et en Egypte, cède le pas à une grande confusion. Presque partout dans le monde arabe, nous assistons à une renégociation, plus ou moins ambitieuse et violente, de tout un contrat social. A la complexité des cas particuliers s'ajoutent leurs fortes corrélations, dans une région en ébullition, où le « modèle tunisien » est discuté jusqu'au fin fond des campagnes syriennes (9) ».

« Hiver islamiste »? Affrontements interconfessionnels? Ecrasement des mouvements par l'armée en Syrie ou en Egypte?

Aucune de ces hypothèses ne peut être écartée, mais toutes sous-estiment la force des contestations, l'attachement à la tenue d'élections démocratiques, l'extraordinaire résilience des populations à Bahreïn comme en Syrie. Tout en maintenant leur appui à la cause palestinienne, qui reste très présente, les peuples sont engagés à renouer avec les luttes sociales et démocratiques, figées depuis 1967. Dans ce contexte, de nouvelles interventions étrangères risqueraient d'attiser les divisions, comme on peut le voir en Irak ou en Libye,

et de transformer le combat démocratique en une lutte confessionnelle, en premier lieu entre sunnites et chiïtes.

ALAIN GRESH.

(2) Sur les débats dans la gauche libanaise, lire Nicolas Dot-Pouillard, « "Résistance" et/ou "révolution" : un dilemme libanais face à la crise syrienne », Les Carnets de l'IFPO, 11 janvier 2012, <http://ifpo.hypotheses.org>

(3) Minorité musulmane, rattachée au chiïsme, dont sont issus la famille Al-Assad et nombre de dirigeants

syriens.

(4) Dogu Ergil, « Syrian Kurds », *Today's Zaman*, Istanbul, 21 février 2012.

(5) Ipek Yezdani, « Syrian dissidents establish new bloc », *Hürriyet Daily News*, Istanbul, 21 février 2012.

(6) « State has full right to check rioting, Interior Ministry says », *Arab News*, 20 février 2012, <http://arabnews.com>

(7) *The Guardian*, Londres, 6 mars 2012, et *The Jerusalem Post*, 8 janvier 2012.

(8) « Iran's Achilles' heel », *International Herald Tribune*, Neuilly-sur-Seine, 7 février 2012.

(9) « Le monde arabe est-il vraiment en "hiver" ? », *LeMonde.fr*, 1^{er} février 2012.

LE FIGARO

The New York Times

13 AVRIL 2012

L'Iran agirait en sous-main en Afghanistan

THOM SHANKER, ERIC SCHMITT
et ALISSA J. RUBIN

WASHINGTON — Fin février dernier en Afghanistan, des soldats américains ont brûlé des exemplaires du Coran saisis dans un centre de détention. Selon des fonctionnaires américains, quelques heures seulement après la révélation de cette information, l'Iran a donné l'ordre à ses agents sur place d'exploiter la vague d'indignation attendue en tentant de déclencher de violentes manifestations à Kaboul et à l'ouest du pays.

La plupart de leurs tentatives et celles de leurs représentants locaux ont échoué, ont-ils ajouté. Cependant, comme l'Otan s'attend à ce que Téhéran riposte en cas d'attaques israéliennes sur ses centrales nucléaires, la volonté et la faculté iraniennes à fomenter des violences en Afghanistan et ailleurs revêtent aujourd'hui plus d'acuité.

Au cours d'entretiens, une douzaine de fonctionnaires ont dressé un tableau contrasté des capacités iraniennes. Ils ont discuté anonymement de ce risque car ils se référaient à des rapports secrets. L'un d'eux a affirmé que l'ambassade d'Iran à Kaboul a un programme "très actif" de provocation contre les Américains. Il reste néanmoins difficile de savoir si après l'incident des corans brûlés, l'Iran a délibérément choisi de limiter ses initiatives ou si elle n'a pas été en mesure d'organiser des opérations plus meurtrières.

Lors d'une récente audition publique au Congrès, le général John Allen, commandant en chef de la force de l'Otan (ISAF), a déclaré que Téhéran continuait d'"alimenter les flammes de la violence" en soutenant l'insurrection afghane. "Nous pensons que l'Iran pour-

rait étendre son rayon d'action, mais ne le fait pas actuellement, et nous surveillons de très près leur activité et leur réseau." Les soulèvements les plus violents qui, pour les fonctionnaires américains, portent la marque de l'implication iranienne ont eu lieu dans la province d'Hérat, située à l'ouest de l'Afghanistan, près de la frontière avec l'Iran. Là, sept personnes ont été tuées et 65 blessées dans la rixe qui a suivi l'épisode des corans brûlés. L'Iran nie toute tentative d'attiser l'agitation en Afghanistan, pourtant, selon les fonctionnaires américains, le pays a mis en place un modèle d'action pernicieux pour étendre son influence au Moyen-Orient et en Asie du Sud. Téhéran semble avoir renforcé son

sées. Les analystes du renseignement soulignent le fait que l'Iran a toujours la possibilité de se servir des redoutables ressources du Hezbollah, le mouvement chiite libanais. Et certains responsables américains restent circonspects devant l'idée que ces derniers complots présageraient d'un affaiblissement des capacités de l'Iran à attiser la violence.

Lors de son allocution, le général Allen a révélé que les forces de l'Otan surveillaient le possible déploiement d'armes plus sophistiquées, plus particulièrement de bombes à haute capacité utilisées au sol, des explosifs à charges formées (EFP) capables de détruire les véhicules blindés américains. Ces dispositifs ont prouvé leur efficacité létale quand Téhéran les a fournis aux militants chiïtes en Irak.

"Nous continuerons à surveiller étroitement ces mouvements d'armes, a ajouté le général, car leur utilisation indiquerait la volonté de l'Iran de faire monter les enchères, et il nous faudrait alors prendre d'autres mesures."

Un analyste du renseignement note que l'Iran apporte son appui aux minorités afghanes, chiïtes et sunnites, depuis longtemps et a tissé un réseau de soutien parmi les Hazaras, les Ouzbeks et les Tadjiks. Téhéran, dit-il, a exercé sa puissance discrète d'autres façons, ouvrant des écoles dans l'ouest de l'Afghanistan pour étendre son influence. L'initiative a été reprise à Kaboul et une université rattachée à une grande mosquée chiïte flambant neuve a reçu des subventions iraniennes généreuses.

L'Iran financerait aussi au moins huit journaux dans la capitale afghane, ainsi qu'un certain nombre de stations de télévision et de radio, au dire de responsables afghans et occidentaux. Après l'incident des Corans brûlés, ces médias ont entrete nu sans relâche la colère contre les Américains, des jours durant.

Washington: "Téhéran continue d'alimenter les flammes de la violence."

ascendant politique, ainsi que ses livraisons d'armes destinées aux rebelles et autres politiciens importants au Yémen. Elle arme et conseille le gouvernement assiégé du président syrien Bachar el-Assad.

Ces opérations témoignent d'une plus vaste campagne, comprenant notamment, selon les fonctionnaires américains, la tentative d'assassinat déjouée de l'ambassadeur saoudien à Washington; tout comme un plan apparemment coordonné par les Iraniens pour attaquer, cette année, des diplomates israéliens en Inde et en Géorgie. Téhéran réfute avoir participé de quelque manière à ces attentats au cours desquels plusieurs personnes ont été bles-

Thom Shanker et Eric Schmitt ont écrit depuis Washington, et Alissa J. Rubin depuis Kaboul en Afghanistan.

KRG should gear itself toward war and self-determination

The Kurdish Globe
By Azad Amin

Kurdistan Region is in a very precarious position in the region.

With the premier of the seventh cabinet of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Nechirvan Barzani has a very critical two years ahead of him with numerous challenges. The gravest issue he must deal with is the growing turmoil and complications in the Middle East. A regime crisis and ongoing public unrest in Syria, the growing tension between Iran and Israel and the West, and the chronic Kurdish question squeezed between the PKK and the AKP government in Turkey are some of the burning issues of the region that are placing tremendous pressure on the KRG. Political and social crises in the Middle East also open new doors and opportunities for the entire Kurdish national liberation movement. Nechirvan Barzani and his new cabinet have historical responsibilities and challenges not only for the people of Kurdistan Region, but for all of Kurdistan.

MIDDLE EAST IS BOILING

Nothing exemplifies more clearly the serious threats and boiling status of the Middle East than Turkish President Abdullah Gül's speech to graduating officers at a military school in Ankara last Thursday. The Turkish president stressed the high probability that possible full-fledged wars or civil wars could result in new chaotic situations in the region, underlining that Turkey does not have the luxury of remaining a spectator if such events unfold in its vicinity. Gül warned the young military officers that for Turkey, "diplomatic activism and military preparedness are not optional, but a must."

Whatever other intentions he may have, the Turkish president's speech indicates how serious the issues are in the Middle East and

that Turkey is considering military intervention if and when necessary. "Military preparedness can be interpreted as military intervention in Turkey's vicinity in order to protect Turkey's national interests in the region.

The new and global hegemonic struggle of global powers has been felt more acutely in the Middle East than anywhere else on Earth. The Syria crisis is a clear indication of this global struggle. Most countries in the Middle East are fast arming and enriching their military arsenal for potential conflicts in the region. The global hegemonic struggle over the Middle East is combined with the Shiite and Sunni power axis led by Iran and Saudi Arabia respectively. The Arab Spring as a popular movement could evolve toward a democratic regime in the region or more probably could evolve toward shallow democracies under the rule of radical Islamic regimes. One thing is certain: The struggle over and within the region is not geared toward a democratization of the region but radiates around power and hegemony.

Kurdistan Region is in a very precarious position in the region. While it has profound dispute with Baghdad, its very existence causes serious apprehension in other regional capitals. The hope that Iraq would be a federal, plural and democratic system in the post-Saddam era has proved to be an illusion. Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani along with some other influential Iraqi Arab leaders now openly accuses Nuri al-Maliki of being the new dictator in Iraq. There is not a single Kurdish leader who still believes that Iraq can be transformed into a democratic country. It is because of this lack of trust over Iraq that the voices calling for independence from Iraq are heard more strongly than ever before. The general public in Kurdistan--whether Kurds, Turkmen or Assyrians/Chaldeans--are expecting and hoping for a declaration of independence.



Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani addresses the parliament after taking an oath on Thursday, april 5th./ GLOBE PHOTO/Safin Hamid

KRG AND SYRIA

While international pressure over Assad's regime in Syria intensifies, the Syrian Kurds, or the Kurds of Southwest Kurdistan, have serious problems with the main Syrian opposition group known as Syrian National Council, SNC. In an Istanbul meeting last March, the main Kurdish opposition group, the Kurdish National Council of Syria (KNC) refused to join the SNC due to the SNC's refusal to recognize even the basic demands of Kurds in Syria. Kurdistan's president, while in Washington, D.C., stated that the KRG is ready to provide all kinds of support to the Syrian Kurds apart from military. Political developments in Syria have to be closely observed by the KRG, and it must provide support to Syrian Kurds to help them attain their national rights. Nechirvan Barzani's government should realize that any failure by Syrian Kurds to obtain their full national rights in a post-Assad era would have serious consequences for the future and well-being of the KRG. A federal structure of Syria in a post-Assad era will consolidate the political status of KRG and set a minimum model for the solution of the Kurdish national question in Iran and Turkey as well.

The fall of Assad's regime in Syria will have another serious conse-

quence in the region, which is Iran's political and military influence in the Middle East. With the fall of Assad's regime, Iran's influence in the region will diminish considerably and it may be a catalyst for civil unrest in Iran and potentially may bring the Iranian regime to an end. Thus it may open new opportunities for the millions of Kurds to realize their national self-determination.

KURDISH SELF-DETERMINATION AND FRAGMENTED KURDISH POLITICS

For Kurds to realize their self-determination during such a chaotic period in the Middle East, the KRG and the political institutions and parties in south Kurdistan (Iraqi Kurdistan) have strategic roles to play. The most crucial role that the KRG can play is to lead in creating a strategic Kurdish national policy in guiding the Kurdish national liberation movement.

This is not an easy task due to the fragmented nature of Kurdish movements dispersed in four parts of Kurdistan and inherited conflicting approaches and perspectives. It can be argued that today there is a general consensus among the various Kurdish national groups for the self-determination of Kurds and necessity for a united position. The only exemption is the PKK and its affiliated groups in Iran and Syria, namely PJAK (Kurdistan Free Life

Party) and PYD (Democratic Union Party) in Iran and Syria, respectively.

Despite the fact that the PKK and its affiliated group PYD denies the charges that they are collaborating with Assad's regime to quell the anti-regime demonstration in Kurdistan of Syria, there is ample evidence that they are in fact coordinating their work with the regime. The famous Al-Jazeera TV channels published secret papers from Syrian Intelligence regarding the regime's policy against the opposition. The papers prepared for President Assad by intelligence and security chiefs throw light on his strategy to quell protests in Syria. In these documents, the relation between the PKK and Syria's regime was exposed. It is a general consensus among the Syrian Kurdish political groups that PYD/PKK operates along with the Syrian regime. Article 12 of the secret document states: "to place Kurdish areas under surveillance; and to coordinate with Kurdistan Labor party (PKK) in secret to quell protest and protesters; and not to intervene by security forces in the Kurdish areas; and to arrest those planning to vandalize or carry guns."

The Syrian regime is aware of the decisive role of full participation of Kurds in the anti-regime opposition. Thus, not to alleviate the Kurds and push them further to join the demonstration, the regime opts to quell the Kurds by other regime-friendly Kurdish groups. It is unfortunate that PKK/PYD play such a vicious role in Syrian Kurdistan. The PKK/PYD position is anti-Kurdish and fragments the Kurdish national movement further.

The KRG and political parties in south Kurdistan thus have to have a dual policy regarding Syrian Kurds. On the one hand, the KRG has to strengthen the Syrian Kurds toward creating a united Kurdish front both against the regime and toward the Syrian opposition, while on the other hand it must expose and diminish the influence of PKK/PYD within the Kurdish movement there.

Nechirvan Barzani's government must be vigilant toward the devel-

opment in Syrian Kurdistan and take seriously the abovementioned speech of the Turkish president. Turkey is preparing for a military intervention in the northern part of Syria when the time comes. The main intention of Turkey in occupying part of northern Syria under the excuse of establishing no-man zone in order to prevent refugee influx into Turkey is to prevent decentralization of a post-Assad period in Syria. Occupation of northern Syria would not be fiercely opposed either by Iran or Iraq. Military intervention of Turkey into northern Syria would be temporary up until the establishment of a new central state in a post-Assad era. Instead of creating another federal structure in the region, Syrian opposition--already under the influence of Turkey--would welcome such intervention in order to secure an Arab-dominated central state in Syria. Both Iran and Iraq would rather to see a temporary occupation of north Syria than to see formation of another Kurdish political entity and a decentralized state formation in the Middle East.

The policy and discourse of the PKK provides legitimacy and will prepare the way for Turkey to intervene into the area without attracting too much international reaction. Thus, the KRG, like it or not, has to face Turkey in Syria and must prepare itself for that eventuality.

KRG NEEDS A UNIFIED FOREIGN POLICY

In order to face such immense regional challenges, the new government has to tidy its own house first. It is imperative for Nechirvan Barzani to seriously and bravely fight against corruption and endeavor utmost sincerity to improve democracy, human rights issues, individual freedoms, freedoms of expression and all other necessities in a proper democratic regime. Without a sincere fight against corruption and sincere work toward a better and transparent government, the KRG cannot face regional challenges.

In his speech in Parliament, Nechirvan Barzani stated correctly that his government needs full support of Kurdish opposition groups to face challenges that await Kurds

both in Baghdad and at the regional level. He further argued that the Kurdish national issue with Baghdad should be carried out as a single voice despite internal differences. Barzani stated that "We must have a united front in our negotiations with Baghdad, and at present the mechanism does not exist to create this united view. We must move ahead quickly with the formation of a High Council for Negotiations to oversee these discussions. All parties "government and opposition -- must participate in this Council so that we can develop a meaningful consensus among ourselves on how to approach these difficult issues."

Indeed, Kurdish opposition groups have to join ruling parties in dealing with Baghdad and develop a coherent policy to stand as Kurdish national front at the regional level.

We are passing through a very historic time, and at such times the destiny of a nation are decided. If we aspire to determine our destiny--if the chains of oppression are to be broken once and for all--then there is only one single path to follow: united as a nation and acting as a nation around a strategic national policy that is self-determination of the Kurdish nation. All other interests are secondary.

OIL DISPUTE

The KRG faces many problems with Baghdad, but it is the oil issue that catches international attention more than others as it relates to major oil corporations and the global energy sector.

The conflict radiating around the oil issue between Erbil and Baghdad is not a simple matter or a dispute resulting in different interpretations of the Iraqi Constitution. It is about sovereign rights over the territory. The KRG rightly insists that natural resources within the territory of Kurdistan Region are to be controlled by the KRG and not by Baghdad. That is the federal right and the Iraqi Constitution grants that right. Bowing to Baghdad on the issue of oil simply means compromising over the sovereign rights of the Kurdistan territory by the KRG, and this is self-denial of its very existence. The KRG has a responsibility toward its

citizens to protect people's sovereign rights in Kurdistan no matter what consequences it may bring.

Blackmailing international oil companies working or wishing to work in Kurdistan by blacklisting them at the Oil Ministry in Baghdad is a breach of the Iraqi Constitution. This was most evident in the case of ExxonMobil, a U.S.-based global giant in the energy sector. When the KRG announced last year that Exxon had agreed to exploration deals for six Kurdish fields, Baghdad reacted with fury. Deputy Prime Minister Hussain al-Shahristani--architect of Baghdad's oil program--said the U.S. firm could forfeit the contract on its huge West Qurna-1 oilfield in the south if it did not halt work with the Kurds. Baghdad also barred Exxon from bidding in the next round of oil deals, although it says the decision is not final. Exxon was also removed from its lead role in a water injection project in the south, although Iraqi officials denied the move was linked to the Kurdish deal.

By creating artificial problems and threatening oil companies working in Kurdistan, Baghdad explicitly indicates its intention that it does not want to see progress in Kurdistan's economy.

Oil and gas are Kurdistan's property and the KRG has absolute sovereign rights to exploit these sources for the well-being of its people. The KRG cannot stay idle and wait for Baghdad to resolve its issue with Erbil.

To sum it up, the new cabinet of Nechirvan Barzani will go through a very challenging period both at home and abroad. Regional wars are not a distant possibility but are moving toward that direction. The KRG has to prepare itself for potential conflicts and war clouds currently gathering over the region.

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PolicyWatch — Special Forum Report

Iraqi Kurdistan as U.S. Ally and Partner in the Middle East

On April 5, 2012, His Excellency Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, addressed a Policy Forum at The Washington Institute. The following is a rapporteur's summary of his remarks.

IRAQ'S INTERNAL POLITICAL CRISIS AND U.S. POLICY

Despite a budding national political crisis originating from the consolidation of power under Prime Minister Maliki, the Kurdish region of Iraq has seen a number of successes in recent years. Per capita gross domestic product has risen dramatically since the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003, illiteracy has been reduced from 56 to 16 percent, and the security situation has been greatly improved. Furthermore, the economic and commercial sector has seen increased foreign investment, and the people of Kurdistan have accepted a tolerant policy that rejects revenge and retaliation. In recent meetings with President Barzani, President Obama and Vice President Biden praised these achievements, reaffirming their commitment to a democratic, federal, and pluralistic Iraq.

Notwithstanding Kurdish achievements, the status quo in Iraq remains unacceptable. The people of Kurdistan have waited six years for promises that have not been delivered and agreements that have not been honored. The constitution is breached on a daily basis, and the same individual holds the powers of prime minister, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, defense minister, chief of intelligence, and interior minister. The central bank may soon be under his purview as well. It is important that these constitutional violations be addressed. The law requires that Iraq be ruled in a power-sharing partnership that consists of the Kurds, the Sunni and Shiite Arabs, and minority groups such as the Turkmens. If this problem is not resolved, the Kurdish leadership will be forced to return to the people and allow them to make their own decision.

The Irbil agreement, signed November 2010, was envisioned not just for the sake of forming the government, but also to solidify a genuine partnership in the country, a commitment to the constitution and its implementation, and the return of balance to all institutions. Had this agreement been implemented, the current crisis could have been averted. Based on the just-concluded Barzani meetings in Washington, the Kurdistan leadership hopes and expects that the United States will support the Iraqi constitution, regardless of personalities. The Kurds do not believe that the U.S. military withdrawal means the end of a positive American role in Iraq.

"FUGITIVE" VICE PRESIDENT TARIQ AL-HASHIMI

The Kurdistan leadership is clear on this issue: Hashimi remains the vice president and has not been convicted of any crime. Because the problem has been greatly politicized, the Kurdish leadership initially suggested that the three executive leaders of Iraq sit together to sort out its political aspects. This meeting has not taken place, however, and the office of the commander-in-chief has improperly influenced the judicial system.

Hashimi recently found safe refuge in the Kurdistan region, and



Baghdad is now accusing the Kurds of covertly "allowing" him to leave on a tour of neighboring countries. Ironically, however, it was Baghdad that asked the Kurdistan government to let him travel abroad.

FOREIGN RELATIONS: FOCUS ON TURKEY, IRAN, AND SYRIA

The Kurdish leadership is prepared to play a role in helping Turkey resolve its conflict with the PKK peacefully. A great and welcome change has taken place in Turkey, demonstrated by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's brave and important step during his recent visit to Irbil, when he stated publicly that the days of denying the Kurdish people are over. The Kurdistan government is therefore willing to assist, provided that all sides take a peaceful approach. They must not resort to violence, which would only lead to more bloodshed.

Kurdistan recognizes Iran's importance in the region as well. The Kurdish government would like to have normal relations with Iran, as the two countries share a border and thus have shared interests. This does not mean, however, that the parties agree on every issue. The Kurdish government, for instance, is committed to UN Security Council resolutions, including sanctions, on Iran, and in no way will it violate these resolutions. Furthermore, the clear position of the Kurdish people and leadership is that, in light of the sacrifices the people have made, no outside entity should be allowed to make decisions on their behalf. Iraqis themselves must find solutions to their domestic problems and must not be influenced by neighboring countries. Only after the people of Iraq have found these solutions should the international community step in to help.

With regard to Syria, the future government of that country must be a democratic coalition that respects the rights of Kurds as well as all other citizens. The Kurdish leadership is committed to supporting the Kurds in Syria morally, financially, and politically, and will use its influence to help them solve their problems. Recently, in line with this commitment, the Kurdistan government held a conference in Irbil that aimed to have Syrian Kurds elect a leadership and devise a unified statement for the future, which is essential. Although neither the current government of Syria nor the opposition has something concrete to offer, it is important that all parties engage in negotiations. The Kurdistan leadership hopes to be able to support the outcome of these negotiations.

OIL PRODUCTION, PIPELINES, AND REVENUES

A good deal of oil has been discovered in Kurdistan, but the current pipeline is insufficient to carry the amount of oil that could be pro-

duced. The natural resources ministries in Kurdistan, Turkey, and Baghdad have therefore begun a series of talks to resolve this issue. It is important to note that any discussion of oil in Kurdistan is a discussion about improving the situation of all of Iraq, not just the Kurdish people. In accordance with the constitution, the oil and gas that have been found in Kurdistan belong to the people of Iraq, and any resulting revenue should be distributed among the entire population.

The Kurdistan government has abided by the constitution in its dealings with foreign companies as well. The agreement reached in 2007 on a draft hydrocarbon law stated that if the legislation did not pass by May 2007, both parties would be free to continue signing contracts with foreign companies. The Kurdish government has therefore acted legally and within the framework of the constitution with regard to oil sales. Four months ago, a number of delegations traveled from the Kurdistan region to Baghdad to address the issue

of reimbursement payments for foreign oil company expenses. The absence of these payments is the sole reason for the current halt in oil exports from the Kurdish region.

"DISPUTED TERRITORIES" AND ARTICLE 140

The Kurdish government has shown utmost flexibility in dealing with the problem of territories that have been detached from the Kurdistan region. Article 140 provides the best way to solve this problem within the framework of the constitution: a referendum. Over the past six years, the Iraqi government has sought to evade responsibility for this issue. Yet implementation of this article is in the interest of all of Iraq, not just the Kurdistan region. This issue will not be forgotten, nor will it be resolved by the mere passage of time. □ □ □

What if an independent Kurdish state is declared?



HASAN CEMAL

United States President Barack Obama's hosting the head of the Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Masoud Barzani, at the White House in Washington is a significant development not only for Iraqi Kurds but for all Kurds.

The U.S., by hosting Barzani as the equivalent of a head of state, has highlighted its special interest in the Kurds. This interest is not new. It is an intimacy that began to become clear especially after the Cold War.

A Kurdish intellectual, now a part of the KRG, who was once a peshmarga wandering the mountains, told me a while back:

"We were continuously debating among ourselves during the Cold War whether the Palestinians or the Kurds would be first to have an independent state in the Middle East."

The fact that the Kurds live separated into four countries, Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, used to be described as "the strategic misfortune of the Kurds." It was put forth that if a serious independent Kurdish statehood movement ever emerged in one of those areas, in the final analysis, it would be choked by the four states. That period can be said to have ended with the Cold War.

With the Iraqi Kurds' de facto statehood after the Gulf (1991) and Iraq (2003) wars toppled Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, and with the emergence of the KRG under the auspices of the U.S. and Europe, the possibility of new scenarios emerged.

The topic of a federation in Iraq was once upon a time within the red lines of Turkey. It was also Ankara's longtime policy to ignore Barzani and Talabani. These are history now.

Turkey, over time and also with forward movement of life, has reached the correct decision and accepted the fact of the KRG in Iraq. But one question about Iraqi Kurds still exists in Ankara: What if the Kurds declare an independent state and make the de facto situation official, what would Turkey do then?

Masoud Barzani told the Al Sharqiya channel in Baghdad, "The fact that Kurds have been persecuted cannot be overlooked. We are also a nation, like the others. We are no less [a nation] than the Persian, Arab or Turkish nations. How many countries has the Arab nation been separated into? Kurdistan is also separated into many nations and a Kurdish state has never been allowed."

Neither a separation nor a union can ever be forced, Barzani said, citing the examples of Czechoslovakia and Germany, and adding, "Those that have been forcefully separated have united after 40 years. A day will come when the Kurdish nation will unite and have the right to self-determination. I do not approve of violence. I don't see this as an issue to be solved by violence and arms. Everyone should know this."

Because both Barzani and Talabani have kept the ideal of an "independent Kurdish state" warm in their hearts, for all Kurds in the world, including those who live in Turkey, Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government is special. It is a "state formation" that is both cherished and monitored closely. Something similar to the feelings and thoughts that all Jews in the world have about Israel is what all Kurds feel about the KRG.

While we are discussing whether Kurdish should be an elective course in Turkish schools, Kurdish children in Southeast Anatolia are being sent to Iraqi Kurdistan to attend schools and universities that teach in Kurdish. Are we aware of this?

In such an environment, if Ankara and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government start taking steps to put the Kurdish issue on track to a peaceful solution as soon as possible, then Turkey will be relieved, and its room to maneuver and have regional influence will expand. Otherwise, hard times await us. ■

Hasan Cemal is a columnist for daily Milliyet, in which this piece appeared on April 11. It was translated into English by the Daily News staff.

SYRIE

Le jeu trouble des salafistes

Selon les services secrets français, 200 à 250 djihadistes salafistes venus d'Irak, du Liban, d'Arabie saoudite, d'Egypte et du Maghreb combattent l'armée syrienne en marge de la lutte des soldats déserteurs. L'intrusion de ces djihadistes, entrés en Syrie le plus souvent par le Nord-Liban, l'Irak et la Jordanie, a soulevé l'ire de l'opposition, qui nie tout lien avec eux. Alors que les soldats insoumis comme l'opposition réclament un Etat démocratique, les djihadistes veulent, eux, exterminer la communauté alaouite, une branche du chiisme, dont le président syrien Bachar al-Assad est issu. Car, pour les extrémistes sunnites, les chiites sont des hérétiques qui



Damas, 17 mars, attentat contre un bâtiment des services secrets

doivent être combattus jusqu'au dernier. Ces « moudjahidine », qui ont créé un Front de la Victoire, sont répartis, selon un responsable salafiste libanais, en deux phalanges (*kata'ib*) - une phalange est l'équivalent d'une compagnie dans l'armée française, soit 140 combattants. C'est ce Front qui, le 17 mars dernier, avait attaqué un bâtiment des services secrets à Damas, faisant des dizaines de victimes militaires et civiles. Déjà, en février, des bâtiments gouvernementaux avaient été pris pour cibles, en plein cœur de la capitale, dans trois attentats à la voiture piégée, tuant 70 fonctionnaires.

FARID AÏCHOUNE

Le Monde

Mercredi 11 avril 2012

L'heure de gloire turque au Moyen-Orient touche à sa fin

Hugh Pope

Directeur du projet Turquie/Chypre de l'International Crisis Group

La Turquie est en position de force sur la scène régionale et internationale. Son économie de marché solide, la vigueur de sa démocratie, son influence culturelle et la mise à l'écart de menaces de longue date, à savoir l'islamisme, le nationalisme ethnique, le militarisme et l'autoritarisme, semblent consacrer son heure de gloire.

Pourtant, les Turcs commencent à se demander si leur chance ne va pas tourner. La température monte au Moyen-Orient, et les frontières de l'Est turc n'y sont pas insensibles. Tout était plus simple au début des années 2000, quand la Turquie pouvait se permettre d'être neutre. Que ce soit avec Israël ou l'Iran, elle maintenait l'ouverture économique de ses frontières et encourageait l'intégration d'infrastructures entre les pays voisins et la création de zones régionales de libre-échange. Cette politique de « zéro problème » est désormais un idéal lointain.

De coopération, les relations avec l'Iran se sont transformées en rivalité pour une

influence sur le monde arabe. Tous deux défendent respectivement les intérêts sunnites et chiites et ont pris des positions opposées sur la couverture antimissiles proposée par l'OTAN. Les relations avec l'Irak, précédemment marquées par un effort d'entente avec toutes les factions politiques, se sont détériorées. Ankara a subi un revers après la défaite de la faction qu'elle soutenait aux élections irakiennes, au profit d'un rapprochement de Bagdad avec Téhéran et Damas.

La Turquie a soutenu les révolutionnaires de la place Tahrir, qui apprécient le charisme du premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, mais sont néanmoins clairs : ils veulent suivre un modèle égyptien, et

non turc. Ils se méfient également de l'ambition turque de leur retirer le rôle de chef de file du monde arabe. Si la dégradation des relations turco-israéliennes, depuis 2009, a amélioré l'image de la Turquie dans le monde arabe, elle risque, sur le long terme, de menacer les relations avec l'allié américain.

De tous les bouleversements du « printemps arabe », les difficultés du voisin syrien affectent particulièrement la Turquie. Le soutien turc à l'opposition syrienne a transformé une entente parfaite en un affrontement indirect. Ankara est embarrassé par les pressions internationales en faveur d'une intervention qui ruinerait sa réputation de neutralité et le placerait en

conflit direct avec, notamment, l'Iran.

Le rapprochement de la Turquie avec l'Europe semble à l'arrêt. Le manqué de progrès sur les 35 chapitres de négociation, aggravé par la décision turque d'interrompre tout dialogue avec Chypre lorsque celui-ci aura pris la présidence tournante de l'Union européenne (UE) en juillet, signale une véritable régression. Les railleries des hommes politiques turcs et la méfiance de certains Etats européens, à la tête desquels le président français, Nicolas Sarkozy, alimentent le malaise. Pour la Turquie, l'UE est hostile, dysfonctionnelle et empêtrée dans la crise de la zone euro. Bruxelles voit d'un mauvais œil la persistance de violations des droits de l'homme en Turquie, les journalistes emprisonnés et l'absence de progrès sur le dossier kurde.

Pourtant, l'UE est une plate-forme fondamentale pour la Turquie. Elle fournit plus de la moitié de son commerce et représente les trois quarts des investissements étrangers directs.

Au lieu d'exiger de l'UE des droits qu'elle ne peut obtenir sans en être membre, la Turquie doit utiliser son influence régionale pour renouer avec l'Europe et coopérer sur le Moyen-Orient. De cette façon, Ankara obtiendrait des garanties solides, alors que la région connaît des difficultés, et regagnerait le respect qu'il mérite au sein de l'Europe. Surtout, cette coopération bénéficierait à toute la région. ■

Nucléaire iranien: le dialogue pour éviter la guerre

La menace de frappes israéliennes planera sur la rencontre d'Istanbul.

ALAIN BARLUET

DIPLOMATIE En janvier 2011, les discussions entre l'Iran et ceux que l'on appelle les « 5 + 1 » (Chine, États-Unis, France, Grande-Bretagne, Russie et Allemagne) avaient tourné court avant même de débuter, faute d'accord sur l'agenda. En se retrouvant samedi à Istanbul, plus d'un an après, l'ambitieux objectif des grandes puissances sera donc, avant tout, de restaurer la confiance et de poser les bases de futurs pourparlers avec Téhéran. Car le dialogue, au fond, n'a jamais pu s'enclencher depuis que le voile a été levé, il y a près de dix ans, sur le programme nucléaire clandestin mené par l'Iran. Cette fois encore, le simple accord sur le lieu du rendez-vous n'a pas été une mince affaire, l'Iran souhaitant « punir » la Turquie pour son engagement contre le Syrien el-Assad.

Sur les rives du Bosphore, finalement, le négociateur iranien, Saïd Jalili, aura face à lui cinq directeurs politiques (menés par Catherine Ashton, la diplomate en chef de l'Union européenne) unis sur l'objectif mais passablement divergents sur la tactique à employer. Tous s'accordent, ils le rappelleront, à empêcher l'Iran de se doter de l'arme atomique en se conformant au traité de non-prolifération (TNP) et aux résolutions du Conseil de sécurité.

Les « 5 + 1 » se sont forgé, de haute lutte, une ligne commune: Téhéran sera tenu de fermer sa centrale souterraine de Fordow, près de Qom, sanctuaire de son programme, cesser d'enrichir l'uranium à 20 % (le seuil de la capacité militaire) dont le stock (100 kg) devra être transféré hors des frontières de la République islamique. À l'approche de la rencontre d'Istanbul, les Iraniens ont soufflé le chaud et le froid, assortissant l'annonce d'« initiatives » de nouvelles menaces. « *Toute la difficulté, résume un diplomate occidental, consistera à garder les Iraniens autour de la table sans perdre de vue nos objectifs finaux.* »

Des « marges de manœuvres » pourront ainsi être dégagées, sur tel ou tel des multiples paramètres d'une négociation complexe, explique cette source, notamment sur les gages de confiance à fournir par l'Iran, le rythme de leur application...

Le rendez-vous d'Istanbul sera surtout dominé par le spectre de frappes israéliennes. Une menace dont les membres des

« Toute la difficulté consistera à garder les Iraniens autour de la table sans perdre de vue nos objectifs finaux »

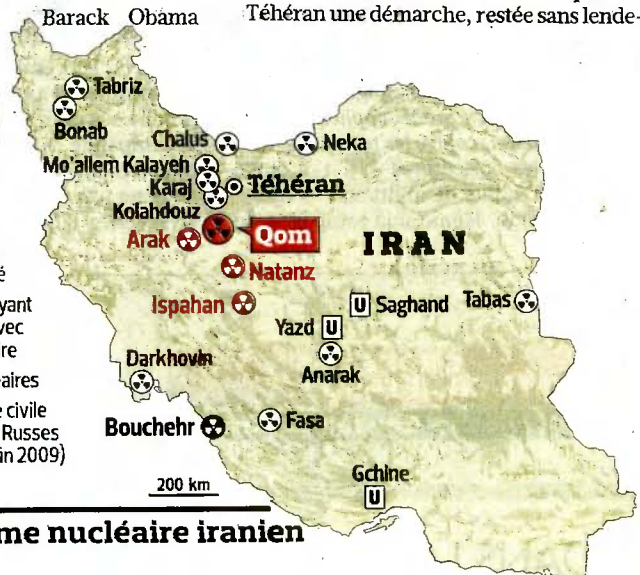
UN DIPLOMATE OCCIDENTAL

« 5 + 1 » sont tous conscients mais que chacun interprète tactiquement en fonction de ses contraintes propres. Vu de Washington, l'enclenchement d'une négociation avec Téhéran éloigne la perspective d'une action militaire de Tsahal.

Barack Obama



- Dernier site d'enrichissement d'uranium identifié
- Sites nucléaires ayant un lien supposé avec le nucléaire militaire
- Autres sites nucléaires
- Centrale nucléaire civile construite par les Russes (mise en service fin 2009)
- Mines d'uranium



Le programme nucléaire iranien

ne peut se permettre de voir une crise faire grimper le prix du pétrole à la pompe et hypothéquer sa réélection. Ces dernières semaines, il a tout fait pour rassurer son allié israélien, épousant le discours de Benjamin Nétanyahou en n'écartant pas l'option militaire. « *I don't bluff* » (« Je ne bluffe pas »), a dit le président américain qui a présenté le rendez-vous d'Istanbul comme celui de la « dernière chance ».

La fenêtre d'opportunité pour d'éventuelles frappes s'amenuisant rapidement, Washington voudrait voir un processus de négociation, quel qu'il soit, s'engager sans délai. C'est donc l'enjeu numéro un des discussions. D'autant plus qu'on ne croit pas, côté américain, contrairement à Israël, à la possibilité pour l'Iran de développer dans l'immédiat l'arme nucléaire. Derrière un message de fermeté, destiné à Israël, il n'est donc guère impossible que Washington tolère une certaine marge de flexibilité dans les négociations, notamment sur la capacité d'enrichissement de l'Iran; pour peu que celui-ci donne quelques assurances. Hillary Clinton s'est évertuée récemment à rappeler le droit pour l'Iran à développer le nucléaire civil.

Paris « gardien du temple »

Cet état d'esprit inquiète Israël mais aussi certains partenaires des « 5+1 » comme la France. Paris se veut le « gardien du temple » en rappelant la nécessité d'une « mise en œuvre intégrale » des résolutions de l'ONU et de la ligne « duale » qui les sous-tend: renforcement des sanctions et ouverture au dialogue. Côté français, comme américain d'ailleurs, on fait l'analyse que les six trains de sanctions imposés à l'Iran depuis 2006 portent leurs fruits. Le sujet a été évoqué jeudi lors de la conversation téléphonique entre Nicolas Sarkozy et Barack Obama. La mise en œuvre par l'UE d'un embargo pétrolier à partir du 1^{er} juillet est censée encore charger la barque.

Enfin, la position russe constitue une autre inconnue de l'équation iranienne. L'été dernier, Moscou a tenté auprès de Téhéran une démarche, restée sans lende-

main, qui envisageait une levée préalable de sanctions pesant sur l'Iran. Depuis, apparemment, la Russie joue le jeu des « 5 + 1 ». Mais le contexte, marqué par les tensions autour de la crise syrienne et le

différend persistant entre la Russie et les États-Unis, n'est guère propice. Pour Moscou, comme pour Pékin, il n'est pas question de renforcer les sanctions. Un tableau d'ensemble qui ne prête guère à

l'optimisme sur les chances d'aboutir. Pourtant, jamais sans doute le risque d'une conflagration n'aura été aussi grand depuis que le nucléaire iranien a été mis sur la table. ■

LE FIGARO

vendredi 13 avril 2012

Israël n'a pas renoncé à l'option militaire

ISABELLE LASSERRE

2012, ANNÉE critique pour le programme nucléaire iranien. En théorie, Téhéran a annoncé son intention de faire de nouvelles propositions aux grandes puissances. Mais personne ne croit vraiment que les pourparlers qui doivent s'ouvrir samedi à Istanbul aient une chance d'aboutir. Le président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a exhorté les Occidentaux à « changer de langage », affirmé que son pays ne renoncera pas à enrichir de l'uranium et prévenu qu'il n'accepterait aucune condition préalable à la reprise des négociations. Téhéran a annoncé mercredi des « contre-sanctions » pétrolières à l'Europe et cessé ses exportations à destination de l'Espagne et de l'Allemagne. La République islamique, qui avance à grands pas vers la bombe nucléaire et exploite habilement le soutien de Moscou et de Pékin, veut avant tout gagner du temps.

C'est aussi le cas de la Maison-Blanche, qui se démène sans compter depuis plusieurs semaines pour convaincre Israël de ne pas mener de frappes préventives contre les installations clandestines iraniennes, comme Tel-Aviv en brandit régulièrement la menace. Du moins avant l'élection présidentielle du 6 novembre.

Drones furtifs de la CIA

Au sein de l'Administration américaine, on pense que l'État hébreu hésitera à utiliser la force tant que les négociations se poursuivent avec Téhéran. Vu de Washington, la reprise des pourparlers aura au moins l'effet d'un bouclier. Mais le temps de la diplomatie, a aussi prévenu Hillary Clinton, n'est pas « illimité ». « Toutes les options restent sur la table », a dit la secrétaire d'État américaine.

Pendant que les chancelleries occidentales accordent une dernière chance à la diplomatie, les états-majors - c'est leur rôle - préparent l'option militaire. Les États-Unis maintiennent deux porte-avions dans le golfe Persique, prêts à intervenir au cas où les Iraniens ferment le détroit d'Ormuz, ce goulet stratégique par où transite une grande partie du pétrole brut mondial.

Le Washington Post a récemment affirmé que des drones de surveillance furtifs de la CIA volaient en permanence

depuis trois ans au-dessus de l'Iran pour collecter des informations sur le programme nucléaire militaire. Avec les écoutes électroniques de l'Agence nationale de sécurité (NSA) et les captures d'images satellites, ces vols font partie d'un vaste programme d'espionnage des installations clandestines iraniennes. L'un des principaux objectifs est de



« Le temps de la diplomatie n'est pas illimité et toutes les options restent sur la table pour empêcher l'Iran d'obtenir l'arme nucléaire »

HILLARY CLINTON

pouvoir déterminer le moment précis où les Iraniens décideront d'assembler leur arme nucléaire, afin d'agir à temps.

Pour Tel-Aviv, ce travail de renseignement est loin d'être suffisant. D'accord sur la nécessité d'empêcher l'Iran d'accéder au statut nucléaire, les Américains et les Israéliens ne sont pas toujours sur le même tempo. Les premiers ne veulent pas de la bombe atomique iranienne, mais certains pourraient éventuellement s'accommoder d'un pays qui resterait au seuil nucléaire, possédant, comme le Japon, la technologie et les composants sans pour autant assembler l'arme. Les seconds, pour qui la bombe atomique iranienne constitue une « menace existentielle », ne peuvent tolérer que l'Iran ait une capacité nucléaire. Cette différence d'apprécia-

tion de la menace explique que les États-Unis estiment généralement avoir encore 15 mois avant d'agir contre le programme iranien alors que Tel-Aviv considère que celui-ci entrera dans une « zone d'impunité » d'ici à neuf mois.

Les chasseurs de Tshal, l'armée israélienne, répètent depuis plusieurs années les différents scénarios en cas de frappes contre les installations clandestines iraniennes. Selon Foreign Policy, Tel-Aviv aurait aussi passé des accords secrets avec l'Azerbaïdjan qui lui permettraient d'utiliser ses bases aériennes et de compenser ainsi l'éloignement géographique qui rend des raids aériens menés depuis Israël à la fois risqués et délicats. Une base en Azerbaïdjan pourrait aussi autoriser les Israéliens à agir sans avoir à demander l'appui et le feu vert américains.

En Israël, la bombe iranienne n'a pas quitté le cœur du débat politique depuis de longs mois. Les différentes institutions en sont même à faire des évaluations du nombre de morts israéliens - entre 100 et 500 selon les sources - qu'entraîneraient des frappes aériennes. Dans un article publié mardi, le journal Maariv estime que les autorités israéliennes pourraient avoir décidé de reporter leurs frappes jusqu'à l'automne prochain, dernière ligne rouge avant que le programme iranien soit trop avancé pour être freiné par des frappes. Quelques semaines seulement avant l'élection américaine, la pire des solutions pour Barack Obama. ■



Des partisans du président Ahmadinejad saluent son arrivée à Jask, jeudi. Photo fournie par le service de presse de la présidence. HO/AFP



Iraq's fugitive VP arrives in Turkey

April 10, 2012 - By ADAM SCHRECK, Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraq's fugitive vice president was in Turkey on Tuesday, his third stop in a regional tour that risks complicating Baghdad's relations with its neighbors.

A statement issued late Monday by the office of Tariq al-Hashemi, the top Sunni official in Iraq's Shiite-dominated government, said he arrived in Istanbul and plans to meet Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to discuss developments in the region.

Istanbul is the third stop on a trip that has also taken him to Sunni powerhouse Saudi Arabia and Qatar, where al-Hashemi sought political support as he tries to bolster his case that he remains a key member of Iraq's government despite being a wanted man in Baghdad.

He is expected to do the same in Turkey, although it is unclear how long he intends to stay. Erdogan is on an official visit to China until late Wednesday, and is scheduled to leave for Saudi Arabia on Thursday.

There was no immediate comment from Turkish or Iraqi officials on al-Hashemi's trip.

Al-Hashemi is wanted in Iraq on terror charges for allegedly running death squads against Shiite pilgrims, government officials and security

forces. Iraq's Shiite-dominated government issued a warrant for his arrest in December, touching off a political crisis in Baghdad and deepening the country's sectarian divide just days after the U.S. military withdrawal.

Al-Hashemi, who has denied the charges and says they are politically motivated, took refuge in the self-ruled Kurdish region in northern Iraq, where he was effectively out of reach from state security forces loyal to Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

Al-Hashemi started his trip with a visit to the Gulf state of Qatar, where he met with the nation's emir and prime minister. He also gave an interview to pan-Arab television channel Al-Jazeera in which he said the charges were designed to push him out of Iraq's political process.

The foreign trip infuriated Baghdad, which called on Qatar to hand al-Hashemi over. Doha refused.

Al-Hashemi then flew from Qatar to Saudi Arabia last week, where he was met by Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal.

Separately in Iraq, lawmakers said Tuesday they approved a law a day earlier establishing the country's first independent human rights commission. It is charged with monitoring and investigating allegations of rights violations.

"We consider it to be a big achievement on the issue of protecting human rights," lawmaker Salim al-Jubouri said.

The U.S. Embassy issued a statement Tuesday congratulating parliament on its decision to seat the commission, saying the panel "will safeguard the rights guaranteed to all Iraqis by the Iraqi constitution." □



18 April 2012

Al-Hashemi rents two apartments in Istanbul

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqi Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi will be protected by high security staff while staying in Istanbul after holding talks with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on April 14 evening.

Two apartments have been rented in the Başakşehir district of Istanbul for al-Hashemi, his family and his guards, who came to Turkey on April 9, daily HaberTürk reported.

The daily said al-Hashemi is being protected during his stay in Turkey by 17 police officers, including one chief police officer from the Turkish Prime Ministry's Protection Department.

Al-Hashemi's wife and two daughters are guarded by separate police officers.

The al-Hashemi family is not staying at a hotel due to security concerns, the daily said.

Diplomatic sources told the Hürriyet Daily News that it is understood that these measures are taken to provide full security for al-Hashemi during his temporary stay in Turkey.

Sources also said al-Hashemi did not make any asylum request from Turkey and that Iraq has not requested extradition of the fugitive leader from Turkey, as it did from Qatar when al-Hashemi was there.

Al-Hashemi said some of his family members were with him while others were in Jordan.



Iraqi Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi (L) and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Photo: AA

Al-Hashemi, however, said he will stay in Turkey for a few days more and that he was waiting for a meeting with the leader of the Kurdish regional government, Masoud Barzani in Istanbul, at an interview on private Kanal 24 news channel two days ago.

Al-Hashemi said he would not discuss his return to northern Iraq with Barzani, saying Barzani has already stated his solidarity.

A political crisis erupted in Iraq on December 19, when Maliki's-led government sought an arrest warrant for Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi on charges he ran death squads and the ouster of Sunni Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq.

Al-Hashemi denies the accusations and has called for the referral of his case to the Kurdistan region, but Iraq's judiciary has rejected his request. □

Peace hopes erode with reports of Syria killings

ANKARA

Ankara officials accuse Assad's forces of shooting refugees inside Turkey

BY SEBNEM ARSU AND ALAN COWELL

Prospects for a peaceful solution to Syria's conflict appeared to diminish further Monday as Turkish officials accused the Syrian military of shooting at Syrian refugees inside Turkey for the first time, and a senior Foreign Ministry official said a cease-fire plan was void.

The Turks said Syrian Army soldiers attacked a group of Syrian civilians who were crossing the border at Kilis, Turkey, seeking sanctuary in a large refugee camp there. At least 23 people were wounded, and two of them later died. Turkish Foreign Ministry officials also said the Syrian soldiers hit at least four people inside the camp — two Syrian refugees, a Turkish policeman and a Turkish translator — who had sought to help the group fleeing across the border. Their condition was not clear.

Syria's ranking diplomats in Ankara were summoned to the Foreign Ministry and informed of "Turkey's irritation about the incident in a harsh tone," said one Foreign Ministry official who spoke on condition of anonymity because of his diplomatic position.

There was no immediate response from Syria. If the Turkish account of it is confirmed, the events would be the first time since the Turkish authorities began sheltering Syrian refugees in the 13-month conflict that the Syrian military had fired at targets inside Turkey.

The attack raised troubling questions about the possibility of a broader conflagration in the tinderbox border region. And it deepened the gloom about the cease-fire under a peace proposal by Kofi Annan, the special envoy to Syria for both the Arab League and the United Nations. The proposal called for government forces to pull back from major cities by Tuesday and for all combatants in the conflict to cease all hostilities by Thursday.

The border violence also afflicted Lebanon, where a Lebanese television station said Syrian soldiers killed one of its cameramen and wounded a colleague as both were filming from the Lebanese side. The television station, Al



Syrian refugees on Monday watching the border from a camp in Kilis, Turkey. More than 24,300 Syrians have crossed into Turkey amid the fighting, according to Turkish officials.

Jadeed, said the shooting took place in the Wadi Khaled region of northern Lebanon, according to news agency dispatches from Lebanon.

President Bashar al-Assad of Syria and his opponents have accused each other of escalating armed violence ahead of the deadline Tuesday. But the Syrian government imposed a new condition on Sunday, asserting it wants written guarantees from the enemy before the pullback of Syrian forces. Ahmad Fawzi, Mr. Annan's spokesman, said such guarantees were not part of the original cease-fire agreement.

Turkish officials, who have become Mr. Assad's most outspoken critics in the region, have said they have little faith that he would abide by terms of the cease-fire, based on a history of broken commitments in the Syrian conflict, which has left at least 9,000 people dead since it broke out in March 2011. On Monday, Naci Koru, a deputy foreign minister, appeared to go one step further, declaring that the Tuesday deadline had become "void at this stage," Turkish news media reported.

Hundreds of Syrians have crossed into Turkey in recent weeks, bringing the total number of refugees there to more than 24,300, according to the prime minister's office in Ankara. Turkey has built several camps in its southern provinces along the 880-kilometer, or 550-mile, border with Syria. Just last week, more than 2,800 Syrians entered Turkey within the space of two days, and a further 700 arrived on Saturday, according to Turkish accounts.

Mr. Annan was expected to arrive in Turkey's Hatay Province on Tuesday to visit some of the camps. Two United States senators, John McCain of Arizona and Joseph I. Lieberman of Connecticut, who were visiting Turkey to confer with members of the Syrian Na-

"In a desperate attempt to crush the uprising, Syrian forces have executed people in cold blood."

tional Council, the leading exile opposition group, also planned to visit a camp in Hatay on Tuesday, an official at the United States Embassy said. Both senators have been outspoken in calling for more action to help anti-Assad elements in Syria. As the deadline for the cease-fire approached, China urged both sides on Monday to abide by Mr. Annan's proposals. China, along with Russia, has blocked Western and Arab demands at the United Nations for a tougher stance to force Mr. Assad from office as part of a transition to democratic rule.

"China urges the Syrian government and opposition groups to seize the current critical moment to abide by cease-fire and troop withdrawal promises, cooperate with special envoy Annan's mediation efforts to alleviate the current tense situation and facilitate humanitarian assistance, and promote a political solution to the conflict in Syria," a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Liu Weimin, said at a regular news briefing in Beijing.

The developments occurred as Human Rights Watch said that Syrian security forces had executed more than 100 people, and possibly many more, including civilians and wounded or captured opposition fighters, during recent attacks.

A report by the group documented what it called more than a dozen episodes in which at least 101 people had been killed since the end of last year, many of them in March. The report accused government and pro-government forces of executing civilians who posed no threat, as well as rebels who had been captured or had stopped fighting.

Ole Solvang, a researcher at Human Rights Watch, said: "In a desperate attempt to crush the uprising, Syrian forces have executed people in cold blood, civilians and opposition fighters alike. They are doing it in broad daylight and in front of witnesses, evidently not concerned about any accountability for their crimes."

There was no immediate response to the report from the Syrian government.

Tumult in Syria endangers Hezbollah

BEIRUT

Lebanese group caught between its patrons and a wave of change

BY ANNE BARNARD

The Syrian revolution has pushed the Lebanese militant group and political party Hezbollah to a seminal moment, forcing it to choose between popularity in the wider Arab world and its longtime patrons in Iran and in the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad.

Unlike many in the region, Hezbollah has stood by Mr. Assad during his deadly yearlong crackdown against opponents who would overthrow more than three decades of rule by his family. But the evolving conflict now presents Hezbollah, Lebanon's strongest political force, with real dangers: the loss of its arms pipeline, increasing isolation in a hostile region, and Lebanese rivals hungry to erode its power.

Not least, there is also the risk of Hezbollah being dragged into a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia or a diversionary conflict with Israel.

Hezbollah is now delicately adjusting its position as it tries to navigate the chaotic change sweeping the region, even recently pushing Mr. Assad, gently but firmly, to stop shooting and make a political deal with his opponents. Syria provides the critical conduit for Hezbollah's Iranian arm supplies.

But Hezbollah's dilemma has become more dangerous as the Syrian conflict becomes more sectarian, interviews with Hezbollah supporters and current and former party activists made clear. Hezbollah's patrons have been Shiite Iran and Alawite-led Syria. Still, for many here Hezbollah has been seen as a pan-Arab champion of the dispossessed, not just for its Shiite Muslim base but for Sunnis as well.

Though Hezbollah's base remains strong, its political support among Sunnis is now threatened. Even its partner against Israel, Hamas, has distanced itself from the Syrian government. Sunni revolutionaries explicitly denounce Hezbollah as an enemy.

On a recent day, Mazen, a Syrian carpenter who organizes protests against Mr. Assad in a suburb of Damascus, had torn down the posters of Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, that once decorated his car and shop.



A street in Tyre, a largely Hezbollah-controlled part of Lebanon. Hezbollah is delicately adjusting its position on Syria as it tries to navigate the chaotic change sweeping the region.

Like many Syrians, Mazen, 35, revered Mr. Nasrallah for his confrontational stance against Israel, and as a voice that spanned sectarian divides. When Hezbollah's followers from south Lebanon fled Israeli bombs during the war in 2006, he and countless other Syrians sheltered them in their homes.

But after Hezbollah called Syrian protesters foreign agents and supported Mr. Assad in his crackdown, Mazen, who would not give his full name for security reasons, has come to see Hezbollah as a narrow sectarian party that supports Mr. Assad because his opponents are mainly Sunnis — despite a Shiite tradition that calls on oppressed people to rise up against bad rulers.

"Now I hate Hezbollah," he said. "Nasrallah should stand with the people's revolution if he believes in God."

A year ago, Mr. Nasrallah decided not to worry what people like Mazen thought. He chose to weather accusations of hypocrisy rather than jettison his alliance with Syria, which has helped make Hezbollah the Middle East's most formidable militant group and a crucial player in what was called, at least until recently, the "axis of resistance" against Israel, along with Iran, Syria and Hamas.

But recently, Hezbollah has shifted its tone. In carefully calibrated speeches last month, Mr. Nasrallah signaled that Mr. Assad could crush the uprising by force and should lay down its arms to seek a political settlement.

And — after long allowing followers to believe that virtually all Syrian violence is committed by rebels or staged by hostile news media — Mr. Nasrallah obliquely noted that the government too is accused of "targeting civilians." He urged Mr. Assad to "present the facts to the people," and implicitly acknowledged moral outrage in the wider Muslim world at the mounting death toll.

Moreover, behind the scenes, Mr. Nasrallah personally tried and failed to start a reconciliation process in Syria early uprising, and is now renewing those efforts, according to a Hamas official involved in the talks, Ali Baraka.

"He refuses the killing for both sides," Mr. Baraka, the Beirut representative for the Palestinian militant group, said.

Mr. Baraka said Mr. Nasrallah visited

Damascus last April and briefly convinced Mr. Assad to try to reach a political solution with Hezbollah and Hamas acting as mediators, but as Hamas began reaching out to fellow Sunni Muslims in the opposition, Syrian security officials scuttled the plan.

Hezbollah rarely allows official interviews and has refused them for months. But interviews with supporters and current and former party activists suggest that the situation is fueling fears of anti-Shiite blowback and testing loyalists who must explain the party's position to others, and to themselves.

Mr. Nasrallah is tempering his position because he wants to avoid asking supporters to endure a new conflict, said a former student activist who spends hours defending the party on Facebook, arguing, for example, that rogue forces, not Mr. Assad, are responsible for "mistakes."

Mr. Nasrallah "doesn't want supporters to suffer," she said, adding that some still feel "broken inside" from the 2006 war and "don't want more pressure."

Syria's conflict is testing Hezbollah's longstanding contradictions: It relies on genuine public support, yet sometimes behaves autocratically. It is a national group founded to fight Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon, but owes its military might — and the funds that rebuilt the south after the 2006 war — to Iran's desire to project power. It styles itself pan-Islamic, but its fallback is rock-solid support from Lebanese Shiites for whom it won long-denied power.

Most of all, Hezbollah won respect for sticking to principles, even among rival sects and Beirut cafe-goers skeptical of its religious conservatism. Now, it is paying a price for realpolitik in Syria.

To a young, college-educated health-care worker who is a lifelong supporter of Hezbollah, backing Mr. Assad keeps faith with the most important principle: opposing Israel.

"This revolution is not made in Syria," she told friends at a seaside café in Sidon after shopping at a fancy mall. "The real target is Lebanon and the resistance."

Echoing the party line, she said the United States and its Arab allies fomented Syria's revolt to punish Hezbollah for defeating the Israelis in 2006.

But that argument has frayed. Hamas, unable to disown Syria's Sunni revolu-

tionaries, declared itself neutral, angering Mr. Assad, and its leadership left Damascus. Some Hamas leaders from Gaza went farther, praising the revolution to crowds that shout "No, no, Hezbollah."

Without the political cover of a Sunni counterpart backing Syria's government — dominated by minority Alawites whose faith is an offshoot of Shiism — Hezbollah has been accused of, and targeted by, sectarian hatred.

Syrian rebels burn the Hezbollah flag, claim that Hezbollah's snipers are killing civilians in Syria, and name their brigades after warriors who defeated Shiites' heroes in Islam's early schismatic battles. In the Lebanese village of Aarsel, one Syrian refugee curtly ex-

plained his fear of Shiites and Alawites: "They have no religion."

Early on, some analysts thought a Sunni Syrian government might support Hezbollah against Israel, but now, says Michael Wahid Hanna of the Century Foundation, Hezbollah may have missed a chance to hedge bets.

Hezbollah's supporters, too, frame fears in sectarian terms. The health care worker worried that if Sunnis came to power in Syria, they would bar Shiites' access to shrines there and in Iraq, as prophesied in a Shiite text. Another supporter thought Sunni extremists might bomb Hezbollah areas.

Hezbollah seems in no danger of losing hardcore supporters. But some in its

constituency have questions.

In the café, a health worker declared that Syrians, with free education and medical care, had no reason to rebel. Her friend, a Shiite from Hezbollah's southern heartland, disagreed.

"They have things," she said, "but they are fighting for their rights."

The Hamas official, Mr. Baraka, suggested that Hezbollah leaders, religious men who prize reputations for morality, are troubled by the "killing of innocents" by both sides and know the government is not blameless.

Reporting was contributed by an employee of The New York Times in Darya, Syria, and Ed Ou in Aarsel, Lebanon.

Herald INTERNATIONAL **Tribune** WEDNESDAY, APRIL 11, 2012

Syria cease-fire plan verges on collapse

BEIRUT

U.N. envoy sees no sign of pullout as government issues new demands

BY NEIL MacFARQUHAR
AND RICK GLADSTONE

The cease-fire plan for the 13-month Syria conflict veered closer to collapse on Tuesday, with the Syrian government making new demands, the opposition ridiculing them as unrealistic and no indication that Syria's military forces had withdrawn from major cities and towns before a midnight deadline as promised.

The plan's chief architect, Kofi Annan, the special representative of both the United Nations and the Arab League, said the plan was yet achievable. But he appeared to lay much of the responsibility for the setbacks on the Syrian government in a letter submitted to the U.N. Security Council.

Despite the Syrian government's opportunity to abide by the original terms of the plan, which called for its military to withdraw from major cities and towns before 12:01 a.m. Wednesday, he said, "in the last five days it has become clear that such a signal has yet to be issued."

In the letter, which was shared by diplomats before its public release, Mr. Annan said Syrian officials had assured him that military forces had been withdrawn from some areas. Nonetheless, he wrote, "credible reports indicate that during that same period, the Syrian armed forces have conducted rolling military operations in population centers, characterized by troop movements into towns supported by artillery fire."

Mr. Annan wrote that the Syrian government's new conditions made in the past three days — guarantees of compliance from the opposition and instant deployment of international cease-fire monitors approved by Damascus —

"put at risk the cessation of violence in all its forms that is so urgently needed."

Earlier Tuesday, Mr. Annan said at a news conference while visiting Syrian refugees in Turkey: "I believe it's a bit too early to say that the plan has failed. The plan is still on the table."

He still held out hope for the second and more important deadline: 6 a.m. Thursday for all combatants in the conflict to stop fighting. "It's a plan the Syrians have endorsed, and from the comments made by the opposition, they're also prepared to go along with it if the government meets its commitments to pull the troops out," he told reporters.

Mr. Annan's letter corroborated all indications on the ground that President Bashar al-Assad of Syria had no intention of abiding by the original terms of the cease-fire to halt the conflict, which has become the most protracted and violent of the Arab Spring, with more than 9,000 people killed and many thousands wounded and displaced since it began in March 2011.

The Syrian National Council, the umbrella group of anti-Assad exiles, said his government had not only failed to comply with the cease-fire but also issued new conditions that were "unacceptable and unrealistic." A spokesman for the council, Basma Qoudmani, told reporters during a visit to Geneva that "we have received a very strong message from the regime that it intends to intensify rather than beginning to comply with the cease-fire."

Even Mr. Assad's most important foreign supporter, Russia, expressed a hint of exasperation with the Syrian government's behavior.

"We expressed to our Syrian colleagues our view that their steps could be more active, more decisive in executing the relevant conditions of the plan," Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov of Russia said in describing a meeting with his visiting Syrian counterpart, Walid al-Moallem, according to the Interfax news service.

But Mr. Lavrov also criticized Syria's opposition, asserting that "it's common knowledge that the proposals of Kofi Annan have not been accepted by some if not the majority of opposition groups, including the Syrian National Council."

And in a rejoinder to the United States, which has harshly criticized both Russia and China for thwarting more aggressive action on Syria at the U.N. Security Council, Mr. Lavrov said: "The U.S. and other countries, which have pretty direct access to Syrian opposition groups, would do better not to constantly blame Russia and China, but to use their levers in order to honestly force everyone to stop shooting each other."

The dimming outlook for Mr. Annan's cease-fire plan came a day after deadly violence in the conflict spilled over into Turkey for the first time, when Syrian Army soldiers near the Turkish border

Mr. Annan said new conditions "put at risk the cessation of violence in all its forms that is so urgently needed."

town of Kilis killed at least two Syrian refugees and wounded at least 23 others, including a Turkish police officer. The shooting substantially increased tensions with Turkey, which once supported Mr. Assad but is now one of his most strident critics.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, visiting Beijing, said Tuesday that the shooting represented "a very clear violation of the border" and he ordered his foreign minister back to Turkey to deal with it. "Obviously we will take the necessary measures," Mr. Erdogan was quoted as saying by Turkey's Anatolian news agency.

Rick Gladstone reported from New York. Sebnem Arsu in Ankara, Alan Cowell in London, Hala Droubi in Beirut and Ellen Barry in Moscow contributed reporting.

Iran passes test in 7-nation nuclear talks

ISTANBUL

BY STEVEN ERLANGER

Iran and six world powers have agreed to hold a new round of talks in Baghdad on May 23, Catherine Ashton, the European Union's foreign policy chief, said after the first meeting in nearly 15 months on Tehran's disputed nuclear program.

Ms. Ashton, speaking for the six nations on Saturday, called the daylong meeting "constructive and useful" and said that "we want now to move to a sustained process of dialogue." She gave no specifics on any proposals made during the sessions but said that the six nations were satisfied that Iran was serious about negotiations that "will lead to concrete steps toward a comprehensive negotiated solution which restores international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear program."

Testing Iran's willingness to negotiate seriously on its nuclear program was the purpose of this meeting, European and U.S. officials said. That was a low hurdle and represented no real breakthrough, and there were no negotiations here on specific steps or proposals. The lack of concrete detail is likely to lead to political criticism of President Barack Obama as the U.S. presidential election campaign unfolds and will make the meeting in Iraq even more important.

The weeks until May 23 will be used by experts on both sides to draw up a concrete agenda for those talks, Ms. Ashton said.

A senior U.S. official at the talks emphasized that this meeting was about testing Iran's seriousness. "But dialogue is not sufficient for any sanction relief," said the official, who, like others involved, spoke on the condition of anonymity as a matter of diplomatic practice. "There must be an urgent effort and concrete steps," the official said, to restore confidence in Iran's assertion that its program is not military.

"We believe there is a conducive atmosphere, but we need to test it," and success in Baghdad is not at all guaranteed, the official added, repeating Mr. Obama's warning that "the window for diplomacy is closing."

A senior European diplomat at the talks said that "we've opened a box, and now we have to fill it." The Iranians were serious and receptive, but in a sense, he said, "we've pushed the prob-



Catherine Ashton of the European Union and Saeed Jalili of Iran after posing for photos in Istanbul.

New talks, in Baghdad on May 23, will determine Iran's seriousness, officials said.

lem six weeks down the road," and the six powers must work hard to shape the Baghdad agenda and decide what to do in response to possible Iranian actions. Although Iran said it would have new proposals, the diplomat said Iran had instead promised a serious dialogue.

The leader of the Iranian delegation, Saeed Jalili, said that there were important points of agreement as well as differences. He praised the "desire of the other side for dialogue and cooperation" and said that "we consider that as a positive sign," compared with "the language of threats and pressure that do not work on the Iranian people."

During the talks, Mr. Jalili held a 90-minute session with Ms. Ashton in which he argued that since Iran was cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency, sanctions should be lifted, but he was rebuffed, another European diplomat said.

Russia and China maintained a unified stance with the other four nations — Britain, France, Germany and the United States — and Russia was chosen to begin the discussion because of its relatively close ties to Iran. But after Mr. Jalili thanked Moscow for its support, the Russian delegate, Sergei Rybakov, said bluntly that "Russia doesn't have to be thanked, but you need to do what we need you to do," a senior European diplomat said.

The centerpiece for future talks, Ms. Ashton said, will be the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, which permits peaceful nuclear energy but requires strict oversight and monitoring by the

atomic agency, which has been rebuffed in its efforts to investigate possible evidence of Iranian efforts to make a nuclear bomb.

"We want now to move to a sustained process of serious dialogue, where we can take urgent practical steps to build confidence and lead on to compliance by Iran with all its international obligations," Ms. Ashton said. "In our efforts to do so, we will be guided by the principle of the step-by-step approach and reciprocity."

The agreement to hold another meeting is without question a success, given that a failure here would make the chances of a military strike on Iran more likely. But putting off any hard decisions until the next meeting will increase pressure on both sides to make progress there, especially on the question of Iran's growing stockpile of uranium enriched to 20 percent purity, only a few steps from bomb grade.

That stockpile is the most urgent matter to settle, U.S. officials have said. They want to get Iran to agree to stop enriching to 20 percent purity and to export its 20-percent stockpile, in order to buy more time for diplomacy and reassure Israel that Iran is not close to being able to make a nuclear weapon.

Mr. Jalili said Saturday that Iran needed 20 percent uranium for its medical reactor, on which 150,000 people depend. In previous meetings, Western countries have offered to supply Iran with the necessary fuel for the reactor.

Sebnem Arsu contributed reporting.

Rien ne va plus entre la Turquie et l'Iran

Le dialogue entre les Occidentaux et Téhéran sur le nucléaire reprend aujourd'hui à Istanbul.

LAURE MARCHAND
ISTANBUL

DIPLOMATIE Attachés à leur tradition d'hospitalité, les Turcs ne feront pas mentir leur réputation. Ils mettront un point d'honneur à recevoir la délégation de Téhéran qui participe aujourd'hui à une réunion avec le groupe des 5 + 1 sur le programme nucléaire iranien à Istanbul. Mais l'accueil réservé aux Iraniens ne saurait masquer les dissensions de plus en plus marquées entre les deux voisins. Le chef de la diplomatie turque, Ahmet Davutoglu, a beau balayer d'un revers de la main les risques de « nouvelle guerre froide » orientale, les relations turco-iraniennes sont en berne. Syrie, arme nucléaire, radar de l'Otan, rivalité régionale... Les griefs s'accumulent et contraignent le gouvernement islamo-conservateur à abandonner le rôle de médiateur qu'il s'était efforcé de tenir ces dernières années.

Le rapprochement a atteint son acmé en 2010, lorsque les Turcs, associés aux Brésiliens, ont signé un accord d'échange d'uranium enrichi avec l'Iran, qui ne s'était jamais concrétisé. « Après un ré-

chauffement inhabituel, la collaboration est désormais ouvertement méfiante, comme par le passé, explique Hugh Pope, chargé de la Turquie au sein de l'International Crisis Group. Les relations ont retrouvé leur teneur naturelle. »

Rivalités exacerbées

La République islamique a finalement accepté Istanbul comme lieu de discus-

sions sur ses activités nucléaires mais en manifestant sa mauvaise volonté. Après avoir proposé elle-même la métropole du Bosphore, elle avait fait volte-face la semaine dernière et déclaré que cette option était « désormais exclue », proposant Bagdad à la place. Courroucé, le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a alors accusé les autorités iraniennes de « manquer d'honnêteté ». Avec ce revirement momentané, les Iraniens ont montré leur mécontentement de la tenue à Istanbul, le 1^{er} avril, de la conférence des Amis de la Syrie, à laquelle ils n'avaient d'ailleurs pas été invités.

Le dossier syrien est la principale pierre d'achoppement entre Ankara, soutien de l'opposition politique et armée à Bachar el-Assad, et Téhéran, tuteur de Damas. Fin mars, la visite de deux jours de M. Erdogan dans la capitale iranienne a mis en exergue les vues inconciliables des deux puissances, la chiïte et la sunnite, engagées dans une compétition pour le leadership régional. Le guide suprême Ali Khamenei a profité de sa venue pour réaffirmer le soutien indéfectible de son pays au régime syrien. Le premier ministre turc avait tout



« La collaboration est désormais ouvertement méfiante, comme par le passé »

HUGH POPE,
INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

juste quitté le sol iranien que le porte-parole du ministère des Affaires étran-

gères critiquait vertement l'engagement turc aux côtés des rebelles syriens. L'Irak, dirigée par le premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki, sous influence iranienne, constitue une autre pomme de discorde. Il s'agit d'« un terrain de confrontation à venir, c'est clair comme de l'eau de roche », pronostique Bülent Kenes, éditorialiste au quotidien *Today's Zaman*.

Cette rivalité régionale est exacerbée par les gages donnés par la Turquie à l'Alliance atlantique, dont elle fait partie. Le radar antimissile de l'Otan installé à l'Est, à 600 kilomètres de l'Iran, a été activé en janvier. Suscitant la colère de Téhéran : un général iranien a menacé de destruction « tout lieu utilisé pour des opérations hostiles ». « La Turquie s'est rapprochée des États-Unis, ajoute Hugh Pope, et est donc plus contrainte de suivre les sanctions internationales. » Ankara et Téhéran ont noué de solides liens commerciaux - leurs échanges bilatéraux ont fait un bond de 1 à 16 milliards de dollars en dix ans. Mais deux jours après le retour de M. Erdogan de Téhéran, Ankara a annoncé une réduction de 20 % de ses achats de pétrole à son voisin, s'alignant finalement sur les nouvelles sanctions américaines.

Pourtant, en dépit de cette somme de contentieux, Ramin Mehmanparast, porte-parole du ministère iranien des Affaires étrangères, a appelé les deux pays à ne pas perdre de vue « leurs relations stratégiques ». Au fil des siècles, les deux anciens empires ont toujours su ménager leurs susceptibilités et intérêts respectifs. ■

La Turquie pourrait en appeler à l'Otan

JEAN-JACQUES MÉVEL
CORRESPONDANT À BRUXELLES

LA TURQUIE ne veut pas rester seule face à la poudrière syrienne. Le premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a indiqué jeudi qu'il pourrait en appeler à l'Otan pour mettre 900 km de frontières communes à l'abri de provocations futures du régime de Damas.

C'est l'article V du traité de l'Alliance atlantique qui est évoqué. Clé de voûte de la sécurité en Europe, il prévoit qu'une attaque contre un pays membre est considérée comme une attaque contre l'Alliance tout entière, ce qui autorise le premier ministre à dire que « l'Otan a la responsabilité de protéger les frontières de la Turquie ». La même logique avait prévalu en faveur des États-Unis après les attaques terroristes du 11 septembre 2001.

Depuis Bruxelles, l'Otan a confirmé

qu'elle respectera le principe à la lettre. « Nous prenons notre responsabilité de protéger les alliés de l'Otan très au sérieux, dit la porte-parole Carmen Romero, et nous suivons de près la situation » à la frontière turco-syrienne.



« Nous prenons notre responsabilité de protéger les alliés de l'Otan très au sérieux »

CARMEN ROMERO, PORTE-PAROLE DE L'OTAN

Sur le terrain, de nouveaux tirs d'armes légères ont touché jeudi matin la Turquie depuis le territoire syrien. Ils visaient un groupe d'une quinzaine de Syriens, dont des femmes et enfants, qui franchissaient la frontière à Kilis (sud-est de la Turquie). Des balles ont touché un camp de réfugiés tout proche, selon l'agence turque Anatolie. Deux fonctionnaires turcs ont été

blessés au début de la semaine dans un scénario similaire.

Pour limités qu'ils semblent, ces incidents réveillent en Turquie la hantise d'une guerre civile qui déborderait la frontière syrienne. Ankara a déjà dit qu'elle ne resterait pas les bras croisés face à une avalanche de réfugiés ou à des massacres de grande ampleur chez son voisin. Erdogan évoquait récemment la création de « zones tampons » en Syrie même. Mais il hésite à agir seul.

À l'heure où débute un cessez-le-feu des plus instables, Ankara s'inquiète tout autant d'une embellie humanitaire qui se paierait d'un pourrissement politique, le clan el-Assad restant au pouvoir. En invoquant l'Otan, Erdogan pose des jalons pour l'avenir, note un diplomate. Vis-à-vis du régime de Damas, en lui signifiant qu'il y a des lignes rouges à ne pas franchir. Et vis-à-vis des Occidentaux, pour leur rappeler qu'un cessez-le-feu, même réussi, resterait une demi-mesure. ■

Les discussions sur le nucléaire iranien vont se poursuivre en mai à Bagdad

Téhéran a accepté de s'engager dans un cycle de négociations sans abattre aucune carte

Istanbul

Envoyée spéciale

Cinq semaines : c'est le temps dont les grandes puissances disposent désormais pour préparer avec l'Iran une feuille de route « soutenue », « étape par étape », fondée sur la « réciprocité » et comportant des « gestes concrets urgents », afin de « restaurer la confiance internationale dans le caractère exclusivement pacifique du programme nucléaire iranien ».

La tâche est ambitieuse. Annoncée samedi 14 avril à Istanbul, à l'issue des entretiens entre l'émissaire iranien Saïd Jalili et les représentants des Six (Etats-Unis, Russie, Chine, Royaume-Uni, France et Allemagne), cette amorce de dialogue représente un tournant, mais elle laisse aussi de nombreuses

questions en suspens. Quelles « mesures d'établissement de la confiance » seront demandées à l'Iran ? En échange de quelles contreparties des Occidentaux ? A quel rythme ? Ces aspects essentiels n'ont pas été abordés. Tout se jouera donc au prochain rendez-vous, prévu à Bagdad, le 23 mai.

Les discussions ont été « constructives et utiles », a estimé la haute-représentante européenne Catherine Ashton, chargée de parler au nom des Six. Elles ont « offert un cadeau » à l'Iran, a critiqué le premier ministre israélien Benjamin Nétanyahou, jugeant que, pendant ce temps, l'enrichissement d'uranium pourrait se poursuivre « sans entrave ». « L'Iran doit faire des gestes urgents et concrets » et respecter les résolutions de l'ONU, a souligné le minis-

tre des affaires étrangères français, Alain Juppé, dans un communiqué, reflet de l'approche française très exigeante. Barack Obama, en tournée en Amérique latine, a réagi dimanche en protestant de sa fermeté : « La fenêtre pour résoudre cette crise par la voie diplomatique est en train de se refermer et l'Iran doit saisir cette chance. »

La diplomatie paraît en tout cas relancée autour de l'atome iranien, faisant reculer le risque d'une action militaire israélienne et atténuant la pression à la hausse sur les prix du pétrole – deux résultats d'importance pour l'administration Obama, en campagne électorale. Le choix de la capitale irakienne pour la prochaine séance de discussions a été concédé par les Six à l'Iran comme rappel de son influence régionale, après le récent retrait des troupes américaines, en espérant que les rendez-vous ultérieurs se dérouleront à Genève, en terrain neutre. Les Etats-Unis veulent faire baisser la tension. L'Iran se montre plus souple, car soumis à la pression de sanctions internationales inédites, pétrolières et financières.

A Istanbul, la représentante américaine, Wendy Sherman, a lu en séance à huis clos un message de M. Obama adressé au négociateur iranien – qui a depuis peu obtenu le titre de représentant personnel du Guide suprême, Ali Khameneï. Les Etats-Unis ne veulent pas de changement de régime en Iran et il n'y a pas de fatalité à ce que les relations entre les deux pays soient ce qu'elles sont, disait en substance cette missive.

« Grand Satan »

M^{me} Sherman s'est ensuite dite intéressée par une rencontre bilatérale avec l'émissaire iranien. La dernière fois qu'une telle chose s'était produite, c'était à Genève en 2009, entre le même Saïd Jalili et le numéro trois du département d'Etat, Bill Burns. L'attente de M^{me} Sherman a été déçue, des diplomates occidentaux attribuant le refus iranien à la difficulté pour le pouvoir à Téhéran d'envisager un dialogue ouvert avec le « Grand Satan », dans le contexte de surenchère entre clans conservateurs.

M. Jalili a par ailleurs cherché, au cours d'un entretien séparé avec M^{me} Ashton, à obtenir un engagement de levée des sanctions internationales. En échange, a-t-il glissé, l'Iran répondrait à certaines questions de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique. M^{me} Ashton, qui avait été prévenue de la manœuvre par l'émissaire russe, Sergueï Ryabkov, a rejeté une demande qui priverait les Occidentaux de tout levier.

Contrairement à janvier 2011, lors de la dernière rencontre avec les Six, M. Jalili ne s'est pas emparé de cette rebuffade pour couper court aux discussions. « Il n'était pas venu pour tout saboter », conclut un diplomate européen. En fin de journée, devant la presse, l'émissaire iranien rappelait la fatwa du Guide suprême contre la bombe atomique. Il s'exprimait devant un grand panneau représentant le « golfe Persique » et comportant les effigies de scientifiques iraniens tués dans des attentats, ainsi qu'un slogan : « L'énergie nucléaire pour tous, l'arme nucléaire pour personne ». ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

Le Parti des ânes dévoile sa statue au Kurdistan irakien

AFP

SOULEIMANIYEH — 12 avril 2012 - (AFP)

LE "PARTI DES ÂNES" a dévoilé sa statue au centre de Souleimaniyeh, seconde ville du Kurdistan irakien: le buste d'un équidé aux longues oreilles, vêtu d'une chemise, d'une cravate et d'une veste.

L'ouvrage en bronze, qui mesure 1,8 m de haut et 1,1 m de large, a nécessité sept mois de travail et a coûté 4.000 dollars. Il est situé rue Nali, nom d'un célèbre poète kurde qui a écrit un épigramme en l'honneur de cet animal.

La statue, réalisée par l'artiste kurde Zerk Mira, a été inaugurée mercredi lors d'une cérémonie à laquelle ont participé de nombreux intellectuels et artistes kurdes, a constaté un journaliste AFP.

A cette occasion, le secrétaire général du Parti des ânes, Omar Kalol, a exprimé l'espoir qu'elle encouragera les habitants du Kurdistan à mieux traiter les animaux et particulièrement les ânes.

"L'âne a joué un rôle très important dans le mouvement de libération nationale kurde. (...) Il a été l'ami des combattants dans les montagnes quand ils



luttaient pour les droits de leur peuple", a-t-il dit, faisant allusion aux années de guérilla dans le nord de l'Irak et de l'Iran contre le pouvoir central.

Le Parti des ânes a été fondé et autorisé en 2005.

Sa structure administrative est basée sur la vie de cet équidé, et le quartier général et ses succursales portent des noms liés à cet animal comme ânesse, ânon ou grison.

Ce parti, absolument unique dans le monde arabe où l'âne est souvent maltraité, a demandé au gouvernement régional du Kurdistan une aide financière pour ouvrir une radio qui s'appellera "Zarin", le nom kurde pour braiment. ○

Irak, les fractures d'un retrait

Analyse

PAR CHRISTOPHE AYAD
Service International

Leur arrivée avait été une catastrophe, leur départ est déjà une calamité. L'invasion américaine de l'Irak, en 2003, a déstabilisé tout le Moyen-Orient, même si on est loin d'en avoir mesuré tous les effets. Mais on ne réalise pas encore à quel point le départ des troupes américaines, en décembre 2011, d'un pays fragile et encore instable, a déjà et aura des effets dévastateurs. Non pas que ce retrait n'était pas souhaitable – l'occupation était devenue insupportable – à la plupart des Irakiens – mais il est intervenu sans qu'un cadre institutionnel et politique stable ait été mis en place en Irak.

De surcroît, ce retrait est intervenu à un moment de très grande instabilité régionale due à la crise syrienne et au bras de fer autour du programme nucléaire iranien. Ces deux derniers foyers de tensions accentuent la fracture régionale entre chiïtes et sunnites, à l'œuvre depuis bientôt une décennie. Or l'Irak est le maillon faible du Proche-Orient. Le principal effet du retrait américain est de laisser, face-à-face, chiïtes et sunnites, au moment où la confrontation entre ces deux communautés a atteint son climax.

L'idée a longtemps prévalu que la fin de l'occupation américaine de l'Irak allait permettre à ce pays de retrouver un début de normalité. C'était oublier combien l'occupation américaine a déstructuré l'Irak et tout son environnement régional. Il n'y a pas de retour possible à un ordre ancien : celui-ci a disparu.

Le drame actuel de l'Irak, c'est que les États-Unis, lassés d'une guerre coûteuse et honteuse, se sont retirés avant d'avoir stabilisé l'édifice bricolé après la chute de Saddam Hussein. Outre la dissolution de l'armée irakienne et du parti Baas, le péché originel de Paul Bremer, le proconsul américain en Irak de 2003 à 2005, a été de mettre sur pied un Conseil de gouvernement intérimaire irakien, principalement basé sur des critères confessionnels et ethniques. Dans le souci d'assurer une représentation « équilibrée », M. Bremer s'est livré à un savant dosage de chiïtes, sunnites, Kurdes et chrétiens, accordant, conformément à la démographie, une majorité aux chiïtes longtemps opprimés sous Saddam

Hussein et ses prédécesseurs, tous sunnites. Le ver était dans le fruit.

Cette grille de lecture unique a donné le coup d'envoi d'une féroce concurrence entre chiïtes et sunnites, qui a dégénéré en guerre civile à partir de 2006. Le mode de scrutin des premières élections libres de 2005 – une proportionnelle par liste dans le cadre d'une seule circonscription nationale – et le boycottage des partis sunnites ont renforcé la domination chiïte.

Les tentatives de corriger cette erreur initiale ont été vaines, mais les Américains, par leur poids et leur présence, ont joué un rôle modérateur, notamment après les dernières élections législatives de 2010. C'est sur leur insistance que le premier ministre (chiïte), Nouri Al-Maliki, a formé un gouvernement d'union nationale incluant la principale formation sunnite, le bloc Iraqiya.

L'occupation américaine a déstructuré l'Irak et tout son environnement régional

L'armée américaine à peine partie, de nuit, et presque honteusement le 21 décembre 2011, le premier ministre faisait émettre un mandat d'arrêt contre le vice-président (sunnite) Tarik Al-Hachemi, accusé d'avoir fomenté des attentats, et lançait une procédure de destitution de son vice-premier ministre (sunnite) Saleh Al-Mutlaq. Ces deux coups de force ont immédiatement entraîné une vague d'attentats meurtriers visant les quartiers chiïtes. Tarik Al-Hachemi a fui l'Irak vers le Qatar, puis l'Arabie saoudite, les deux parrains du sunnisme régional. Depuis Riyad, où il se trouve aujourd'hui, il dénonce la mainmise de l'Iran en Irak, par le

biais de ses alliés chiïtes et à la faveur du retrait américain – qui a laissé un vide.

C'est une autre des nombreuses incohérences américaines : en plein bras de fer sur le nucléaire, Washington a laissé le champ libre à l'influence iranienne en Irak. Son principal relais, le premier ministre, M. Al-Maliki, se définit comme « chiïte, irakien, arabe et membre d'Al-Dawa [parti islamiste chiïte] » : l'ordre des mots est important. Il concentre aujourd'hui des pouvoirs considérables : chef du gouvernement, ministre de la défense et de l'intérieur.

En outre, il a divisé et intimidé ses adversaires. Le chiïte Maliki tire profit au maximum d'un système institutionnel où l'équilibre communautaire des postes de pouvoir est une règle, sans pour autant avoir été fixée par des principes intangibles comme c'est le cas au Liban, autre pays arabe multiconfessionnel. La démocratie, tant vantée par les néoconservateurs proches de George W. Bush, est devenue un instrument de domination plus que de libération.

De plus en plus inspirés par les succès – la province kurde, qui jouit d'une quasi-indépendance –, les provinces sunnites réclament une large autonomie. Cette tentation centrifuge est renforcée par la perspective de voir arriver au pouvoir, dans la Syrie voisine, une majorité sunnite après quatre décennies de pouvoir alaouite, une branche dissidente du chiïsme. La majorité chiïte au pouvoir en Irak s'oppose à cette volonté d'émancipation des sunnites, de peur de voir lui échapper une partie des réserves pétrolières et d'un éclatement du pays.

L'Irak, au centre de cet imbroglio régional, n'est pas le seul affecté par la ligne de faille communautaire. En Syrie, au Liban, à Bahreïn et au Yémen, tous les ingrédients d'un affrontement chiïtes-sunnites sont réunis, dont les champions respectifs sont l'Arabie saoudite et l'Iran. Les ambitions nucléaires iraniennes et la compétition pour l'hégémonie régionale entre Riyad et Téhéran donnent à cette confrontation un tour dramatique. ■

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REUTERS

Nouvelle passe d'armes entre Maliki et Erdogan

BAGDAD - 21 avril 2012 - (Reuters)

LE PREMIER ministre irakien a qualifié vendredi la Turquie d'"Etat hostile", après que le chef du gouvernement turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a accusé Nouri al Maliki d'attiser les tensions entre les communautés chiïtes, sunnites et kurdes à cause de sa gestion "auto-centrée".

"Les dernières déclarations de M. Erdogan constituent une nouvelle ingérence flagrante à l'encontre des affaires intérieures irakiennes", a déclaré Maliki dans un communiqué diffusé sur son site internet.

"Continuer sur cette voie (...) nuit aux intérêts de la Turquie et fait de lui un Etat hostile pour tous", a-t-il dit, ajoutant que la Turquie voulait imposer son "hégémonie" sur la région.



Erdogan avait fait ces déclarations après une rencontre à Istanbul avec Massoud Barzani, président de la région semi-autonome du Kurdistan, en Irak.

Les relations entre la Turquie sunnite et le gouvernement de Nouri al Maliki, membre de la majorité chiïte, sont tendues depuis qu'un mandat d'arrêt a été délivré en décembre à l'encontre du sunnite Tarek al Hachemi, soupçonné de diriger des "escadrons de la mort" et qui s'est réfugié au Kurdistan irakien. □

France urges world to bear down on Syria until it ends deadly crackdown

PARIS

BY STEVEN ERLANGER

International sanctions aimed at the Syrian government have cut its financial reserves in half and pressure must be maintained on Damascus to stop its bloody crackdown on opponents despite a shaky five-day cease-fire, the French foreign minister, Alain Juppé, said on Tuesday.

The financial pressure, including an oil embargo and sanctions on the Central Bank, is damaging Syria's ability "to finance and arm militias, the lethal shabiha death squads," Mr. Juppé said, and hurting those around what he called "the ruling clan" of President Bashar al-Assad.

As Mr. Juppé spoke to a gathering in Paris of the Friends of Syria, representing 57 countries who have imposed sanctions on Damascus, Syrian forces continued to shell towns in the north, around Idlib, and in the south, in Dara'a Province, in apparent violation of a U.N.-negotiated cease-fire.

An advance team of six U.N. observers worked on how to monitor the cease-fire as they waited for 24 more observers to arrive in the next few days. The observers "will start with setting up operating headquarters and reaching out to the Syrian government and the oppo-

sition forces so that both sides fully understand" their role, Ahmad Fawzi, the spokesman for the special envoy Kofi Annan, said in a statement Monday.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based anti-Assad group with contacts in Syria, said Syrian military tanks also shelled the southern town of Busra al-Harir, killing at least two people, and the Khaldiyeh district of Homs on Tuesday. Both areas are considered strongholds of the Free Syrian Army, a group of former soldiers and others who have taken up arms against Mr. Assad's forces. The use of such heavy weapons, if confirmed, would represent a significant breach of the cease-fire. Syrian forces reportedly killed 39 people Tuesday, mainly in Idlib Province, according to Al Arabiya television.

The Paris conference is at the expert level and is intended to coordinate and strengthen existing sanctions on the Syrian government, according to French diplomats, as a follow-up to grander meetings of the Friends of Syria at a higher level, in Tunis and Istanbul. It is chaired by France, the European Union's foreign service and Morocco, representing Arab countries on the U.N. Security Council. Two Arab League nations, Syria's neighbors Iraq



FRANCK TIFE/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Foreign Minister Alain Juppé spoke Tuesday in Paris at a meeting of the Friends of Syria.

and Lebanon, did not attend.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is expected in Paris on Thursday afternoon after NATO meetings in Brussels for a higher-level discussion of Syria, French diplomats said. France is hoping to have a group of foreign ministers, including from Arab League countries like Qatar, which has been pressing for more military help to the Syrian opposition, to a meeting over dinner to reinforce the general disapproval of Damascus and its bloody repression of opposition groups.

Mr. Juppé, in his speech, listed the consequences: 10,000 dead, more than 44,000 refugees, 1.5 million Syrians in need of humanitarian aid, he said, calling it "the sad toll of the Syrian regime's criminal crackdown."

In Moscow, however, Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov accused unspecified countries and "external forces" of trying to undermine the Security Council and Mr. Annan by encouraging the opposition to keep fighting the government, not respecting the cease-fire, supplying weapons to the opposition and setting up separate groups like the Friends of Syria to oppose the regime.

"I can't avoid pointing to the problems of foreign influence on the process in Syria," Mr. Lavrov said, according to Russian news agencies. These "external forces" are "doing everything to replace the Security Council with a host of informal formats, such as the 'Friends of Syria' and other groups, and doing everything to convince the Syrian opposition not to cooperate with the government, including reconciliation and subsequent dialogue."

Mr. Lavrov has regularly defended the Syrian government's military efforts to defeat what he has called "armed gangs" and "armed terrorist groups" who have infiltrated peaceful protestors. Russia has justified Syrian use of force as a response to armed insurrection.

On Tuesday Mr. Lavrov met in Moscow with some Syrian opposition figures who said they nonetheless sensed a shift in the Russian position toward more criticism of Mr. Assad.

Haytham Manna, a Syrian exile leader, pointed out Russia's support for democratic change in Syria. "The Russian representatives discussing the problems of our country with us are no longer in-

clined to support the continuing existence of a dictatorial regime but speak of the necessity for democratic change." He said Russia "has all the necessary levers to apply pressure on Assad's government and help Annan's mission."

Hassan Abdul-Aziz, who led the delegation, attributed the difficulties in finding a resolution to "the absence of Syrian national consent, the absence of Arab agreement and the absence of a common international position," which has served to prolong, he said, "the suffering of the Syrian people."

In Paris, the working group issued conclusions saying that they had better organized themselves to coordinate sanctions, called on Syrian entrepreneurs to distance themselves from the government — promising that those who did so would not be the targets of sanctions — and urged other countries to join in the sanctions.

The group particularly condemned countries that supported the Syrian government with funding or sold arms to it and said that Syrian actions "can be considered crimes against humanity."

The working group will meet again next month in Washington.

Reporting was contributed by Neil MacFarquhar in Beirut, Glenn Kates in Moscow and Rick Gladstone and J. David Goodman in New York.

Quiet imam casting long shadow in Turkey

ISTANBUL

BY DAN BILEFSKY
AND SEBNEM ARSU

When Ahmet Sik was jailed last year on charges of plotting to overthrow the government, he had little doubt that a secretive movement linked to a reclusive imam living in the United States was behind his arrest.

"If you touch them you get burned," a gaunt and defiant Mr. Sik said in an interview at his apartment in March here, just days after being released from more than a year in jail. "Whether you are a journalist, an intellectual or a human rights activist, if you dare to criticize them you are accused of being a drug dealer or a terrorist."

Mr. Sik's transgression, he says, was to write a book, "The Army of the Im-

"We are concerned there is a hidden agenda to challenge secular Turkey."

am." It chronicles how the followers of Fethullah Gulen have proliferated within the police and judiciary, working behind the scenes to become one of Turkey's most powerful political forces — and, he contends, one of its most ruthless, smearing opponents and silencing dissenters.

The case quickly became among the most prominent of dozens of prosecutions that critics say are being driven by the followers of Mr. Gulen, 70, a charismatic preacher who leads one of the most influential Islamic movements in the world, with millions of followers and schools in 140 countries. He has long advocated tolerance, peace and interfaith dialogue, drawing on the traditions of Sufism, a mystical strain of Islam generally viewed as a moderate contrast to more fundamentalist Islamist sects.

But the movement's stealthy expansion of power as well as its tactics and lack of transparency are now raising accusations that Gulen supporters are using their influence in Turkey's courts, police and intelligence service to engage in witch hunts against opponents with the aim of creating a more conservative Islamic Turkey. Critics say the agenda is threatening the government's democratic credentials just as Turkey steps forward as a regional power.

"We are troubled by the secretive nature of the Gulen movement, all the smoke and mirrors," said a senior American official, who requested an-



RUTH FREMSON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

MOVEMENT'S LEADER Fethullah Gulen at his home in Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania.

onymity to avoid breaching diplomatic protocol. "It is clear they want influence and power. We are concerned there is a hidden agenda to challenge secular Turkey and guide the country in a more Islamic direction."

The movement has strong affiliations or sympathy in powerful parts of Turkey's media, including the largest daily, Zaman, and, Turkish analysts say, among at least several dozen members of its 550-seat Parliament, with support extending to the highest levels of government.

With its strong influence in the media and a small army of grass roots supporters, the Gulen movement has provided indispensable support to the conservative, Islam-inspired government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Some officials and analysts suspect that some elements within the Gulen movement have served as a stalking horse for the government, which has benefited as the Gulenist media have cowed common opponents and backed trials that Mr. Erdogan has publicly supported.

But the relationship between Mr. Erdogan and Mr. Gulen has sometimes been fraught, with the prime minister, a mercurial populist, sensitive to any challenges to his authority. Analysts say that in recent months Mr. Erdogan and other members of his Justice and Development Party have grown increasingly concerned, as high-profile arrests of critics of the Gulen movement embar-

The charge that Gulenists control the police "is impossible to confirm but we have found no one who disputes it."

pass the government. There is growing talk of a power struggle.

A culture of fear surrounding the Gulenists, however exaggerated, is so endemic that few here will talk openly about them on the phone, for fear their conversations are being recorded and that there will be reprisals, given the perception of the movement's strong presence within the police and intelligence communities.

Ayse Bohurler, a founding member of the Justice and Development party, bemoaned that the lack of transparency and clear organizational structure make it impossible to hold the group accountable. "There is no reference point, they are kicking in the shadows," she said. "They are everywhere and nowhere."

Mr. Gulen rarely gives interviews, and he declined a request for this article. But Mustafa Yesil, President of the Journalists and Writers Foundation, an Istanbul-based group affiliated with the movement, described the Gulenists as a "civic movement" with no political aspirations. If members affiliated with the movement were well-represented in Turkey's state bureaucracy and police,

Mr. Yesil said, it was based on merit.

"The old guard feel squeezed because their space is getting smaller and they are sending the bill to the movement,"

he said. His words were reinforced by a rare public statement posted on a leading Gulen community Web site in April. It called it a "violation of human rights" that Gulenists in the state bureaucracy were being accused of "infiltration" when they were upholding the rule of law and serving their country.

The Gulenists are well known for running a network of schools lauded for their academic rigor and commitment to spreading Turkish language and culture. With their neatly trimmed moustaches, suits and ties and missionary zeal, followers convey the earnestness of Mormon missionaries. The eyes of some followers moisten at the mention of Mr. Gulen's name, which is invoked with utmost reverence.

Sympathizers say the notion of Mr. Gulen as a cultish puppet master are malicious caricatures. The group has no formal organization or official membership but operates through a network of followers. Mr. Gulen communicates in essays and videotaped sermons, which are posted on the Internet and in other Gulen-related media outlets.

His sympathizers say his goal is the creation of a "golden generation" which would embrace humanism, science and Islam and serve the Turkish state. He has publicly affirmed the importance of complying with Turkey's secular laws, and math and science competitions at Gulen schools overshadow religious expression, which takes place quietly in "relaxation rooms" that double as prayer spaces.

But some critics say that outward appearances belie the true agenda of a movement working behind the scenes to expand the role of Islam in Turkey's secular politics. They say that, ultimately, the community aims to bring Mr. Gulen, who is ailing, back to Turkey. Supporters say Mr. Gulen has resisted returning home, mindful that he could polarize the country.

Mr. Sik, the author, accused the Gulenists of misusing their positions of power. Once arrested, he was accused of links to a shadowy network called Ergenekon, which, prosecutors contend, planned to engage in civil unrest, assassinations and terrorism to create chaos as a prelude to a coup.

Even Mr. Sik's staunchest critics say the charges against him appeared ludicrous. A longtime critic of the military, he wrote a book arguing how prosecutors could better investigate the coup he is now accused of abetting.

The Ergenekon trials have been a watershed for Turkey, as prosecution of the alleged conspiracy has swept up dozens of journalists, intellectuals and current and former military personnel — in a country where the military long regarded itself as the guardian of the secular state. The ascent of Mr. Erdogan's Muslim-inspired government since 2002 has radically shifted that balance of power, and analysts say the Gulenists



Students singing the national anthem of Turkey in the courtyard of a Gulen school in Istanbul in March.

The system of private schools has often been praised for its academic rigor.

have seized the opportunity to settle old scores and tame their former rivals, including the military.

"Hard-core activists within the Gulen movement are driving the arrests," said Gareth Jenkins, a Turkey expert at the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute affiliated with Johns Hopkins University. "It is revenge for the 1990s when the military oppressed Muslim conservatives."

Gulen supporters argue that the Ergenekon trials are a long-overdue historical reckoning aimed at bringing to account a murky group of ultranationalist operatives, linked to the military, that has fought against perceived enemies of the state, including pro-Islamists. Few here doubt that there is some truth to the conspiracy — police have uncovered stashes of weapons linked to retired officers — in a country where the military has intervened four times to overthrow democratically elected governments.

Mr. Gulen himself has lived in self-imposed exile on a 45-acre, or 18-hectare, estate in the mountains of eastern Pennsylvania since 1999, when he fled Turkey amid allegations of plotting to overthrow the secular government. Around that time, the Turkish authorities made public a supposed taped sermon in which Mr. Gulen was heard advising his followers to "move within the arteries of the system, without anyone noticing your existence, until you reach all the power centers."

Mr. Gulen has said his words were manipulated, and he was acquitted of all charges in 2008.

Mr. Gulen, who has preached openly against fundamentalism and terrorism, was embraced in Washington after Sept. 11 as a welcome face of moderate Islam, analysts say. His green card application shows that his bid to remain in the United States was endorsed by a former official of the Central Intelligence Agency. The movement's events

have been attended by luminaries such as former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright and former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan.

A 2009 cable by former American Ambassador to Turkey James F. Jeffrey, made public by Wikileaks, noted that the Gulen community was strong within the police force and in conflict with the mili-

"There is no reference point, they are kicking in the shadows. They are everywhere and nowhere."

tary. It said that the assertion that the Turkish national police is controlled by Gulenists "is impossible to confirm but we have found no one who disputes it."

The cable goes on to say that the Gulen-controlled media is supporting the investigation into Ergenekon and has helped put many opponents of the ruling Justice and Development Party behind bars. But the interests of the movement and the government appear increasingly to be diverging, as prosecutions of opponents widen.

In February, a prosecutor asked Hakan Fidan, the head of the National Intelligence Agency, MIT, and a close ally of Mr. Erdogan, to testify in a court case widely backed by Gulen supporters over secret links between the agency and the P.K.K., a Kurdish terrorist group. The government moved swiftly to block the questioning, and the prosecutor was removed from the case.

It was not the first case in which tensions with the government have surfaced, or of murky allegations.

In September 2010, Hanefi Avci, a former police chief and Gulen sympathizer, was arrested for being part of the Ergenekon plot after publishing a book alleging that a network of Gulenists in the police were manipulating judicial

processes.

In another case, in 2009, three non-commissioned officers confessed to planting a forged document implicating the commander of their air force base in the central city of Kayseri, according to Serkan Gunel, a lawyer familiar with the case. The document asked army personnel to assist an officer jailed on charges of plotting to overthrow the government.

The officers told investigators they had planted the file at the request of their Gulenist mentor. Soon after, articles appeared in the Gulen-affiliated

media saying that their confessions had been extracted under hypnosis. The military prosecutor who carried out the investigation, Col. Ahmet Zeki Ucok, was accused of cavorting with Russian prostitutes as part of a smear campaign, the lawyer said.

The officers recanted their accusations and were restored to their posts. A forensic medical report, obtained 18 months after the officers were interviewed, said they could have been hypnotized. Colonel Ucok was convicted on Tuesday on charges of torture and sen-

tenced to seven years and six months in prison.

Mr. Sik, who remains out of prison, pending trial, has not been silenced. Police seized the manuscript to his book, but it was nevertheless published by a group of supporters on the Internet. Mr. Sik says he hopes to return to writing books, assuming he is not put back in jail.

"My only wish is for my children to read about these events as dirt from the past," he said. "I want it to be buried."

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 2012

Wave of attacks shakes Iraq

BAGHDAD

Over 2 dozen are killed and 100 wounded in fresh sign of insurgency

BY TIM ARANGO

A string of deadly explosions and other attacks shook Iraq on Thursday, with bombings in Baghdad and the northern city of Kirkuk resulting in the most fatalities. Over all, more than two dozen people were killed and over 100 wounded, security officials said.

By the standards of Iraq — where attacks occur daily, although at a much diminished rate compared with the height of the war — the wave of violence on Thursday was not extraordinary, although it was a reminder, after weeks of relative calm, that an organized insurgency remained active.

The biggest attack appeared to be a series of explosions in the village of Al-Malhaa, on the outskirts of Kirkuk, that left 9 people dead and 24 wounded, said an official in Kirkuk, a city divided

among three ethnic groups often at odds with one another — Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen.

In Baghdad, nearly 15 people were killed in a handful of explosions, including one on Palestine Street aimed at the convoy of Health Minister Majeed Hammad Amin. He was unharmed, but two bystanders were killed, an official said.

Some bombs targeted Shiite Muslims, who make up the majority of Iraq's population and are often the victims of what is left of the country's Sunni insurgency and its main group, Al Qaeda in Iraq. A hotel in Khadamiya, a Baghdad neighborhood that is home to an important Shiite shrine, was struck by a car bomb. The attack killed two at the hotel, which often houses Shiite pilgrims from Iran.

In Samarra, north of Baghdad, two car bombs hit a checkpoint guarded by members of a local Awakening group, the movement that is made up of former insurgents who were paid to switch sides under a program that was begun by the American military. In that attack, three were killed and six wounded.

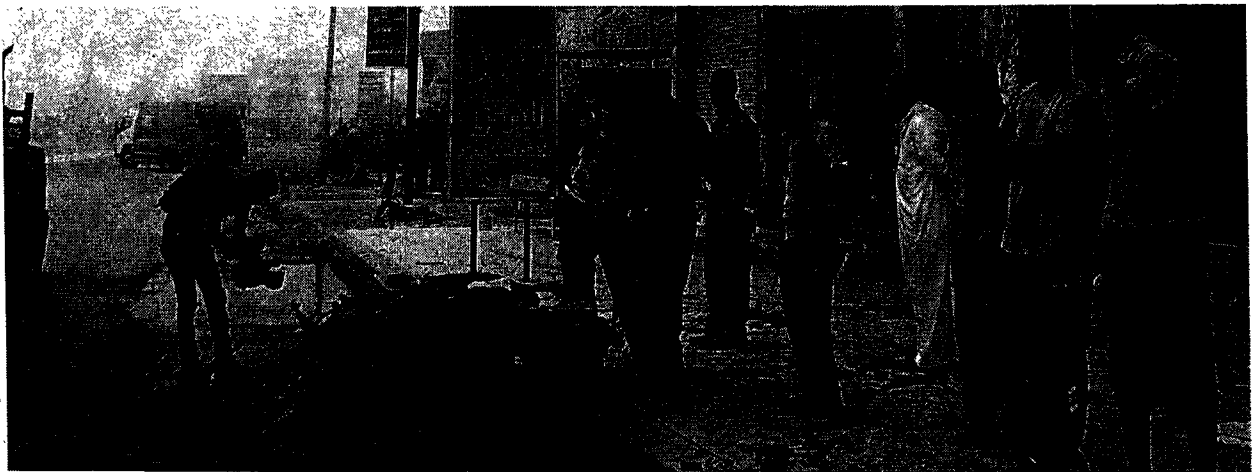
Several attacks were carried out in Diyala Province, which is north of Baghdad and was the site of some of the

worst carnage during Iraq's sectarian war in 2006 and 2007. A suicide bomber struck the home of a military official, killing one person and wounding five others. A checkpoint was also attacked, and two roadside bombs hit an army patrol.

Nearly four months have passed since the withdrawal of the American military, and despite the attacks on Thursday, security has not deteriorated, as many analysts had contended it would. By some Iraqi government measures, which have been widely reported by the news media, March was one of the least violent months since 2003, when the American-led war began.

But according to statistics cited by the United Nations, violence has actually remained steady, and similar to the levels over the past three years. In March, according to those statistics, 294 people were killed in attacks, slightly higher than in February and comparable to many months last year.

Employees of The New York Times contributed reporting from Kirkuk, Samarra and Diyala Province, Iraq, and Omar al-Jawshy and Zaid Thaker from Baghdad.



Ramadi was among the Iraqi cities that were hit by bombings Thursday. In Baghdad, more than a dozen people were killed in explosions.

Kurds sit out the fighting in Syria

KILIS, TURKEY

Long-oppressed group with hope of nation-state fears joining losing side

BY J. MICHAEL KENNEDY

The Kurds of Syria, long oppressed by the government of President Bashar al-Assad, are largely staying out of the fighting that has gone on for more than a year in their country, hedging their bets as they watch to see who will gain the upper hand.

Mr. Assad has made major efforts to keep them out of the fray, aware that their support for the opposition could prove decisive. He has promised that hundreds of thousands of Kurds will be given citizenship, something the ruling Assad family has denied them for nearly half a century.

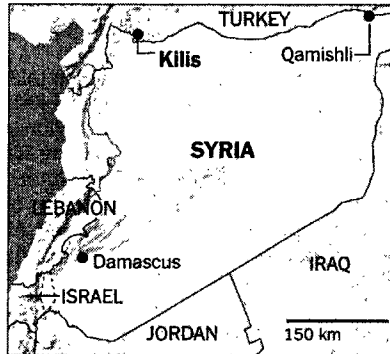
The Kurds have other reasons for holding back: The opposition movement in Syria is made up in large part by the Muslim Brotherhood and Arab nationalists, two groups that have little sympathy for Kurdish rights, and the Kurds cling to their long-sought goal of a Kurdish state.

"Syrian Kurds are, by and large, sitting out this dance," said Jonathan C. Randal, the author of a widely respected book on the Kurds — the largest ethnic group in the world without a state. Yet a recent report by the Henry Jackson Society, a foreign policy research institute in London, describes the Kurds as a "decisive minority" in the Syrian revolution and says their support would help in a "rapid overthrow in the Assad regime."

The Kurds, who make up about 10 percent of the country's population, find themselves in something of a dilemma. If the revolution against Mr. Assad succeeds, their passive role will give them less of a say in how the country is ruled. But they also fear that any future government will be much more Islamist than the secular Assad government.

As Michael Weiss, a spokesman for the institute, said, "The Kurds don't want to join something that will lose."

That is not surprising, given the history of oppression of the Kurdish people, not only in Syria but also in Turkey, Iraq and Iran, the four countries



that intersect the traditional Kurdish region, much of it rugged mountain terrain.

In the past, they have been denied language, culture and any sort of national identity in those countries, though major changes have been made in oil-rich northern Iraq since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

Besides the banning of the Kurdish language and books from schools, celebrations like Nowruz — the traditional Kurdish New Year — were long prohibited in Syria.

As part of his effort to appease the Kurds, Mr. Assad pledged that he would grant citizenship to about 200,000 stateless Kurds as protests were spreading — a promise he has yet to make good on.

Mr. Weiss, the institute spokesman, said it was Kurdish protests at the government in early 2011 that first alarmed the Assad government, which little realized that an uprising was to follow in other parts of Syria. "At first, Assad just thought he had a Kurdish problem on his hands," he said.

Gokhan Bacik, the director of the Middle East Strategic Research Center at Zirve University in Gaziantep, Turkey, said the Syrian Kurds were fragmented among many political parties, making it all the more difficult for them to unite for any cause.

But even though the Kurds as a whole do not want to jeopardize the long-term goal of a nation-state, he said, they are keeping their own counsel.

"There is a nascent idea of a Kurdish nation," he said. "They don't want to risk this process. For them, the major point is long-term survival in better conditions."

The Kurdish National Council, a bloc

of Kurdish parties, walked out of a meeting in Istanbul last month of the Syrian National Council, an organization that has come to represent the rebellion in exile. They did so because the Islamist-dominated Syrian group refused to include wording about the rights of Kurds.

The Kurds have said they are seeking constitutional recognition, compensation for their suffering and a federal government, as well as the removal of the word "Arab" from Syria's official name: the Syrian Arab Republic.

In Iraq, Masoud Barzani, the president of the semiautonomous Kurdish north, has been an active supporter of the Kurdish National Council. Turkey, meanwhile, has tried to act as the interlocutor for the Syrian National Council and the role the Kurds play. But that has its own set of pitfalls because the Kurds remain suspicious of Turkey, which has treated its own Kurdish population poorly.

A wild card in all this is the Kurdistan Workers Party, or P.K.K., a well-armed and well-trained militia that has been designated a terrorist organization by the United States. In Syria, the group has allied itself with the Assad govern-

President Assad has promised citizenship to Kurds, which his ruling family has denied them for nearly half a century.

ment, which could use it to stir up tensions along the Turkish border, should Mr. Assad see the need.

In the past, Syria armed and protected the P.K.K. in its long campaign against Turkey, though that assistance cooled when relations between the countries began improving little more than a decade ago. The group has already threatened to turn all Kurdish areas in the region into a "war zone" if Turkey crosses the border to intervene in the Syrian crisis.

A Turkish journalist, Serdar Alyamac, who has specialized in Kurdish issues, said the group would also serve as an enforcer for Mr. Assad in the Kurdish regions of Syria.

"Assad naturally wants to use the P.K.K. to control the area," he said. "Plus the P.K.K. is familiar with the area. It's a win-win situation for Assad and the P.K.K., if it works."



Irak: une série d'attentats meurtriers fait au moins 35 morts

Jeudi 19 Avril 2012

RFI, Avec notre correspondante à Bagdad, Fatma Kizilboga

En Irak, une série d'attaques à travers tout le pays a causé la mort de 34 personnes et blessé une centaine d'autres ce jeudi 19 avril. Aucune revendication pour l'heure, mais tout porte à croire que les attentats étaient coordonnés. Il semble ainsi que tous les moyens ont été mis en œuvre afin de viser un maximum de personnes.

Ce sont au total près d'une trentaine d'attaques qui ont secoué différentes villes en Irak, de Bagdad à la ville riche en pétrole et tant disputée de Kirkouk, en passant par les bastions sunnites de Samarra et de Baquba.

Les assaillants n'ont pas lésiné sur les moyens : voitures piégées, engins explosifs déposés aux bords des routes, attaques-suicide; tous les moyens connus des services de sécurité ont été déployés. Avec pour objectif commun de

viser la population civile ou les représentants des forces de l'ordre irakiennes.

Une série d'attentats qui survient alors que la crise politique semble atteindre son paroxysme. Si les tensions entre la minorité sunnite et le gouvernement chiite se ne se sont jamais vraiment apaisées, plus récemment ce sont les représentants kurdes qui ont fait part de leur mécontentement.

Après le vice-Premier ministre Salah el-Mutlaq, le président de l'autonomie du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, a également mis en garde contre ce qu'il qualifie de « dérives autoritaires de Nouri al-Maliki ».

Seize mois après la formation du gouvernement, le Premier ministre irakien refuse toujours de nommer les principaux ministres en charge de la Sécurité. Une situation qui reflète, selon les partis de l'opposition, une certaine méfiance d'une majorité chiite bien décidée à garder le pouvoir. □



Dans la région de Kirkouk, à 250 km au nord de Bagdad, six explosions ont eu lieu, tuant au moins huit personnes et blessant 32 autres.

REUTERS/Ako Rasheed



Des eurodéputés demandent aux Kurdes en grève de la faim de cesser leur mouvement

STRASBOURG, 18 avril 2012 (AFP)

UNE VINGTAINE de députés européens ont demandé mercredi à 15 militants kurdes en grève de la faim depuis le 1er mars à Strasbourg de cesser cette action qui met leur vie en danger, tout en apportant leur soutien à leurs revendications.

"Nous soutenons votre demande par rapport à M. Öcalan, qui est à l'isolement depuis des mois: il a le droit de voir ses avocats et sa famille", a notamment déclaré Jürgen Klute, coordinateur de la question kurde au Parlement européen, sur le parvis de l'église Saint-Maurice à Strasbourg où sont rassemblés les grévistes de la faim.

"Mais personnellement je pense que vous devriez arrêter votre grève de la faim. Grâce à votre action votre message a maintenant été bien entendu par les institutions européennes et il ne sert à rien de continuer", a-t-il ajouté.

Les grévistes de la faim demandent au Comité pour la prévention de la torture (CPT) d'envoyer une délégation sur l'île prison turque d'Imrali, où est retenu le leader du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) Abdullah Öcalan, pour examiner sa situation. Le leader kurde y purge depuis 1999 une peine de prison à vie.

Les dix hommes et cinq femmes en grève de la faim ont également reçu le soutien de Leyla Zana, députée du Parti pour la Paix et la Démocratie en Turquie. Cette figure de la contestation kurde avait notamment été arrêtée

en 1994 pour avoir prêté serment en langue kurde au Parlement turc.

"Il faut trouver une solution politique et pacifique à la question kurde. Je comprends votre souffrance et je vous demande d'arrêter cette grève de la faim", a-t-elle dit devant une assistance d'environ 200 personnes.

L'ancien avocat de Nelson Mandela, le Sud-Africain Essa Moosa, a lui aussi pris la parole et dit son "inquiétude" quant à l'état de santé des grévistes de la faim.

Ceux-ci n'absorbent que des boissons sucrées ou salées depuis 49 jours. Certains sont très faibles et ont été hospitalisés mais ils refusent tout traitement, selon l'un des grévistes, Fuat Kav, un écrivain et journaliste qui a par le passé été emprisonné durant plus de 20 ans en Turquie.

Après les interventions de ces diverses personnalités mercredi les grévistes de la faim ont déclaré qu'ils allaient examiner la situation avant de prendre une décision dans les jours à venir sur la suite à donner à leur mouvement.

Au printemps 2007, 18 militants kurdes avaient déjà observé une grève de la faim pendant 39 jours à Strasbourg. Ils avaient finalement obtenu que le CPT envoie une délégation auprès d'Abdullah Öcalan.

Abdullah Öcalan, purge depuis 1999, en solitaire, une peine de prison à vie sur l'île-prison d'Imrali, au sud d'Istanbul. Condamné à mort le 29 juin 1999, Öcalan, surnommé "Apo", 62 ans, doit la vie au parlement turc qui a aboli la peine de mort en août 2002 dans le but de rapprocher le pays, candidat à l'Union européenne, des normes européennes. ○

Le Monde
Mercredi 18 avril 2012

Au Liban, les islamistes mobilisent contre Al-Assad

Tripoli
Envoyée spéciale

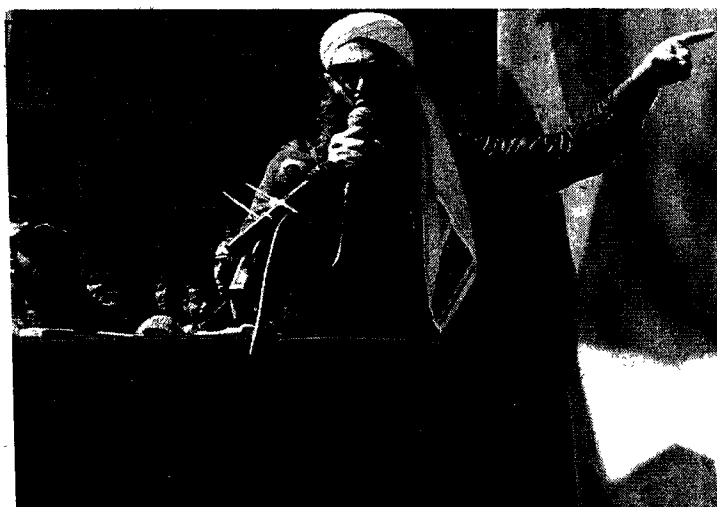
La libération de Jérusalem passe par Damas !», « Vous [les Assad] finirez comme les Kadhafi, nous briserons votre royaume ! ». La voix de l'imam résonne dans le quartier populaire d'Abou Samra, à Tripoli (nord du Liban), lors du prêche du vendredi.

La deuxième ville du Liban sort de sa torpeur. Tripoli, dont l'économie sinistrée et la pauvreté des faubourgs sont souvent relevées, est devenue l'un des terrains majeurs de la mobilisation en faveur de la révolte syrienne. C'est dans ses hôpitaux que sont accueillis la plupart des blessés venant de Syrie. Quelque 3 000 réfugiés syriens sont installés dans ce bastion sunnite. Et presque chaque vendredi, au sortir de la prière, des manifestations anti-Assad y ont lieu.

La dernière en date s'est déroulée le 13 avril. Des jeunes hommes ont brandi le drapeau de la révolution syrienne à trois étoiles rouges – un symbole souvent arboré dans les rues de Tripoli. Certains portaient aussi l'étendard noir des fondamentalistes. Les mouvements islamistes sunnites (des Frères musulmans aux ultraconservateurs salafistes) ancrés à Tripoli comptent en effet parmi les principaux organisateurs de ces rassemblements qui drainent des centaines de manifestants. « *Bachar, bouchar!* », « *Nous sommes tous Syriens!* », « *A mort Bachar! A mort le Hezbollah!* », peut-on entendre parmi les slogans.

« *Le régime syrien est criminel. En tant que musulman, je ne peux pas accepter la répression en Syrie* », explique Hussein, habitant de Diniyé (région de Tripoli) et sympathisant du parti Hezb Al-Tahrir, qui prône l'établissement du califat et mobilise régulièrement ses partisans le vendredi. « *Les gens de Tripoli sont en colère. D'après moi, le régime doit être sunnite en Syrie, à l'image de la majorité de la population. Mais je ne souhaite pas un Etat religieux* », explique Mohammed, qui participe aux protestations. Déçu par les partis traditionnels, le jeune homme est désormais engagé dans l'aide sociale aux réfugiés syriens avec un imam de son quartier.

Dans ce domaine, les mouvements islamistes sont très actifs.



L'imam radical Ahmed Al-Assir anime un rassemblement anti-Assad à Wadi Khaled, à la frontière syrienne, le 1^{er} avril.

Dar El-Chifa, l'hôpital de la Jamaa Islamiya, la branche libanaise des Frères musulmans, situé près d'Abou Samra, soigne des rescapés de l'enfer syrien. « *La cause de la révolution syrienne est importante pour nous. Des gens sont tués, alors qu'ils ne demandent que la liberté* », indique Abdallah Daboussi, responsable de l'association médicale des Frères musulmans.

Derrière cette mobilisation, il y a certes un réflexe de solidarité sunnite, mais aussi un désir de revanche sur le régime de Damas. Personne n'a oublié, à Tripoli, les années d'occupation syrienne (1976-2005) marquées par une sévère répression contre les islamistes. Pour certains, c'est à cette époque que tout a basculé. « *J'avais quinze ans quand les services syriens m'ont arrêté, sans raison. Ils m'ont jeté en prison, torturé. Quand je suis sorti, ma chemise ensanglantée collait à ma peau. J'ai décidé que je me battrais contre*

l'injustice », raconte, pour expliquer son ralliement au salafisme, Nabil Rahim, 40 ans, vêtu d'un kamis à la mode pakistanaise.

Ahmad Moustapha Mohammed, 46 ans, membre de l'association islamique Al-Bachaer qui soutient les réfugiés syriens, a quitté Tripoli du temps de l'occupation : « *J'avais étudié la charia [droit islamique], je pratiquais. Je me sentais menacé: quand les Syriens voyaient un barbu, ils pensaient qu'il appartenait au Tawhid [mouvement islamiste puissant et antisyrrien au début des années 1980, aujourd'hui minoritaire et prosyrien] et le tuaient.* » Il est rentré d'exil en 2007, deux ans après le retrait syrien du Liban.

La mobilisation des islamistes s'explique aussi par le vide laissé par l'exécutif libanais, dominé par la coalition du Hezbollah, prosyrienne. Ces mouvements reprochent aussi au Courant du futur, la formation sunnite dirigée par Saad Hariri, son manque d'implica-

tion auprès des réfugiés syriens. Ils capitalisent sur la traditionnelle méfiance des sunnites à l'égard du Hezbollah, ravivée par les violences meurtrières de mai 2008, quand le Parti de Dieu s'était momentanément emparé des quartiers sunnites de Beyrouth.

Nabil Rahim, accusé en 2007 d'appartenir à Al-Qaïda et détenu pendant plus de trois ans, dément toutefois l'existence d'une filière

La mobilisation des islamistes s'explique par le vide laissé par l'exécutif libanais, dominé par la coalition du Hezbollah

de soutien à la lutte armée en Syrie. « *Si des gens partent combattre en Syrie, c'est de façon individuelle. C'est une lutte légitime, même si elle n'est pas dans l'intérêt du Liban et de la Syrie* », affirme celui qui organisa, dans les années 2000, le transfert depuis le Liban de djihadistes vers l'Irak. Selon une source informée, des aspirants au djihad auraient cependant rejoint le nord du Liban.

La contestation du pouvoir syrien n'est pas du goût de tous les islamistes sunnites de Tripoli. D'Hicham Minqara, chef de l'une des branches du Tawhid, on attendrait, à tout le moins, un mot de condamnation de Damas. L'homme a passé quatorze ans dans les geôles baasistes, de 1986 à 2000, avant d'être relâché dans le cadre d'un accord avec le régime syrien. A peine dénonce-t-il les « *violences des deux parties* » (régime et opposition). Pour cet allié du Hezbollah, l'affaire est entendue : « *La chute du régime syrien n'est profitable qu'à Israël. Je ne défends pas l'injustice, mais je défends la résistance.* » ■

LAURE STEPHAN

Tripoli et l'onde de choc de la révolte syrienne

Avril 2011 Premières manifestations de soutien à la révolte syrienne à Tripoli.

Juin 2011 Affrontements entre quartiers sunnites et alaouites, après des rassemblements hostiles au pouvoir syrien. Six morts.

Février 2012 Mobilisation massi-

ve contre la répression à Homs à l'appel de mouvements islamistes. Nouveaux affrontements entre quartiers sunnites et alaouites. Trois morts.

Avril 2012 3000 réfugiés syriens sont installés à Tripoli, selon le Haut Commissariat aux réfugiés des Nations unies.

Strasbourg : Après 52 jours, des Kurdes cessent leur grève de la faim



La visite d'eurodéputés il y a quelques jours aux grévistes de la faim. Photo Dominique Gutekunst

Quinze militants kurdes, en grève de la faim depuis 52 jours à Strasbourg pour obtenir du Conseil de l'Europe qu'il intervienne en faveur du leader kurde emprisonné Abdullah Öcalan, ont annoncé samedi qu'ils cessaient leur mouvement car celui-ci a «atteint ses objectifs».

Les activistes, venus de plusieurs pays d'Europe, demandaient notamment que le Conseil de l'Europe envoie à Istanbul des experts de son Comité pour la prévention de la torture (CPT) afin d'y examiner les conditions de détention de M. Öcalan, lequel n'a reçu aucune visite depuis plus de huit mois.

«Notre grève de la faim a atteint ses objectifs», ont affirmé les militants dans un communiqué, ajoutant: «A partir de ce jour, nous mettons fin à cette action». («Nous sommes aujourd'hui convaincus par les dernières déclarations que les institutions européennes vont effectuer les premiers pas dans la voie de la cessation de l'isolement» d'Öcalan, déclarent les militants, qui évoquent des déclarations en ce sens du secrétariat du Conseil de l'Europe et de la présidence du Parlement européen.

Les grévistes de la faim s'étaient installés depuis le 1er mars dans une église strasbourgeoise. Leur mouvement a été ponctué par de nombreuses manifestations de soutien, dont certaines ont rassemblé plus d'un millier de Kurdes, notamment devant les institutions européennes.

Mercredi, une vingtaine de députés européens leur avaient demandé de cesser cette action, tout en apportant leur soutien à leurs revendications.

Au printemps 2007, 18 militants kurdes avaient déjà observé une grève de la faim pendant 39 jours à Strasbourg. Ils avaient finalement obtenu que le CPT envoie une délégation auprès d'Abdullah Öcalan.

Abdullah Öcalan purge depuis 1999, en solitaire, une peine de prison à vie sur l'île-prison d'Imrali, au sud d'Istanbul. Il a été condamné à mort en juin 1999 mais sa peine a ensuite été commuée en détention à perpétuité. La Turquie est l'un des 47 Etats-membres du Conseil de l'Europe. (AFP)

□□□



La Turquie demande au leader kurde Barzani de sévir contre le PKK

ANKARA, 20 avril 2012 (AFP)

LA TURQUIE a demandé vendredi au dirigeant kurde irakien Massoud Barzani, en visite à Ankara, d'adopter des mesures plus sévères contre les rebelles kurdes turcs, retranchés sur son territoire, a indiqué une source diplomatique turque à l'AFP.

"Une lutte plus efficace contre le PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan)" de l'administration kurde d'Irak a été évoquée au cours d'un entretien du ministre turc des Affaires étrangères Ahmet Davutoglu avec le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, a précisé cette source sous couvert d'anonymat.

"Les deux parties sont convenues de poursuivre le dialogue sur ces sujets" qui comprennent également la politique intérieure en Irak, a-t-on ajouté de même source.

M. Barzani a pour sa part indiqué à des journalistes que son administration allait "employer toutes les méthodes, y compris les pressions et les bons conseils" pour convaincre les rebelles d'abandonner les armes dans le nord de l'Irak.

"Si le PKK choisit les armes, je ne lui permettrai pas" d'utiliser le Kurdistan

irakien, a-t-il affirmé, cité par l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Jeudi, au terme d'une rencontre à Istanbul avec le dirigeant kurde, le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan s'en est une nouvelle fois pris à son homologue irakien chiite Nouri al-Maliki, l'accusant de monopoliser le pouvoir et d'"égocentrisme" politique, discriminant notamment les groupes sunnites dans son gouvernement, rapporte la presse turque.

"Les développements en Irak ne présagent rien de bon", a-t-il ajouté.

La Turquie réclame de longue date un soutien plus actif de l'administration Barzani contre les rebelles du PKK, qui disposent de bases arrière en Irak d'où ils lancent des attaques en Turquie.

"Si le PKK dépose les armes, les opérations (armées) se termineront", a en outre déclaré M. Erdogan au Qatar, où il est en visite, selon les médias.

La visite du dirigeant irakien intervient à un moment de tension politique chez le voisin irakien accentuée par le mandat d'arrêt lancé en décembre contre le vice-président Tarek al-Hachémi, un sunnite, accusé de diriger un gang de tueurs, qui s'est réfugié dans un premier temps au Kurdistan irakien.

M. Hachémi est actuellement à Istanbul où il a eu un entretien avec M. Barzani. Il bénéficie de la bienveillance du gouvernement islamo-conservateur turc qui dirige un pays largement sunnite.

M. Barzani a indiqué vendredi que M. al-Hachémi pouvait, s'il le souhaitait, revenir dans le Kurdistan irakien.○

No fans of Assad, Syria's Kurds distrust uprising

By ZEINA KARAM
Associated Press

BEIRUT—Syria's Kurds, who have long complained of discrimination under President Bashar Assad, would seem a natural fit to join the revolt against his rule. Instead, they are growing increasingly distrustful of the opposition who they see as no more likely to grant them their rights.

Kurdish parties angrily pulled out of a recent conference aimed at unifying the opposition ranks after participants ignored their demands for more rights and recognition in a post-Assad Syria.

A few days after the withdrawal, while the rest of the country was protesting against Assad, Kurds in their main cities of Qamishli and Hasakeh protested against the predominantly Sunni Arab opposition, demanding it back a system that would give them greater say over their own affairs. "We want federalism," some protesters shouted, carrying red, white and green Kurdish flags.

Tens of thousands of Kurds have been joining in weekly protests against Assad's regime. But suspicion of the opposition has kept many of Syria's estimated 2.5 million Kurds—more than 10 percent of the population—sitting on the fence amid the country's turmoil. As a result, they effectively join Christians, Alawites and other key minorities whose fear for the future if Assad's secular regime collapses has kept them from joining the uprising in force.

Both the Damascus government and the opposition have courted the Kurds but neither have been willing to make full concessions. The Kurds are also hampered by

their own divisions among multiple parties and factions, one of which is accused of openly siding with Assad's regime.

"The Kurds are being used as political pawns in the battle between Assad's regime and opposition forces," said Fares Tammo, whose father, Mashaal Tammo, one of the most vocal and charismatic Kurdish opposition figures, was assassinated in October by gunmen who burst into his apartment in northern Syria.

The Kurds' hesitation also underlines a major problem for the opposition: its overwhelmingly Sunni Arab nature and the perception that it is dominated by Islamic hard-liners who will discriminate against minorities if given a chance at power.

Omar Hossino, a Washington-based Syrian-American researcher, said it is key to the uprising's success for the main opposition umbrella group, the Syrian National Council, to integrate the Kurds.

"This in turn could not only reassure other minority groups fearful of Arab Sunni Islamist majoritarianism, but would also guarantee a more pluralist regime in the post-Assad period," said Hossino.

Still, many in the opposition react to Kurdish demands much like the Assad regime always has. They see the demands as a call to split the country, particularly Kurds' hope for a federal system that would give them self-rule similar to northern Iraq's autonomous region of Kurdistan.

The SNC's chief further angered Kurds with an interview published Monday in which he told Kurds not to cling to the "useless illusion" of federalism.



In a Sunday, Dec. 25, 2011 photo, a Syrian Kurdish boy who lives in Lebanon carries a banner during a protest outside the Arab League office in Beirut, Lebanon. Syria's Kurds, who have long complained of discrimination under Assad, would seem a natural fit to join the revolt against his rule. Instead, they are growing increasingly distrustful of the opposition who they see as no more likely to grant them their rights. (AP Photo/Bilal Hussein)

"It is interpreted as a Kurdish demand for separatism," Burhan Ghalioun told the Iraqi Kurdish newspaper Rudaw. "The SNC refuses to give the Kurds self-rule because there is no part of Syria where Kurds represent 100 percent of the population ... There is no such thing as Syrian Kurdistan."

He said that if Kurds throw their weight behind the uprising, it would "strengthen their position in the future to demand their rights" and to have a greater role "in Syria in general."

Mustafa Osso, secretary general of the Azadi Kurdish Party in Syria, said Ghalioun's comments will "discourage Kurdish parties from joining the SNC."

"The Kurds have a right to self-determination and one of the options is federalism," he told The Associated Press.

"Federalism is absolutely not the same thing as separatism, which we reject."

Kurds are the largest ethnic minority in Syria, centered in the poor northeastern provinces of Hasakeh and Qamishli, wedged between the borders of Turkey and Iraq. Areas of the capital Damascus and Syria's largest city of Aleppo also have sizable Kurdish communities. The Kurdish ethnic group stretches into contiguous areas of Turkey,

Iraq and Iran.

Syrian Kurds have long complained of neglect and discrimination. Assad's government for years argued they are not citizens at all.

They rose up in 2004, clashing with security forces in Qamishli, the capital of Syria's Kurdish heartland, after a brawl between Kurdish and Arab supporters of rival soccer teams. The unrest spread to the nearby cities of Hasakeh and Aleppo. At least 25 people were killed, and the clashes gave Damascus a pretext to further crack down on the Kurds.

Now Assad's regime has sought to assuage the Kurds enough to prevent them from joining the current revolt against his rule, which erupted early last year. Security forces have refrained from using deadly force against protests that have occurred in Kurdish areas.

Early on, Assad ceded ground on a major Kurdish demand: In April last year, he granted citizenship to some 200,000 Kurds who were registered as aliens before. The decree excluded thousands of other Kurds known as "maktoumeen," who are unregistered and have no identity cards.

"It was an obvious attempt to pacify us," said Amina Farman, a



37-year-old Kurd who was among those who acquired citizenship. "I would have been happy and grateful to get it had the circumstances been different. Now it just feels like a meaningless buyout," she said by phone from Qamishli.

Farman, who was born in Syria, can now for the first time vote, work legally and own property. But the regime still bans Kurds from publicly speaking in their own language or teaching it, prevents Kurdish political and cultural public gatherings and treats Kurds as second-class citizens.

Still, Farman is also not convin-

ced by the opposition and is concerned about the growing militarization of the uprising.

"There's something not quite right," she said of the opposition's disregard of Kurdish rights.

"We want to bring democracy to Syria," she said. "We don't want to replace tyranny with tyranny."

Late last month, an opposition conference in Istanbul ignored Kurdish demands it support political decentralization and Kurdish rights in a post-Assad state. In response, the main Kurdish umbrella group, the

Kurdish National Council, walked out of the gathering.

A few days later at a "Friends of Syria" meeting in Istanbul on April 3, SNC head Ghalioun read a national charter for the new Syria that included a pledge to uphold Kurdish rights. But the KNC called the wording too vague.

The Kurds are also suspicious about influence over the SNC by Turkey, which has a history of oppressing its own Kurds and which, they believe, does not want them to gain rights in Syria as well.

Turkey is concerned "that the

role played by Kurds in Syria would reflect on Turkey's Kurds, too," the Germany-based Kurdish Center for Legal Studies and Consultancy said in an international appeal for support last week.

Fares Tammo, whose Kurdish Future Movement is the only Kurdish party in the SNC, defends his party's presence in the council.

But, he admits, some of its members "see through chauvinist eyes and try their best to marginalize the Kurdish role."

TODAYS ZAMAN

20 April 2012

Barzani, Erdoğan find common ground against Maliki government

TODAY'S ZAMAN, ANKARA

Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani's two-day talks in Istanbul and Ankara appear to have focused on tensions brewing between Iraq's Shiite-led government and minority Sunnis and Kurds, which Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has described as "ominous."

Barzani had closed-door talks with Erdoğan in Istanbul on Thursday and met with President Abdullah Gül and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in Ankara on Friday. Speaking to reporters about his meeting with Barzani, Erdoğan said both Barzani and the cross-sectarian Iraqiya group are "seriously bothered" by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's policies.

Erdoğan said they had discussed Syria, Iraq and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) issue with Barzani in the meeting, which Deputy Prime Minister Beşir Atalay, Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu and National Intelligence Organization (MIT) Undersecretary Hakan Fidan also attended.

Erdoğan answered questions from the press prior to his visit to Qatar on Thursday. When asked what particular issues were discussed with Barzani, Erdoğan replied that he was not going to disclose the details, adding that, in summary, Iraq was the priority issue that con-



stituted the agenda of the meeting.

Erdoğan said the developments in Iraq were ominous. "The behavior of the current prime minister towards his own coalition partners and his self-centered attitude and approach of pushing limits in Iraq seriously bothers Barzani, the cross-sectarian Iraqiya group and the Shiite groups. These developments affect the process negatively. We [Erdoğan and Barzani] focused on these issues," the prime minister said.

Barzani said Maliki was holding power in one hand, although in the constitution the balance of power was clear. "Iraq is for all of us. The political tension in Iraq must be solved according to the existing constitutional order. The share of money and power is clear in the constitution. Baghdad is slow in transferring funds to the Kurdistan Regional Government

(KRG) and the amount is often too low," said Barzani.

Erdoğan also said developments in Syria were evaluated during the meeting. He added that their [Erdoğan and Barzani] approaches towards the Syrian crisis correlated.

Erdoğan underlined that the PKK terrorist organization was the third issue on the table and that both sides [Erdoğan and Barzani] had parallel approaches against PKK. "Barzani said they were disturbed by the PKK and that it was impossible to approve the approaches of the terrorist organization. We [Erdoğan and Barzani] will be in touch. The two countries also engage in economic cooperation. We will act together on energy and infrastructure," said Erdoğan.

Barzani also met with Iraq's fugitive Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi in Istanbul on Thursday. Al-Hashemi, the top Sunni Muslim official in Iraq's Shiite Muslim-dominated government, said that he and Barzani discussed recent trips to the United States and Gulf countries.

Al-Hashemi, for whom the Shiite-led central government issued an arrest warrant in late 2011, arrived in Turkey earlier this month after his visits to Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Hashemi recently stated that he will return to Iraq and will not seek political asylum in neighboring countries. □



Anxious to keep lid on Iraq, Obama woos Kurds



April 17, 2012 - By Alister Bull - (Reuters) -

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama, facing a damaging election-year problem if Iraq's political crisis worsens, has launched an urgent behind-the-scenes push to ease tensions between the Baghdad central government and the Kurds.

Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurds' semi-autonomous regional government, paid a quiet visit to the White House on April 4 and left with backing for two long-standing requests that could help build the worried Kurds' confidence in U.S. support.

Barzani's heated criticism last month of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has fanned concern the country could splinter, potentially setting off a fresh civil war.

Reuters has learned that to demonstrate U.S. support, the White House and Congress agreed to lift a designation that treats Kurdistan's two main political parties as if they were terrorist groups, complicating members' travel to the United States. In addition, the U.S. consulate in Erbil will begin issuing U.S. visas before the end of 2012.

Since withdrawing the last U.S. troops in December, Obama has, at least publicly, put little focus on Iraq, and critics view the latest gestures as not much more than damage control.

But Obama still has a lot at stake in Iraq. If violence explodes, it could tarnish Obama's bragging rights with U.S. voters for concluding the unpopular war.

And worsening relations between the Shi'ite-led central government and semi-autonomous Kurdistan could thwart White House efforts to lower gasoline prices. The Kurds halted oil exports to Baghdad on April 1, citing a payment dispute.

CIVIL WAR

Barzani last month delivered a sharp denunciation of Maliki's government and suggested he could seek a referendum of some kind on the Kurdish region's relations with Baghdad - although he stopped far short of breaking a taboo by making explicit reference to independence.

Analysts say the probability of the Kurds declaring independence is low, although not zero.

"If Kurds were to declare independence in the near term there is a very high likelihood that that would provoke a war with Baghdad," said Kenneth Pollack, a former CIA analyst.

The White House promises to the Kurdish president "constitute useful takeaways for Barzani but they are probably about the absolute minimum that he would have found acceptable," said Pollack, now a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution's Saban Center for Middle East Policy.

The goal of the Washington meetings in early April, both the White House and the Kurds said, was to re-commit to a relationship that both value. Obama dropped in on one of the meetings Vice President Joe Biden hosted for Barzani that day.

Biden assured Barzani of U.S. backing for the Kurds, but he also cau-

tioned that Washington could not pick sides between Kurdistan and Baghdad, a senior administration official said.

"Neither relationship can come at the expense of the other relationship," the official said. "A red line for us is that all this must be done in a way that is consistent with the (Iraqi) constitution."

ENERGY SECURITY

Iraq boasts some of the world's largest oil reserves and could provide essential extra production capacity to help stabilize world oil markets, at a moment when gasoline prices are one of the most pressing issues for U.S. voters.

And while foreign policy hasn't yet been a major factor in the U.S. presidential campaign, both parties are likely to sharpen their focus on it ahead of the one-year anniversary of Osama bin Laden's killing by U.S. commandos on May 2.

Qubad Talabani, son of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and the representative for the Kurdistan Regional Government in Washington, said the Kurdish delegation was happy with Biden's words of support to Barzani.

"The reaffirmation of the commitment to Kurdistan and the Kurdish people went down very well," he said.

"For us, we're naturally an insecure people, and given the history that we've had, we're expecting at some point or another to be let down again," he said.

The Kurds, severely persecuted under late Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, have become increasingly nervous since U.S. troops left.

Indeed, the troop departure was followed almost immediately by a political crisis sparked by Maliki's demand for the arrest of a Sunni Muslim vice president, who fled to Kurdistan, where Barzani defied the prime minister by granting him shelter.

SEE NO EVIL

Critics of Obama's Iraq policy complain that the White House is primarily concerned on keeping a lid on events until after the November 6 U.S. election.

"I think the administration is of the mind-set of 'see no evil, hear no evil' and it wants Iraq to be invisible for the political debate in the United States," said Ned Parker, a visiting fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

To encourage the Kurds to remain within Iraq's political process, the administration is bowing to their long-standing plea to amend the status of the main political parties, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Under the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act, members of the groups are deemed to be engaged in terrorist activity.

This is not as severe as being designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department. But it means that members of these organizations must get a government exemption to visit or stay in the United States.

An aide to Senator Joe Lieberman, chairman of the Senate Homeland Security Committee, said Lieberman was working on legislation to remove the designation.

In addition, the U.S. decision to begin issuing visas from its consulate in Arbil from the end of 2012 will save Kurds who want to visit the United States the expense and hazard of journeying to Baghdad to get a visa or traveling to a U.S. consulate outside of Iraq.

State Department spokesman Michael Lavalley confirmed this move, which had been long sought by the Kurds, but stressed in a statement that it was part of a broader effort to "work with the government of Iraq to continue to normalize our consular services throughout the country."

OIL SAFETY VALVE

U.S. officials also offered to help the Kurds in talks with Baghdad to resolve the oil payments dispute and get the exports flowing once

again, the Kurds said.

The amounts involved are modest - around 50,000 barrels per day from Kurdistan compared with Iraq's national output of some 2.6 million barrels, according to published 2011 estimates by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

But the dispute highlights the country's ongoing failure to agree to a national oil law, potentially dampening the willingness of big foreign oil firms to make the investments necessary to exploit these resources.

The Kurds currently have no independent export route for their oil outside of the central government.

"They have a lot of potential," said Ben Lando of the Iraq Oil Report. "There are substantial oil and gas reserves but there has not been a qualified number put on that and in many places exploration is still ongoing." □

Al Maliki calls Turkey a 'hostile state'

Relations reach a new low as Iraqi pm says Erdogan has a sectarian agenda

Gulf News

Reuters & AFP

Baghdad: Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki has branded Turkey a "hostile state" with a sectarian agenda, the latest in a series of bitter exchanges between the neighbours.

Al Maliki was responding to comments made by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Thursday in which Erdogan accused the Iraqi leader of fanning tensions between the country's Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds with his "self-centred" ways.

"The recent announcements by Erdogan represent another return to flagrant interference in Iraqi internal affairs," Al Maliki said in a statement on his website.

"His announcements have a sectarian dimension. To insist on continuing these internal and regional policies will harm Turkish interests and make it a hostile state for all."

Al Maliki accused Turkey of trying to establish "hegemony" in the region.

Sectarian tensions flared in Iraq in December when the Shiite-led government tried to remove Sunni Deputy Prime Minister Saleh Al Mutlaq and sought an arrest warrant for Sunni Vice-President Tareq Al Hashemi on charges he ran death squads.

Dispute

Erdogan made his comments on



Thursday after a meeting in Istanbul with Masoud Barzani, the president of the autonomous Kurdistan region in north Iraq, who has cultivated close relations with Ankara.

After closed-door talks with Barzani, Erdogan stoked further tensions with Iraq by accusing Al Maliki of taking an "egocentric approach" in politics.

"The current prime minister's treatment toward his coalition partners, his egocentric approach within Iraqi politics... seriously concern Shiite groups, Mr Barzani and the Iraqiya group," the main Sunni-backed political bloc, Erdogan was quoted by local media as saying.

Erdogan has warned before that Turkey, which is mainly Sunni but officially secular, would not remain silent if a sectarian conflict were to erupt in Iraq.

The city of Kirkuk is at the centre of a dispute between the central government and the Kurdish region, which claims the city and the region's rich oil reserves.

The rift between Baghdad and the Kurds recently worsened when the Kurdistan Regional Government said it

was halting oil exports because the central government was not paying oil firms operating in the north. Turkey is worried that the violence in Syria and growing tensions in Iraq could lead to a wider conflict between Shiite and Sunnis in the region.

Tense

It is a new low for Iraq-Turkey ties, although relations have been tense for some time.

Earlier this year, Erdogan warned Al Maliki against fomenting sectarian tensions, which Al Maliki said "provoked all Iraqis," and the two countries called in each other's respective ambassadors to express their anger.

Sunni-majority Turkey and Shiite-majority Iraq have taken sharply different tacks on violence in Syria, an issue that has furthered sectarian tension and division between Sunni and Shiite states in the region.

In Syria, the regime of President Bashar Al Assad, a member of the minority Alawite sect which is an offshoot of Shiite Islam, is carrying out a bloody crackdown on a Sunni-led uprising against his rule in which thousands of people have been killed.

Erdogan has called for Al Assad to step down, while Al Maliki has said non-interference in Syria and opposition to arming either side in the conflict is in Iraq's best interest.

Iraq is Turkey's second largest trading partner after Germany, with trade reaching \$12 billion (Dh44 billion) last year, more than half of which was with the Kurdistan region. □



April 19, 2012

Iraqi Kurdish Region President, Turkish Officials Meet, Discuss Syria

Dorian Jones | Istanbul

voanews.com

The head of the Iraqi Kurdish region, Masoud Barzani, is visiting Turkey in a deepening of relations built on trade and growing shared regional interests. But the unrest in Syria poses both a challenge and opportunity for the two parties.

The Iraqi Kurdistan regional President Masoud Barzani started his two-day visit Thursday by meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. One of the key topics of talks is reported to be the crisis in neighboring Syria.

Sinan Ulgen is a former senior Turkish diplomat who now heads the Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies. He said Ankara has deep concern about the role Kurds will play if the Syrian regime falls to government opponents.

"In a post-Assad era, if the Syrian Kurds, possibly with the support of the Iraqi Kurdish leadership, want to obtain a degree of autonomy – if not to say independence, that can fuel secessionist tendency of other Kurds in the region," Ulgen said. "That is certainly a risk. But Barzani, before coming to Turkey, he also made a number of statements to trying to assuage those fears."

International relations expert Soli Ozel



People stand in front of a Kurdish flag during a protest against Syria's President Bashar al-Assad and a celebration of Nowruz held by Qamishli's Kurdish community, March 21, 2012.

Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan (R) and Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani shake hands before their meeting in Istanbul, April 19, 2012. Photo: Reuters



of the Turkish newspaper Haberturk said with Syrian Kurds making up a large part of the rebel group PKK, the Syrian crisis poses a dilemma to Ankara. The largest Kurdish population lives in Turkey and for more than three decades the PKK has been fighting the Turkish state for greater rights.

"You see Turkey, on one hand, does not want Damascus's grip to weaken in order to keep the Kurds in place. On the other hand, it wants Assad regime to go. It is very difficult act," said Ozel.

Still, the Turkish government is rolling out the red carpet for the Iraqi Kurdish leader. With a meeting scheduled Friday with Turkish President Abdullah Gul, the Barzani visit is being described in the Turkish media as akin to an official state visit by a leader of a country.

In the past few years, relations have dramatically improved between the Turkish government and the Iraqi Kurdish leader.

Cengiz Aktar, professor of International relations at Istanbul's Bahcesehir University, said the warm reception is an indication of the importance to Ankara of Barzani.

"Some time ago he was considered as a local bandit. Now he is considered as a statesman," said Aktar. "The main tie is economic, and Turkish industrialists and tradesmen are very busy and very active. It's very important, it's very useful, it's very healthy and this is how relations are developing. And there is so much trust on especially on Masoud Barzani. The Turkish government is trying to subcontract the solution of its

own Kurdish problem to him."

Barzani is expected to discuss steps to end the PKK insurgency against Turkey. He has resisted calls by Ankara to move against PKK bases in northern Iraq. The Iraqi Kurdish leader is reported to be planning to call for a PKK cease-fire in the coming weeks.

But it is a reciprocal relationship.

Turkish authorities are offering strong support to Barzani in his political struggle with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki over the distribution of power and control of resources. Former Turkish envoy Ulgen said common interests are forging a strong relationship.

"This is a grand equation. And the more Turkey and Iraq Kurdish leadership acquire common points of convergence, the more confidence will emerge on the two sides. We have already seen signs of that: the fact that they now see eye-to-eye on the future of Iraq and trying to push back against Maliki," said Ulgen. "It is also helping to discuss more constructively the role Syrian Kurds can play in the future of Syria."

Several Syrian Kurdish opposition groups are using the Iraqi Kurdish region as a place to meet. Analysts say Ankara may well be looking to Barzani as a moderating force on their demands and to persuade them to unit behind the main opposition Syrian National Council. □



April 20, 2012

Unraveling the Kurdish Conundrum

Morton Abramowitz, Jessica Sims

For the last century, some 30 million Kurds in the Middle East and Turkey got the short end of the stick. They were the unacknowledged, often-persecuted minority in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. They had little ability to affect the politics of these countries. But that began to change after the first Gulf War, when the Kurds of northern Iraq gained significant autonomy. And now the Arab uprisings have awakened a Kurdish consciousness throughout the region.

While Kurds have started talking more to each other, there has been no coming together and no unified Kurdish area is remotely in the offing—but as the situations in Syria, Iraq and Iran change, a new status for the region's Kurds is coming. To understand and protect its interests in the outcome, Washington must pay close attention to the dynamics at work.

The United States has a checkered history with the Kurds, but it has done at least one impressive thing. In 1991, it established a protected area for the Kurds in Iraq that allowed them to create a successful, quasi-independent state after decades of division and oppression. The unexpected result was something of a beacon for all Kurds.

Despite this new model, there is still disunity and disagreement among the various Kurdish groups. But the instability that reigns throughout the region will also transform the Kurdish situation in uncertain ways. Turkey's continued struggle with its Kurdish population, Iraq's fracturing political scene and the Syrian upheavals are opening new vistas for the Kurds.

Nobody can easily predict how today's dust settles. But the United States wants the Kurds to emerge in better shape and not become an issue that further divides countries and the region. That is no easy job in an area that hardly plays to Washington's strong suit.

FOUR STATES, MULTIPLE DIVISIONS

Turkey has the largest Kurdish population in the region but has not resolved its long-standing Kurdish problem. After thirty years of war (recently with significant U.S. help) and forty thousand dead, it has not vanquished the terrorist group PKK,

despite the fact that its long-revered leader has languished in jail for thirteen years. The PKK still dominates the Kurdish political consciousness. While the lives of many Kurds have vastly improved with Turkey's economic growth, Ankara has never delivered much in terms of Kurdish political interests because of Turkish nationalism and deep domestic political divisions within the country on the Kurdish issue.

The ruling AKP party is the first to try to tackle the long-festering Kurdish problem. And the Turkish government may have the opportunity to make real progress on the Kurdish matter this year as it drafts a new constitution that could deal with such major issues as Kurdish identity and education. Unfortunately, major reform presently seems unlikely. Turkey is imprisoning many Kurdish politicians and once again intensifying its war against the PKK, while hoping that Iraq's Kurds will now do more to control the PKK elements long established in their territory. That is likely to be an uphill battle. Yet many in the Turkish media now recognize and state openly that major change is necessary.

Most Turks strongly opposed the creation of the protected zone in northern Iraq after the first Gulf War, fearing it would lead to an independent Kurdistan and enormously impact Turkey's Kurds. They were right, but the impact was far less than they feared. Indeed, after a period of isolating the KRG, Ankara changed its approach and established strong trade ties, considerable investment and a degree of political cooperation unthinkable a decade ago.

Iraqi Kurds are by far the most successful and politically stable group, but they have their share of problems. They differ from other major Iraqi groups on a number of important issues, including the status of Kirkuk, and the KRG may have overstepped its bounds by signing oil deals in disputed territories. Tensions are also escalating over sectarian differences and Prime Minister Maliki's authoritarian tendencies. Many Kurds see rising violence in the rest of Iraq sinking the ship of state. If the leaks worsen, independence could well beckon.

KRG relations with Turkey and its inclination toward pragmatism and economic growth seem to mitigate the fear of a unilaterally declared Kurdistan, although some see these factors as generating hopes

for independence. Iraqi Kurds, moreover, also know that a call for independence would be met with hostility on all sides, which seems to have led them to the view that greater political and economic autonomy might be the more viable alternative to an independent state. Moreover, the KRG has no security guarantee from Washington and would have to turn to Turkey for help if it got into trouble. Keeping a unified Iraqi state avoids adding fuel to the Kurdish fire in Turkey.

Meanwhile, Syria's Kurds largely have escaped violence so far. But they are divided over how to proceed in the wake of Syria's terrible descent. While a majority in the northeast came out against Assad, the Syrian Democratic Union Party (PYD) in central and northwest Syria supports Assad and has strong links with the PKK. Even those who want to see Assad go are skeptical that the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated opposition would recognize their ethnic rights—something the opposition so far has failed to do. Kurds are waiting to see how the Syrian situation evolves and how long Assad is likely to be around. If Assad continues to hang on, division among Kurds will harden and diminish the more moderate Kurdish parties. KRG prime minister Barzani has tried to be a political broker for the fractured Syrian Kurds, but his first attempt at a council failed to produce any common approach. A planned meeting in June to bring together Kurds from the major parties in the region will be important symbolically if not determinative politically.

Turks and increasingly the Turkish press closely follow the Kurdish scene in Syria. They remain concerned over PKK activity in the country and their collaboration with Assad, but so far little has happened. The PKK is probably more useful to Assad as a threat against Turkey than serious military efforts, which could bring in the Turkish military. More fundamentally there are latent fears in Turkey regarding the creation of another autonomous Kurdish region or, worse, calls for an independent Kurdish state should Assad leave the scene. (If the truce brokered by Kofi Annan holds, it will be a serious setback for an autonomous Kurdish zone. It could also close the window of opportunity for the Kurds to play a larger political role, as they would remain outside both the government and the opposition.)

Iran currently has perhaps the fewest issues with its Kurdish population. After a recent truce with the PJAK, the PKK-affiliated terrorist group that has been fighting the Iranian state since the late 1990s, the Iranian government has kept its Kurds quiet by giving them nominal participation in elections and government, while periodically executing Kurds who step out of line.

Iranian Kurds' own fractured political parties make the government's job easier. Despite previous support for the PKK and links between the PKK and PJAK, there does not seem to be Iranian or Kurdish interest in violence against Turkey. The Kurdish dimension is seemingly less important for the Iranian government given its other problems. And the Kurds themselves are probably waiting to see what happens between Washington and Tehran.

SEARCHING FOR A KURDISH POLICY

All this complexity makes it difficult for United States to formulate any approach toward the regional Kurdish issue. Washington has no Kurdish policy, only an Iraqi policy in which Kurds are not front and center. The United States remains close to the Iraqi Kurds but refused to give them security assurances when American forces departed. While keeping Iraq united remains the administration's line to Iraqi Kurds, Barzani's recent visit to Washington was tinged with references to independence even as he received a greet-

ing fit for a head of state.

Given the close relationship between President Obama and Turkish prime minister Erdogan on Middle East issues, U.S. and Turkish policies toward Syrian and Iraqi Kurds are being carefully coordinated. But as turbulence continues to shake the region, Turkey's policy toward its own Kurds now has serious implications for the regional Kurdish issue. The Obama administration has stayed quiet on Turkey's domestic Kurdish policy because of long-standing, lingering Turkish fears that the United States is intent on dismembering Turkey for the Kurds. It supports Turkey's efforts against the PKK and provides important intelligence support for fighting the PKK in northern Iraq. It is time, however, for Washington to remind Ankara, at least privately, that failure to address its domestic Kurdish situation harms Turkey's ability to help shape broader Middle East outcomes.

In the near term, both Washington and Ankara want to see Syrian Kurds become part of the government-in-exile Syrian National Council (SNC). This would make the opposition more representative of the Syrian population, deliver a blow to the Syrian regime, and isolate the PYD and PKK, who still support Assad. The United States and Turkey would need to convince the SNC and other opposition that minority rights are in the long-term interest of a future Syrian state and that international support will depend on whether they keep these promises. Turkey will want to be

reassured that U.S. support for the Syrian Kurds will not result in a de facto Syrian version of the KRG—a second autonomous area would be a strong inducement to many Turkish Kurds.

The Kurds have so far benefitted little from the Arab Spring, certainly not yet in Iran. The Kurds are the largest minority in the Middle East, making them the natural beneficiaries of the emergence of more democratic states. But the Kurdish populations in each country remain fractured with no apparent vision for their place in the region and no consensus on whether there should be one.

The United States will need to continue to weigh in with Iraqi Kurds, ensuring their aspirations do not get out of hand while encouraging efforts at mediation among Arab Sunnis and Shiites within Iraq and the Kurds in Syria. Once again, Ankara remains critical: if Turkey can consolidate its growing democracy by making progress with its own Kurds, it will create the basis for a better region, hopefully including a recovering Syria and a more stable Iraq. Washington should support Turkey in such efforts. Time may be growing short.

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TODAYS ZAMAN

20 April 2012

Erdoğan: Military operations will stop if PKK lays down arms

TODAYSZAMAN

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said the Turkish military would "completely" halt military operations against the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) if the organization were to lay down its arms.

"The separatist terrorist organization



Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan responded to questions by reporters on April 20, 2012 in Doha. (Photo: Cihan)

should lay down its arms. This is our call. The stance of the Turkish state is clear once they lay down their arms. It is [our stance] to completely stop military operations. But it is out of question for operations to end unless the organization lays down its arms," Erdoğan said on Friday while responding to questions from reporters in Doha.

When asked whether he discussed the issue with Kurdistan Regional

Government (KRG) President Massoud Barzani during a meeting on Thursday, the Turkish prime minister said although they did not discuss it, he did say the issue of the PKK's laying down its arms is always on Turkey's agenda in talks with northern Iraq's regional administration.

Barzani arrived in Turkey for a two-day visit on Thursday and met with Erdoğan in Istanbul on the same day. He also had talks with President Abdullah Gül and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu on Friday.

Turkey has been fighting the PKK since 1984 and as many as 40,000 people have died since then. Turkey has demanded active support from the Kurdish regional administration in the fight against the terrorist organization, which has several bases in northern Iraq, including its main base in the Kandil Mountains □



En Irak, l'achat de F-16 aux Etats-Unis inquiète le Kurdistan

Le président kurde Massoud Barzani redoute que Bagdad n'utilise ces avions de combat contre son territoire.

ERBIL (Irak), (AFP)

LE CHEF DE la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien Massoud Barzani s'est déclaré opposé à la vente par les Etats-Unis de F-16 à l'Irak tant que Nouri al-Maliki demeurait Premier ministre craignant qu'il ne les utilise contre son territoire.

"Les F-16 ne doivent pas arriver dans les mains de cet homme. Nous devons empêcher qu'il possède ce type d'armes et s'il les obtient, il ne doit pas rester à son poste", a-t-il déclaré dimanche soir à des journalistes.

En décembre 2011, les Etats-Unis avaient donné leur accord pour vendre 36 F-16 à Bagdad dans un contrat de plusieurs milliards de dollars.

M. Barzani prétend sans en apporter la preuve ni la date que M. Maliki, lors d'une réunion avec des officiers de l'armée irakienne, aurait menacé d'user ces appareils pour frapper le Kurdistan.

Selon lui, «ils ont parlé des problèmes entre Bagdad et Erbil et les officiers lui ont dit : "Monsieur. Donnez nous l'ordre et nous allons les chasser d'Erbil" et il (Maliki) a répondu : "Attendez l'arrivée des F-16"».

Sous la protection d'ExxonMobil

Jamais les relations entre les deux hommes les plus puissants d'Irak n'ont atteint un tel degré d'animosité.

Massoud Barzani, inquiet des conséquences d'un pouvoir fort à Bagdad, a multiplié ces derniers temps les attaques contre le chef de gouvernement irakien l'accusant de se conduire en dictateur en concentrant tous les pouvoirs entre ses mains.

Par ailleurs, pour le dirigeant kurde, l'installation dans sa région d'ExxonMobil, la plus grande compagnie pétrolière au monde, représenterait une protection considérable.

"Quand j'ai été aux Etats-Unis (ce mois-ci), ils (ExxonMobil) ont voulu me voir et m'ont affirmé être engagés par ce qu'ils ont signé", a souligné M. Barzani.

"Si ExxonMobil vient cela équivaut à la présence de divisions militaires américaines", a-t-il ajouté. C'est même mieux, selon lui, car "les dix divisions (américaines) peuvent se retirer immédiatement si elles reçoivent un télégramme en ce sens" de Washington alors qu'avec ExxonMobil "nous pouvons dire qu'ils défendront leur territoire car ils y auront des intérêts".

ExxonMobil avait signé à la mi-octobre un accord d'exploration pétrolière avec le Kurdistan, s'attirant les foudres du gouvernement central irakien, qui considère cet accord comme nul et non avenu.

Mais un responsable gouvernemental irakien avait indiqué



mi-mars que le groupe américain "suspendait" ce contrat, au sujet duquel Bagdad et la région autonome sont en conflit depuis plusieurs mois, ce qu'a démenti la présidence kurde.

La région kurde, devenue autonome en 1991 avec l'interdiction faite à l'aviation irakienne de survoler ce territoire, est en conflit avec le pouvoir central depuis la création de l'Irak dans les années 20. Les dirigeants arabes qui ont gouverné ce pays ont toujours voulu s'emparer de ce territoire rebelle.

"Il s'agit chez les Kurdes d'une peur historique", estime l'expert de l'Irak Reidar Visser, l'éditeur du site www.historiae.org.

Pour Jotyar Adel, professeur de sciences politiques à l'université Salaheddine à Erbil, "il existe une peur chez le président de la région

(Massoud Barzani) liée à la mémoire historique des autorités kurdes envers le gouvernement irakien".

Le 20 mars, Massoud Barzani avait accusé dans un discours M. Maliki de mettre sur pied une force à ses ordres. "On assiste à une tentative de mettre sur pied une armée d'un million d'âmes dévouées à une seule personne", a-t-il souligné.

"Où, dans le monde, une seule et même personne peut-elle être Premier ministre, chef des armées, ministre de la Défense, ministre de l'Intérieur, chef des services secrets et chef du conseil de sécurité nationale ?", avait-il martelé.

Il avait ajouté que le gouvernement de Bagdad "attendait d'obtenir les F-16 pour confronter les peshmergas (milices kurdes)".■



Un soldat turc tué par une mine posée par les rebelles kurdes

DIYARBAKIR, 21 avr 2012 (AFP)

UN SOLDAT a été tué samedi dans le sud-est de la Turquie par l'explosion d'une mine posée par des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), a affirmé une source locale de sécurité.

Le sous-officier participait à une opération de ratissage dans une zone rurale proche de la localité d'Uludere, dans la province de Sirnak, voisine de l'Irak, quand il a marché sur une mine posée par le PKK.

Grièvement blessé, il a succombé à ses blessures, selon la même source, soulignant que des opérations contre le PKK se poursuivaient dans la région.

Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 45.000 morts, selon l'armée, depuis le début de l'insurrection du PKK en 1984 dans le sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le PKK est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie et de nombreux pays.○

Les Occidentaux dans le piège de Damas

Scènes de la barbarie ordinaire en Syrie : lundi 23 avril, des troupes gouvernementales en convoi blindé ont dévasté un quartier de Hama à la mitrailleuse lourde, fauchant une vingtaine de civils dans leur raid. La veille, un groupe d'observateurs des Nations unies, chargés de superviser le cessez-le-feu décrété le 12 avril et de préparer le déploiement de 300 bérets bleus supplémentaires, s'était pourtant rendu dans cette ville du centre du pays.

Ils s'étaient entretenus avec le gouverneur, un obligé du président Bachar Al-Assad, avant de rencontrer des partisans de l'opposition, sortis en masse pour les accueillir, et pour défier du même coup le régime de Damas. Le message n'a pas échappé au pouvoir, qui, en réaction à une embuscade de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) dans laquelle deux officiers ont

été tués, a envoyé ses troupes en opération punitive.

Quels enseignements tirer de cette nouvelle poussée de violences, qui porte à près de 230 le nombre de civils tués depuis la proclamation du cessez-le-feu ?

Une évidence, d'abord : la trêve, que les diplomates occidentaux, sans craindre l'euphémisme, qualifient d'« incomplète », n'est jamais entrée en vigueur. Il y a une désescalade. Au lieu de recenser 50 à 100 morts par jour, l'Ob-

Editorial

servatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH), qui tient cette sombre comptabilité, en dénombre moitié moins. Mais le sang n'a jamais cessé de couler.

Deuxième constat, le régime syrien n'a aucune intention de

laisser ses opposants profiter du plan de sortie de crise de Kofi Annan pour se remobiliser. Ce plan, dont le cessez-le-feu est la première étape, impose le droit de manifester pacifiquement. Mais Damas ne permettra pas un retour aux grands cortèges populaires des débuts du soulèvement. L'hécatombe de Hama visait à dissuader ses habitants de redescendre dans la rue, et notamment sur la place Al-Assi, qui fut le théâtre, durant l'été, de gigantesques rassemblements anti-Assad.

La chance de Damas – et c'est le troisième enseignement –, c'est que le front uni de l'opposition s'est brisé sur la militarisation de la révolte. Au sein de l'ASL, une partie au moins des combattants sont opposés au principe du cessez-le-feu et concourent à son échec : 70 soldats réguliers ont ainsi été tués depuis le 12 avril,

selon l'OSDH. Cette fraction de l'ASL espère par là passer plus rapidement à l'étape que les États-Unis et les pays européens rejettent pour l'instant : l'intervention militaire étrangère.

C'est sur ce champ de mines que les 300 observateurs de l'ONU vont être déployés à partir de la semaine prochaine. Si le nombre de victimes quotidiennes ne baisse pas dans les jours qui suivent, les gouvernements occidentaux devront choisir entre deux mauvaises options : maintenir la mission, au risque de laisser Damas l'utiliser comme paravent à sa politique de répression ; ou rapatrier les observateurs, tout en sachant qu'une guerre civile généralisée pourrait s'ensuivre.

Il reste quelques jours à Damas pour peaufiner son piège. Et guère plus aux Occidentaux pour trouver la parade. ■

Paris envisage un recours à la force en Syrie en cas d'échec du plan de Kofi Annan

Confronté à la poursuite des tueries malgré le cessez-le-feu, Alain Juppé préconise l'adoption d'une résolution contraignante aux Nations unies

Ce n'est pas encore un constat d'échec du plan de sortie de crise de Kofi Annan, mais cela y ressemble fort. Confronté au cynisme du régime syrien, qui dit soutenir les efforts de l'émissaire des Nations Unies et de la Ligue arabe, mais poursuit la répression sur le terrain, Alain Juppé a envisagé pour la première fois, mercredi 25 avril, de faire pression pour l'adoption à l'ONU d'une résolution autorisant le recours à la force.

Le 5 mai, date du prochain rapport de Kofi Annan, représentera « un moment de vérité », a estimé le chef de la diplomatie française, à l'issue d'une rencontre avec des militants de l'opposition syrienne. Dans l'hypothèse où la mission d'observation des Nations Unies en cours de déploiement ne parviendrait toujours pas à faire cesser les violences, M. Juppé a déclaré qu'il « faudrait à ce moment-là passer à une autre étape que nous avons

déjà commencé à évoquer avec nos partenaires, sous chapitre VII de la charte des Nations Unies ».

Son homologue américaine Hillary Clinton avait déjà évoqué jeudi 19 avril un éventuel recours à ce chapitre VII, qui met à la disposition de l'ONU, « en cas de menaces contre la paix », toute une gamme de mesures contraignantes, des sanctions à l'intervention militaire.

Mardi, Burhan Ghalioun, le chef du Conseil national syrien, la principale plateforme de l'opposition syrienne, avait dit son souhait que la réunion de la Ligue arabe, prévue jeudi 26 avril au Caire, ouvre la voie à une telle résolution, « afin de créer des zones de sécurité dans le pays et pouvoir acheminer de l'aide humanitaire ».

Reconnaissant qu'Alain Juppé a franchi « un nouveau cran », un diplomate français précise toutefois « qu'à ce stade », les réflexions

Les réflexions du Quai d'Orsay portent davantage sur l'imposition de sanctions onusiennes que sur une action militaire

du Quai d'Orsay portent davantage sur l'imposition de sanctions onusiennes, comme par exemple un embargo sur les livraisons d'armes, que sur une action militaire à proprement parler.

Difficile de savoir ce que recouvre cette nouvelle rhétorique. S'agit-il d'une simple guerre des mots destinée à pousser Damas à

retirer ses forces des centres urbains, comme l'y oblige le plan Annan ? Ou bien des prémices d'un durcissement de la diplomatie occidentale, laquelle risque de se heurter, à l'ONU, à un nouveau veto de la Russie, les protecteurs des autorités syriennes ?

Faute de consensus, et sûrement aussi de certitudes sur le meilleur moyen d'enrayer le basculement de la Syrie dans la guerre civile, Alain Juppé s'en remet, pour l'instant encore, au plan Annan. Il a appelé à un rapide déploiement des 300 bérets bleus censés venir épauler la dizaine d'observateurs actuellement sur le terrain.

Mercredi, vingt-sept civils ont été tués en Syrie, notamment à Hama (centre), objet de violents pilonnages. Selon les services de sécurité libanais, le corps d'Abdel Ghani Djaouhar, chef de l'organisation extrémiste libanaise Fatah Al-Islam, a été retrouvé à Qusair (centre). Considéré comme l'un des hommes les plus recherchés du Liban, il aurait trouvé la mort alors qu'il déposait une bombe dans le cadre de la lutte au côté des insurgés. ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE

In Uprooting of Kurds, Iraq Tests a Fragile National Unity

By TIM ARANGO

KHANAQIN, Iraq — In January, the dismembered body of Wisam Jumai, a Kurdish intelligence officer, was discovered in a field in Sadiyah, a small town in northeastern Iraq. Soon his family and friends, one after another, received text messages offering a choice: leave or be killed.

“Wisam has been killed,” read one message sent to a cousin. “Wait for your turn. If you want your life, leave Sadiyah.”

After Mr. Jumai’s killing, nearly three dozen Kurdish families fled their homes and moved here, according to local officials, to the sanctuary of a city that is claimed by the government in Baghdad but patrolled by Kurdish forces. Other Kurds from the area have come here after being pushed out over property disputes that can be traced to Saddam Hussein’s policy in the 1970s of expelling Kurds and resettling Arabs.

Whether by terrorism or judicial order, the continuing displacement of Iraq’s Kurdish minority lays bare the unfinished business of reconciliation in the wake of the American military’s withdrawal, and it is a symptom of the rapidly deteriorating relationship between the semiautonomous Kurdish government based in Erbil and the central government in Baghdad.

The schism, which is most immediately over sharing oil wealth but is more deeply about historical grievances and Kurdish aspirations for independence, raises serious questions about the future of a unified Iraq. The crisis, American officials say, is far more grave than the political tensions between the Shiite-dominated government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki and the country’s Sunni Arab minority set off by an arrest warrant on terrorism charges issued in December for Tariq al-Hashimi, the Sunni vice president.

The Kurds, unlike the Sunnis, have their own security forces, oil reserves, ports of entry and even their own de facto foreign policy, with envoys operating in other countries. This could eventually lead them to seek more independence from Baghdad.

“Fearing a resurgence of a strong



Kurds in northern Diyala Province have faced a campaign of terror. In Jalawla, a Kurdish official’s home was bombed.



central state, Kurdish leaders want to leave Iraq, and they appear to believe their moment to do so may soon arrive,” wrote Joost Hiltermann, an analyst at the International Crisis Group, in a recent report.

In the latest chapter of a long-simmering dispute, Kurdish authorities have shut off their oil exports, claiming that Baghdad is behind on payments to oil companies working in the Kurdish region. Officials in Baghdad, angered by this and by Kurdistan’s oil deal with Exxon Mobil that bypasses the central government, in turn threatened to cut off billions of dollars that flow to Kurdistan from the Iraqi budget. Massoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdish regional

government, has called Mr. Maliki a dictator and expressed fears that Baghdad might use American-supplied F-16 warplanes against the Kurds. Both sides have accused the other of smuggling oil and siphoning off profits.

“I cannot respect myself, working with the people in Baghdad,” said Mohammed Ihsan, the Kurdish government’s representative in Baghdad, who is calling for a referendum in Kurdistan on independence, something he acknowledged was unfeasible in the short term because of Western opposition. “But a lot of people are thinking that way,” he said.

American officials are concerned that Kurdish leaders are considering seeking a deal to sell oil to Turkey, in an effort to become economically self-sufficient. Such a pact would probably be illegal and unlikely before 2014, when Kurdistan is expected to complete its own oil pipeline.

“The Kurds hope, however, that Turkey’s thirst for oil and gas will align with their own thirst for statehood,” Mr. Hiltermann wrote in his report.

Kurds are captive to the painful memories of repression under Hussein; like the Sunni and Shiite Arabs, who fought a brutal sectarian war, the Kurds, too, cling to a narrow identity, theirs defined by ethnicity, rather than national citizenship.

“How can we forget?” said Bakir Karim, a member of the Kurdish Parliament in Erbil who described Iraq

as a “fake state” created by the British after World War I that, he said, has only “harmed us and tortured us.”

He added, “If you ask any Kurd if he wants independence from Iraq, without hesitation he will say yes.”

Khanaqin, a few miles from the Iranian border, lies at the end of a belt of rugged land in northern Diyala Province that runs from Sadiyah through Jalawla, another disputed town. It is also a place of ethnic rivalry, where Arabs and Kurds are trying the soft ways of democracy to settle feuds that nevertheless can still end in bloodshed.

Outside a Kurdish political office in Jalawla is a mural of three men, representing the area’s main ethnicities: Arab, Kurd and Turkmen. “We are all brothers,” it declares.

Inside, Khader Mohammed, who directs the office, waved an intelligence report he recently received from authorities in Baquba, Diyala’s capital. It claimed that the Islamic State of Iraq, an umbrella group of militants, would “attempt a number of attacks to destabilize the security situation in the province.” Among the targets: Mr. Mohammed.

“I’m not afraid,” he said. “This is my duty. I have to do my work.”

Karim Ali, 60, is among those who may soon leave. Like many Kurds here, Mr. Ali was forced out in the mid-1970s

as part of the Hussein government’s “Arabization” policy, which aimed to dilute ethnic opposition. He resettled in Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province, but reclaimed his old home in 2003 as some Arabs, fearing revenge from the Kurds, decided to return to their original homes in other regions.

Though a court was set up to handle claims stemming from the Arabization policy, Kurds say that property records that would verify their ownership claims were destroyed. As a result, Arabs are now reclaiming homes that were seized from Kurdish families in the Hussein years.

This, Mr. Ali said, is what happened to him. “This belonged to my father,” he said, standing outside his home. “In 20 days, I have to evacuate my house.” He said he was taken to a police station in handcuffs several months ago and forced to sign papers turning the property over to an Arab who held the deed from 1975 to 2003.

“It’s the same as during Saddam,” Mr. Ali said. “It’s even worse now because I was young then, and now I’m old.”

Local officials say nearly 400 houses in Jalawla are being turned over in a similar fashion. Mr. Ihsan, the Kurdish representative in Baghdad, is also involved in matters related to these disputed areas. He said the process was

rife with corruption: “We have the most corrupted judicial system in the world.” (A 2009 report on internal displacement in Iraq by the Brookings Institution and the University of Bern called the process one of “incomprehension” and “frustration.”)

“It’s getting worse,” Mr. Ihsan said. “The Americans left without finishing the job. We are worried that history is going to repeat itself.”

For their part, Arabs in the area say that they are also targets of terrorist attacks, and that the property transfers are the result of a fair and legal process.

On a recent afternoon, Rasmiya Ahmed, the mother of Mr. Jumai, the murdered officer, unzipped a blue nylon pouch and out tumbled the strips of pills that provide her with a measure of relief from her sleeplessness and anxiety. Another son, a soldier, was killed last year. “I don’t have anyone now,” she said.

The Kurds may be free from the Baath Party’s brutality, but for Ms. Ahmed things were better then, because, she said, “at least I had my boys.”

Duraïd Adnan contributed reporting from Khanaqin, and employees of The New York Times from Diyala and Erbil Provinces.

theguardian April 18, 2012

Iraq says Exxon won't move on Kurdish oil blocs

LONDON (Reuters) - Exxon Mobil has told Baghdad it will not break ground on its oil blocs in the semi-autonomous Kurdish north until the central government approves the contracts, Iraq's top energy official said on Wednesday.

Exxon sent Baghdad into a fury at the end of last year by signing up for six KRG exploration blocs. The central government holds that any oil contracts signed with Kurdistan are illegal.

The U.S. major, also leading a pro-



ject at the supergiant West Qurna-1 oilfield in southern Iraq, has sent two letters to the oil ministry confirming its decision to freeze its Kurdish deals.

Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Hussain al-Shahristani said on a visit to London that the company made clear it would only proceed if Baghdad approved its KRG contracts.

Shahristani has indicated many times that such approval was unlikely to be granted.

"As for Exxon, they have sent a letter to the ministry of oil confirming that they will not take any action on the ground until their contract is approved by the Iraqi government," he said at a conference.

Baghdad has threatened to exclude Exxon from its upcoming exploration round and Shahristani said a decision had yet to be made on whether it could take part.

A long-running dispute between Iraq's central government and the KRG over land and oil rights has worsened in recent weeks and Arbil halted oil exports at the start of April.

Shahristani said Baghdad is prepared to discuss serious differences with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) over oil matters, but said they would take time to resolve.

The high-ranking Iraqi official also confirmed that talks were taking place between BP and Baghdad over the northern Kirkuk oilfield.

The UK major is looking closely at a project to revive the giant, ageing oilfield. Baghdad is understood to be keen to have the British oil major positioned in northern Iraq to counter the recent controversial move by Exxon into Kurdistan. ♦

US, Turkey and Iraqi Kurds join hands

By M K Bhadrakumar

There was something very odd when Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said on Friday that Turkey was becoming a "hostile state" in the region. After all, Baghdad is supposed to be the "soul" of the Arab world and Turkey is supposed to be the role model for democratized Arab nations like Iraq.

"The latest statements of [Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip] Erdogan are another return to the process of interfering in Iraqi internal affairs and it confirms that Erdogan is still living the illusion of regional hegemony," Maliki said, adding: "It is clear that his statements have a sectarian dimension, which he used to deny before, but have now become clear, and all Iraqis reject them ... His insistence on continuing with these domestic and regional policies will damage Turkey's interests and make it a hostile state for all."

Erdogan is unused to hearing such tongue-lashing, although the immediate provocation was a remark by Erdogan himself, accusing Maliki of being "egocentric". After a close-door meeting with the visiting Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani in Istanbul last week, Erdogan lashed out, "The current prime minister's treatment of his coalition partners, his egocentric approach in Iraqi politics ... seriously concerns Shi'ite groups, Mr Barzani and the [Sunni-backed] Iraqiya group."

On the face of it, Erdogan was merely being his usual self when he dictated to Maliki how he should rule Iraq. But The Turkish Foreign Ministry has since weighed in with a statement on Saturday confirming Erdogan spoke with deliberateness and that Ankara has definite opinions on how democracy should function in Iraq.

The statement said, "The basis of the political crisis in which Iraq finds itself is that Iraqi politicians seek to consolidate power and exclude others, rather than [follow] politics based on democratic and universal principles. It is a

fact that behind the misperceptions that led to the accusations against Turkey by Prime Minister Maliki, who instigated the crisis in Iraq, this wrong understanding of politics can be found."

Axis at work

The tensions between Turkey and Iraq have been steadily building up, and of late they have sharply escalated. The "crisis in Iraq" referred to in the Turkish statement is Maliki's ongoing political battle with Iraqi Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi, which has taken a sectarian Shi'ite-Sunni dimension. In sum, Turkey has waded into Iraq's sectarian politics and is positioning itself on the side of the Sunnis and the Kurds.

Hashemi is currently in Istanbul and met Erdogan before the latter fired the verbal fusillade at Baghdad. But this is only one template of the plot. The fact that Hashemi arrived in Turkey on the final leg of a tour, which took him to Qatar and Saudi Arabia, gives a regional backdrop to what is unfolding. (By the way, Erdogan also just concluded a round of consultations in Riyadh and Doha.)

Indeed, Maliki has been in the Saudi and Qatari crosshairs as well. Riyadh and Doha see him as an Iranian surrogate and make no bones about their desire to have him replaced. They boycotted the recent Arab Summit in Baghdad where Maliki acted as the host.

Thus, the very same regional axis of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar that is working for "regime change" in Syria is also on a confrontation path with Maliki - and the leitmotif is once again isolating Iran in its region.

In immediate terms, Erdogan is also smarting under the perceived slight by Tehran, which frustrated his hopes of Turkey acting as the facilitator of the talks between Iran and the "Iran Six" (also known as the P5+1, the US, Great Britain, France, Russia and China plus Germany.) Tehran administered the snub in the full glare of world publicity when it proposed Baghdad as the venue of the next round of talks with P5+1 on May 23. Erdogan's standing as the sultan of the Muslim Middle East took

a lethal blow.

Interestingly, following the sharp exchange of words with Erdogan, Maliki left for Tehran on Sunday on a two-day visit. What annoys Maliki most that Erdogan has embarked upon a course of robustly strengthening ties with Kurdish leader Barzani. Ankara promotes an alliance between Barzani and Iraqi Sunni leadership with a view to challenging Maliki's leadership in Baghdad. (Turks ensured that Barzani met Hashemi in Istanbul last week.) Ankara is playing on Barzani's political ambitions as the supremo of Kurdistan, the autonomous Kurdish entity with Arbil as its capital in northern Iraq. At a press conference in Istanbul after meeting Hashemi, Barzani accused Maliki of harboring dictatorial ambitions.

The convergence of interests between Ankara and Arbil is nothing new. It dates back to the imposition of the "no-fly zone" over northern Iraq by the US, Britain and France in the early 1990s. Turkey played a key role in the emergence of Kurdistan as an autonomous region within Iraq.

Today's matrix has a strong economic dimension too: Barzani needs an outlet to the outside world for trade, especially Kurdistan's oil exports; Turkey provides it and, in turn, immensely profits out of it. The business links between the two sides are flourishing and today accounts for more than half of Turkey's US\$12 billion trade with Iraq.

On another plane, Turkey is prepared to go the whole hog in promoting Barzani if only he gives a helping hand to muzzle the Kurdish insurgency in eastern Turkey, led by the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which operates out of sanctuaries in northern Iraq.

Barzani was given a red carpet welcome by the Turkish leadership, befitting a head of state. He met Turkish President Abdullah Gul, Erdogan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, apart from intelligence chief Hakan Fidan. Barzani has kindled fresh hopes in the Turkish mind that he would do something tangible in preventing

the PKK from bleeding Turkey anymore in guerilla war waged from the territory under his control in northern Iraq.

He told the Turkish media, "You won't get anywhere with weapons. The PKK should lay down its arms. I will not let the PKK prevail in northern Iraq ... If the PKK goes ahead with weapons, it will bear the consequences." These words will come as music to the Turkish ears.

Kurdish conundrum

Ankara's dilemma, however, is that Barzani has said such fine words in the past also about cracking down on the PKK, but changed tack once he returned home to Arbil. The hard reality is that the sympathy toward PKK's cause is widespread among the Kurdish peshmerga (fighters) in northern Iraq.

But then, there could be a qualitative difference this time. For one thing, Barzani, who has keen bazaari instincts, knows that Turkey could help him and his family make an incredible amount of money through oil exports via Turkish pipelines, and second, behind Turkey stand the Saudis and Qataris, who will also be prepared to bankroll him.

From the perspective of the Saudis and Qataris, the fact that Barzani can prove to be a thorn in the flesh of Maliki makes him an object of interest. They want Maliki to be weakened to a point that he can be of no meaningful help to the beleaguered Syrian regime. (Maliki has been helping Syria critically with oil supplies and to generally break out of the western sanctions.)

Erdogan made it a point to highlight that he discussed the Syrian situation with Barzani last week. Indeed, there is a major Kurdish dimension to Turkey's Syria policy. For one thing, the specter of the revival of the old alliance between the Syrian regime and the PKK haunts Turkey. In retaliation to the heavy Turkish interference in Syrian affairs, Damascus has begun showing renewed interest in the PKK.

These are low-key moves at present but are ominous enough

about what could happen if push came to a shove and Damascus finally made up its mind to pay Ankara back in the same coin. It is relatively easy for Damascus to hit back at Turkey if it takes a strategic decision to do so, because the PKK's leadership comprises Kurds of Syrian extraction and one one-third of the PKK cadres are of Syrian origin.

Conversely, in order for Turkey to step up its interference in Syria in the coming period, it needs to first minimize the scope of retaliation by Damascus. Turkey hopes that Barzani can lend a hand in reaching out to the Syrian Kurdish groups.

Another complicating factor is that Syria's Kurds, who constitute about 10% of the country's population, have been reluctant to align with the Muslim Brotherhood and other Syrian opposition groups unless their demand for an autonomous Kurdish region in eastern Syria (where Syria's oil fields lie) is conceded.

Most of Syria's Kurdish population lives in the arid region of Ayn al-Arab and in the Ifrin agricultural area bordering Turkey. Kurds also dominate large neighborhoods of Damascus and the commercial hub of Aleppo, which lies less than 50 kilometers from the Turkish border. Unsurprisingly, Kurdish autonomy within Syria will ever remain a sensitive issue for Ankara, as it could have a domino effect within Turkey itself.

But the Kurdish groups within Syria are a divided lot and it is here that Barzani comes in. The largest Kurdish umbrella group in Syria, known as the Kurdish National Congress (KNC), enjoys Barzani's backing. If KNC could be persuaded to link up with the Syrian opposition, Turkey would feel far more comfortable.

Indeed, Turkey is encouraging Barzani to convene a national Kurdish conference in Arbil in June with a view to pushing Turkey's interests both with regard to collaring the PKK, as well as encouraging Syria's Kurds to give up their present ambivalence toward "regime change" in Damascus and to decisively link up with the opposition to Assad, which is based in Turkey.

Ankara knows well enough that Barzani is a slippery customer. But what encourages the

Turkish leadership is that the United States has also stepped in to ensure that Barzani delivers. The US extended an invitation to Barzani to visit Washington in early April, where President Barack Obama received him.

Taking the cue from Turkey, Washington is also catering to Barzani's bazaar instincts. A US-Kurdistan Business Council has been formed in Washington to promote US "investments" in the territories of northern Iraq under Barzani's control. ExxonMobil's chief executive officer Rex Tillerson met Barzani in Washington. (In November, Barzani awarded lucrative contracts to ExxonMobil to explore six oil fields in Kurdistan, ignoring the loud protests by Maliki's federal government that Baghdad reserves such powers to grant concessions to foreign oil companies.)

While in Washington, Barzani also met Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Deputy Secretary of State William Burns (during which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stopped by to greet him) and interacted with influential think tankers. Vice President Joe Biden hosted a "working lunch" for Barzani.

Interestingly, Barzani's tirades against Maliki took a noticeably sharp turn after his visit to Washington. He told al-Hayat, "Iraq is moving toward a catastrophe, a return to dictatorship", and that on his return to Arbil he would call a meeting of Iraqi leaders to "save" the country from Maliki and to seek "radical solutions" (read Kurdistan's secession). Barzani also declared that he wouldn't hand over Hashemi to Baghdad. (Again, at the root of Maliki's discord with Hashemi is the issue of the distribution of Iraq's oil wealth.)

Maliki's spokesman in Baghdad Ali Mussawi called Barzani's heightened rhetoric after the Washington visit as "an incomprehensible escalation." Significantly, Maliki's government has since "blacklisted" ExxonMobil. The company doesn't figure on the finalized list of 47 pre-qualified bidders for the next round of Iraq's energy exploration rights in 12 new blocks in western and central Iraq, which would add a whopping 29 trillion cubic feet of gas and 10 billion barrels of oil to

Iraqi reserves. The bidding is due to be held on May 30-31.

A card to play

Be that as it may, Barzani felt encouraged after his Washington visit to take to a path of strategic defiance of the federal government in Baghdad. The US extended a warm greeting to him on a scale befitting a head of state and it was heavily tinged with references to Kurdistan's independence.

Conceivably, Washington and Ankara are acting in tandem and there is close coordination of the US and Turkish policies toward Syrian and Iraqi Kurds. For both, the ultimate objective is to weaken Iran's regional influence. The Obama administration hopes that Turkey's efforts against the PKK are successful and is providing intelligence support for the military operations.

Washington also expects that under concerted pressure from multiple quarters, Maliki would finally realize what is good for him and loosen his ties with Iran and Syria. Least of all, Washington would desire that the Syrian Kurds cross over to join the opposition groups based in Turkey so that the agenda of forcing a "regime change" in Damascus gets more cutting edge.

However, there are several imponderables in the emergent scenario. Pushed against the wall, Damascus may let the Kurdish genie out of the bottle and the result could well be a Syrian version of Iraq's Kurdistan - a second autonomous Kurdish area along Turkey's borders. That could in turn induce Turkish Kurds also to seek similar autonomy. The best course for Erdogan would have been to make progress toward a political solution to Turkey's Kurdish problem as he had been doing. But the pre-requisite for that would be a return of "normalcy" in Turkey's ties with Syria and a more stable Iraq.

Arguably, Erdogan is on a slippery path. His acrimonious exchange with Maliki underscores that Turkey's isolation is almost complete in its immediate neighborhood. The weakest link in the Turkish strategy is Barzani himself.

Ankara heavily depends on Barzani to broker deals with the PKK as well as to finesse the

Syrian Kurds. True, Barzani has a vested interest in working with Ankara since Iraq's Kurdistan has developed extensive economic links with Turkey and these ties are deepening by the day. But Barzani has his limitations, too.

Everything hinges on his capacity to harness Kurdish nationalism scattered across not only Turkey, Iran and Syria but also Iran, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Lebanon and to convince them that their only realistic hope is to seek increased autonomy within existing state structures on the lines he has secured with American support. That's a tall order. Whether the Kurdish militants will be persuaded to put down their guns and follow Barzani's footsteps remains in serious doubt.

Barzani is a controversial figure himself among the Kurds. Essentially, he is a tribal warlord who uses coercive methods, often very violent methods, to keep his family on top of the heap of Iraqi Kurdistan and his family exercises personal control over the region's land, property, resources and finances. Put plainly, he and his family run a business cartel called "Kurdistan". Kurds increasingly resent that they are being treated as his tenants and serfs.

Barzani's patronage system is predicated on his practice of treating the budget and revenues from Kurdistan's oil and gas as his family's private accounts with no real financial control or accountability. This patronage system is overwhelmingly based on clan rule and it may run only so long as there is no rule of law, but then, Iraq's democratization is spreading its virus into the Kurdistan as well and educated Kurds are beginning to resent the Barzani clan's autocratic lifestyle.

For instance, the 'oil contracts' signed by the Turkish, American, British and other foreign companies are going to be the principal instruments for Ankara and Washington to influence Barzani, while no one has a clue as to what these 'contracts' are about, how they were negotiated or where the money comes and goes. To be sure, Barzani has extensive business interests in Turkey, the US and several European countries.

All said, the bankruptcy of the US policy today is such that it

made heavy sacrifices in human lives and resources to remold Iraq as a democratic country and, arguably, the one signal success it had would be the democratization of Iraq. Despite all the aberrations of the Iraqi system, the country enjoys a degree of representative rule, which is an exception rather than the rule in the Muslim Middle East. Now, in a curious twist, Washington is propping up Barzani in order to realign Iraqi political scene to suit its geopolitical interests, completely overlooking his veal track record.

Obama is literally taking a leaf

out of Henry Kissinger's monumental cynicism and duplicity toward Iraq's Kurds - pampering their national aspirations as part of a ruthless, deceitful process to destabilize the regime in Baghdad but all the while not wanting their proteges to win their struggle because it could be too disruptive for the entire region, especially for the US's closest ally, Turkey. Barzani has always been, historically speaking, "a card to play" and even by the yardstick of covert operations Obama and Erdogan are locked in a cynical enterprise.

Kissinger, at least, was for-

thright. Looking back at the US's sellout of Kurds in Iraq in 1975, Kissinger commented, "Covert action should not be confused with missionary work." Obama would probably agree here, but his crucial difference is that Erdogan has showed him how dalliance with the Kurds can also be made self-financing and put on cost-accounting principles, an angle that always fascinates Obama in these hard times.

In short, while Kissinger was immersed in realpolitik, Obama also makes sure American companies do some profitable business

in Kurdistan's fabulous oil fields so that the US is sure to be in a "win-win" situation no matter the trajectory of democracy in Iraq or the longevity of the regime in Damascus. □

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middle east online
میدل ایست اونلاین

APRIL 23, 2012

Barzani: Maliki may think of using F-16s to attack Kurdistan

President of Iraq autonomous Kurdistan opposes sale of F-16 warplanes to Iraq while Maliki is premier, as he fears they would be used against his region.

Middle East Online

By Abdel Hamid Zebari - ARBIL (Iraq)

Massud Barzani, the president of Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan, said he opposes the sale of F-16 warplanes to Iraq while Nuri al-Maliki is premier, as he fears they would be used against the region.

Barzani also said that he thinks that oil giant ExxonMobil, which has signed an oil exploration deal with Kurdistan against Baghdad's wishes, could provide significant protection for the region.

"The F-16 must not reach the hand of this man," Barzani told reporters at his residence near the Kurdistan region's capital Arbil on Sunday, referring to Maliki.

"We must either prevent him from having these weapons, or if he has them, he should not stay in his position," Barzani said.

Barzani alleged that Maliki had discussed using F-16s against Kurdistan during a meeting with military officers.

"During a military meeting, they talked about problems between Baghdad and Arbil," Barzani said.

"They told him, 'Sir, just give us the authority, and we would kick them out of Arbil,'" Barzani said. "And (Maliki) answered: 'Wait until the arrival of the F-16.'"

The United States has agreed to sell 36 F-16 jets to Baghdad in a multi-billion-dollar deal aimed at increasing the capabilities of Iraq's fledgling air force, a weak point in its national defences.

"When I went to the United States, they (Exxon) wanted to see me and I met the president of the company and other people and they said they are committed to (the contract) they signed with the



Barzani: Maliki told officers to wait until arrival of F-16s

Kurdistan region," Barzani said, referring to a visit to the US this month.

"If ExxonMobil came, it would be equal to 10 American military divisions," he said adding that "they will defend the area if their interests are there."

On October 18, Kurdish authorities signed a deal with ExxonMobil for it to explore six areas in Kurdistan, but Baghdad regards any contracts not signed with the central government as invalid.

There are long-running disagreements between Kurdistan and the central government over disputed territory and dozens of energy contracts Kurdistan has signed without the approval of Baghdad, but tensions have recently reached a new high.

Barzani accused Maliki of aiming to "kill the democratic process" after the head of Iraq's electoral commission was arrested for alleged corruption, and previously said Maliki was moving toward dictatorship.

Earlier this month, Kurdistan stopped oil exports over \$1.5 billion owed to foreign oil companies working in the region that it says Baghdad has withheld.

The central government's top two oil officials responded by saying Arbil owed Baghdad more than \$5 billion in promised exports, and was smuggling the oil it produced to Iran.

Kurdistan also hosted Iraq's Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi after he was accused of running a death squad and declined to hand him over to the central government.

The region then permitted the fugitive official to leave on a trip that first took him to Qatar, then Saudi Arabia, and now Turkey. ◆

Syria fails to observe peace plan, U.N. reports

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The political chief of the United Nations said Monday that the Syrian government was still using heavy weapons and had failed to fully carry out the six-point peace plan that President Bashar al-Assad's government approved.

The comments by the official, B. Lynn Pascoe, followed reports on Monday that Syrian troops armed with heavy machine guns had killed dozens in the central city of Hama, just a day after chanting protesters welcomed a visit by a U.N. team of monitors.

Mr. Pascoe, undersecretary general for political affairs, told the U.N. Security Council that the cease-fire remained incomplete and "human rights violations are still perpetrated with impunity."

"We are at a pivotal moment in Syria," he said.

The day's violence, Hama's worst in months, added a dangerous new aspect to the U.N. team's work: that the Syrian regime might exact deadly revenge against opponents who feel empowered by the observers' presence to spill into the streets.

Some details of the violence remained murky, though different activists said the attacks had started early in the morning and stopped a few hours later, after dozens had been killed.

Rami Abdul-Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which is based in London, said troops had stormed Hama, firing assault rifles and heavy machine guns, killing at least 33 people.

An activist named Ahmed, reached by phone in Hama, said troops had shelled the Arbeen district early Monday before sending in foot soldiers. He said 27 people had been killed and families were still searching damaged homes for others. He did not give his full name for fear of retribution.

Another activist in Hama, Mousab Alhamadee, reached via Skype, said as many as 50 had been killed. He said he thought the attack was a direct result of the U.N. monitors' visit.

"This was the punishment for the people of Hama because yesterday they were very brave when they met the U.N. monitors," he said.

The U.N. has sent an advance team of eight observers to Syria as part of the plan by the special envoy Kofi Annan to end the fighting. More monitors are due

Turkey business update

ECONOMY | A year of rebalancing

Steady management of slower growth

After a couple of years of record growth, 8.9 percent in 2010 and 8.5 percent in 2011, 2012 is a year of rebalancing for the Turkish economy. Fueled by soaring domestic demand, the rapid expansion brought the current account deficit to an unsustainable level of 10 percent of the country's \$772.2 billion gross domestic product, raising concerns that Turkey could face trouble financing the gap. Inflation also returned to double digits in 2011, while the Turkish lira lost 12 percent of its value before rebounding in the first three months of 2012.

Renewed capital flows to emerging countries in the first quarter of this year significantly reduced the risk that Turkey would experience a hard landing. The predominance of loose monetary policy in many countries helps, says Serhat Gürleyen, director of Research at Is Investment: "Turkey still benefits from lower global interest rates."

In the first three months of the year, \$2.56 billion have flowed into the Istanbul Stock Exchange. Turkey also expects foreign direct investment to at least match last year's level of \$15 billion.

Economic growth has slowed, but forecasts for this year still range from 2.5 percent to 4 percent. Crucially, the country's trade gap is showing signs of narrowing as imports slackened, together with domestic demand. Exports to Europe increased 18 percent last year, in spite of the euro-zone crisis. Data for February showed a marked improvement in Turkey's trade balance as the percent of imports covered by exports increased to 66.5 percent, its highest level in nearly two years.

By diversifying trade and taking advantage of closer ties with Middle Eastern countries as well as with emerging economies farther afield, Turkey is seeking to offset the potential impact of declining sales to weaker European markets. Iraq, for instance, rose to second place among recipients of Turkey's exports after Germany last year, with a share of 6.8 percent of total sales.

In spite of the balance of payment deficit, Turkey's macroeconomic fundamentals remain fairly solid. Careful fiscal management by the ruling Justice and Development Party reduced the public-debt ratio to 40 percent of G.D.P. at the end of last year, down from 73.7 percent a decade ago. The central bank signaled in March that it would maintain a tight monetary policy until inflation has returned to the mid-term target of 5 percent.

In the past 10 years, under the powerful and somewhat autocratic leadership of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's profile has risen on the international scene, and the country, a member of the G-20, is seen as a major regional player.

Two operations in the past six months raised concerns about Erdogan's health. It is unclear who would succeed him at the head of the ruling party if, as is expected, he seeks a presidential mandate in 2014 when the incumbent head of state, Abdullah Gül, steps down. For now, Justice and Development, which secured a third mandate in June 2011, rules unchallenged, boosted by a strong economic performance over the past decade, in the face of weak opposition.

In the short term, Turkey, dependent on energy imports, remains vulnerable to global volatility: each \$10 increase in the price of a barrel of oil adds 0.5 percent to Turkey's current account shortfall.

The Turkish government is actively trying to put the country's growth on a more sustainable path. Through an overhaul of the pension system, the authorities hope to boost the nation's savings rate, which has fallen to 12 percent. A new incentive program, the most comprehensive so far, aims to reduce reliance on imports of intermediate goods for industrial production, attract investment to sectors with strong potential (such as aviation, chemicals, food production and agriculture, steel, textiles and automobiles) and reduce regional disparities through tax reductions and exemptions in the poorest provinces from social security premiums.

"With this new system, we primarily hope to increase production and investments in the area of intermediate goods and products which currently have a high degree of import dependency, so as to reduce the current-account deficit," Erdogan announced in early April.

An important pillar supporting Turkey's economic progress is its robust banking system, which has demonstrated its strength during the 2008-09 turmoil. Turkey's banks remain well capitalized, with an average capital-adequacy ratio of 16.8 percent, and they are in a good position to contribute to the country's economic expansion. Most Turks enjoy relatively high living standards, with G.D.P. per capita over \$10,000, and Turkey's young population is expected to continue to power economic activity in the coming period. ■

to arrive in coming days, and the U.N. has authorized a total of total observers, though it remains unclear when the full contingent will deploy.

Since the cease-fire went into effect, regime forces have continued to shell rebellious areas and rebels have attacked re-

gime checkpoints and military convoys.

The Syrian state news agency said Monday that "terrorists" had killed a doctor in the south of the country, two military officers in the central province of Hama and two others in the south.

Power Struggles in Baghdad and Beyond Mean Opportunities for Iraq's Kurds

By Tony Karon

The thriving Kurdish mini-state in northern Iraq is a monument to the ability of the nationalist Kurdish-Iraqi leadership to parlay the conflict between more powerful geopolitical forces around them to maximum advantage. And the escalating power struggle in Baghdad, combined with the regional conflict between Iran, Turkey and the Gulf Arab states being played out in Syria, may offer the Kurdish leadership in Erbil new opportunities to strengthen foundations for independence from Iraq. It may be a perilous game of temporary alliances of convenience among forces that don't necessarily share a common vision, but that's precisely the sort of political balancing act that created the Kurdish polity in northern Iraq, which already has many of the attributes of independence such as its own flag, administration and security forces — and is seeking to expand its independent economic base.

The power struggle in Baghdad has escalated to alarming proportions in the months since the last U.S. troops withdrew in December 2011, with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki eschewing the principle of a unity government that gives all stakeholders a share of power and instead amassing power in his own hands. Even the radical Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, whose support was critical to getting Maliki reelected, has taken to referring to the Prime Minister as "the dictator." Sunni insurgent violence continues, while Sunni political leaders have been hounded out of government by Maliki. Recent days have seen him huddling with his key regional allies in Tehran, as he steps up a war of words and threats with Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whom he accuses of meddling in Iraq's affairs. Turkey makes no secret of its support for Iraq's Sunni political bloc, Iraqiyya, and has castigated Maliki for pursuing a sectarian and "egocentric"

style of ruling. Ankara has recently played host to fugitive Iraqi Sunni leader Tarek al-Hashemi, who was forced to flee Baghdad to escape a criminal prosecution his supporters see as a trumped up charge designed to hobble the Sunni political leadership. Hashemi fled first to Erbil, capital of Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), whose terrain the Iraqi security forces are not authorized to enter.

As dramatic as the language and gestures of some of the key players may be, however, patronage politics has entrenched a certain pragmatism in Iraq's political class that shows no sign of evaporating in a headlong rush into civil war. Still, every new breakdown and episode of brinkmanship brings opportunities to press the Kurdish cause.

The Kurds, who represent some 20% of Iraq's population, maintained good relations with Iran before Saddam Hussein's ouster, and have typically been courted in post-Saddam politics when the major Shi'ite and Sunni political players have needed them to tip the balance against the other. The de facto casting vote provided by their share of Iraq's proportional representation parliament has allowed the leaders of Kurdistan's main parties — the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan of Jalal Talabani, who serves as President of Iraq, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Masoud Barzani, who holds the position of Prime Minister in the KRG — to extract more concessions on autonomy and territorial control than Iraq's Arab politicians would otherwise offer.

And these days, it's not only Iraqi politicians that are courting the Kurds. Turkey last week feted Barzani in Ankara, rolling out the red carpet and affording him a meeting with Turkey's President Abdullah Gul and Foreign Minister Ahmet



Massud Barzani (L), president of the autonomous northern Kurdish region in Iraq, said Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is monopolising power and preparing the ground for a return to dictatorship in an interview published on April 8, 2012.

Davutoglu, and he recently returned from a visit to Washington D.C. where he met with senior Administration officials. Those visits seemed to amplify Barzani's defiance of Baghdad in a dispute over oil revenues, with the KRG prime minister accusing Maliki of paving the way for a return to dictatorship, and warning that absent "radical solutions and a specific time-frame to resolve the present crisis ... we will resort to other decisions" — a not-so-veiled threat to declare independence from Iraq.

Independence, of course, remains the historical goal of Kurdish Iraqis, and a referendum on the issue staged in 2005 saw some 98% vote to break away from Iraq. Geopolitical realities, however, has required a curbing of that popular sentiment. Iraqi Kurdistan is small and landlocked, and while it possesses significant oil reserves, it would require the cooperation of one of its powerful neighbors — Turkey, Iran or Iraq — to pipe that oil to market. Also, the KRG was carved out in large part because the U.S., which had just overthrown Saddam Hussein, helped ensure its emergence, but made clear it was not ready to support a breakup of Iraq.

Thus the Kurdish political game, as described by the International Crisis Group:

"Kurds have waited for the moment when they will succeed in removing the shackles of an overbearing, at times highly repressive, central state. They know that when Baghdad is weak, they can take steps to bring their dream of statehood closer to reality, but that when the centre is strong it will use its superior resources to push them back into their place — or worse. This is why the Kurds are so alarmed at attempts by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to amass power at the

➔ *expense of his rivals and rebuild a strong state, armed with U.S. weaponry, under his unchallenged control.*

“Ever since arriving in Baghdad on the coattails of the U.S. invasion in 2003, the Kurds understandably have used their new position and the centre’s weakness to develop their own region. They seek to reverse a legacy of discrimination and economic neglect but also to create an escape route should relations with Baghdad sour beyond repair. Yet, in many ways, this approach contains elements of a self-fulfilling prophecy: by pressing their advantage, Kurds inevitably aggravate matters, convincing the federal government that they are aiming for secession – and aiming to take with them a good chunk of disputed territory that Kurds claim as historically part of a notional Kurdistan but that also appears to be immensely rich in oil and gas.”

Conventional wisdom before the U.S. invasion had held that Turkey would fiercely oppose the emergence of an autonomous Kurdish entity in northern Iraq for fear of spurring separatist inclinations among its own Kurdish minority. But even as the violent insurgency of the Kurdish separatist PKK has sparked an increasingly repressive backlash by the authorities in Ankara in recent years, Turkey has instead emerged as a key ally and economic partner of the emerging Iraqi Kurdish polity,

with Turkish trade with the KRG amounting to fully half of all of its trade with Iraq.

It’s a pragmatic arrangement of mutual benefit: The Kurds have lately expanded their autonomous oil industry, concluding deals late last year with Exxon Mobil – which include the right to drill fields that are not currently recognized as part of the KRG, but are coveted by it as part of the patrimony of their state in the making. That move outraged Baghdad, and Erbil earlier this month halted oil exports through territory controlled by Baghdad over a financial dispute. The Kurdish leadership hope to use a pipeline built through Turkish territory as an alternative export route once it has been completed, which would lessen the KRG’s dependence on Baghdad.

Whereas a thriving autonomous Kurdish entity on its border may once have been deemed deeply threatening to Turkey, today Ankara appears ready to support Iraq’s Kurdish separatists not only as part of its contest with Iran for regional influence, but also because Turkey sees the KRG as a potentially important ally in its struggle against the PKK. Turkish support is premised on the willingness of the authorities in the KRG to clamp down hard on PKK operations in territory under its control. Barzani certainly talks the talk, publicly demanding, in Ankara last week, that the PKK lay down

arms, www.ekurd.net and warning that he will not allow the group to operate freely in Northern Iraq as long as it remains committed to violence. But as analyst MK Bhadrakumar has noted, it may not be quite that simple: While Iraq’s Kurdish leadership may understand the geopolitical necessity of cooperating with Turkey’s campaign against the PKK, the peshmerga fighting men on whom they’d rely to actually tackle PKK operations on their turf are generally far more sympathetic to the plight of their brothers in arms from across the Turkish border.

Turkey’s PKK fears are exacerbated by the crisis in Syria, where its support for those fighting the regime of President Bashar al-Assad has prompted Damascus to threaten to retaliate by resuming support for the PKK – a move that could spell trouble inside Turkey which shares a long border with Syria’s Kurdish region. Some suggest enlisting the likes of Barzani could serve as something of a hedge, and possibly even persuade more Syrian Kurds to move off the sidelines and support the anti-Assad rebellion.

They may be one of the peoples overlooked by the British and French when they redrew the borders of the Middle East in the wake of World War I, but today’s Iraqi Kurds appear to have digested the lessons of history, first and foremost the maxim that every crisis is also an opportunity. ♦



24 April 2012

Blast Erdogan on your way to Iran!



By Tariq Alhomayed

The above title is a summary of the story of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, in which he accuses Turkey of hostility and inciting sectarianism, whilst the facts dictate that Iraq is now, under its current government, one of the principal sources provoking sectarian strife in the region. As a result, we find that al-Maliki himself is today without any allies in Iraq, just as he lacks any normal relations with the Arab world.

With regards to Iraq, al-Maliki is profoundly at odds with the Sunnis, and wants to imprison his deputy, Tareq al-Hashemi. He has also clashed with the Kurds, as well as the Sadrists loyal to Iran, and even with [Abdulaziz] al-Hakim. He is also got

involved in an intense dispute with the Iraqiya bloc, led by Dr. Iyad Allawi. So what left for Mr. al-Maliki after all this? Regionally, and in terms of the Arab world, al-Maliki does not have any normal relations with the influential Arab countries of the region, or any countries in the region for that matter, with the exception of Iran. Al-Maliki has launched attacks on Saudi Arabia in language not worthy of a diplomat, let alone a Prime Minister, and he has done the same with Qatar, and now with Turkey! This is not all of course, as al-Maliki is also the one who said: “the [al-Assad] regime did not fall, and it will not fall, and why should it fall?”, despite all that the Baathist tyrant of Damascus has done to the Syrian people. Iraq is now creating passageways to help the al-Assad regime by transferring weapons and money and smuggling oil. So what left after all this? How can al-Maliki say that

Turkey is a hostile country, inciting sectarianism in Iraq, while Tehran launches an attack on [Massoud] Barzani, on the eve of al-Maliki’s visit to Iran, and also accuses al-Hashemi of wanting to restore Sunni rule in Iraq with the support of Saudi Arabia?

Therefore it is clear today that Nuri al-Maliki is not trying to be the new Saddam Hussein, rather he is adopting the role of al-Assad in the region. This is what I referred to several months ago when I said that Iraq would be an alternative to Syria, and hence we find al-Maliki attacking the Turkish Prime Minister and then immediately travelling to Iran, because the Syrian revolution has constituted a real blow to Tehran’s policies in the region, and the fall of al-Assad, or the fact that the Syrian people are currently besieging him, represents a sizeable >>

>>tremor for Iranian foreign policy. This has prompted Tehran to immediately begin searching for an alternative to al-Assad in the region, in terms of both a state and its leadership, with this alternative in turn providing support for the Syrian regime so that it can survive for a longer period. Should the tyrant of Damascus fall, the alternative, i.e. Iraq, will work to ensure that the supply lines

are not cut off to Iran's allies in the region, such as Hezbollah, the Huthis and so on, and will of course besiege the Gulf States and contain the post-Assad Syria. The importance of Iraq is completely different to that of Syria, whereby Baghdad is financially sufficient and possesses a variety of sources, and most importantly of all - as far as Tehran is concerned - in Iraq there are sectarian figures ready to

work with Iran, albeit at the expense of their own people, even Iraq's Shiites. From here it is clear that Iraq's escalation against Saudi Arabia and Turkey specifically, and its defense of al-Assad, means that the Iraqi government has repositioned itself to be a subsidiary of Tehran, searching for Iranian support both at home and abroad.

□ □ □

FP Foreign Policy

APRIL 25, 2012

Turkey's Kurdish leadership debates the definition of terrorism

By Allison Good

Members of Turkey's Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) proposed a more decentralized Turkish government at a Brookings Institution panel on Tuesday.

"We don't believe that a centralized system of government that manages all of these different ethnic groups and communities is viable and productive," said BDP chairman Selahattin Demirtas. "We see this [decentralized government] as the most viable alternative."

Demirtas also emphasized that he is not calling for a completely independent Kurdish entity:

"We are not talking about the Kurdish people [living] in a region

called Kurdistan."

Though he stressed that the BDP has no "organic relationship" with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which the Turkish government classifies as a terrorist organization, Demirtas noted that the PKK is not the problem, but a result of the problem:

"We believe the PKK is part of the reality of this conflict, and we believe that they should be communicated with.... We don't see the PKK as a problem, we see it as a result of the problem."

Ahmet Türk of the Democratic Society Party (DTP) agreed, and urged the audience to consider that the Turkish government's longstanding policy of denying its Kurdish citizens their civil rights might be the root of the problem.

"You don't provide Kurds an opportunity to express themselves, so the PKK emerged."

While Demirtas made sure to explain that his party does not condone violence, he did take issue with the Turkish government's definition of terrorism:

"This means of violence that is being used has to be understood correctly. The simple, traditional [defi-



nition of] terrorism cannot be used here. This is a 100-year-old conflict.... As long as you are unable to define it correctly, the wrong definition will cause misunderstanding."

BDP member and Turkish parliamentarian Gülten Kisanak argued that the PKK's numbers are evidence that the government must rethink its position toward the organization:

"According to data provided by the Turkish chief of staff, since 1978 40,000 Kurds have participated in the PKK and lost their life in fighting the struggle. I believe these numbers cannot be seen as terrorism in that sense."

The BDP may support President Abdullah Gül's call for a new "flexible and freedom-based" constitution, but its forward-thinking notions about the PKK isn't going to win it many points with Ankara. ♦

REUTERS

Kurdish rebels kill 4 Guards in western Iran

April 25, 2012 - (Reuters)

DUBAI - Kurdish rebels killed four members of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards in an attack in the west of the country, the Iranian news agency Mehr said on Wednesday.

Iranian security forces have been on the offensive against the rebels in mountainous areas bordering Iraq since last year.

Another four guards were wounded in Tuesday's assault by the PJAK (Party of Free Life of Kurdistan) group in the western district of Paveh, according to Mehr.

"The small terrorist group PJAK also suffered casualties in this attack, the exact number of which will be announced later," an Iranian security official told the agency.

PJAK is an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which took up arms in 1984 to fight for an ethnic homeland in southeast Turkey. Both Iran and its major adversary the United States have called PJAK a terrorist organisation □

Moqtada Sadr au Kurdistan pour résoudre la crise



Moqtada Sadr et Massoud Barzani. Safin Hamed/AFP

Irak Le chef radical chiite irakien Moqtada Sadr s'est présenté hier à son arrivée à Erbil, capitale de la région autonome du Kurdistan, comme un médiateur entre le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki et le chef kurde Massoud Barzani, qui sont à couteaux tirés. Venu d'Iran où il poursuit ses

études religieuses, il a indiqué aux journalistes avoir une liste de 18 points qu'il entend discuter avec les responsables kurdes pour tenter de mettre fin à quatre mois de crise politique.

« J'ai rencontré Nouri al-Maliki à Téhéran et je suis venu ici pour écouter l'opinion et les points de vue des dirigeants kurdes. Chacun doit regarder

l'intérêt général et l'unité du peuple irakien et j'espère que chacun fera preuve de responsabilité », a-t-il dit. Il a critiqué indirectement M. Maliki, qu'il avait déjà qualifié de dictateur, en affirmant que « les minorités représentent une part importante de l'Irak ».

Dans un pays à majorité chiite, les Kurdes comme la formation laïque Iraqiya, soutenue par les sunnites, fustigent le pouvoir personnel de Nouri al-Maliki et l'accusent de prendre ses décisions sans consulter son gouvernement. Mais M. Sadr a également implicitement blâmé les Kurdes. « L'intérêt national, l'unité de l'Irak et son indépendance doivent primer sur l'intérêt confessionnel ou ethnique », a-t-il ajouté. Le chef chiite s'en est pris aussi à la Turquie qui avait accusé le Premier ministre de discrimination à l'égard des sunnites. « Nous rejetons l'interférence de n'importe quel pays dans les affaires intérieures irakiennes », a-t-il dit.

« C'est une visite histo-

rique qui renforcera les relations entre le Kurdistan et le reste de l'Irak et qui va permettre d'offrir plus de stabilité dans la situation politique du pays », a estimé Fouad Hussein, chef du bureau de la présidence kurde. Auparavant, lors d'une conférence de presse à Bagdad, le porte-parole de Moqtada Sadr, cheikh Salah al-Obeidi, avait indiqué qu'une telle action était nécessaire pour « résoudre la crise » en Irak. Le chef du Kurdistan autonome, Massoud Barzani, inquiet des conséquences d'un pouvoir fort à Bagdad, a multiplié ces derniers temps les attaques contre le chef du gouvernement irakien l'accusant de se conduire en dictateur en concentrant tous les pouvoirs entre ses mains.

Après sa visite à Erbil, M. Sadr pourrait se rendre à Najaf, au centre de l'Irak, selon un responsable de son bureau. □ (Source : AFP)



Iraq to get first F-16 jets in early 2014

April 29, 2012 / Raheem Salman (Reuters)

IRAQ WILL receive the first 24 of 36 F-16 fighter jets it has ordered from the United States at the beginning of 2014, a senior official told Reuters on Sunday.

Under deposed dictator Saddam Hussein, Iraq's air force was one of the largest in the region with hundreds of mainly Soviet-designed jets. Its military was disbanded after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003.

Last July, Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki doubled the number of warplanes Iraq had initially planned to buy to strengthen an air force neglected during a protracted period when the country relied on U.S. air support.

Iskander Witwit, the deputy head of parliament's security and defence committee, said that the first 24 planes would make up two air force squadrons.

"Iraq intends to have equipment which is more developed than

neighboring countries have. Small neighboring countries like Kuwait even have five squadrons," Witwit said.

Iraq would be in the market for more planes in the future, Witwit said. Pilots are already training to fly the new F-16s.

Some of Iraq's neighbors and the president of its semi-autonomous Kurdish region, Masoud Barzani, have said they are worried about Baghdad acquiring the jets.

"I feel Kurdistan's future is in severe danger because of (Maliki)," Barzani said last week. "F-16 (jets) should not reach the hands of this man."

The central government and the Kurdish region have long-running disputes over political autonomy, oil rights and contested territories.

But Witwit dismissed the concerns, telling Reuters the warplanes were intended to defend Iraq, not "one man".



Turquie : trois rebelles kurdes, un soldat et un milicien tués dans des combats

DIYARBAKIR - 24 avril 2012 - AFP

TROIS REBELLES kurdes ont été tués dans des affrontements opposant des forces de sécurité turques aux militants du Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), survenus mardi dans la province de Bingol dans l'Est de la Turquie, apprend-on de source officielle.

Un soldat turc a été blessé lors de ces heurts qui ont eu lieu dans une zone rurale près de la ville de Genc dans la province de Bingol, précise-on de même source.

Les forces de sécurité turques ont lancé une large opération dans la région

pour poursuivre les rebelles kurdes impliqués dans ce clash.

Tôt dans la matinée, une bombe a explosé au passage d'une patrouille des forces turques sur l'autoroute reliant Mardin à Diyarbakir dans le sud-est de la Turquie, une région peuplée en majorité de kurdes. Cette explosion a fait plusieurs blessés dans les rangs des forces turques, selon la presse turque.

La Turquie fait face depuis l'été dernier à une montée de la violence des séparatistes du PKK, un mouvement considéré comme terroriste par Ankara et plusieurs autres capitales du monde, qui a pris les armes contre le gouvernement turc en 1984 pour s'engager dans un conflit qui a fait plus de 45.000 morts depuis lors. ○



Iran: quatre Gardiens de la Révolution tués par des rebelles kurdes

TEHERAN, 25 avril 2012 (AFP)

LES REBELLES kurdes ont tué quatre Gardiens de la Révolution, l'armée d'élite du régime iranien, dans l'ouest du pays, a indiqué mercredi un responsable provincial, cité par l'agence de presse Mehr.

L'attaque a été menée mardi soir par des membres du PJAK (Parti pour une vie libre au Kurdistan), principal mouvement kurde de lutte armée

contre le régime de Téhéran, près de la ville de Paveh, dans la province de Kermanshah, a précisé Mehr.

"Quatre membres des Gardiens ont été tués et quatre autres blessés dans cet acte lâche", a déclaré un haut responsable de la sécurité de la province, Shahryar Heydari.

Selon lui, le PJAK a également subi des pertes, sans plus de précisions.

Ces morts sont les premiers annoncés depuis l'été dernier.

En septembre, les Gardiens de la révolution avaient indiqué avoir "nettoyé" les zones frontalières du nord-ouest de l'Iran des groupes rebelles kurdes armés et tué 180 rebelles du PJAK.

Et en octobre, le ministre iranien des Affaires étrangères, Ali Akbar Salehi, et le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, avaient affirmé que la question du PJAK était "régulée". ○



Irak : Moqtada Sadr opposé à un troisième mandat de Nouri al-Maliki

NAJAF, 27 avril 2012 (AFP)

LE CHEF RADICAL chiite irakien Moqtada Sadr est opposé au renversement immédiat du gouvernement mais refuse que l'actuel Premier ministre, Nouri al-Maliki, puisse se présenter en 2014 pour un troisième mandat, ont annoncé vendredi à l'AFP ses proches collaborateurs.

En visite à Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan irakien dans le nord du pays, Moqtada Sadr a rencontré vendredi le président irakien Jalal Talabani, le président de la région autonome Massoud Barzani et son Premier ministre Nechirvan Barzani, selon un communiqué de la présidence kurde.

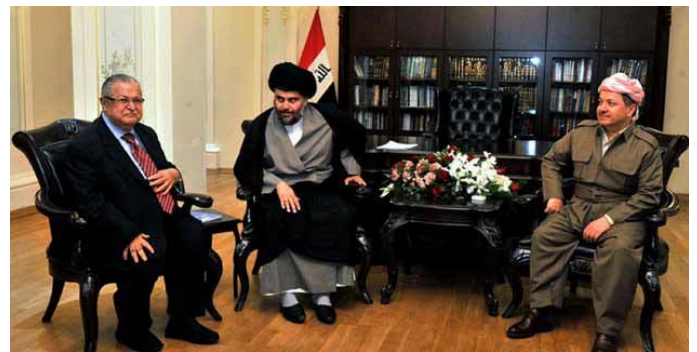
Venu jeudi d'Iran, où il poursuit ses études religieuses, le dirigeant chiite s'est présenté comme un médiateur entre MM Barzani et Maliki, qui sont à couteaux tirés.

"Moqtada Sadr a évoqué (avec Massoud Barzani) divers sujets lors de sa visite au Kurdistan, notamment celui de ne pas accorder un nouveau mandat à Nouri al-Maliki, considérant que ce dernier a déjà pris position en ce sens", a affirmé Dhia al-Assadi, secrétaire général du bloc Ahrar, qui regroupe les 40 députés sadristes au Parlement.

M. Maliki, en poste depuis mai 2006, avait indiqué à l'AFP en février 2011 qu'il ne solliciterait pas un troisième mandat, avant de revenir sur ses propos et d'adopter une position plus ambiguë.

Selon M. Assadi, le dirigeant radical chiite a discuté des "problèmes entre le chef de la région (Massoud Barzani) et le gouvernement fédéral" et il "a appelé à soutenir le gouvernement actuel et à ne pas le renverser à condition que tous les Irakiens puissent y participer".

Il s'est ainsi différencié de M. Barzani et des Kurdes qui fustigent, aux côtés



de la formation laïque Iraqiya, le pouvoir personnel de M. Maliki et veulent le renverser par une motion de censure au Parlement.

Les sadristes font partie de la grande coalition chiite (159 députés sur les 325 sièges du Parlement) qui appuie le Premier ministre, tout en le critiquant.

"La principale préoccupation de Moqtada Sadr est d'obtenir de meilleurs services publics et que la richesse de l'Irak (le pétrole) bénéficie à tous les Irakiens", a insisté M. Assadi.

Un autre proche collaborateur de Sadr a confirmé que le refus d'accorder un troisième mandat à M. Maliki avait été discuté entre les deux dirigeants "mais il n'y pas eu d'accord car la limitation à deux mandats nécessite une loi adoptée par le Parlement".

Lors de la réunion vendredi à Erbil, "les participants ont insisté sur la nécessité de mettre en place un programme national plaçant les intérêts supérieurs du peuple irakien au-dessus des intérêts confessionnels ou partisans", selon le communiqué de la présidence kurde. ○

Turkey and Iraq Trade Barbs in Growing Diplomatic Spat

By JOE PARKINSON

ISTANBUL—A rolling diplomatic spat between Turkey and Iraq's government is heightening regional strains, as Baghdad and Ankara accuse one another of stoking sectarian strife.

The two countries this week summoned each others' top diplomats, after Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on April 19 said Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's "self-centered" actions had fanned tensions between Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds. The Iraqi leader countered later that day that Turkey was becoming a "hostile state" with a sectarian agenda.

Mr. Erdogan weighed in again Saturday, appearing to goad the Iraqi premier: "If we respond to Mr. Maliki, we give him the opportunity to show off," he said.

A statement on Iraq's foreign ministry website on Tuesday said Baghdad had "acquainted the Turkish ambassador with the Iraqi government's intense protest against the recent statements...and expressed hope that the Turkish government will stop giving statements that affect Iraq's sovereignty and internal affairs."

Later Tuesday, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu told reporters that Turkey had "never been a part of the political conflict or the sectarian agenda in Iraq."

The latest round of sparring builds on tensions between Turkey and Iraq that flared in January, when Baghdad accused Ankara of meddling in its internal affairs.

Turkey's commercial interests in parts of Iraq make it unlikely that any ties would be severed. Still, the deepening rift could threaten to dent the Middle East's fastest-growing trade relationship.

The disagreement also speaks to

escalating sectarian tensions across the region, reflecting a wider conflict between Sunni Turkey and Shiite Iran, which supports Mr. Maliki's administration in Shiite-majority Iraq.

These tensions have risen in the wake of the U.S. troop pullout from Iraq and amid the battle in Syria, where protesters largely from the Sunni majority are battling President Bashar al-Assad's Iran-backed government.

"What we're seeing is what we had feared after the U.S. pulled back its troops—namely the rising influence of Iran in Iraq, which is fueling sectarian tensions," said Sinan Ulgen, a former Turkish diplomat now at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "There has been a lack of tact from Turkey and Iraq. In the short term the animosity will likely increase as Turkey's interests continue to diverge from Iran's."

One trigger for the acrimony between the neighbors was Turkish politicians' public comments on the case of Tariq al-Hashemi, Iraq's Sunni vice president, who sought refuge in Kurdish-ruled northern Iraq late last year after the government accused him of leading death squads against Shiites.

Mr. Hashemi, who denies the charges, met privately with Mr. Erdogan on Tuesday, the latest in a series of meetings with Turkish officials that have drawn fire from Baghdad.

In an interview Wednesday in Istanbul, Mr. Hashemi said the charges against him were "politically motivated" and accused Mr. Maliki of pursuing policies of "sectarian polarization" and violence that could lead to the kind of sectarian conflict that claimed thousands of lives in Iraq in 2006 and 2007 at the height of the bloodshed following the 2003 U.S.-led invasion.

"Locally and regionally, we're at a critical point," said Mr. Hashemi, who is currently staying under the protection of Turkish authorities in Istanbul before his planned return to northern Iraq later this week. "Turkey tried to restructure the geopolitics in the region on the basis of getting everybody together to focus on the economy—now we're at a point where we see major sectarianism and we need to step back."

The two countries have in recent years enjoyed a fast-expanding trade relationship. Iraq is now Turkey's second-largest trading partner after Germany, with trade swelling 40% to reach \$12 billion last year, according to Turkey's government. However, more than half of that volume is between



Turkish Premier Erdogan, right, speaks with Iraqi Vice President Hashemi on April 14, one in a series of meetings that have angered Baghdad.

Turkey and Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish region.

Baghdad's concerns over Turkey's role in Iraqi affairs has been fueled by Turkey's recent moves to forge closer ties to the Kurdish region's president, Masoud Barzani, whose administration is embroiled in a row with the Baghdad government over territorial claims, control of the region's oil and its recent sheltering of Mr. Hashemi.

Mr. Barzani on Monday urged Washington to halt an agreed sale of F-16 warplanes to Iraq while Mr. Maliki is prime minister, for fear they could be used against his region. That marked the starkest warning yet from the Kurdish leader, who has previously accused Mr. Maliki of seeking to centralize power and moving toward dictatorship.

The U.S. has agreed to sell 36 F-16 jets to Baghdad in a multi-billion-dollar deal aimed at increasing the capabilities of Iraq's fledgling air force, a weak point in its national defenses.

Baghdad and Ankara have also publicly disagreed over Syria's uprising. While Mr. Erdogan has taken a hawkish line in favor of the country's opposition, Mr. Maliki has said the insurgency could spread "like a house on fire" into Iraq.

Mr. Erdogan's approach could jeopardize an important relationship, some analysts say.

"Mr. Maliki is not Assad, and Erdogan should be more polite: Turkey has substantial economic interests in Iraq," said Atilla Yesilada, partner at the Istanbul office of New York-based research firm Global Source Partners. "Many in Baghdad feel they shouldn't be taking lectures from Erdogan on marginalizing opponents when, from their perspective, he's done similar things in Turkey." ♦

The Kurdish problem: developments to watch

MURAT YETKİN / Hürriyet Daily News

When you read the statements Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan made in Qatar on Friday, and those Masoud Barzani, the leader of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq made in Ankara the same day, you can see two important similarities.

The first is a call to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Both Barzani and Erdoğan asked the PKK to drop its weapons immediately. This is perhaps not new, since we have heard the same from both of them at different times before. But the difference this time is that they met in Istanbul on Friday and discussed the matter.

That meeting was followed by a long overseas trip by Barzani, the most important part of which was a visit to Washington, D.C. There he was received by U.S. President Barack Obama, Vice President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta; it was almost like the state reception of a national president.

In Turkey Barzani was met with a similar presidential-style reception as well. After his meeting with Erdoğan and National Intelligence Organization (MİT) chief Hakan Fidan on Thursday, he met with President Abdullah Gül and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu on Friday. In addition to that, Barzani met with the co-chairman of the Kurdish problem-focused Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), which acknowledges that it shares the same power base with the PKK.

Barzani made his statements following all those meetings. And Erdoğan made his statements in Qatar at almost the same time that Barzani made his in Ankara. Plus, Barzani underlined very clearly that he would not allow the PKK to continue to use the territory of the KRG to carry out attacks on Turkey; we can assume that this had been a subject of discussion in D.C., as well as in Istanbul and Ankara. Erdoğan's addition to his call was that negotiations would not be possible unless the PKK abandoned arms.

Meanwhile, very interesting developments are taking place on the domestic scene with the Kurdish problem in Turkey. On Thursday it became clear that İrfan Dündar, one of the leading lawyers for Abdullah Öcalan, the founder and leader of the PKK, who is serving a life sentence on the prison island of İmralı, had applied to benefit from the repentance law. He revealed how he and other members of Öcalan's legal team had secretly conveyed coded messages obtained during prison visits with their client to the PKK, giving the organization instructions as to what step to take, including their actions of all kinds. Following the exposure of some MİT informants linked to the PKK, that development is likely to escalate the psychological pressure on the PKK.

The second of two similar statements that both leaders made was about the need to preserve the unity of Iraq. When you talk about unity, it means you consider the possibility of the opposite as well. It is meaningful for the leader of an autonomous region, bordering Turkey and Iraq, to make that statement at a time when he is harboring the Sunni Arab Vice President of the country (Tariq al-Hashemi), who is on the run from an arrest warrant issued under Shiite Arab Prime Minister Nouri Maliki. Al-Hashemi is currently staying in Turkey, and Barzani accused Maliki in his Friday press conference of trying to establish a regime of one-man rule in Iraq.

It will be worth observing the new moves all of the parties involved will make following Barzani's return to his homeland. ■

Iraq's Shahrستاني: dispute with Kurds an internal affair

By Alister Bull / Reuters

WASHINGTON - A simmering dispute between Iraq's central government and the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan is an internal affair, a top Baghdad official said on Thursday, in an implicit rebuff of U.S. efforts to broker a compromise between the two sides.

"Of course there is American interest and goodwill to facilitate an understanding," said Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Hussain al-Shahrستاني.

"But it was clear to all sides that any internal matter has to be discussed by Iraqis inside Iraq," he told reporters after meeting with U.S. Vice President Joe Biden.

Washington is anxious to ease a political crisis that erupted after U.S. troops left Iraq last year, which analysts fear could strain the country's unity if it escalates further.

Oil is at the heart of the broad dispute between Kurdistan in northern Iraq and the central government, which worsened when the Kurds stopped oil exports to Baghdad earlier this month in protest over non-payment.

Shahrستاني said no progress had been made in lifting the Kurdish oil export embargo.

"They were supposed to be sending a delegation to Baghdad, which has not come, to discuss this issue," he said.

Kurdistan Regional Government President Masoud Barzani recently met Biden in Washington and has also visited Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, who has publicly chided Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki for stoking the conflict.

This blunt break with traditional diplomacy drew sharp words from Baghdad, which Shahrستاني echoed in Washington.



"We regret that we hear some of the comments that have been coming from Ankara," he said. "We do not appreciate comments from others, or interference in our internal affairs."

However, Shahrستاني said he did not expect the dispute to harm trade, including oil exports, between the two neighbors. Iraq is Turkey's second-largest trading partner with trade of \$12 billion last year.

In addition, Iraqi cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, a powerful broker in the country's coalition government, visited Kurdistan on Thursday in an effort to lower tensions.

Shahrستاني said bilateral talks were welcome, "but they are not a substitute for a national conference, where all parties are present." □

⇒ The White House, concerned by high U.S. gasoline prices in an election year, wants to do everything possible to boost the supply of oil on to world markets.

Biden's office said the vice president had "reaffirmed our commitment to work with Iraqi leaders across the spectrum to support the

continued development of Iraq's energy sector."

Iraq sits atop some of the largest oil reserves in the world and has ambitious plans to lift production.

But development has been clouded by tension between Baghdad and the Kurds, who

have signed exploration deals with several foreign oil companies, including U.S. oil major Exxon Mobile, which are deemed illegal by the central government.

Shahristani said the issue of Exxon Mobile had not been raised during the talks with Biden on Thursday. ♦

Rudaw

29 April 2012

By ADNAN HUSSEIN

rudaw.net

Will Barzani "Checkmate" Maliki?

BAGHDAD, Iraq -- Last week was a very busy one for Iraqi politicians, with Erbil once again being the center of attention.

Ayad Allawi, head of the Iraqiya bloc, Muqtada Sadr, head of the Sadrist Trend, and Adil Abdulmahdi, senior official with the Iraqi Supreme Islamic Council, all visited Erbil and met with Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani.

Separately, Barzani met with head of the Change Movement (Gorran) Nawshirwan Mustafa and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani.

News leaked from the meetings that Talabani and Barzani had reached an agreement on solving the current problems within the principles of the Erbil Agreement. Talabani and Barzani have pointed to the significance of meeting with Iraqi leaders until an agreement is reached on how to tackle the problems that have brought the country's political process to a standstill.

The Iraqiya bloc attended four of the five Erbil meetings. Dr. Fuad Masoum, head of the Kurdistan Coalition in Iraqi Parliament, told Rudaw, "The last meeting cannot be considered part of the preparation for a national consensus meeting since one of the major parties did not attend."

Dr. Masoum added, "We suggested all Iraqi political parties comply with the provisions of the Erbil Agreement. Ninety percent of the Erbil Agreement covers nationwide issues. We asked the National Alliance to bring their concerns to the negotiation table and for the Iraqiya bloc to do the same. Then the Iraqi president can assess the concerns, talk to the parties and set a date for a national consensus meeting."

Moayad Teyib, spokesperson for the Kurdistan Coalition, says a national consensus meeting is the best option for addressing Iraqi issues, but added, "In the last meeting, we refused to reach an agreement on holding the national consensus meeting due to the absence of the Iraqiya bloc."

Shakir Daraji, an Iraqi MP from the National Alliance (Shia) and senior official in the Iraqi prime minister's Dawa Party says the Iraqiya bloc's absence at the meeting was unjustified and that had a number of conditions for participating at the last minute.

In this photo from June 2010, Kurdistan Region's President Massoud Barzani meets with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki in Salahaddin, east of Kurdish capital Erbil. Photo www.krp.org



"The discussions were going well, but the Iraqiya bloc is interested in escalating conflict. They do not want the meetings to go well. At each meeting, the Iraqiya bloc brings a new set of conditions. This shows that the Iraqiya bloc is not honest about their demands and do not want progress," Daraji says.

Daraji thinks that the Iraqiya tries to use the Kurdistan Region president, Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia to gain political points.

"But political issues cannot be solved this way. The issues can only be solved in Iraq, not outside Iraqi borders," he says.

Nahida Daini, an MP from the Iraqiya bloc, disagrees with Daraji, saying, "The Iraqiya bloc has never been assured that the Erbil Agreement will be implemented, which is why we refused to participate in the last meeting," she said. "We were the first party to call for a national consensus meeting."

During a visit to the United States earlier this month, Barzani stated that he would bring Iraqi leaders together in Erbil when he returned to Kurdistan. Most Iraqi leaders, among them Muqtada Sadr met in Erbil this week with the exception of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's party officials.

Daraji says Dawa Party senior officials refused to participate in the meeting for two reasons "Firstly, recent statements by President Barzani show that he is not impartial to the issues; he has taken sides and therefore cannot play a mediator's role. Secondly, if the meeting takes place in Erbil, some individuals will attend that we do not want at the meeting."

A political analyst says the real reason behind Maliki's party's refusal is that they may face undesirable circumstances if they attend the meeting -- Iraqi parties might agree in Erbil to withdraw confidence from the Maliki cabinet.

Maliki's coalition has described Barzani's initiative as an attempt to disregard Talabani's

plans, but Dr. Masoum told Rudaw, "Talabani and Barzani are in complete agreement on the issues."

Baha Aaraji, head of Sadr's Ahrar Trend, describes Barzani's initiative as "significant".

"The Kurdistan president's initiative allows political parties to voice their concerns and thus prepares them for a national consensus meeting, a meeting that Talabani has called for as well," he says.

Teyib, spokesperson for the Kurdistan Coalition, told Rudaw, "The initiatives of both Talabani and Barzani have the same end. They both aim at solving the current Iraqi crisis. They both agree that the best roadmap to reach a solution is to comply with the Erbil Agreement."

Political analysts believe the Kurdistan president does not intend to "checkmate" Maliki -- to borrow a term from chess -- but simply to put him in "check" since there is no better alternative.

Teyib added that forming a new coalition with the Iraqiya bloc was not feasible under the current situation, as some of the groups in the bloc have conflicting opinions to those of the Kurds. "We have some common ground with the Iraqiya bloc, but we also still have some with our former allies in the PM's coalition," he said.

The Iraqiya bloc's statements regarding the removal of Maliki are seen more as a way to put pressure on the Iraqi PM, rather than genuinely attempt to remove him from his post.

Daraji says forming a new alliance between the Iraqiya bloc, Kurds and the Sadrist Trend is more a dream than a real possibility.

"The Sadrist Trend has no intention of withdrawing confidence from Maliki's government," Daraji said, adding that during Maliki's visit to Iran he was assured by Sadr that the group supports the prime minister's coalition. □

France would back force if Syria fails on peace plan

PARIS

Juppé says deployment of observers is urgent as Russia voices concern

REUTERS

France wants to see at least 300 United Nations observers in Syria within two weeks and will push for a U.N. Security Council resolution permitting the use of force unless Damascus complies with a peace plan, Foreign Minister Alain Juppé said Wednesday.

At a news conference after meeting with opponents of President Bashar al-Assad, Mr. Juppé said there must be a rapid deployment of U.N. observers because the peace plan was "extremely compromised."

"We want to see observers in sufficient numbers," Mr. Juppé said, adding that he wanted them in Syria within "two weeks, not three months."

Any resolution at the U.N. Security Council permitting force would almost certainly face a veto from Russia, which is particularly wary of military intervention similar to the NATO campaign that helped topple Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi in Libya. Moscow fears that such a move could draw in Assad allies like Iran and further destabilize the Middle East.

Nevertheless, Vitaly I. Churkin, Russia's ambassador to the United Nations, said Wednesday that it would be worrying if Damascus failed to withdraw troops and weapons.

"If this is the case, if the promise in the letter has not really been carried out, that would mean it is a breach of the promise they made on Saturday," Mr. Churkin said. "I'm certainly going to bring it to the attention of Moscow."

Throughout the conflict, Russia has been one of Syria's few friends, providing protection at the United Nations from any Security Council measures.

Kofi Annan, the former U.N. secretary general who has been designated as an international envoy to Syria, said Tuesday that Syria had failed to comply with a pledge to withdraw weapons from population centers and that towns where residents met U.N. truce monitors may have been attacked.

Mr. Juppé said May 5, when Mr. Annan is due to present a report to the Security Council on Syria, would be the "moment of truth."

"If that does not work, we cannot allow the regime to defy us," he said. "We would have to move to a new stage with a Chapter 7 resolution at the United Na-

tions to take a new step to stop this tragedy."

Chapter 7 of the U.N. Charter permits the Security Council to call for armed intervention, and the United States reneged on a promise to seek such a resolution before invading Iraq.

The French government has said it would support military action in Syria if there were a U.N. mandate, something that remains unlikely given the opposition not only from Russia but also China. Both have veto power in the Security Council.

When asked if he thought Russia would support a Chapter 7 resolution, Mr. Juppé noted that Moscow had already accepted resolutions enabling Mr. Annan's mission and the sending of observers.

"I hope they will realize that the regime is blocking the process and I hope that their position will evolve in light of what's happening on the ground," he said. "It is the regime that is cracking down and the opposition that is defending itself as well as it can."

Mr. Annan emphasized the need to get "eyes and ears on the ground," but the U.N. peacekeeping chief, Hervé Ladous, said it would take a month to deploy the first 100 monitors.

As international pressure built on Mr. Assad, the Syrian Observatory for Hu-

"It is the regime that is cracking down and the opposition that is defending itself as well as it can."

man Rights, an opposition group based in London, said four people had been killed when security forces opened fire on a bus at a checkpoint on the main road from Aleppo to Damascus.

An elderly man was also killed, it added, in heavy fighting in Dera'a, a southern city that is the crucible of the anti-Assad revolt that flared 13 months ago after uprisings against autocratic leaders in the Arab world.

Shelling was relentless in Douma, east of the capital, according to a woman who visited there Tuesday night. The town was without water, power or mobile phone connection, she said, and pro-government gunmen were wandering the streets, preventing people from leaving their homes.

"There was bombardment all night," she said. "Artillery and tanks. We didn't sleep at all. Not for a moment. Most residents have gone down to live on the ground floor, because most of the second and third floors have been hit."

There was no mention of the bus shooting or bombardment in Syria's news media or comment from the authorities in Damascus, which has barred most foreign journalists since the protests started.

Damascus and opposition trade blame for collapse

BEIRUT

BY NEIL MACFARQUHAR AND HWAIDA SAAD

A large number of Syrian civilians died in a poor neighborhood of Hama after their houses crashed down on them, but the government and the opposition offered widely different accounts on Thursday of the cause of the episode.

The opposition activists called it a massacre, saying intensive government shelling collapsed a row of cinder-block shanties, killing about 70 people. State media, however, said 16 people died when a bomb-making operation by government opponents went awry, with a series of blasts leveling the houses in the Mashaa al-Tayar neighborhood.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, based in London, had a similar lower toll, but said the cause of the deaths was as yet undetermined.

The episode was certain to deepen the



SHAAM NEWS NETWORK, VIA AP
Amateur footage of a rally in Hama, Syria, on Thursday, after shanties fell on civilians.

skepticism that a shaky cease-fire negotiated by Kofi Annan, the former United Nations secretary general, would hold.

A new pattern has also developed in recent days of the government rushing to blame the opposition, which it uniformly labels "terrorists," for deaths in episodes of violence.

On Tuesday, Mohamed Khadra, a vol-

unteer for the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, was killed in a barrage of gunfire that hit an ambulance ferrying the wounded from the Damascus suburb of Douma. The opposition has accused government forces of repeatedly preventing the evacuation of wounded from neighborhoods that staged anti-government protests, while the state-run media blamed an "armed terrorist group" for the attack.

In Istanbul on Thursday, the Syrian National Council, the main opposition group in exile, issued a statement de-

scribing the deaths in Hama as a blatant violation of the cease-fire. It called on the U.N. Security Council to meet to do something more to protect Syrian civilians. The government of President Bashar al-Assad had committed a series of "crimes" against Hama residents, including heavy shelling, summary executions, raids and arrests, it said.

"The world continues to wait while the regime continues to massacre the Syrian people," said the statement. There was no independent confirmation from Hama of either account of what happened on Wednesday evening, be-

cause Syria prevents foreign reporters from circulating freely despite the terms of the cease-fire.

Although two members of an advance party of U.N. monitors were in Hama, activists said they did not make it to the scene. Opposition activists said government forces had singled out Hama for punishment because of a series of anti-government protests when the first U.N. monitors visited last Sunday.

The shelling has been erratic but continual, said one activist in Hama reached via Skype, who declined to be identified to avoid retribution.

Le Monde

Mardi 24 avril 2012

L'ONU vote l'envoi d'une mission de 300 observateurs non armés en Syrie

Le contingent de bérets bleus ne devrait pas être opérationnel avant plusieurs semaines. Sur le terrain, les forces du régime de Damas poursuivent la répression

New York (Nations unies)
Correspondante

Sans illusion, l'ONU s'apprête à déployer une mission de 300 observateurs internationaux en Syrie. Depuis l'entrée en vigueur, le 12 avril, de la trêve négociée par Kofi Annan, l'émissaire des Nations unies et de la Ligue arabe, les violences n'ont jamais cessé. Chaque jour, des dizaines de civils sont la cible des troupes syriennes. Damas doit « une fois pour toutes, arrêter d'utiliser des armes lourdes et les retirer des centres de population », a martelé l'ancien secrétaire général de l'ONU.

Son plan de paix, accepté par la Syrie début avril, prévoit un cessez-le-feu immédiat, l'aide et l'accès humanitaire, l'ouverture d'un dia-

logue politique, la libération des personnes arbitrairement détenues, l'accès pour la presse et la liberté de manifester. Aucun de ces six points n'a, à ce jour, été respecté par le régime syrien. Le lancement d'un plan d'aide humanitaire de 180 millions de dollars (136 millions d'euros) mis au point par l'ONU est lui-même suspendu au feu vert de Damas.

« Dans ce contexte, nous savons qu'en votant cette résolution, nous prenons un risque », a souligné, samedi 21 avril, l'ambassadeur français Gérard Araud, après le vote unanime par le Conseil de sécurité en faveur du déploiement de 300 militaires non armés pour quatre-vingt-dix jours. Si la grande majorité des 15 pays membres prônent une intervention rapide de la mission d'ob-

servation, les Etats-Unis étaient parmi les plus réticents, estimant préférable d'attendre que Damas ait rempli ses obligations avant toute action. Un désaccord qualifié de « purement tactique » par les Européens, quant à eux plus prudents que réticents, et qui avaient soumis un texte menaçant la Syrie de sanctions, en cas de refus d'obtempérer.

« Patience à bout »

Un vœu pieux face à la menace de veto que Moscou et Pékin, en fidèles alliés de Damas, étaient à deux doigts de brandir pour la troisième fois. Après d'âpres négociations, Russes et Occidentaux se sont entendus sur une version moins offensive. « Notre patience est à bout », a fait savoir l'ambassadrice américaine Susan Rice, qui a menacé Damas de ne pas opérer de renouvellement automatique de la mission après trois mois.

Une mise en garde à laquelle s'est rallié le représentant de la France. La marge de manœuvre des Nations unies en Syrie est « ténue », reconnaît un diplomate, qui rappelle que le régime syrien, après treize mois, « tient toujours ». « Quelle est l'alternative à l'envoi d'observateurs ? Nous n'en avons pas. Si l'ONU ne tente pas ce pari, l'alternative, c'est la guerre civile », fait-il encore remarquer, convaincu de l'importance aujourd'hui d'avoir « un pied dans la porte ».

L'objectif de cette présence « renforcée » des Nations unies est de

faciliter la remontée d'informations du terrain et d'assurer à terme un effet de modération, souligne-t-on à l'ONU. « Le déploiement d'une dizaine d'observateurs n'a en rien changé le comportement meurtrier du régime », a relevé Gérard Araud, jugeant « absolument indispensable » de déployer une mission « élargie ».

La résolution adoptée à l'unanimité pose les conditions de ce déploiement, telles que négociées par l'équipe avancée de M. Annan et Damas, notamment une totale liberté de mouvement, des moyens de communication et de transport au sol indépendants, et une sécurité assurée par les forces syriennes.

Reste que ce protocole ne clarifie pas la question des moyens aériens. L'ONU souhaite déployer ses propres avions et hélicoptères, seule garantie de mobilité rapide pour les 300 « bérets bleus », mais le régime syrien refuse de perdre le contrôle du survol de son territoire.

Etant donné les contraintes logistiques auxquelles sont confrontés les responsables du maintien de la paix – l'organisation ne dispose que de 9 véhicules blindés légers, il en faudrait 120 –, la mission ne devrait pas être au complet avant plusieurs semaines. Quant à son coup d'envoi, il ne peut venir que du secrétaire général Ban Ki-moon, chargé d'évaluer d'ici à quinze jours si la « consolidation » du cessez-le-feu le permet. ■

ALEXANDRA GENESTE

Environ 200 morts depuis l'application du cessez-le-feu

Les violences en Syrie ont fait, depuis le 15 mars 2011, plus de 11100 morts, dont environ 200 depuis l'entrée en vigueur du cessez-le-feu, le 12 avril.

14 avril Le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU approuve la résolution 2042, autorisant le déploiement d'une équipe de 30 observateurs pour surveiller le cessez-le-feu.

18 avril Plus de 80 morts en trois jours à travers le pays.

19 avril Damas signe un proto-

le sur le travail des observateurs.

20 avril Des milliers de manifestants antirégime interpellent les observateurs. Les violences font 46 morts dont 29 civils.

21 avril Le Conseil de sécurité vote une 2^e résolution (2043), autorisant l'envoi d'une mission élargie de 300 casques bleus non armés « pour une période initiale de quatre-vingt dix jours ».

22 avril 17 tués dans des affrontements, malgré les observateurs.

Kurds, Syria, and the Chessboard

By **ANDREI SHERIKHOV**, *political scientist, Strategic Culture Foundation expert, was published in International Affairs magazine.*

Last March, at the peak of the pressure on Syria and Iran, the Syrian Kurds boldly declared the independence of West Kurdistan, with the city of Afrin as the capital. The territory thus claimed lies in the northern part of Syria and borders Turkey. A forum of Syrian opposition groups held earlier this year in Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, passed a resolution to the effect that a self-governed Kurdish formation would be established in North-Eastern Syria when Assad's regime finally falls.

Predictably, it took Turkey virtually no time to respond. Premier Erdogan said that the only way to keep civilians safe in the Idleb and Rakka provinces would be to dispatch the Turkish troops and to set up a buffer security zone in the region. If the plan becomes reality, guerrillas from the Syrian Liberation Army would get enviable positions for attacks against the government forces in Syria plus a stronghold where they would be free to exercise and to reorder their ranks under Western instructors' oversight.

Should the promised Western Kurdistan come into being, Ankara which already faces serious risks due to the near-total autonomy of Southern Kurdistan in Iraq would be confronted with two serious problems instead of one. It should be taken into account that, as the developments in Libya increasingly demonstrate, central governments in countries recovering after regime change have slim chances to regain control over the territories which had sent independence messages in the days of unrest.

Ankara simply must keep a lid on whatever concerns Western Kurdistan, considering that the rise of a new center of Kurdish statehood in Syria would likely be a prologue to the creation of a Greater Kurdistan and thereby put Turkey on the brink of territorial disintegration. The course taken by Syrian Kurds can inspire their brethren resident in Turkey, and their separatist tendencies are as of today Ankara's worst headache.

Kurds, in turn, also reacted to the plan rolled out by Ankara without delay. Leaders of the Kurdistan Workers Party - in particular, Murat Karayilan - threatened that fighting would immediately spill across the entire Kurdistan if the Turkish army invades Syria.

In the settings, opponents of the Kurdish movement were able to charge that the Kurds must have cut a secret deal with B. Assad. Allegations sounded that they expect special terms from Damascus upon B. Assad's re-winning a grip on the country and that some of the pledges were already being fulfilled. The Kurdish wish list in Syria is well-known and features citizenship for some 400,000 of the 2.5 million Kurds living in the country, a cultural autonomy, school instruction in Kurdish, the opening of Kurdish-language media, etc. It must be noted that the territory of West Kurdistan is strategic as a source of agricultural products for Syria and as the part of the country containing key oil reserves.

The dynamics within the Syrian opposition appears to support the hypothesis that there indeed exists some sort of a deal with Assad. At the end of last March, the Syrian opposition held cru-



Syrian Kurds declared the independence of West Kurdistan, with the city of Afrin as the capital.

cial negotiations in Istanbul, and the Kurdish delegates walked out in the process, further destabilizing the fairly disunited front. In a pertinent comment, the **Курдистан.ру** outlet stressed that a recent report by Henry Jackson Society, a British-based foreign-policy thinktank, described the Kurds as "the decisive minority" in the anti-Assad revolution and said that their joining the cause would be "in the interests of the U.S. for a stable and inclusive Syria". Regardless of the West's calls, though, the Kurds are showing little if any resolve to get into the fight against Assad.

The Iraqi Kurdistan, in the meantime, urges the Kurds to eye the involvement in Syria with caution. Kurdistan's director of security and intelligence Masrour Barzani maintained in an interview that, being a part of the Middle East, the Kurds should be prepared for a worst-case scenario and receptive to whatever opportunities - if changes create greater stability, everybody will enjoy the enhanced security, but otherwise security will deteriorate and preparations have to be made accordingly.

The truth is that consensus between the Kurdish leaders and their Arab partners over the status the Kurds would be given in Syria if Assad is ejected has not been reached. The Kurds demand clearcut guarantees, but the Syrian opposition declines to provide them. As a result, the Kurds have no motivation to fight against the government in Syria. In contrast, B. Assad has accommodated some of the Kurdish demands since the outbreak of unrest in the country.

Speaking of the possibility that an independent West Kurdistan establishes itself as an independent territory and starts struggling for survival under pressure from both Turkey and Syria (with or without B. Assad) and that political turbulence erupts on other Kurdish-populated territories, the unraveling of the story would show that a global scenario intended to radically transform the region's political landscape is being implemented. One of the issues capable of jumping to the regional agenda is the independence of South Kurdistan from Iraq. In fact, Kurdish autonomy president Masoud Barzani upheld the plan to declare the independence following the celebrations of Nowruz on May 21, but the step was postponed.

The complexities around Iran additionally factor into the above situation. If the Western coalition attacks the country, the Kurds would likely unveil their own set of demands as they did during the war between Iraq and Iran in the 1980ies.

The launch of any of the scenarios - the declaration of independence by West Kurdistan, by the Kurdish autonomy in Iraq, or by Iranian Kurds - or of the three combined would electrify all Kurdish-populated territories, and the explainable merger of the newly born statehoods would mark the materialization of the old

Kurdish dream about the Greater Kurdistan. The circumstance not to be overlooked at this point is that the Kurds are backed by a hyperpowerful ally – the US. The reasons behind Washington's support for the Greater Kurdistan aspirations are on the surface. First, the cooperativeness displayed by Masoud Barzani and the whole Kurdish community makes it considerably easier for the US to handle Iraq where, at the moment, the Kurdish part is more stable and manageable than any other. Secondly, the US-Kurdish partnership evidently has a destabilizing impact on Iraq, where the Kurdish population is bigger than in Iran (6.6 million vs. 5 million) and inhabits a larger chunk of the territory (160,000 vs. 75,000 square kilometers). A further objective linked to Washington's engagement with the Kurds is to achieve control over the Middle Eastern oil and gas reserves. The autonomy of South Kurdistan

and the friendship with Barzani should help the US military presence in Iraq continue even after the announced withdrawal. For a time, rumor had it that the Pentagon either intended to plant a new airbase in the Kurdish autonomy or to transfer to it the Incirlik base from Turkey, and it did not evade watchers that no official statements disproving the projection had been released.

The Arab Spring made the Kurds a group central to the US plan to dominate the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, and the Persian Gulf. The Kurds who never dropped their centuries-old independence goal out of sight are eager to seize the arising opportunities and to capitalize on the strategic alliance with the US. ♦

The Washington Post April 28, 2012

Iraq leaders call for solution to political crisis, say dispute threatens nation

LARA JAKES / Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Leaders from nearly all of Iraq's top political blocs called Saturday for a solution to the nation's political crisis that pits the Shiite-led government against Sunnis and Kurds, saying the dispute threatens the country's national interests.

The statement came after three-days of meetings that brought together senior Sunni, Kurdish and even Shiite politicians disgruntled with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki — who was not represented at the talks in Irbil, the capital of Iraq's northern Kurdish region. While no one at the mini-summit demanded that al-Maliki step down, the fact that the discussions brought together key figures from across Iraq's political spectrum underscored the growing impatience with the Shiite prime minister.

Al-Maliki's critics accuse him of consolidating power and sidelining both Sunnis and Kurds, leading to a political impasse that has brought government work to a near standstill and threatens to break up Iraq.

A statement issued after the Irbil meeting said the leaders "stressed the need for finding ways to dismantle the crisis, the continuation of which puts the supreme national interests in danger." They also discussed "ways to strengthen the democratic process."

The talks were hosted by Massoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdish autonomous region, and included Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, as well as former prime minister Ayad Allawi



Kurdish president Massoud Barzani, center, welcomes Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr upon his arrival in Irbil, a city in the Kurdish controlled north 217 miles (350 kilometers) north of Baghdad, Iraq, Thursday, April 26, 2012. /AP

and hard-line cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, both Shiites. Parliament speaker Osama al-Nujaifi, a Sunni, also took part.

The statement also called for better services for Iraqis in what likely was a promise made at al-Sadr's request. The backbone of the cleric's followers are poor, and have been at the forefront of nationwide demands for more jobs and better public utilities like electricity and water — both of which experience deep shortages during Iraq's searing summers.

Al-Maliki did not mention the government crisis in a speech Saturday to his Dawa Party, and government spokesmen did not respond to calls seeking comment about the Irbil meeting.

The monthslong political impasse began when the government issued terrorism charges against the nation's highest-ranking Sunni, Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, as the final U.S. troops left Iraq in December. Sunni politicians briefly boycotted the govern-

ment.

At the same time, Barzani butted

heads with al-Maliki over a deal for Exxon Mobil Corp. to drill for oil in the Kurdish region without Baghdad's oversight. Barzani threatened this week to let Kurds vote to secede from Iraq if the government crisis has not been resolved by September regional elections.

Also Saturday, five people were killed in Baghdad in a tribal dispute linked to a wedding.

Police said the couple got married Friday without permission from the bride's family, prompting her cousins to attack the groom's house at dawn Saturday. The couple escaped unharmed, but three members of the groom's family and two of the bride's were killed in the fighting in Baghdad's Shiite-dominated Zafaraniyah neighborhood.

A medic at a nearby hospital confirmed the casualties.

Laws in some Iraqi tribes require relatives' permission before a woman can marry. If any cousins reject the suitor, the woman must refuse the proposal.

REUTERS

Turkey: 5 Killed as Rebels Clash With Military

April 25, 2012 - REUTERS

THREE KURDISH MILITANTS, a Turkish soldier and a village guard were killed during battles in eastern Turkey on Tuesday, security officials said, in the latest in a series of clashes in recent

months between the rebels and the military. Two soldiers were also wounded in the fighting between militants from the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party, known as the P.K.K. for the initials of its Kurdish name, and security forces in eastern Bingöl Province, the officials said. After talks between Turkey and the P.K.K. to end the violence broke down last year, the fighting resumed. Scores of militants, soldiers and civilians have been killed since. Hundreds have also been arrested on charges of secretly supporting the P.K.K. ■

middle east online
میدل ایست اونلاین

APRIL 26, 2012

SADR PLAYS ROLE OF MEDIATOR IN BAGHDAD-ERBIL CRISIS

Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr arrives in Iraq's Kurdistan region, presenting himself as mediator in crisis between Maliki, Barzani.

Middle East Online / By Abdel Hamid Zebari - ARBI (Iraq)

Powerful Iraqi Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr arrived in Iraq's Kurdistan region on Thursday, presenting himself as a mediator in a crisis between Iraq's premier and the region's president.

Tensions are high between the autonomous region's president, Massud Barzani, and Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, whom Barzani has accused of moving toward dictatorship.

"I met Nuri al-Maliki in Tehran, and I came to listen to the opinion of the Kurdish leaders and their views," Sadr told a news conference at Arbil airport, after arriving on a private plane from Tehran.

"Everyone should look out for the public interest and the unity of the Iraqi people, and I hope that everyone will be responsible," he said.

Sadr then presented a list of 18 points that he wants to discuss with Kurdish leaders.

"Minorities are an important part of Iraq, and we have to bring them to participate in building Iraq, politically, economically and in security," Sadr said, also calling for "cancelling the policy of neglect and marginalisation."

Another point is that "we have to work to support the Iraqi government by bringing all the components of the Iraqi people inside it," he said.

And "we have to give priority to Iraqi interests over sectarian and ethnic and party interests."

Sadr also said "we have to end the issue of the security posts," meaning that permanent ministers of security and defence must be appointed.

And "we have to stand strongly against any internal or foreign threats against any component of the Iraqi people," he said.

Fuad Hussein, head of the office of the presidency in Kurdistan,



'We have to give priority to Iraqi interests'

said this was "a historic visit, and it will lead to the expansion and strengthening of the relationship between Kurdistan and all Iraq."

"It will also lead to more stability in the political situation in the country," he told journalists at the airport.

Sadr, who spends most of his time on religious studies in Iran, "will meet Barzani today, and there is a significant possibility that he will go to Najaf after finishing his meetings in Kurdistan," a Sadr source said.

Najaf is the Shiite holy city where Sadr's main office is located, and where he spent much of his life.

Sadr spokesman Salah al-Obeidi earlier told a news conference in Baghdad that the cleric had accepted an invitation to visit Kurdistan, saying "the crisis needs such a move to resolve the situation."

He added that "the sayyid (Sadr) is trying to put Al-Ahrar (his parliamentary bloc) and himself personally in the middle."

"One of the goals of the visit is to solve the crisis," Obeidi said.

Barzani said on April 22 that he opposes the sale of F-16 warplanes to Iraq while Maliki is premier, as he fears they would be used against Kurdistan.

Barzani had previously accused Maliki of moving toward dictatorship, and said the premier aimed to "kill the democratic process" after the head of Iraq's electoral commission was arrested for alleged corruption.

Earlier this month, Kurdistan stopped oil exports over more than \$1.5 billion (1.13 billion euros) it said is owed to foreign oil companies working in the region, that Baghdad has allegedly withheld.

The central government's top two oil officials responded by saying Arbil owed Baghdad more than \$5 billion in promised exports, and was smuggling the oil it produced to Iran. □



Iraq's Coming Civil War

By Daniel Greenfield

As the Obama Administration tries to hammer together an American withdrawal from Afghanistan, the body count from his disastrous retreat from Iraq is swiftly rising. Last week alone there were fourteen car bombings orchestrated by Al-Qaeda in Iraq, whose goal has always been a civil war between Shiites and Sunnis. The bombings, which received only light coverage in a media unwilling to talk about anything that might show their candidate in a bad light, are only one of the fracture points.

A united Iraq died a few days after the withdrawal. The only people who still believe in the fiction of a centrally governed Iraq are holding down desks in the State Department. There are several Iraqs now. There is Iran's Iraq, the one overseen by Tehran's puppet in Baghdad, Prime Minister Maliki. Then there is Iraqi Kurdistan which stands on the verge of declaring its independence, an act that will touch off a violent territorial dispute accompanied by ethnic cleansing.

Iraqi federalism is only popular among some in the Shiite majority, for whom it means majority rule. Maliki's warrant for Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi and the latter's subsequent flight and sanctuary in Iraqi Kurdistan has ended the fiction of joint rule in Iraq. The Kurds have branded Maliki a dictator and are swiftly breaking their remaining ties to Baghdad.

President Barzani of Iraqi Kurdistan declared that, "Power-sharing and partnership between Kurds, Sunni and Shiite Arabs, and others is now completely non-existent and has become meaningless" and concluded his speech by hinting at an independence referendum, a move almost certain to touch off a violent conflict, particularly in oil rich Kirkuk.

For now it's a countdown to the inevitable. Barzani has been conducting a diplomatic tour to line up support for the next phase. As has Tariq al-Hashemi. Facing a Shiite majority and Maliki's consolidation of power, they need all the domestic and international support that they can get. Western troops have left leaving behind a power vacuum that Iran is swiftly filling up.

Obama's recent meeting with Barzani was typical of the empty discussions that have taken place since the withdrawal. While Obama urged Barzani to work within the Iraqi Constitution, the United States has made some concessions that pave the way for independence, including issuing visas through the US Consulate in Erbil, allowing Kurds to bypass Baghdad. The underlying message is that while the United States does not officially support Kurdish separatism, it is reducing obstacles to its independence.

The United States and the United Kingdom might be gone, but Barzani has managed to find a new ally in an unlikely place, Istanbul. Turkey has turned to Iraqi Kurds to check growing Iranian influence in Iraq. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan and Prime Minister Maliki have exchanged harsh words, with Erdogan criticizing Maliki for sectarian policies and Maliki accusing Turkey of becoming a "hostile state".

The real showdown isn't between Baghdad and Istanbul, but between Tehran and Istanbul. Turkey's ruling Islamists crawled into bed with Iran, but the relationship is turning sour. The flash-point is Syria, which is Iran's puppet and which Turkey is doing its best to replace with the rebel Muslim Brotherhood. Turkey's hosting of the Friends of Syria conference of countries looking to overthrow the Syrian government and replace it with the Brotherhood, led to Iranian accusations of Zionist collaboration and furious over an Iranian refusal to come to Istanbul, Erdogan accusing it of dishonesty.

Iran's strategic response has been to move the time wasting talks over its nuclear program to



Baghdad, a reminder that it is a step away from controlling Iraq's oil and gas, which Turkey is dependent on. But Iraq's largest oil export line runs out of Kirkuk which will be a major target in any Kurdish independence bid. Kirkuk has Iraq's second largest oil reserves, after Shiite Basra, and has seen ethnic cleansing before. It will see it again.

Baghdad and the Kurds are already fighting over Kirkuk's oil, with the Kurds pulling the plug on oil exports. Baghdad has tried to intimidate Exxon out of oil exploration in Kurdistan while trying to replace it with the friendlier British Petroleum. BP has close ties to Iran's oil industry and backdoor connections to Iran's government, making it a natural choice for Baghdad. BP was originally the Anglo-Persian Oil Company and more trusted in Baghdad and Tehran. But not in Kurdistan.

The first shot in Iraq's full scale civil war will likely be fired in Kirkuk. Everyone knows it's coming, the only question is when. Barzani's pivotal speech indicated that he hoped to solicit support from Shiite militias of the Sadr and Badr Brigades. Muqata Al-Sadr has reciprocated by endorsing Kurdish rights to oil exploration. These gestures however are only temporary. The Kurds have fought the Sadrist before over Kirkuk and will again. The Kurds were ethnically cleansed in favor of Shiite Arabs under Saddam's divide and conquer program and since the liberation, the Kurds have been steadily pushing out the Arabs. The Sadr and Badr brigades have fought each other and everyone will fight the Kurds over Kirkuk.

Iraq is above all else dysfunction-

al. Alliances even within ethnic and sectarian groups are momentary and quickly vanish. The Sadrists may be Shiites, but they want to protect their own corrupt fiefdoms, and a strong Maliki federal government threatens that. But that hasn't stopped Shiite militias from threatening to ethnically cleanse Kurds from Baghdad, while accusing the Kurds of using checkpoints to keep Arabs out of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The stakes in the conflict are not just local, but regional. Under Maliki relations have sharpened with Sunni Gulf states, all of whom have a stake in bringing him down. And that drives funding to Al-Qaeda which is leading the bloody local campaign against the Shiites. The Saudis and Kuwaitis might find a splinter Al-Qaeda Emirate acceptable if it kneecaps a Shiite Iraq and that risks turning Iraq into the next Afghanistan.

America has been counting on the Kurds for stability, but their patience is running out and so is our influence. The Kurds have a limited interest in the sectarian conflicts except as a way of carving out their own state. That is what they wanted all along and they have been patient about it. Their best tactic is dividing Iraq as much possible, pitting Sunnis against Shiites and Shiites against Shiites, Iran against Turkey, until their enemies are too busy fighting each other to stop them.

Together the Shiite Arabs, the Sunni Arabs and the Kurds are bringing down Iraqi federalism and together with Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey they are ushering in a full scale civil war. □

AP Interview: Iraqi Kurd leader hints at secession

Wednesday, April 25, 2012

LARA JAKES, Associated Press

THE PRESIDENT of Iraq's self-rule Kurdish region demanded Wednesday that Shiite leaders agree on sharing power with their political opponents by September or else the Kurds could consider breaking away from Baghdad.

The warning by Kurdish President Massoud Barzani in an interview with The Associated Press underscores that Shiite domination in Iraq's government is reviving secession dreams that the now departed American military had tried to contain.

"What threatens the unity of Iraq is dictatorship and authoritarian rule," Barzani said in a 45-minute interview in his sprawling office outside of Irbil, the capital of the Kurdish region he leads in northern Iraq. "If Iraq heads toward a democratic state, then there will be no trouble. But if Iraq heads toward a dictatorial state, then we will not be able to live with dictatorship."

He called it a "very dangerous political crisis in the country" and said the impasse must be broken by September, when voters in the Kurdish region may consider a referendum for a state independent of Iraq.

"They have to decide if they are willing to accept to live under a dictatorial regime or not," Barzani said. "They have to make that decision. It is their natural right."

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's media adviser, Ali al-Moussawi, declined immediate comment.

The specter of a divided Iraq has been discussed -- and dismissed by many -- for months. Barzani said Wednesday that he is still committed to negotiating a compromise before promoting secession. But he insisted it will be an option if the government logjam continues for much longer.

Barzani is the highest-ranking Iraqi official to disavow al-Maliki's government for sidelining its political opponents and, in some cases, persecuting them in what critics call an unabashed power grab. He stopped short of demanding that al-Maliki step down to ease the crisis. But he left little doubt that tensions between the central government in Baghdad and the three-province Kurdish region have reached a new high.

Iraq expert Ramzy Mardini, with the Institute for the Study of War in Washington, said Barzani's comments likely are aimed more at getting al-Maliki to bend to Kurds on some positions instead of containing a real threat to secede. He noted that Kurds are years away from having enough oil and gas infrastructure to produce the resources necessary to support an independent state.

Oil disputes -- specifically Baghdad's blacklisting of ExxonMobil from bidding on new projects as punishment for plans to work in Kurdistan -- have been at the heart of recent feuding between the two sides.

"A unified Iraq is at the center of U.S. policy and concerns every neighboring state," Mardini said. "Despite the real financial barriers, the very talk about Kurdish independence still makes eve-



Kurdish president Massoud Barzani reacts during an interview with the Associated Press in Salah al-Din resort, Irbil north of Baghdad, Iraq, Wednesday, April 25, 2012. Barzani told The Associated Press on Wednesday that one possible alternative is a political revolt. He says opposition parties have run out of patience after feeling sidelined in al-Maliki's Shiite-led government. Photo: Khalid Mohammed / AP

ryone uneasy. It's unwise to underestimate the role Kurdish aspirations and fears play in their calculus regarding statehood."

The Kurdish region in Iraq's north is politically autonomous, although it does receive a share of the nation's \$100 billion annual budget. It was created as a haven for the country's ethnic Kurds in the 1970s after years of fighting with the central government. Kurds account for up to 20 percent of Iraq's population; it is unknown how many of them live in the northern region since there has been no census taken for years.

Neighboring Turkey and Iran have been concerned that an independent and prosperous Iraqi Kurdistan might promote separatism among their own Kurdish minority populations. Iran's semiofficial Mehr news agency reported Wednesday that four troops from Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guards were killed in clashes with Kurdish rebels in western Iran the previous day.

During the early years of the Iraq war, the U.S. worked hard to ensure that the Kurds remained part of the Iraqi state, encouraging all parties to give the Kurds a major role in the government. Kurdish approval of the Iraqi constitution in 2005 was hailed as a major victory for U.S. policy.

Relations between the central government in Baghdad and the Kurdish region long have been strained, and Barzani has threatened previously to break off the region from Iraq.

But Barzani may feel more emboldened now that the U.S. troops have gone, and since talks last week in Ankara signaled a burgeoning partnership between the Kurdish region and neighboring Turkey.

On Wednesday, Barzani signaled he was impatient with requests by President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden for the Kurds to work with the al-Maliki government.

"They reiterated they support a federal, democratic, pluralistic, united Iraq. And I reassured them that certainly if Iraq is democratic, federal and pluralistic, it will be united," Barzani said. "Certainly, we have reservations about their policy and their attitude."

"We cannot sit and do nothing or try nothing to remedy the situation."

➔

Barzani also said he "wholeheartedly" supports Sunni desires to create their own self-rule regions in Iraq. Sunni lawmakers, whose Iraqiya political coalition won the most seats in 2010 parliamentary elections but were outmaneuvered by al-Maliki for the right to form the government, bitterly complain they have no say in Iraq's power structure.

Sunni lawmaker Hamid al-Mutlaq said many of his constituents have been lukewarm about creating a self-rule Sunni region.

"But because of the injustice they are experiencing, due to the practices of the government security forces especially concerning arrests, marginalization and double standards, that makes them call for creating these regions," al-Mutlaq said.

Iraq's top Sunni official, Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, is wanted on government terrorism charges that his supporters call trumped up and Barzani said Wednesday were politically motivated.

Lawmaker Ali al-Alak, a member of the State of Law political coalition that al-Maliki leads, said Kurdish secession should

not be an option.

"The problems can't be resolved by issuing threats, but through dialogue," al-Alak said. "If one party tries to impose solutions on others, then this a dictatorship scenario. We are with unity of Iraq and we strongly reject dividing Iraq and its people."

Others feel it is al-Maliki who is dividing the Iraqi people.

Al-Maliki kept his job in 2010 only after corraling enough support from Kurdish lawmakers and the hardline followers of Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. Now, even Sadrist lawmakers are increasingly irritated with the government's long-standing dismissal of their concerns.

"The current political situation in Iraq is like a time bomb that could explode at any moment," said Sadrist lawmaker Bahaa al-Araji.

He said the political strain between al-Maliki and the Kurds could be the first domino to fall in a broken Iraq: "Baghdad has the same problems with other provinces," al-Araji said. "This will lead to dividing Iraq, and there will be no Iraq on the world map." □



28 avril 2012

Irak, les leaders de l'opposition exigent une meilleure démocratie

Par RFI, Avec notre correspondante à Bagdad, Fatma Kizilboga

LA CRISE POLITIQUE en Irak ouvre un nouveau chapitre. Réunis samedi 28 avril à Erbil, la capitale du Kurdistan irakien, les principales figures de la coalition ont lancé un appel en faveur d'une meilleure application des principes démocratiques. Si le Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki se garde pour l'heure de tout commentaire, les Kurdes agitent à nouveau la menace d'une sécession.

En l'espace de quelques semaines le président du Kurdistan irakien Massoud Barzani est passé du rôle de médiateur entre les différentes factions politiques, à celui d'opposant le plus farouche.

Celui qui, 16 mois auparavant, avait permis à Nouri al-Maliki de rester au pouvoir, l'accuse désormais de dérive autoritaire, et exige un meilleur partage du pouvoir. Un changement de position ouvertement exprimé depuis l'aggravation du désaccord entre l'autonomie kurde et Bagdad, portant sur le partage des rentes pétrolières.

Autre protagoniste crucial dans cette



Le leader chiite radical Moqtada al-Sadr est accueilli par le président de la région autonome kurde, Massoud Barzani, à Erbil samedi 28 avril 2012. REUTERS/Azad Lashkari

crise, Moqtada el Sadr, arrivé tout droit d'Iran pour assister à la réunion. Si l'imam radical chiite a également fait part de ses inquiétudes et de son mécontentement, le dirigeant de la deuxième formation politique irakienne privilégie toujours la voie du dialogue et refuse d'envisager un quelconque retrait de confiance du parlement, tel que le proposent les sunnites.

Outre Massoud Barzani et Moqtada el Sadr, les deux chefs de la coalition laïque, soutenue par les sunnites, Iyad Allawi et Oussama Noujaifi participaient à la réunion. Ensemble, ils ont lancé un « appel pour activer les mécanismes

démocratiques de gestion des affaires du pays afin de prévenir les dangers qui menacent » la démocratie selon eux. Ils souhaitent notamment que Nouri al-Maliki ne se présente pour troisième mandat en 2014, ce que le Premier ministre avait accepté avant de revenir sur ses engagements.

A quelques jours de la conférence nationale visant la réconciliation politique, le ton est donné, alors que le lieu même de la réunion fait toujours débat entre Bagdad et Erbil. ■

Iran 'rational,' Israeli general says

JERUSALEM

Defense chief believes Tehran leadership won't build a nuclear bomb

BY JODI RUDOREN

The Israeli military chief has described the Iranian government as "rational" in newly published interviews and said he did not believe Tehran would build a nuclear bomb, appearing to put some distance between himself and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak.

"I believe he would be making an enormous mistake, and I don't think he will want to go the extra mile," the chief of staff of the Israeli Defense Force, Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz, told the newspaper Haaretz, referring to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"I think the Iranian leadership is composed of very rational people," General Gantz added. "But I agree that such a capability, in the hands of Islamic fundamentalists who at particular moments could make different calculations, is dangerous."

In remarks made on Thursday, however, General Gantz appeared to

send a message that Iran should not lower its guard. He told The Associated Press that other countries beside Israel — he did not name them — have readied their armed forces for a potential strike against Iranian nuclear sites.

"The military force is ready," General Gantz said. "Not only our forces, but other forces as well. We all hope that there will be no necessity to use this force, but we are absolutely sure of its existence."

U.S. and Israeli leaders seem to be walking a delicate line: keeping enough pressure on Iran to make clear the extreme risks of pursuing its nuclear program, without unduly scaring the relevant publics or provoking some dangerous miscalculation.

In recent weeks, talk of a pre-emptive attack seems to have faded somewhat.

Both Mr. Netanyahu, a political conservative, and Mr. Barak, a former Labor Party prime minister, have argued that if Israel has to choose between the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran and the certain regional disruptions that would follow a pre-emptive attack on Iran, it must favor the latter.

The question of whether the Iranians are rational has been a critical focus of debate over how to handle Tehran's nuclear program, which the government insists is for peaceful purposes.

But Western powers, cognizant of Iranian calls for Israel's destruction, have instituted an increasingly tough set of sanctions aimed at curbing the nuclear work.

Mr. Netanyahu has described Iranian nuclear capability as an existential threat to Israel, and he told CNN on Tuesday that he would not want to bet "the security of the world on Iran's rational behavior," according to The Associated Press.

Several analysts saw the comments by General Gantz, who rarely gives extensive public remarks, as more in line

The world is seeing "signals of an easing of rhetoric on war."

with the views of Israel's military and intelligence establishment, including a former Mossad chief, Meir Dagan.

They were also seen as parallel to the position of his United States counterpart, Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who cautioned earlier this year that an attack on Iran could destabilize the entire region.

There was at least a hint of conciliation from Iran this week. Its envoy to Moscow, Mahmoud-Reza Sajjadi, said on Wednesday that officials were considering a Russian proposal to avert the tougher sanctions set to take force in July, Bloomberg News reported.

The world is seeing "signals of an easing of rhetoric on war, not an easing of pressure or sanctions," said Scott Lucas, a foreign-policy specialist at the University of Birmingham in England.

But Victoria Nuland, a State Department spokeswoman, described Mr. Sajjadi as "not a central player" in the nuclear talks.

"What's most important is what Iran says and does at the negotiating table," she said in Washington.

Meir Javedanfar, an Iranian-Israeli expert who lives in Tel Aviv, told The Guardian newspaper that Mr. Gantz's comments were "a welcome development" that "takes the hysterics out of Israel's public assessment of the Iranian nuclear program."

Mr. Netanyahu and some others in the Israeli agreement have repeatedly expressed skepticism about the nuclear talks between Tehran and foreign powers, warning that Iran's presence was a cynical ploy.

The multiparty negotiations over Iran's nuclear program are set to resume on May 23 in Baghdad.

Brian Knowlton contributed reporting from Washington.

Bombing kills 9 in Damascus as protests persist across Syria

DAMASCUS

FROM NEWS REPORTS

A suicide bomber blew himself up across the street from a mosque in the Syrian capital Friday, killing nine people and wounding 30, state television said. Thousands of Syrians protested elsewhere to denounce persistent violence by the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

The blast was the latest blow to a peace plan brokered by the special envoy Kofi Annan that called for a cease-fire two weeks ago. The truce has been roundly ignored on the ground, and the United Nations has only 15 monitors in Syria trying to salvage it.

The blast Friday took place in the Midan neighborhood of the capital. Syrian television showed white smoke billowing from under a bridge as people streamed out of the mosque.

State television reported that nine people were killed and 30 wounded. The health minister, Nader al-Halqi, con-

firmed at least eight dead and said they included seven police officers.

Meanwhile, the United Nations said international monitors had moved into another hot spot in Syria to try to stop violence. The monitoring team's spokesman, Neeraj Singh, said Friday that two observers had been stationed in the southern city of Dara'a, where the uprising began 13 months ago.

U.N. monitors in Syria are visiting flash points to try to salvage a plan to end the fighting. Despite the plan, violence has continued. An amateur video posted online Thursday showed people carrying the body of a boy said to have been shot and killed by Syrian troops. U.N. vehicles are seen nearby.

The United Nations has approved increasing the mission to 300 observers.

The U.N. secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, said Friday that he was "gravely alarmed" by the continuing violence. At a news conference in New Delhi, Mr. Ban said "the continued repression of the civilian population is totally unacceptable" and "must stop immediately." (AP, REUTERS)

Former US Diplomat Says Time is Ripe for Kurdish Independence

Interview by HAWAR ABDULRAZZAQ
rudaw.net

In this interview with Rudaw, former U.S diplomat and adviser to the Kurdistan Regional Government Peter Galbraith says the time is ripe for Kurdish independence thanks to the thriving oil industry, international investment and the fact that Kurds are America's only reliable ally in the volatile region. Galbraith says Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is not following the constitution or respecting the rights of Kurdistan.

Rudaw: Do you think the constitution can prevent the resurgence of a dictatorship in Iraq?

Peter Galbraith: The constitution establishes a weak central government, enshrines power-sharing among Iraq's different peoples (Shia, Sunnis and Kurds) at the center and gives the Kurdistan Region de facto independence. As such, the constitution is designed to prevent the reestablishment of a powerful centralized state that has led to dictatorship in the past. But no constitution can prevent dictatorship. That is up to the people.

Rudaw: Do you think constitutions matter in the Middle East region? In these countries, the ruler often has all the authority.

Peter Galbraith: Yes, they matter. But, it is up to the people and their leaders to enforce the constitution.

Rudaw: Right now, Iraq is in political turmoil and most parties accuse PM Nuri al-Maliki of violating the constitution. Do you think he has violated the constitution?

Peter Galbraith: Clearly, he is not following the constitution. He is not respecting Kurdistan's rights, including those over natural resources, and he has not held the constitutionally required referendum on Kirkuk and other disputed areas.

Rudaw: Kurdish leaders blame Maliki for not sharing power and consolidating all of it in his own hands. Do you think those accusations are correct?

Peter Galbraith: Yes. They are correct.



Former US diplomat and adviser to the Kurdistan Regional Government, Peter Galbraith. Photo Nacional

Rudaw: Barzani says that Maliki is only killing time and doesn't want to solve important issues such as Article 140 regarding the disputed territories and the oil and gas issue. He also says that if the situation continues like this, he will let the people of Kurdistan decide their own future through a referendum. Does the Iraqi constitution give the Kurds the right to separate from Iraq?

Peter Galbraith: The Kurds agreed to stay in Iraq on the basis of the constitution in its entirety. If the Baghdad government does not keep its part of the bargain, then the basis for Kurdistan's continued membership in Iraq no longer exists.

Rudaw: When the constitution was written, did you feel it would solve issues such as Article 140 and the Peshmerga?

Peter Galbraith: I knew these issues would be difficult because the mindset of those who wanted a centralized Iraq did not change. But, I hoped the constitution would be followed.

Rudaw: When the Balkan countries gained independence, you were the U.S. ambassador in that region. Based on your experience, do you think now is the right time for Kurdistan to become independent from Iraq?

Peter Galbraith: Yes. The Kurds tried being part of Iraq for 90 years and Iraq has failed them. I learned in the Balkans that there is something worse than the breakup of a country, and that is trying to keep people in a country against their will.

Rudaw: In your opinion, what are the obstacles to a Kurdish state in Iraqi Kurdistan?

Peter Galbraith: President Massoud Barzani and Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani have eliminated the most impor-

tant obstacles to full independence. They have developed a close political and economic relationship with Turkey, they have created an oil industry in Kurdistan which provides the financial basis for independence and they have encouraged other international investments in Kurdistan. They have shown that Kurdistan is America's only reliable and democratic ally in Iraq and in a volatile region.

Rudaw: Do you think that, in the future, the U.S. will support an independent Kurdistan?

Peter Galbraith: The U.S. usually supports the status quo and probably will not support secession until after it takes place. The U.S. has no friend as good as the Kurds so it will have no alternative but to accept Kurdistan's independence once it takes place.

Rudaw: Kurdish leaders were happy when U.S. oil giant ExxonMobil came to Kurdistan. What is your view on that issue?

Peter Galbraith: There is no greater vote of confidence in Kurdistan's oil industry than to have the world's largest oil company invest there.

Rudaw: What do you think of Kurdistan's oil policy?

Peter Galbraith: It makes the centuries-old dream of self-government a reality and provides great benefits to the people of Kurdistan.

Rudaw: Generally, the Kurds admire your support for them, but three years ago you were linked to Kurdish oil contracts which some Western media called scandalous. Can you elaborate on that?

Peter Galbraith: Before 2004, Kurdistan was entirely dependent on Baghdad and foreign aid. I helped bring the first oil company to Kurdistan and, as a result, Kurdistan now has a thriving oil industry. For the first time, the people of Kurdistan benefit from their own resources and the Kurdistan government has the resources to run its own affairs. Some Western media criticized my work because they are deeply attached to the bankrupt idea of a centralized Iraq where everything is controlled by Baghdad. I am proud of my contribution to a self-governing and prosperous Kurdistan. ■

Face à la Syrie, la valse-hésitation d'Ankara

En cas d'intervention directe en Syrie, la Turquie risque de plonger à son tour dans les conflits interreligieux, estime l'historien turc Soner Cagaptay.

The New Republic (extraits)
Washington

Les observateurs de la crise humanitaire qui frappe de plus en plus durement la Syrie redoutent à juste titre que le conflit ne dégénère en une guerre de religion [entre musulmans sunnites et musulmans alaouites]. Le régime de Bachar El-Assad jouit d'un soutien massif auprès de la minorité alaouite du pays [dont il est issu], alors que la majorité sunnite a pris la tête de la rébellion. Mais le conflit présente un autre danger : il risque d'engendrer des tensions religieuses en Turquie, qui pourraient à leur tour entraver une intervention internationale contre le régime syrien.

Le problème majeur est la communauté alévie, une ramification syncrétique et laïcisée de l'islam qui est basée en Turquie et qui se présente souvent comme une minorité persécutée par la majorité sunnite du pays. Si le conflit syrien devait dresser les sunnites contre les alaouites, les alévis turcs pourraient se sentir solidaires de la minorité alaouite syrienne et, par suite, du régime de Bachar El-Assad. Plus encore, ils pourraient s'opposer activement à toute intervention organisée par leur propre gouvernement.

Des Arabes alaouites en Turquie

Ce risque provient en partie de la politique récente de la Turquie. Le Parti pour la justice et le développement (AKP), qui a rompu avec ses origines islamistes et

croire semblables aux alaouites, alors qu'ils n'ont pas de liens ethniques ni religieux avec eux (les alaouites sont arabes et les alévis sont turcs).

Une autre raison peut faire craindre à Ankara une extension des tensions religieuses : plus d'un demi-million d'Arabes alaouites vivent en Turquie – en majorité dans la province de Hatay, autour d'Antakya, l'ancienne Antioche – et le sud du pays abrite également 1 million d'Arabes sunnites. Si le conflit en Syrie prend une dimension plus religieuse, il pourrait trouver un écho, par-delà la frontière, chez les Arabes alaouites et sunnites de Turquie.

La Turquie a construit à Antakia des camps pour héberger les réfugiés qui fuient la répression en Syrie. Dans une manifestation, j'ai vu des Arabes alaouites scander des slogans hostiles à l'AKP et favorables au régime syrien. Des commerçants alaouites étaient également étendu son emprise sur la plupart des secteurs de la société turque, n'a guère réussi jusqu'ici à rallier les alévis, qui représentent 10 % à 15 % des 75 millions d'habitants du pays. Contrairement à l'AKP, la communauté alévie, qui tend à s'aligner sur les idées laïques du fondateur de la Turquie, Kemal Atatürk, est favorable à une stricte séparation de la religion et de la politique. Et le conflit religieux des années 1970, notamment les attentats sunnites commis contre des alévis, a laissé un passif de méfiance entre les deux communautés.

Les relations se sont améliorées récemment, mais, si Ankara devait intervenir en Syrie contre le régime d'Assad, une partie de la communauté alévie pourrait y voir une nouvelle "agression sunnite" contre une minorité. Cette probabilité est renforcée par la tendance de nombreux alévis à se

fiers de vendre des gadgets pro-Assad. Compte tenu de tous ces facteurs, il se pourrait donc bien que la Turquie ait les mains liées, dans la définition de sa politique à l'égard de la Syrie, par la perspective des troubles religieux qui risquent d'éclater sur son propre sol.

Les mesures à prendre

Cela dit, c'est un problème qu'Ankara peut encore éviter. Il convient, pour cela, que le pays dissipe la crainte que sa politique syrienne vise à servir d'étroits intérêts religieux. Pour commencer, le gouvernement doit abandonner un discours qui fait le jeu du confessionnalisme et établir explicitement le dialogue avec le Parti républicain du peuple (CHP) [social-démocrate et laïc, dans l'opposition] et la communauté alévie pour les informer de la nature humanitaire de sa politique syrienne. Ankara doit également envisager de tendre la main aux alaouites syriens en leur signifiant clairement que les hauts responsables alaouites du régime qui feraient défection pourraient trouver refuge en Turquie.

Il y a une autre mesure à prendre. La Turquie débat de la mise en place d'un corridor humanitaire afin de permettre à la communauté internationale de porter secours aux civils syriens. Ankara devrait s'engager fermement pour l'ouverture de ce premier corridor vers le cœur de la Syrie alaouite ou vers la ville multiethnique de Lattaquié. Le gouvernement turc signalerait ainsi son intention de protéger tous les Syriens. **Soner Cagaptay**

Syrie

Mais que peut faire la Turquie ?

Le site syrien de l'opposition a interrogé des responsables turcs sur toutes les options auxquelles peut avoir recours Ankara pour chasser Bachar El-Assad du pouvoir.

All4Syria (extraits) Damas

A lors que la presse syrienne favorable au régime tire à boulets rouges sur la Turquie, l'accusant de trahison, d'ingratitude, et pointant son ambition de renouer avec son passé impérial ottoman dans ses relations avec ses voisins arabes, l'opposition et la jeunesse syriennes en veulent à la Turquie pour son manque de fermeté face aux provocations de Bachar El-Assad. Certes, les déclarations d'Ankara sont tonitruantes, mais elles ne se traduisent guère en actes. Quant aux Kurdes de Syrie, ils se posent mille questions sur les intentions réelles de la Turquie.

Les réponses à ces interrogations sont à chercher dans les coulisses de la politique turque. Nous avons voulu rencontrer plusieurs officiels. Un responsable du ministère des Affaires étrangères nous a expliqué : *«La Turquie est consciente que Bachar El-Assad ne respectera aucun de ses engagements en faveur de tel ou tel plan de paix. Il n'existe que deux moyens de lui faire quitter le pouvoir, qui ont été rappelés par le chef de la diplomatie turque, Ahmet Davutoglu, à quelques-uns de ses homologues étrangers, notamment arabes. Le premier consisterait à ce que des gens de son entourage au sein de l'armée ou de l'appareil de sécurité l'assassinent. Le second, ce seraient des frappes. Or personne ne peut prévoir les dégâts que celles-ci pourraient faire en termes de victimes collatérales. La Turquie ne souhaite pas apparaître comme l'agresseur de la Syrie, car cela risquerait de heurter certaines minorités syriennes telles que les Arméniens, les Alaouites, les Druzes, ainsi que les Kurdes. La Turquie insiste donc pour présenter sa politique comme motivée par la seule défense de ses frontières. Ankara attend qu'on épuise tous les recours politiques jusqu'à ce que la majorité, à l'intérieur de la Syrie – y compris parmi les Kurdes –, arrive à la conclusion qu'Assad*

ne partira pas à moins d'avoir totalement dévasté le pays. C'est alors que la Turquie pourrait apparaître comme le sauveur, et non pas comme un agresseur.»

Interrogée sur les choix qui se présentent à Ankara, une personne proche du ministre de la Défense répond que les dirigeants militaires et politiques du Conseil pour la sécurité nationale se réunissent chaque semaine, voire plus, afin d'étudier toutes les hypothèses. Récemment, des ambassadeurs de pays membres de l'Otan auraient également participé à ces rencontres. Et voici les solutions qui seraient envisagées :

1 – L'intervention de l'Otan placée sous le chapitre 5 de l'Alliance, relatif à la protection des frontières des pays membres, une initiative qui ne nécessite pas de mandat onusien.

2 – L'établissement d'une zone de séparation sous prétexte de protection des civils, ce qui nécessiterait un mandat international ou, du moins, un assentiment tacite.

3 – La coordination avec de hauts responsables de l'armée ou de l'appareil sécuritaire qui se chargeraient eux-mêmes d'éliminer Bachar Assad, idée vers laquelle la Turquie tend depuis plus de deux mois.

4 – La création d'une armée entièrement équipée et apte à affronter l'armée régulière syrienne.

5 – Le lancement de frappes sur les points stratégiques du régime au moment où l'Armée libre syrienne [les forces rebelles] lancerait des actions : de grandes manifestations se dérouleraient sur le terrain et des civils infiltreraient les institutions du régime afin de rendre l'appareil sécuritaire impuissant.

Au sujet de la zone de séparation, dont on parle beaucoup ces derniers temps, le même responsable militaire répond que la Turquie *«a deux options, la première étant de faire comme Turgut Özal [Premier ministre en 1991] quand des hélicoptères irakiens avaient réprimé le soulèvement kurde et provoqué l'afflux massif de réfugiés kurdes en Turquie : Özal avait alors pris la décision courageuse de demander à la communauté internationale l'instauration d'une zone de séparation dans le nord de l'Irak, pour des raisons à la fois humanitaires et politiques.*

Son appel avait été entendu par la Grande-Bretagne et les pays européens, mettant dans l'embarras les Etats-Unis, qui avaient gardé le silence [face au drame subi par les Kurdes]. Cela avait produit un renversement des rapports de force en défaveur de Saddam Hussein. Aujourd'hui, la Turquie n'a pas encore su définir ce que serait une telle zone de séparation, étant donné qu'une grande partie de la zone frontalière turque avec la Syrie est habitée par les Kurdes.»

Aussi, les militaires turcs auraient décidé qu'en cas d'accord international pour la création d'une telle zone de séparation celle-ci devrait se situer loin des

régions des Kurdes afin qu'ils ne la perçoivent pas comme une menace de la part des Turcs. Les militaires pencheraient en faveur de la zone frontalière [proche de la mer Méditerranée] non habitée par les Kurdes, ethniquement homogène et où il existe d'excellentes relations de proximité avec la Turquie. Toujours selon la même source, cela expliquerait pourquoi le régime syrien concentre justement ses attaques sur cette région.

La seconde option serait la stratégie dite *«de la tache d'huile»*, dans laquelle la zone frontalière à Idlib et Jisr Al-Choughour [nord-ouest de la Syrie], connue pour l'hostilité de ses habitants à l'égard du régime d'Assad, qui les a marginalisés et a fait nombre de victimes dans la population civile, serait appelée à s'étendre progressivement pour d'abord isoler, puis absorber Alep, deuxième ville du pays, privant ainsi le régime syrien du poumon économique du pays. ♦