

INSTITUT
KURDE
DE PARIS

Bulletin de liaison et d'information

N°322

JANVIER 2012

*La publication de ce Bulletin bénéficie de subventions
du Ministère français des Affaires étrangères (DGCID)
et du Fonds d'action et de soutien pour l'intégration et la lutte contre les discriminations (FASILD)*

Ce bulletin paraît en français et anglais
Prix au numéro : France: 6 € — Etranger : 7,5 €
Abonnement annuel (12 numéros) France : 60 € — Etranger : 75 €

Périodique mensuel
Directeur de la publication : Mohamad HASSAN
Numéro de la Commission Paritaire : 659 13 A.S.
ISBN 0761 1285

INSTITUT KURDE, 106, rue La Fayette - 75010 PARIS
Tél. : 01- 48 24 64 64 - Fax : 01- 48 24 64 66

www.fikp.org
E-mail: bulletin@fikp.org

- **KURDISTAN D'IRAK : VERS UN CHANGEMENT DE CABINET AU PROFIT DU PDK**
- **SYRIE : FORMATION D'UN CONGRÈS NATIONAL KURDE ET CONFÉRENCE D'ERBIL**
- **IRAN : FORTES PRESSIONS POLICIÈRES SUR LES MEDIA ET LES SYNDICATS INDÉPENDANTS**
- **DROITS DE L'HOMME : HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH PUBLIE SON RAPPORT POUR 2011**
- **CULTURE : UNE KURDE DE 75 ANS DEVIENT UNE PEINTRE RECONNUE AUX PAYS-BAS**

KURDISTAN D'IRAK : VERS UN CHANGEMENT DE CABINET AU PROFIT DU PDK

Comme cela avait été prévu dès la formation de la liste commune PDK-UPK (Alliance du Kurdistan), l'actuel Premier Ministre de la Région du Kurdistan d'Irak, Barham Salih (UPK), doit bien céder sa place à une personnalité politique issue du PDK, qui n'est autre que son prédécesseur, Nêçirvan Barzanî.

En vertu du même accord, qui impose un échange de postes tous les 2 ans, M. Barzani doit avoir un vice-Premier Ministre UPK et c'est à ce parti de choisir lui-même son candidat.

Concernant le poste de vice-Premier ministre, plusieurs noms ont couru avant la nomination officielle : Adnan Mufti, ancien président du Parlement,

Kosrat Rasul, second de l'UPK et ancien vice-président de la Région, de 2005 à 2009 ou Imad Ahmed, ancien vice-Premier Ministre.

Revenu de l'étranger pour Erbil le 15 janvier, Nêçirvan Barzanî a officiellement accepté le 18 janvier de prendre la tête du nouveau cabinet. Le porte-parole du PDK, Jaffar Ibrahim, a annoncé la tenue, le 19, d'une réunion entre les dirigeants du PDK et de l'UPK pour décider de la rotation des postes et de la nomination des nouveaux ministres.

Si les négociations entre le PDK et l'UPK ne devaient pas se heurter à des obstacles majeurs, hormis le choix du vice-premier ministre qui est surtout une question interne à l'UPK, les

observateurs politiques et la presse attendaient de voir si le nouveau gouvernement allait pouvoir s'entendre avec les trois principaux partis d'opposition, Goran, la Ligue islamiste et l'Union islamique (ce dernier ayant des relations peu cordiales avec le PDK).

Bien que son score électoral n'oblige en rien l'Alliance kurde à composer avec l'opposition pour gouverner, il est de tradition, au Kurdistan comme en Irak, de tenter de former un gouvernement de coalition, voire de 'consensus', soit pour prévenir d'éventuels troubles politiques, soit pour contrer les critiques des partis adverses sur les erreurs de leadership, ou bien encore pour donner le sentiment à la population que l'hégémonie politique

des deux grands partis n'empêche pas un certain pluralisme des opinions. Jusqu'ici, cependant, les négociations ont toujours échoué : les partis d'opposition avaient d'abord annoncé qu'ils accepteraient de prendre part au gouvernement, avant de se rétracter, appelant au 'boycott' des ministères sous le motif que le parti au pouvoir n'a pas engagé les réformes promises ou réclamées. La raison principale en est peut-être davantage les mauvaises relations du PDK avec les partis islamistes et les derniers événements de Zakho, où des bureaux du KIU ont été brûlés en représailles d'attaques contre des boutiques et

des villages chrétiens n'ont pas amélioré ces relations, le PDK et le KIU se renvoyant mutuellement la responsabilité des troubles.

Muhammad Ahmed, un leader de l'Union islamique a ainsi exprimé sa réticence à rallier le gouvernement : « Avant les incidents, le PDK nous avait demandé de rejoindre le gouvernement, mais les incidents ont tout changé. », tout en ajoutant : « Si nous ne sommes pas certains que le prochain gouvernement fera des réformes, il est inutile de participer à un tel gouvernement. »

Cependant, d'autres voix au sein

de l'Union islamique, tel Salahaddin Babakir, une autre porte-parole, a déclaré au journal Rudaw que son parti avait l'intention de rester dans l'opposition, mais que la porte restait ouverte à d'éventuelles négociations.

Avant même sa nomination officielle, Nêcirvan Barzani a donc entamé une série de visites aux leaders des différents partis d'opposition, le plus important d'entre eux étant Goran. Le 24 janvier, au sortir de cet entretien, son dirigeant, Nawshirwan Mustafa annonçait cependant qu'il resterait dans l'opposition.

SYRIE :

FORMATION D'UN CONGRÈS NATIONAL KURDE ET CONFÉRENCE D'ERBIL

Longtemps divisés, les Kurdes de Syrie commencent à se regrouper et à débattre de leur projet politique pour l'avenir de la Syrie.

Après plusieurs mois d'échanges et de discussions, la plupart des partis politiques kurdes de Syrie ont pu former un Conseil national kurde, appelé à représenter les Kurdes de Syrie sur les plans politiques et diplomatiques pour faire entendre leurs revendications et défendre leurs intérêts.

Dès sa formation, le Conseil a lancé une offensive diplomatique en Europe et au Proche-Orient. Le président du Conseil national des Kurdes de Syrie, Abdul Hakim Bashar s'est rendu à Paris fin janvier, après avoir été invité à Londres par le ministre des Affaires étrangères britannique. En France, il a pu rencontrer des responsables du ministère des Affaires étrangères français.

Répondant à un journaliste du Nouvel Observateur, Abdul Hakim Bashar explique que son

Conseil souhaite être considéré « avec les autres minorités, à égalité avec l'opposition arabe » et rechercher l'appui des gouvernements étrangers à cet effet. Les 15 et 16 janvier derniers, le Conseil national des Kurdes de Syrie a adressé officiellement cette demande au président du Conseil national syrien, Burhan Ghalioun.

Questionné sur la relative modération des Kurdes dans les manifestations, le leader affirme au contraire, que toutes les régions kurdes organisent des manifestations, mais que les media arabes ne les filmant pas.

Les revendications du Conseil national des Kurdes de Syrie s'axent autour d'une Syrie décentralisée et laïque, comme l'explique Abdul Hakim Bashar :

« Nous demandons une décentralisation politique car la Syrie est composée de différentes ethnies et religions. Bashar al-Assad a voulu nous monter les uns contre les autres en prétendant que s'il tombe, viendront alors des terroristes islamistes à sa

place et d'ailleurs beaucoup l'ont cru. Nous, nous demandons la décentralisation car elle seule peut garantir les droits de toutes les communautés. Une décentralisation dans une Syrie unie.

Les Alaouites, proches d'Assad craignent d'avoir de gros problèmes s'il est destitué. Mais avec la décentralisation, leurs droits aussi pourraient être préservés et si l'opposition nous suivait dans cette démarche, ils seraient rassurés.

Nous demandons également un Etat laïc alors que l'opposition arabe demande un Etat civil. Or, un Etat civil ne garantit pas la laïcité. Des islamistes peuvent se revendiquer d'un Etat civil. »

Sur la question des revendications proprement kurdes, le CNKS demande :

- la reconnaissance du peuple kurde dans la constitution syrienne,
- l'annulation des lois et décrets racistes et discriminatoires à l'encontre des Kurdes,
- le droit à l'autodétermination mais dans l'unité de la Syrie.

Sur la question de la préservation de « l'unité syrienne » il s'agit, comme pour les Kurdes d'Irak, d'accepter un état de fait imposée aux Kurdes, et de former une association arabo-kurde au sein d'un État décentralisé :

« Pourquoi ? Quand la Syrie a été créée, cette unité a été faite par la force. Nous voulons accepter les frontières actuelles par libre choix. Nous sommes le deuxième peuple en Syrie, nous composons entre 15 et 20% de la population et nous voulons être un véritable associé dans le pays. Les Arabes doivent arrêter de dire "ça c'est bon ça c'est mauvais pour les Kurdes". Ce n'est pas à eux de décider de nos droits. Malheureusement, jusqu'à maintenant les négociations avec l'opposition arabe n'ont pas abouti. Ils disent qu'ils donneront plus après le changement mais cela nous inquiète. Nous pensons que si aujourd'hui ils ne nous donnent rien, ils ne nous donneront rien demain non plus et n'établiront pas non plus la démocratie.

Si les Alaouites, les Druzes, les chrétiens ne sont pas vraiment dans la révolution syrienne c'est parce que l'opposition n'a pas pu les convaincre, n'a pas su les rassurer sur le fait que le changement de régime est dans leur intérêt.

Deux choses vont les rassurer : la décentralisation et une vision politique claire qui montre que les communautés sont associées. Il ne faut pas que l'opposition syrienne distribue les droits mais il faut que tous soient associés, il faut que cette pensée de "nous sommes les dominants et nous vous distribuons des droits" soit écartée. »

Les 28 et 29 janvier, plus de 200 hommes politiques kurdes venus de tous les pays se sont réunis en conférence à Erbil, sur l'invitation du président de la Région

du Kurdistan d'Irak, afin de débattre de la situation en Syrie et de s'entendre sur des objectifs communs.

Parmi les leaders des partis kurdes syriens figuraient des personnalités indépendantes, et, bien sûr, les dirigeants de partis ayant rejoint le Conseil national syrien.

Les buts de cette conférence ont été annoncés par son président, Ali Shindin, sur le site Aknews : « Les leaders kurdes discuteront de la question kurde en Syrie, comment traiter avec l'opposition syrienne et comment instaurer les droits kurdes en Syrie. Les conclusions de la conférence seront soumises ultérieurement au groupe d'opposition du Conseil national syrien, de sorte qu'ils puissent traiter avec les Kurdes en fonction de leur présence et de leur poids, maintenant et dans le futur. »

Burhan Ghalioun, à la tête du Conseil national syrien, s'est d'ailleurs rendu à Erbil en début de mois pour y rencontrer Massoud Barzani, et apaiser les inquiétudes des Kurdes suscitées par la présence de mouvements arabes religieux au sein de l'opposition. Selon le journal Rudaw, le Syrien aurait assuré au président kurde ses intentions de garantir les droits de ses compatriotes en Syrie. Abdul-Bast Sayda, un Kurde membre du comité exécutif du Conseil national syrien, qui accompagnait Burhan Ghalioun lors de cette rencontre a assuré que l'attitude du président Barzani à l'égard du Conseil national syrien « aurait changé » après cette rencontre.

Les Kurdes de Syrie se plaignent en effet de voir leurs revendications négligées ou mises de côté par l'opposition arabe et dix partis kurdes ont boycotté la

réunion fondatrice du CNS, qui a eu lieu à Istanbul en septembre dernier, par méfiance ou hostilité à la Turquie. Les mouvements kurdes absents ont alors fondé leur propre Conseil national du Kurdistan mais dans l'ensemble, les partis kurdes de Syrie restent divisés sur l'adhésion au CNS.

Abdul Bast Sayda milite lui même activement pour rallier le plus de Kurdes possible au CNS et souhaite une « unification des Conseils nationaux syrien et kurde », en envisageant une future rencontre à Erbil, ce qui permettrait d'ailleurs aux Kurdes d'Irak d'exercer une influence sur la question syrienne et l'opposition, au lieu de laisser le champ libre à la seule Turquie.

Mais lors de son discours à cette conférence, Massoud Barzani a affirmé que la Région du Kurdistan ne souhaitait pas « interférer dans les affaires des Kurdes de Syrie », mais qu'elle offrait une aide et un soutien à leurs décisions. « Mais, a ajouté le président, « à condition que vous restiez unis dans cette période sensible et que vous évitiez les conflits internes. La situation est importante pour nous car (la Syrie) est un pays voisin, nous avons une longue frontière avec elle, et plus de deux millions de Kurdes y vivent. C'est important de savoir quel sera son futur. » Le président kurde a poursuivi en disant que « l'époque de négation des Kurdes était révolue ».

S'ils n'étaient pas présents à la conférence d'Erbil, les dirigeants du Conseil national syrien ont cependant envoyé une déclaration en forme de mea culpa, qui a été lue, reconnaissant que « toutes les forces politiques en Syrie avaient nié les droits des Kurdes et que leurs soutiens n'avaient pas été ce qu'ils

auraient dû être. » Le CNS a appelé à la reconnaissance du peuple kurde en tant que tel et à lui octroyer ses droits.

Dans la déclaration finale, la violence des forces syriennes contre les manifestants a été dénoncée, et l'accent a été mis sur l'importance d'une coopération entre les Kurdes hors et dans le territoire syrien.

Malgré cela, les participants sont restés divisés sur plusieurs points, à commencer par la question d'une intervention militaire étrangère en Syrie. De même, Jawad Mella, le Secrétaire général du Congrès national kurde a appelé à la création d'un gouvernement autonome en Syrie, et s'est dit favorable à une intervention étrangère pour chasser Bashar Al Assad du pouvoir.

« Une intervention internationale est la seule solution, parce que nous avons déjà connu l'expérience du régime de Saddam Hussein, qui ne serait jamais tombé sans une intervention extérieure. » a-t-il déclaré à l'AFP. « Le Baath syrien est de même nature que le Baath irakien, et rien ne pourra l'éliminer hormis une intervention extérieure. C'est la seule solution. »

Saadeddin Al-mulla, un dirigeant du parti Démocratie a par ailleurs fait remarquer que des interventions étrangères étaient actuellement déjà en cours en Syrie, celle de l'Iran qui soutient le régime, et

celle de la Turquie qui soutient l'opposition. Ainsi, l'ONU pourrait utiliser le chapitre VIII de sa charte, qui prévoit toutes sortes de mesures, dont une intervention militaire, en cas de menace pour la paix ou d'agressions contre un pays.

Hamad Darwish, secrétaire du Parti kurde progressiste de Syrie, appuie lui aussi une demande auprès de l'ONU : « Si la Ligue arabe ne peut imposer ses solutions, le cas devra passer au Conseil de sécurité qui ne peut rester spectateur devant ce qui se passe dans ce pays. »

Mais le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan a exprimé, lui, ses réticences à ce sujet, par la voix de son leader Abdul Hakim Bashar :

« Il est trop tôt pour parler d'une intervention internationale, et je pense que nous devons chercher une solution nationale avant une pression internationale dans les domaines politique, économique, ceux des media ou de la diplomatie. »

Sur la question de l'auto-détermination des Kurdes syriens, le président du Conseil national des Kurdes de Syrie, Abdul Hakim Bashar, a répété ce qu'il avait dit à Paris sur la décentralisation dans une Syrie unie, et se dit favorable à un référendum sur cette question :

« C'est au peuple kurde de décider

ce qu'il veut, et son droit à l'auto-détermination se fera dans le cadre de l'unité de la Syrie et sur le principe de la décentralisation. »

Saad Adin Mullah, membre de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan de Syrie, appuie lui aussi un référendum, dont les options seraient « décentralisation, autonomie ou fédéralisme ».

Quant à Jawad Al Mulla, dirigeant du Congrès national kurde, il appuie un gouvernement (autonome) kurde en Syrie, plus à l'instar du Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan d'Irak :

« Mais comme pour le moment, la rue et les partis politiques ne sont pas d'accord entre eux, il vaut mieux laisser cette question pour après la chute du régime. Il y aura alors un référendum pour déterminer si les Kurdes veulent rester dans le cadre de la Syrie ou opter pour leur indépendance. »

De son côté, Hamid Darwich, secrétaire du Parti progressiste kurde de Syrie, a rejeté le modèle d'une large autonomie, telle qu'elle s'applique au Kurdistan d'Irak :

« Nous n'allons pas obtenir la même chose que les Kurdes irakiens car les circonstances sont différentes. Nous demandons que nos droits nationaux soient inscrits dans la Constitution et qu'ils soient approuvés par nos frères arabes. »

IRAN :

FORTES PRESSIONS POLICIÈRES SUR LES MEDIA ET LES SYNDICATS INDÉPENDANTS

Le 2 janvier, la bloggeuse Rojîn Mohemmedi a été relâchée de la prison d'Evin (Téhéran). Elle était détenue depuis le 23 novembre 2011, accusée de propagande contre le régime. Étudiante en médecine à Manille, elle avait été arrêtée dès

son retour, à l'aéroport de Téhéran, et avait été mise au secret dans le carré 2A de la prison d'Evin, contrôlé par l'Armée des gardiens de la révolution islamique (IRGC).

Mais la pression, les intimidations, les arrestations et les juge-

ments arbitraires se poursuivent en Iran, visant particulièrement des militants pacifistes, féministes ou pour les droits de l'homme, ou des bloggeurs.

Ronak Saffarzadeh est une militante féministe kurde, qui participe notamment à la campagne

« Un million de signatures pour le retrait des lois discriminatoires envers les femmes ». Elle est aussi membre d'une association qui fait un travail d'éducation et d'alphabétisation des femmes kurdes dans leur langue maternelle, l'Azar Mehr Kurdish Women Society. Le 8 octobre 2008, elle a été arrêtée par les forces de sécurité, parce qu'elle distribuait des tracts qui réclamaient l'éducation en langue kurde et dénonçaient la pratique des « crimes d'honneur » à l'occasion de la Journée internationale de l'Enfance. Les autorités sont venues l'arrêter chez elle, en fouillant sa maison et confisquant ses affaires. Après un an et demi de détention, elle a finalement été condamnée à 6 ans et 7 mois de prison par le Premier Tribunal révolutionnaire de Sanandaj (Sine), le 13 avril 2009 mais a été disculpé du chef d'accusation « moharebeh », ou « ennemi de Dieu » qui lui aurait fait encourir la peine de mort. Elle a cependant été jugée coupable d'appartenance au PJAK et de « propagande contre le régime ». En août 2009, la cour d'appel a confirmé la sentence dans sa totalité et l'a envoyée à la prison centrale de Sanandaj, au milieu des droits communs et non de politiques, ce qui met sa vie en danger, Ronak Saffarzadeh ayant été agressée et blessée à plusieurs reprises.

Un autre militant des droits de l'homme, Muhammad Sediq Kaboudvand a été transféré à l'hôpital de la prison de la prison d'Evin où il est détenu depuis 5 ans. M. S. Kaboudvand a été arrêté en 2007 et condamné à 10 ans de prison pour « atteinte à la sécurité nationale » ayant fondé et dirigé la Défense de l'organisation des droits de l'Homme du Kurdistan, et était aussi le rédacteur en chef de l'hebdomadaire Payam-e Mardom, magazine bilingue en

persan et kurde, qui traitait de questions politiques, sociales et culturelles. Il avait écopé d'une peine supplémentaire d'un an pour « propagande contre la République islamique ». Son épouse, interviewée par le journal Zamaneh a indiqué qu'en 54 mois, aucune permission ne lui avait été accordée et que durant 2 ans, toute visite individuelle lui était interdite. Muhammad Sediq Kaboudvand est en mauvaise condition physique, ce qui nécessite des interventions chirurgicales, à la fois du cœur et de la prostate.

La Cour suprême a par ailleurs confirmé la peine de mort de deux prisonniers politiques kurdes, selon des sources locales relayées par la Campagne internationale pour les droits de l'Homme en Iran. Le 22 décembre 2010, Zanyar Moradi et Loghman Moradi, détenus à la prison Rajae Shahr de Mariwan, avaient été condamnés par la 15^{ème} chambre du tribunal révolutionnaire de Téhéran, en tant que moharebeh (ennemi de Dieu) et pour le meurtre du fils de l'imam de Mariwan.

Ayant pu s'entretenir brièvement avec sa famille, par téléphone, Loghman Moradi a confirmé ce verdict, en ajoutant que puisqu'il ne lui a été signifié qu'oralement et non par écrit, il espérait encore en une tentative d'intimidation. L'avocat des deux prisonniers a exprimé lui aussi sa surprise en apprenant ces condamnations. Loghman Moradi et Zanyar Moradi avaient auparavant déclaré dans des lettres qu'ils ont pu adresser à l'extérieur, que tous leurs aveux avaient été extorqués sous la torture.

S'exprimant au sujet de l'accusation de meurtre du fils d'un mollah de Mariwan, le père de Zanyar étale les irrégularités et

l'aspect très artificiel de ce dossier : « Mon fils a été arrêté il y a 20 mois, et c'est seulement 17 mois après qu'il a été accusé de meurtre et de terrorisme. Mais tous les gens de Mariwan, et même la famille de la victime, savent bien que ce n'est pas Zanyar et quelques autres de ces jeunes qui ont fait cela. Tous les gens de Mariwan et même la famille de la victime savent que ces cas récents de meurtres ne sont rien d'autre que le fait du régime, et que cela n'a rien à voir avec ces jeunes. »

De même, le père de Loghman Moradi, Osman Moradi a confirmé le caractère tardif des accusations : « Durant les 9 premiers mois qu'il était détenu par les services de renseignements, il n'y avait pas d'accusation de meurtre dans son dossier. Même plus tard, durant les 7 mois où il était en prison, on n'a jamais parlé de cela. Mais ils l'ont ramené au ministère du Renseignement une fois de plus et ils l'ont gardé 25 jours. Il a été torturé et maltraité à un point tel qu'il a reconnu le meurtre. Je veux dire qu'il l'a reconnu pour échapper à une telle situation. Il a fallu 17 mois pour obtenir de lui cette confession. »

De façon générale, toute forme d'opposition ou de protestation, qu'elle soit politique ou sociale, encourt les foudres du régime qui ne faiblit pas dans le durcissement de sa répression. Les régions kurdes, comme toutes celles abritant de fortes minorités ethniques, sont particulièrement visées. Ainsi, Human Rights Watch a dénoncé, le 31 janvier l'arrestation de plusieurs dizaines de syndicalistes à Téhéran, dans la province de Kurdistan et dans la ville de Tabriz.

« Les syndicats indépendants ont joué un rôle clef dans la protection

des travailleurs, sous la présidence de Mahmoud Ahmadinjad » explique Joe Stork, responsable du département Moyen-Orient à HRW. « Ces récentes arrestations sont dans la continuité d'une longue et répugnante tradition qui prend pour cible ces syndicats

indépendants pour assurer un total contrôle de l'État sur ces groupes. »

Toute contestation de cette répression entraîne d'autres mesures judiciaires. Ainsi, un éminent militant syndical de Sine

(Sanandadj, Kurdistan) a été arrêté ainsi qu'un dirigeant de l'Union des travailleurs libres d'Iran. Ce dernier a été arrêté après qu'il se soit rendu au bureau du procureur de Sanandadj pour s'enquérir du sort de deux autres syndicalistes arrêtés en début de mois.

DROITS DE L'HOMME : HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH PUBLIE SON RAPPORT POUR 2011

Le rapport de l'ONG Human Rights Watch pour l'année 2011, pointe, pour la Turquie, les contradictions entre la politique étrangère de la Turquie, qui « s'attache à promouvoir les intérêts régionaux de la Turquie en réponse aux mouvements pro-démocratie du Printemps arabe », alors que « les droits de l'homme ont subi des reculs à l'intérieur de ses frontières. Depuis 2005, les réformes en faveur des droits de l'homme ne sont plus la priorité du gouvernement, et les libertés d'expression et d'association sont attaquées par les procédures judiciaires en cours et les incarcérations de journalistes, d'écrivains et de centaines de militants politiques kurdes. »

Malgré les changements politiques en vue de résoudre la question kurde, annoncés à grand fracas en 2009, la question des droits de l'homme et des minorités a plutôt régressé depuis 2005, ajoute l'ONG, avec un accroissement de la violence armée, avec une recrudescence des attaques du PKK contre l'armée et la police, d'une part, et la reprise des bombardements turcs au Kurdistan d'Irak, contre les bases de la guérilla, ce qui ne s'était plus produit depuis 2008.

Les civils ont souffert eux aussi de la violence armée. Deux attentats à Ankara et à Siirt, revendiqués respectivement par le groupe des TAK (mouvement armé clandestin dont le PKK se désolidarise) et par

le PKK ont tué en tout 5 personnes. HRW constate que « la non-résolution de la question kurde demeure le plus grand obstacle au progrès des droits de l'homme en Turquie. »

La liberté d'expression, d'association et de réunion est trop souvent bafouée et permet, sous couvert d'accusation de « terrorisme » d'intimider, de harceler judiciairement ou d'emprisonner des éditeurs, des journalistes, des ONG, des universitaires : « Les procureurs portent fréquemment plainte contre des individus pour des discours ou des écrits non-violents. Les politiciens poursuivent leurs détracteurs pour 'diffamation'. Les tribunaux rendent leur jugement sans prendre suffisamment en compte la protection de la liberté d'expression. Une révision complète de toutes les lois restreignant la liberté d'expression est toujours en souffrance. » Sont ainsi rappelées les arrestations des journalistes Ahmet Şik et Nedim Şener, de l'universitaire, Büşra Ersanlı et de l'éditeur Ragıp Zarakolu.

La vague d'emprisonnements, lancée contre l'Union des communautés du Kurdistan (KCK/TM), en avril 2009, « s'est intensifiée en 2011, dirigée contre le parti pro-kurde, Paix et démocratie (BDP), qui a pourtant une existence légale. Des centaines de personnes sont en détention préventive et des milliers font face à des procès pour terrorisme, après toute une série d'arrestations d'officiels et de membres du BDP (qui a obtenu 36

sièges aux législatives de juin 2011), toujours pour liens avec le KCK. »

HRW rappelle également que près de 15 000 sites Internet restent bloqués en Turquie, « soit pour 'contenu pornographique' soit pour contenu pro-kurde ou d'autres messages politiques, ce par décision à la fois de la Justice et du ministère des Télécommunications. »

En Iran, les Kurdes paient un lourd tribut dans la répression judiciaire et pénale, généralisée dans tout le pays mais visant plus particulièrement les groupes minoritaires. Près de 20 Kurdes attendaient en octobre 2011 leur exécution dans « les couloirs de la mort ». La plupart des auteurs de délits d'opinion, qu'ils soient militants politiques, féministes, ou pour les droits de l'homme, encourrent le risque d'être jugés comme « ennemis de Dieu », ce qui est puni de la peine capitale.

La discrimination des minorités englobe aussi les minorités religieuses, ce qui concerne aussi les Kurdes, largement sunnites ou yarsan et, de façon générale, « le gouvernement a restreint les activités politiques et culturelles dans tout le pays, contre les Azéris, les Kurdes, les Arabes et les Baloutches, restriction qui inclut les organisations se consacrant à des questions sociales. »

Enfin HRW établit le bilan des opérations militaires iraniennes et turques au Kurdistan d'Irak, qui,

au cours de l'été 2011 « ont au moins tué 10 personnes, blessé une douzaine d'autres et déplacé des centaines de civils. »

Au Kurdistan d'Irak, la situation des droits de l'homme est nettement plus favorable, même si les manifestations de février 2011 dans la province de Suleïmanieh ont fait au moins 10 morts et plus de 250 blessés.

Le 27 avril, le Gouvernement Régional du Kurdistan a d'ailleurs « publié un rapport de 19 pages qui établit que les forces de sécurité et les manifestants sont responsables des violences, et que les forces « n'étaient pas préparées à contrôler la situation ».

Mais le principal reproche des ONG envers le GRK est le traitement de la presse par les forces de sécurité. Les journalistes se plaignent régulièrement d'arrestations arbitraires, de coups, de harcèlement, de menaces, de confiscation et de destruction de matériel, surtout lors des manifestations qu'ils couvraient.

Autre problème particulier à certaines régions du Kurdistan d'Irak, celui de l'excision des fillettes, qui peut atteindre 40% selon les endroits. Mais « le 21 juin, le Parlement du Kurdistan a adopté une loi contre les violences familiales, qui comprend plusieurs dispositions rendant criminelles cette pratique, ainsi

que les mariages forcés ou les mariages d'enfants, les abus verbaux, physiques et psychologiques des femmes et des jeunes filles. »

En Syrie la violence armée se propage dans la plus grande partie du pays et jusqu'ici, les régions kurdes ont été le moins touchées. La citoyenneté a été octroyée par décret aux Kurdes apatrides de Djézireh, mais si officiellement l'état d'urgence a été levé, « la répression sanglante en cours montre la détermination du gouvernement à écraser la dissidence et à rejeter toute réforme qui pourrait diminuer son autorité. »

CULTURE :

UNE KURDE DE 75 ANS DEVIENT UNE PEINTRE RECONNUE AUX PAYS-BAS

Khanim Amen, surnommée Haji Khanem par les Kurdes est aussi appelée « The Lady of Colours » par les galéristes néerlandais et anglais. Née à Suleïmaneh en 1939, elle est en effet devenue, à 75 ans, une peintre reconnue aux Pays-Bas, et notamment à Amsterdam, la ville où elle réside actuellement.

Haji Khanem n'était aucunement destinée, à l'origine, à mener une carrière artistique, même si elle

était attirée, dès l'enfance, par l'artisanat, le tissage, la poterie et la décoration des intérieurs. Mais son père lui ayant interdit toute formation poussée, elle est mariée à l'âge de seize ans et n'apprendra même à lire et à écrire que bien plus tard, à quarante ans, dans des cours pour adulte, tout en travaillant comme sage-femme et infirmière, et en tissant des tapis, vendus ou exposés dans des fêtes. Réfugiée après la Première Guerre du Golfe, en 1991, aux Pays-Bas, elle apprend le néerlandais et participe à plu-

sieurs activités locales artistiques, commençant alors à exposer. Sa première exposition professionnelle a lieu en 2005, et elle a, depuis, vendu une centaine de tableaux exposés dans des galeries et centres culturels et en novembre 2011 ses tableaux ont été exposés dans une galerie londonienne. Un reportage de la BBC lui a été consacré en décembre dernier et le reportage a été depuis largement repris et diffusé sur Internet, que ce soit dans la presse anglo-saxonne, européenne ou kurde.

La Turquie versera des réparations aux familles des 35 Kurdes tués

La Turquie paiera des réparations aux familles de 35 contrebandiers kurdes, confondus avec des rebelles et tués mercredi lors d'un raid aérien près de la frontière irakienne, a annoncé lundi 2 janvier le vice-Premier ministre turc Bulent Arinc.

"Les réparations vont être versées d'ici deux jours", a déclaré Bulent Arinc à la télévision en rendant compte d'une réunion du gouvernement. Cependant, a-t-il précisé, le gouvernement ne présentera pas "officiellement" ses excuses.

Bulent Arinc a assuré que cet incident n'était pas dû à un acte intentionnel et qu'une enquête avait été ouverte sur une éventuelle négligence qui aurait été commise par l'armée.

"Il est absolument hors de question que l'incident ait été intentionnel. Cependant, bien qu'il n'ait pas été intentionnel, des investigations sont en cours sur une éventuelle négligence", a-t-il dit.

Cette bavure inédite a provoqué une vague de protestations des milieux prokurdes qui ont crié au "massacre".

Erdogan, "meurtrier"

Vendredi, des milliers de Kurdes en



Les corps des personnes tuées le 29 décembre 2011 dans la province turque de Sirnak transportés à bord d'un camion (AFP)

colère ont enterré les victimes du bombardement et ont conspué Recep Tayyip Erdogan, le qualifiant de meurtrier.

Le gouvernement turc a reconnu une erreur militaire tandis que l'armée a déclaré avoir bombardé la zone sur la base de renseignements selon lesquels des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) allaient s'infiltrer en Turquie.

"Les citoyens tués sont des civils mais il faut savoir que (l'armée) réalise des opérations transfrontalières dans cette région. C'est une zone où les activi-

tés et rassemblements terroristes sont intenses", a déclaré Bulent Arinc.

D'après les informations dont disposaient l'armée, un groupe d'une cinquantaine de personnes voyageaient avec des mules susceptibles de transporter des armes, a ajouté le vice-premier ministre.

Le groupe ne s'est pas arrêté en dépit des tirs d'artillerie. C'est alors que les avions ont bombardé la région, selon Bulent Arinc.

Le Nouvel Observateur avec AFP

IRAN-ISRAËL • Des frappes pour le printemps ?

Un édito du Washington Post et les déclarations des dirigeants israéliens relancent les spéculations sur une prochaine intervention israélienne en Iran. Les Américains semblent déjà résignés.

Hamdam Mostafavi

Courrier international

"La plus grande inquiétude du secrétaire d'Etat américain à la Défense, Leon Panetta, réside dans la possibilité croissante d'une attaque israélienne contre l'Iran ces prochains mois", affirme l'éditorialiste David Ignatius dans le Washington Post, dans un article paru le 2 février. "Panetta pense qu'il est hautement probable qu'Israël attaque l'Iran en avril, mai ou juin, avant que les Iraniens entrent dans ce que les Israéliens décrivent comme une 'zone d'immunité' où ils auront déjà commencé à construire une



bombe nucléaire. Très bientôt, les Iraniens auront enfoui assez d'uranium enrichi dans des installations souterraines pour pouvoir réaliser une arme et alors, seuls les Etats-Unis, seront capables de les arrêter

militairement. Le Premier ministre israélien Benyamin Netanyahu ne veut pas laisser le sort d'Israël dépendre d'une action américaine", continue le journaliste.

"Le président Obama et Leon Panetta ont prévenu les Israéliens que les Etats-Unis s'opposaient à une attaque, pensant que cela va à l'encontre des sanctions internationales de plus en plus efficaces et des autres efforts non-militaires pour arrêter l'Iran. Mais la Maison Blanche n'a pas encore décidé comment les Etats-Unis répondraient si les Israéliens attaquent. Le gouvernement américain semble vouloir rester en dehors du conflit, sauf si l'Iran s'attaque directement à des intérêts américains."

Côté israélien, les dirigeants font à nouveau monter la pression. Le ministre de la Défense Ehoud Barak a déclaré jeudi 2 février que "tout ceux qui pensent 'plus tard' vont sans doute se rendre compte que 'plus tard', ce

sera 'trop tard'. Dans le Yediot Arahonot, l'éditorialiste Alex Fishman considère que l'année 2012 sera "l'année de la décision", reprenant les propos de Benny Gantz, chef d'Etat-major de l'armée israélienne. Fishman rappelle que selon Barak, "la fenêtre pour attaquer l'Iran se referme peu à peu". Selon le journaliste, "certains affirment que cette fenêtre n'est que de quelques mois, alors que des observateurs plus prudents parlent de 18 mois. Quoi qu'il en soit, le compte à rebours a déjà commencé. Nous

sommes en plein milieu d'une rhétorique guerrière, qui ne fait que monter. Pourtant, arrêter le programme nucléaire iranien ne passe pas nécessairement par le bombardement de dizaines de sites iraniens. Face à la pression économique efficace, il faudra ouvrir la possibilité d'une sorte de dialogue secret avec l'Iran. Il est très probable que l'invitation des Iraniens envers les inspecteurs de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique [qui ont visité les installations nucléaires iraniennes du 29 au 31 jan-

vier, et reviendront du 20 au 21 février] soit le premier signe de l'existence d'un dialogue secret."

Le blog iranien Mikhak, animé par un collectif de journalistes anonymes, ne favorise ni la guerre ni les sanctions. Il souligne que les sanctions pèsent en premier lieu sur la population. Celles qui avaient été appliquées contre l'Irak pendant des années n'ont pas affecté le dictateur Saddam Hussein, mais les Irakiens, rappelle-t-il. ♦

LE FIGARO

jeudi 5 janvier 2012

Ankara et Téhéran mesurent leurs désaccords

Le ministre turc des Affaires étrangères est en Iran pour évoquer les dossiers qui fâchent.

LAURE MARCHAND
ISTANBUL

MOYEN-ORIENT L'Irak, la Syrie, le nucléaire... Les contentieux entre Ankara et Téhéran, symptomatiques de leur rivalité régionale, s'amoncellent et ils sont au programme de la visite de deux jours qu'Ahmet Davutoglu effectue en Iran. Arrivé hier dans la République islamique, le ministre des Affaires étrangères turc a prévu d'évoquer les dossiers qui fâchent avec les autorités iraniennes, au moment où l'Occident fait à nouveau pression sur le programme nucléaire iranien et où l'Iran menace de fermer le détroit d'Ormuz. Motivant ce déplacement par son souci « d'empêcher une guerre froide au Moyen-Orient », le chef de la diplomatie turque a déclaré, avant de s'envoler pour Téhéran, que « des tensions interconfessionnelles seraient un suicide pour la région ».

Frictions sur la Syrie

Dans un espace géographique en proie à de profonds bouleversements, les Turcs cherchent à la fois à placer leurs pions dans la nouvelle donne moyen-orientale et à maintenir l'Iran dans le jeu diplomatique pour empêcher les risques de conflits qui peuvent suivre de nombreuses lignes de fracture - entre les sunnites et les chiïtes, l'Iran et la Turquie, les alliés régionaux des États-Unis, les pays

Depuis le retrait des soldats américains, le 18 décembre, l'Iran reprend la main

arabes... L'exercice est complexe. Pour Ankara, le dossier le plus urgent,



Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (à gauche) et Ahmet Davutoglu (à droite) lors d'une rencontre - à Téhéran, en juillet dernier.
EPA/MAXPPP

sur lequel il se trouve aux antipodes avec son voisin, est la crise en Irak. C'est le nouveau terrain d'affrontement entre les deux puissances régionales, la sunnite et la chiïte. Depuis le retrait des soldats américains, le 18 décembre, l'Iran reprend la main et la politique de plus en plus autoritaire du premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki, un chiïte plus que jamais sous influence de Téhéran, relance le spectre d'une guerre multiconfessionnelle. Le vice-président Tareq al-Hachémi, un sunnite soutenu par la Turquie, est accusé par al-Maliki d'avoir orchestré des attentats. Visé par un mandat d'arrêt, il s'est réfugié au Kurdistan irakien et Ankara a proposé de l'accueillir. Concernant le soulèvement en Syrie, les divergences entre le gouvernement islamo-conservateur turc, qui appelle régulièrement Bachar el-Assad à quitter le pouvoir, et l'Iran, qui le

protège toujours, sont sources de friction. Les Turcs grignotent également, lentement mais sûrement, l'influence iranienne sur le Hamas : pour son premier voyage à l'étranger depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir à Gaza du mouvement islamiste palestinien en 2007, Ismaël Haniyeh, le chef du gouvernement du Hamas, se trouvait mardi à Ankara. Il a été accueilli par les applaudissements nourris du groupe parlementaire du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) au pouvoir et a posé main dans la main avec le premier ministre Erdogan devant les objectifs.

Enfin, le système antimissile de l'Otan, dont une partie a été installée sur le territoire turc et qui devrait être mise en service incessamment, non loin de la frontière iranienne, cristallise le mécontentement de la République islamique. À la fin de l'année dernière, des officiels iraniens avaient déclaré que la destruction du radar serait la priorité de l'armée si leur pays était menacé d'une « attaque extérieure ». ■

Crise nucléaire : l'Iran est menacé d'un embargo international sur ses ventes de pétrole

Le régime de Téhéran a tiré un missile de moyenne portée, et menace de bloquer le détroit d'Ormuz en représailles à des sanctions d'une ampleur inédite visant ses ressources en devises

Menacé de sanctions internationales touchant au cœur de son économie, à savoir ses exportations de pétrole, l'Iran cherche à désamorcer la pression à la fois en agitant la menace de ses capacités de représailles, et en brandissant de nouvelles offres de dialogue avec les grandes puissances.

Le régime de Téhéran a procédé, dimanche 1^{er} janvier, à un tir de missile sol-air de moyenne portée près du détroit d'Ormuz, un passage par lequel transite une partie majeure du trafic pétrolier mondial, et que l'Iran menace d'étrangler si ses ventes d'hydrocarbures sont entravées. De la « *gesticulation verbale* », minimise-t-on de source diplomatique occidentale.

L'élément déclencheur de cette nouvelle montée des tensions dans le Golfe a été la signature, samedi 31 décembre 2011, par Barack Obama, d'une loi permettant aux États-Unis de bloquer l'accès à leur système financier de toute banque étrangère traitant avec la Banque centrale iranienne.

La force de frappe de cette loi à caractère extraterritorial est manifestement redoutée par le pouvoir iranien, qui se livre à une surenchère de manœuvres militaires, dans un contexte où les États-Unis intensifient leurs livraisons d'ar-

mements aux pays sunnites du Golfe, comme l'illustre la fourniture de 84 avions bombardier F-15 à l'Arabie saoudite.

Pressés par Israël de resserrer l'étau économique sur Téhéran avant que les travaux nucléaires iraniens franchissent certaines lignes rouges, les Occidentaux ne peuvent pas exclure que l'État juif – où se poursuit un débat interne sur l'opportunité de frappes militaires contre des sites iraniens – décide en 2012 de passer à l'action. Le minis-

La Russie est braquée contre la stratégie des Occidentaux, qu'elle accuse d'aller au-delà du traitement de la crise nucléaire

tre israélien de la défense, Ehoud Barak, avait indiqué, en novembre, qu'une échéance de l'ordre de neuf mois devait être prise en compte, au-delà de laquelle un point de non-retour pourrait être atteint.

Le même mois, un rapport de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique détaillant les recherches iraniennes sur la fabrication d'une ogive nucléaire et des tests d'explosifs, avait renforcé le senti-

ment d'urgence, apportant des arguments à ceux qui jugent que le moment est venu de passer à un registre supérieur en matière de sanctions.

Un embargo international sur les importations de pétrole iranien est ainsi en préparation. Les responsables français, qui travaillent activement à une telle campagne, souhaitée par Israël, disent avoir bon espoir d'entraîner sur cette voie l'ensemble des pays de l'Union européenne (UE), dès la fin janvier. La stratégie consiste à bâtir une coalition de pays volontaires, sans passer par le Conseil de sécurité, où le double blocage russe et chinois semble incontournable.

L'effort diplomatique porte à ce stade sur la création d'un « bloc » rassemblant l'UE, le Japon et la Corée du Sud, dont les achats de brut iranien représentent ensemble environ 17% des revenus du gouvernement de Téhéran. En Europe, cependant, il faut encore lever certaines réticences. L'Italie craint pour sa firme ENI, qui a des intérêts en Iran. La Grèce se procure du brut iranien à crédit. L'Allemagne est d'accord pour cesser les achats de pétrole iranien, mais elle juge qu'une autre mesure prônée par la France – le gel des avoirs de la Banque centrale iranienne – va trop loin, en visant un attribut fondamental de l'État.

L'arme pétrolière contre l'Iran avait déjà été évoquée, il y a plusieurs années, mais sans être retenue par les Occidentaux, de peur qu'elle mène à une flambée des cours du brut sur les marchés mondiaux, et que la République islamique se livre à une série de représailles déstabilisatrices pour l'ensemble du Moyen-Orient.

Ces appréhensions n'ont pas disparu. La différence, aujourd'hui, tient au constat occidental que la fenêtre se réduit dangereusement pour la diplomatie, d'autant que les États-Unis sont entrés en campagne électorale, et que la gamme

des sanctions de moindre ampleur apparaît épuisée.

Pour éviter de grosses perturbations sur les prix mondiaux du brut, les Occidentaux semblent espérer que l'Arabie saoudite, avec ses capacités d'exportations inutilisées, pourra être mise à contribution. On juge par ailleurs que l'Iran aura du mal à atténuer le choc des nouvelles sanctions en se tournant encore plus vers le marché chinois. Pékin, qui achète 22% des exportations iraniennes, voudra éviter d'apparaître trop dépendant d'un seul fournisseur.

Toutefois, la Chine continuera de représenter un grand « trou » dans le dispositif de sanctions en préparation. De même que la Turquie, dont 51% du pétrole importé provient d'Iran. Les récentes tensions diplomatiques entre Paris et Ankara n'ont rien fait pour convaincre le gouvernement turc de se rallier à la politique souhaitée par l'Élysée sur l'Iran.

La Russie apparaît pour sa part très braquée contre la stratégie des Occidentaux, qu'elle accuse d'aller bien au-delà du traitement de la crise nucléaire, en visant à terme le changement de régime en Iran. Moscou avait proposé à l'été 2011 un compromis comportant un gel de l'accroissement des sanctions contre un gel iranien de l'enrichissement d'uranium à 20%.

Une solution qui semble avoir intéressé dans un premier temps l'équipe Obama, avant que celle-ci ne renonce, face aux messages sans ambiguïté envoyés par Israël. La France aussi était vent debout contre l'offre russe, y voyant trop de concessions aux Iraniens.

Israël a fait savoir qu'un des facteurs déclencheur d'une action militaire pourrait être l'imminence d'un transfert d'uranium enrichi vers le site nucléaire iranien de Fordow. Creusé dans une montagne près de Qom, celui-ci serait difficile à détruire par voie aérienne. ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

De nouvelles mesures de restriction américaines

Le président Barack Obama a signé, le 31 décembre 2011, un texte de loi sur le financement du budget de la défense comprenant de nouvelles sanctions frappant les institutions financières engagées dans des transactions avec la Banque centrale iranienne. Ces mesures punitives concernent aussi bien les établissements bancaires privés que ceux contrôlés par l'État, y compris les banques centrales. Elles entreront en vigueur après une période d'avertissement de deux

à six mois, a précisé un haut responsable de l'administration Obama. Les institutions pénalisées seront « gelées » sur les marchés financiers américains. Ce texte de loi vise, grâce aux sanctions contre Téhéran, à réduire les revenus pétroliers de l'Iran tout en donnant au président américain le pouvoir de lever les pénalités à la demande. Cette loi prévoit par ailleurs un financement du département de la défense à hauteur de 662 milliards de dollars. – (Reuters.)

Blocs pursue short-term fixes for Iraq political crisis

Suadad al-Salhy

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Looking to step back from the brink, Iraq's fractious political blocs are working on short-term solutions to cool a crisis that threatened a slide back into sectarian strife, but fundamental differences may be left to smolder.

Political leaders from Sunni Muslim, Shi'ite Muslim and Kurdish factions are looking to a national conference this month and the courts to defuse hostilities triggered when Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki called for the arrest of Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi after the last U.S. troops left.

"People are talking about dialogue. It does look like calm and wisdom are prevailing. I think we have stepped back," said one Western diplomat.

The outcome of the crisis has wider implications in a region where Syria's anti-government upheaval is taking on a sectarian tone and Shi'ite power Iran, Sunni Arab Gulf nations and Turkey to Iraq's north are all jostling to extend their influence.

At stake in Baghdad is the survival of an uneasy power-sharing government among Maliki's Shi'ite alliance, Sunni-backed Iraqiya and the Kurdish blocs that divides up ministries and posts but has struggled to work, hamstrung by deep mistrust.

In two apparent gestures over the past two days to calm the atmosphere, Maliki appealed for political stability and parliament speaker Osama al-Nujaiifi called on Iraqis to "build the present and the future with one heart and one hand."

The rival blocs appear to have agreed to attend the conference later this month proposed by Nujaiifi, a Sunni, and President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, and to let the courts resolve Maliki's allegations that Hashemi ran death squads.

But a senior Shi'ite politician who asked not to be named saw little hope that national dialogue would produce results.



Residents demand to put on trial Iraq's Vice-President Tareq al-Hashemi during a demonstration outside the headquarters of Diyala local government in central Baquba, about 65 km (40 miles) northeast of Baghdad (STRINGER/IRAQ, REUTERS / December 20, 2011)

"It is not expected that this conference will offer anything new, but it offers an acceptable reason for Iraqiya leaders to end their boycott and save face," the lawmaker said.

For the moment, Iraqiya's boycott of parliament stands and suggestions for early elections -- not due until 2014 -- and other measures for long-term change are not gaining traction.

Whether Iraqiya's boycott survives may become apparent on Tuesday when parliament is due back from a recess and Maliki's cabinet convenes its regular weekly meeting.

Last week, two Iraqiya Sunni ministers, including Finance Minister Rafie al-Esawi, boycotted the cabinet and four were absent with excuses, but two others attended, highlighting the longstanding schism in the bloc.

A senior Shi'ite lawmaker said Sunday he was leaving the bloc over dissatisfaction with its leaders' decision-making and handling of the Hashemi crisis, joining 11 other Iraqiya lawmakers who have departed in the last three months.

"Iraqiya is really divided, broken," said a senior Sunni leader in the bloc. "All (its leaders) want is to go back to their jobs. Maliki humiliated Iraqiya (leaders) and now they are ready to sacrifice Hashemi."

If some Iraqiya ministers quit, others within the bloc may be ready to claim their jobs, strengthening Maliki's hand.

Should Iraqiya walk out or splinter, Maliki would likely turn to Kurdish partners and Iraqiya dissidents who have already split from

their bloc, seeking a majority government.

"The majority government is one of the options, not the only one, and not the current solution," said Kamal al-Sadi, a senior leader in Maliki's Dawa party.

Maliki could also face opposition within his own bloc, where some factions appeared to be using the crisis to push for a new prime minister or to negotiate for posts or other benefits.

Maliki's move against Hashemi and his demand that parliament dump Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq, another Sunni leader, sparked Iraq's worst political crisis in a year.

The Shi'ite leader has presented Iraqiya with a challenge to sideline Hashemi, one of its senior leaders, or lose its sway in government. Iraqiya may ultimately have to decide whether it stays together or splinters, and cracks have already appeared.

Iraq's crisis could still go two ways: pulling back from the abyss once again or falling into deeper turmoil that shatters the frail cross-sectarian government and renews bloodshed after the mid-December withdrawal of the last U.S. forces.

ISLAMIST INSURGENTS

The rising tensions could unravel Iraq's U.S.-backed democratic experiment as the country's still-rebuilding security forces grapple with a weakened but still lethal al Qaeda-linked Sunni insurgency that carries out daily attacks.

Political infighting could open the door to foreign intervention and to Shi'ite and Sunni armed groups to

ramp up attacks, reviving sectarian conflict.

Politics in Iraq, despite inflammatory rhetoric, is a slow boil with hours of back-room negotiations leading to deals. The power-sharing arrangement itself took more than half a year of horse-trading and cajoling as blocs bargained over posts.

U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, Maliki's Shi'ite partner anti-U.S. cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and Kurdish President Masoud Barzani have been odd bedfellows in trying to pull the government back together.

RISKY BACKLASH

But the major question now is Iraqiya's next move.

The party is in talks with other blocs and lobbying for a parliamentary vote of no confidence against Maliki. Any stand against Maliki will require backing from the Kurds and a

Shi'ite bloc within Maliki's coalition.

Iraqiya will have to measure the potential loss of its government posts against any possible gain made by opting out of the government. It holds parliament speaker, a vice presidency, a deputy prime minister post and the finance ministry.

The risk for Maliki is if Iraqiya and the Kurdish blocs team up. But the Kurds may see more advantage in using the crisis as leverage to negotiate with Maliki over their own issues, such as control of oil resources and territories disputed between Baghdad and Iraqi Kurdistan, rather than backing Iraqiya.

"Frankly, Kurds are not ready to sacrifice their strategic interests and alliances because of Hashemi," one senior Kurdish leader said. "I don't think Iraqiya will succeed."

But Sunni discontent with Maliki

is deep, and Iraqiya has already accused him of renegeing on power-sharing agreements.

Nearly nine years after the invasion that overthrew Saddam Hussein, sectarian friction still runs close to the surface in Iraq, where sustained violence between Sunni and Shi'ite communities killed thousands of people in 2006-07.

Maliki's manoeuvres are fanning minority Sunni fears of political isolation. Since Saddam's fall, Iraq's Shi'ite majority has risen and Sunnis say they feel they have been pushed out of key decision-making.

Already, Sunni-dominated provinces like Anbar and Salahuddin are pressing for more autonomy from the central government, resisting what they see as Maliki's interest in pushing a Shi'ite agenda at the expense of Sunnis.□



January 5, 2012

"Failure to implement Federation System shall lead to catastrophe in Iraq," Barzani says

ARBIL / Aswat al-Iraq: The President of north Iraq's Kurdistan Region, Massoud Barzani, has said on Thursday that the "failure of implementing the Federal System in Iraq shall lead to a catastrophe in Iraq," confirming that the "Kurds are determined not to get involved in the sectarian difference, caused by the attempt of Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, to arrest Vice-President, Tariq al-Hashimy."

"The Kurds are not part of the sectarian differences, now taking place..

Yes, we are part of the political difference and the political conflict, but not part of the sectarian difference," Barzani said in interview with Reuters News Agency.

Noteworthy is that the Kurdish Leaders have called for the holding of a national conference to settle the differences between Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki and al-Iraqiya Alliance, now boycotting the Parliament and the Cabinet's meetings, charging the government, led by the Shiites, with having concentrated the authorities in its hands.

"The Kurds are looking forward towards an agreement among the political parties about the venue and the time of the conference, Barzani said, expressing "readiness to host the conference, but political sources said that Maliki opposes holding it in the Kurdistan

Capital of Arbil, insisting to settle the case of Vice-President Hashimy first."

Barzani said that "if the political parties decide another venue for the conference, that would be their decision, but the venue does not represent a problem for the Kurds," though he expressed conviction that several related parties were not prepared to meet in Baghdad.

As regards to the fate of Vice-President Hashimy, Barzani said: "this is something to be decided by the Legislative System and the courts, and the Kurds won't interfere in any measures taken by the Judicial System."

Hashimy said that he was prepared to attend a trial in Kurdistan Region, insisting that he won't have a just trial in Baghdad.

The crisis have laid the Kurds in fears from dangers, but they could lay them in the position of mediators, in case of reaching to a political agreement, with al-Maliki and al-Iraqiya Alliances would need the support of the Kurds in the Parliament, within the confrontation between both alliances.

Barzani explained that "the Kurds have chosen a voluntary unity between the Arabs and the Kurds, provided that the ruling system in Iraq be a Federal System, which is a Constitutional right for the Kurds and the whole people of Iraq," pointing out

that "the prevention of implementing certain constitutional items, would push the country towards grave problems and catastrophe."

As regards to the oil contacts, signed in Kurdistan Region, which is a point of difference between Baghdad and Arbil,

Barzani said: "there is an agreement with Baghdad that each side continues the signing of such deals, till the issuance of the Oil & Gas Law."

Kurdistan Region had signed contracts with the American Exxon Company new oil contracts that Baghdad officials say there had been signed in the areas-in-conflict between Arbil and Baghdad, but Barzani said that "the Kurds consider those areas as part of Kurdistan Region.

Assad: friend or foe of the Kurds?

The National / UAE.

Phil Sands

DAMASCUS // As Syrian protesters battle to overthrow President Bashar Al Assad, the country's large Kurdish minority is struggling to decide if its interests lie in the fall of the regime or in its survival.

Politically divided and uncertain about their future, Syria's two million Kurds, 10 per cent of the population, have played a limited role in the uprising, analysts, activists and Kurdish groups say.

"Until now we are putting about 10,000 people in the street for the largest demonstrations [in the Kurdish areas of north-east Syria]," said one Kurdish activist.

"When we really rise up there will be hundreds of thousands, and there will be big Kurdish protests in Damascus and Aleppo, but we are not at that stage yet."

Mr Al Assad has offered concessions to win Kurdish support - or at least entice them to stay out of the revolt - granting citizenship to stateless Kurds in April.

The military crackdown has also been less harsh in Kurdish areas, in an effort to avoid inflaming the tense situation there, but those measures alone do not explain the cautious involvement in the uprising.

Among those in Syria with an axe to grind against the regime, the country's Kurdish minority would seem to rank near the top - a long history of state-imposed ethnic discrimination and economic neglect put it in permanent semi-rebellion against Damascus.

The north-east city of Qamishli in Hasika province, the Kurds' stronghold, has long been one of its most impoverished areas.

Over the years many Kurds have moved to Aleppo and Damascus in search of work and education, often settling in illegally built neighbourhoods as a poverty-stricken urban underclass that derived little direct benefit from the state.

Baathist rule and its doctrinal Arabism resulted in discrimination against the Kurds, with some 300,000 left stateless. Until Mr Al Assad issued his decree recognising them, they were officially considered for-



Source: damascusbureau.org, kurdishtcentre.org

eigners, excluded from the basic services and subsidies granted to Syrians.

That often uneasy coexistence with Arab neighbours has been compounded by a broader Kurdish dispossession.

The world's 30 million Kurds are the largest ethnic community without a homeland.

Divided between neighbouring Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, they have long aspired to the statehood promised them by the victors in the First World War, who oversaw the dismantling of what was left of the Ottoman Empire.

But Britain and France reneged when they redrew the Middle East.

That territorial division created a source of political and ethnic tension that continues to exert a major influence on the region.

The four countries view with suspicion their Kurdish populations and the separatist movements that exist among them.

The Kurds feel themselves targets of harassment and discrimination, and many do want to

win Kurdish autonomy.

With a strong sense of communal identity, the Kurds have been the most politically active and well-organised opposition bloc in Syria, and played a leading role in the short-lived Damascus Spring of 2005, making unprecedented calls for democracy and greater freedoms.

Still, mainstream Kurdish political parties have trod carefully since March when the uprising began, trying to solve the equation of whether their interests would be better served by a revolt that could yet succeed or fail, or by trying to reform the status quo.

"It's true that for seven months or so some of the Kurdish political parties were not engaged in the uprising. Really, it was just the Future movement and Yeketi. The rest hadn't taken the decision to go to the street," said Foad Aleko, a senior Syrian Kurdish political figure and Yeketi party official.

Of the dozen or so Kurdish parties in Syria, the Future movement is an anomaly.

Founded by Meshaal Tammo it quickly and unequivocally



Protesters in the Kurdish city of Qamishli in northern Syria carry a huge national flag during a pro-democracy demonstration in May last year. The word written on the flag is Kurdish for "freedom".AFP

joined the revolt, co-operating closely with Arab protesters nationwide.

It was the only Kurdish group to join the opposition Syrian National Council.

Unlike other Kurdish leaders, Mr Tammo shunned identity politics. He flatly refused to have Kurdish flags flown at protest rallies, insisting instead the Syrian national flag be raised

Mr Tammo was murdered by gunmen on October 7, the first national level opposition figure to be killed in the uprising.

While his funeral attracted about 50,000 mourners - five were shot during the procession by security forces - and led to speculation it would inflame the Kurdish street, it did not.

Instead, allegations about who killed him only underlined divisions among them.

Some blamed the government. Some accused Turkey, fighting its own Kurdish insurgency against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Others pointed to different Kurdish factions, citing mafia-like entrenched interests.

These schisms, and in particular the hostility between Turkey and the PKK's political wing, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), one of the largest and most influential Kurdish parties in Syria, have helped the Syrian authorities to prevent the Kurds from fully supporting the

uprising.

In an effort to solve their lingering divisions, Syrian Kurdish political blocs, including 10 major parties and representatives of non-affiliated groups - doctors, engineers and other professionals - met in October to thrash out a unified position. The PYD did not attend.

In June it had helped found the National Coordination Committees (NCC), an opposition alliance that the other Kurdish groups refused to join because it insisted Syria be defined as part of the Arab world.

The October 26 meeting declared the Kurds were fully committed to the Syrian revolution and would not negotiate with the regime independently of other opposition blocs. It demanded a new constitution recognising the Kurds and their right to self-determination within a united Syria.

"That meeting was a decisive point and a decision was made by all to take to the streets and the protests have been getting bigger and bigger since," said Mr Aleko.

"The protests are big now, the regime blocks the streets, there is tear gas and shooting so the accusation that we're not committed to the revolution isn't true."

But one analyst said the Kurds are still hedging their bets.

"We've seen hundreds of thousands of

protesters in the streets in Homs, Hama, Deraa and Idleb despite all the dangers they face, but in Kurdish areas the numbers have been nothing like as big," he said, on the condition of anonymity.

The Kurds have long been better organised than Arab groups, so this means a political decision has been made to pull their punches, the analyst said.

"The Kurds have a foot in both camps still, they are not sure if the regime will survive or fall, and they want to be able to benefit whatever the outcome," he said. "They are waiting until they know the answer to that big question, then they will commit themselves."

Kurdish political leaders deny they have cut a deal with the regime. They say they want to prevent the uprising being seen as Kurdish, not Arab.

Despite such assurances, deep divisions remain among the Kurds.

"To be honest, the Kurds have not decided who the real enemy is yet, the [Syrian] regime or the Turks," said another Kurdish activist. "Both are threats to our future but we have to decide which is the biggest and we have to know what will happen to us if Assad does fall."

○○○

psands@thenational.ae

The New York Times January 9, 2012

Iraq: 16 Killed in Multiple Attacks

By JACK HEALY

At least 16 people were killed across Iraq on Monday in car bombings, assassinations, roadside bomb blasts and attacks on security forces. The rash of seemingly unconnected attacks stoked fears that disparate insurgent groups from around Iraq are trying to sow sectarian violence by exploiting the uncertainty and instability of the country's political crisis. On Monday, two car bombs exploded in Shiite areas of Baghdad — one near a mosque, the other near a market — killing 12 people and wounding 50. Earlier in the day, a bank manager was assassinated outside her home in a middle-class Baghdad neighborhood. In the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, two Kurdish security forces were killed in a checkpoint attack.



Iraqi Shiite Muslim pilgrims walk to the holy city of Kerbala to mark Arbain in Baghdad's Doura District January 9, 2012. REUTERS/Thaier al-Sudani

L'Iran menace Ormuz pour éviter des sanctions

C'est un goulet stratégique par lequel transite près d'un cinquième de la consommation mondiale de pétrole. Le détroit d'Ormuz constitue l'extrémité sud d'une ligne de front invisible qui sépare les deux rives du Golfe, l'arabe et l'iranienne. Il constitue à ce titre un excellent instrument de mesure de l'intensité de la guerre froide qui oppose Téhéran à un bloc arabe soutenu par l'Occident, inquiet des ambitions régionales d'un pays qui a toujours voulu faire par ailleurs de ce Golfe une mer intérieure iranienne, bien avant l'instauration de la République islamique, en 1979.

En a témoigné lundi 2 janvier le test de trois missiles iraniens, au dernier jour de manœuvres navales autour du détroit d'Ormuz. La portée des missiles Nasr, Nour et Ghader utilisés lundi va de 35 à 200 km. Ils sont « transportables, précis et d'une capacité de destruction très élevée », a précisé l'amiral Habibollah Sayyari, le commandant de la marine iranienne.

Le 28 décembre 2011, alors que les manœuvres militaires iraniennes venaient de débuter, ce haut responsable iranien avait assuré que « fermer le détroit est très facile pour les forces armées iraniennes ». « C'est comme boire un verre d'eau, comme on dit en persan », avait-il ajouté, avant de préciser : « Aujourd'hui, nous n'avons pas besoin de [fermer] le détroit car nous contrô-

lons la mer d'Oman et nous pouvons contrôler le transit. »

Alors que les Etats-Unis, puissance militaire majeure du Golfe dont la V^e Flotte mouille à Bahreïn, vien-

Les pipelines, sur la péninsule Arabique, sont des alternatives terrestres à Ormuz

nent de conclure un contrat militaire important avec l'Arabie saoudite portant sur la vente de 84 F-15, les menaces voilées de l'amiral Sayyari s'inscrivent dans un contexte de nouvelles tensions entre l'Iran et les pays occidentaux à propos du programme nucléaire controversé que développe la République islamique.

Le 6 janvier 2008, le dernier incident sérieux répertorié entre Iraniens et Américains – lorsque cinq vedettes rapides s'étaient portées à la hauteur d'un convoi de trois navires de guerre américains – était intervenu alors que l'hypothèse d'une attaque préventive contre le programme nucléaire iranien était régulièrement évoquée.

Le 27 décembre 2011, le vice-président iranien, Mohammad Reza Rahimi, a affirmé qu'« aucune goutte de pétrole ne transitera par le détroit d'Ormuz » si les pays occidentaux adoptaient des sanctions contre les exportations pétroliè-

res de l'Iran, ce qui ferait flamber les cours de l'or noir.

Le 16 février 2005, intervenant devant une commission du Sénat des Etats-Unis, un haut responsable américain, le vice-amiral Lowell Jacoby, avait assuré que la République islamique avait la capacité de « fermer brièvement le détroit d'Ormuz » ou de perturber « périodiquement » le trafic des supertankers.

En avril 1988, pendant la guerre opposant l'Irak à l'Iran (au cours de laquelle un missile américain avait abattu par méprise un Airbus iranien avec à son bord 290 passagers), un navire américain avait été endommagé par une mine iranienne. C'est à la même époque que le Koweït avait deman-

dé des escortes pour les pétroliers.

Il existe des alternatives terrestres à Ormuz, via le pipeline qui court, en Arabie saoudite, de la province orientale pétrolière à la mer Rouge, ou celui qui relie, aux Emirats arabes unis, Abou Dhabi à l'emirat de Foujeïrah, sur la mer d'Oman. Mais ces alternatives ne concernent pas la production pétrolière ou gazière (liquéfiée) du Koweït et du Qatar.

L'arme du détroit est enfin à double tranchant. Elle toucherait aussi la production iranienne, dont Téhéran a cruellement besoin, et pénaliserait surtout les pays asiatiques, à commencer par la Chine, que l'Iran ne cesse de courtiser. ■

GILLES PARIS

... PAR LEQUEL TRANSITE 35% DU TRAFIC MARITIME PÉTROLIER MONDIAL...

Répartition de la production d'hydrocarbures

Gisements ■ gaz ■ pétrole

Terminal pétrolier

Oléoduc

Oléoduc fermé

Exportations, en millions de tonnes, en 2010

Asie Pacifique*	227,1
Japon	179,9
Inde	129,6
Chine	118,4
Europe	116,7
Etats-Unis	86
Singapour	45,4

* hors Singapour et Japon

... DONT LE CONTRÔLE, OBJET DE CONVOITISES, EST ÉTROITEMENT SURVEILLÉ

Par les pays limitrophes

▲ Aéroport militaire

■ Iles occupées par l'Iran depuis 1971 et revendiquées par les Emirats arabes unis.

▨ Limite des eaux intérieures

— Limite du plateau continental définie par un accord bilatéral

— Couloir de circulation maritime international

⋯ Limite d'équidistance des côtes

Par les pays occidentaux

★ Base américaine

● Flotte militaire

★ Base française

★ Base britannique

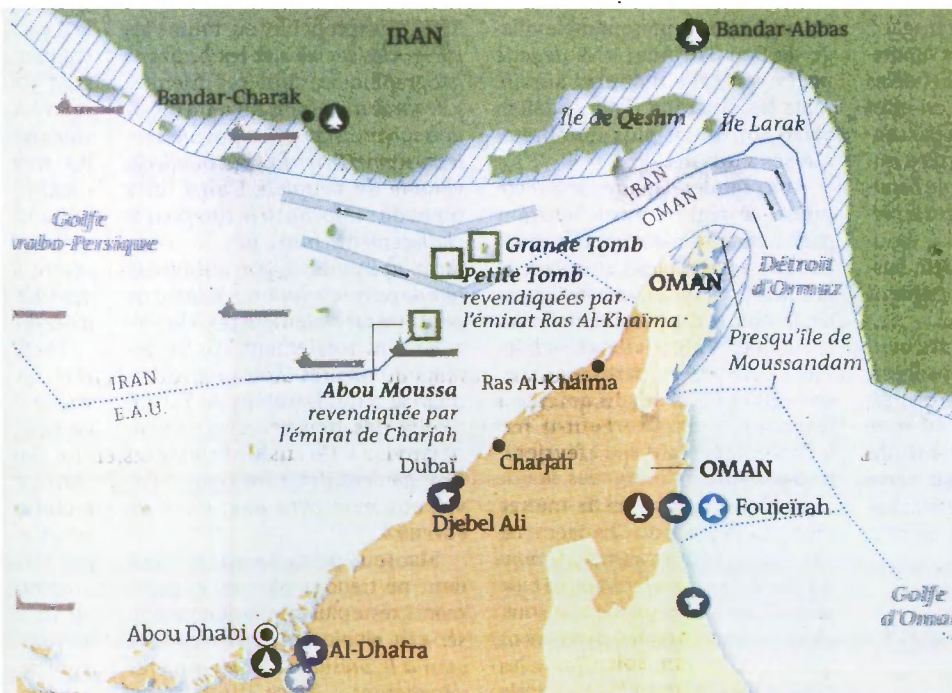
Degré d'hostilité aux positions iraniennes

Fort

Moyen

Faible

SOURCES : D. ORTOLLAND ET J.-P. PIRAT, ATLAS GÉOPOLITIQUE DES ESPACES MARITIMES, 2010, ÉDITION TECHNIP ; P. CADÈNE ET B. DUMORTIER, ATLAS DES PAYS DU GOLFE, PUPS, 2011 ; LE GOLFE ET SES ÉMIRATS, REVUE HÉRODOTE, N° 133, LA DÉCOUVERTE, 2009 ; BP STATISTICAL REVIEW OF WORLD ENERGY, JUIN 2011 ; THE GULF/2000 PROJECT ; LE MONDE



Irak

Année zéro

Après huit années de présence en Irak, les Etats-Unis n'ont pu rétablir une distribution d'électricité dépassant la demi-douzaine d'heures par jour en ville, ni un service postal convenable, ni les transports publics et pas même une compagnie aérienne nationale. Joli bilan.

Plus grave, à peine les dernières troupes américaines avaient-elles quitté l'Irak, le 18 décembre dernier, qu'une douzaine de voitures piégées tuaient 60 personnes à Bagdad et en blessaient quelque 200. Ces attentats étaient la réponse sunnite au coup de force du Premier ministre chiite Nouri al-Maliki. Celui-là venait de destituer le vice-Premier ministre Saleh Moutlak, un sunnite qui l'avait accusé d'être un dictateur. M. Maliki le dénonçait, à son tour, comme étant le commanditaire d'un groupe de tueurs qui a assassiné des membres du gouvernement ! Dans la foulée, il lançait aussi un mandat d'arrêt contre un autre sunnite de premier plan, Tariq al-Hachemi, vice-président de la République, qui se réfugiait en région kurde où sa sécurité était garantie...

Pas de stabilité politique

On pourrait difficilement trouver meilleur témoignage que la question du partage du pouvoir entre les sunnites (20 % de la population), maîtres du pays depuis la création de l'Irak en 1920, et les chiïtes (60 %), qui dominent l'Etat depuis l'intervention américaine (2003), n'était nullement réglée. En octobre déjà, le Premier ministre Maliki avait fait arrêter plus d'un demi-millier de personnes, presque toutes sunnites, accusées d'être d'anciens membres du Baas, le parti de Saddam Hussein.

Certes, l'occupation américaine a doté l'Irak d'une Constitution, d'un Parlement (où siègent 25 % de femmes), d'une presse aux opinions variées et d'une quarantaine de chaînes de télévision relativement libres. Les élections se déroulent dans des conditions globalement régulières. Tout cela ne suffit pas à garantir l'Etat de droit mais contraste jusqu'à présent avec les méthodes du régime de Saddam Hussein.

Enfin, les Etats-Unis ont formé activement une armée irakienne, au risque de négliger le théâtre afghan, considéré comme secondaire. En 2008, cette armée était trois fois plus nombreuse que celle de



Après l'explosion d'une voiture piégée, à Bagdad, le 22 décembre dernier.

Au terme de huit années de présence militaire, qui leur ont coûté 800 milliards de dollars et 4 500 hommes, les Etats-Unis ont quitté le pays. Sans aucun résultat : instabilité politico-ethnique et attentats sont toujours de mise.

PAR GÉRARD CHALIAND*

l'Afghanistan, pour une population équivalente, avant que les Etats-Unis ne finissent par s'apercevoir que l'Afghanistan était la victime collatérale de la guerre d'Irak, situation à laquelle ils cherchent, depuis, à remédier, sans grand succès.

Sans évoquer la somme d'erreurs commises dans cette guerre délibérée, que symbolisent les photos des sévices infligés à la prison d'Abou Ghraïb, on ne peut que constater que les Etats-Unis, au terme de huit années de présence militaire, qui leur ont coûté 800 milliards de dollars et 4 500 hommes, n'ont pu préparer les conditions de la stabilité politique.

Comment s'étonner alors que surgissent les contradictions que les Américains n'ont pu contribuer à régler, mais qui, jusqu'alors, étaient contenues par leur présence ?

L'Irak doit-il être un Etat centralisé, comme le veut Nouri al-Maliki, ou devenir une fédération, ainsi que le souhaitent les Kurdes, qui représentent 20 % de la population du pays et sont autonomes *de facto* dans trois de ses 18 provinces ? Hostiles jusqu'en 2005 à toute participation électorale, les sunnites ont décidé de voter en 2010 et certains d'entre eux, comme dans la province de Diyala (Est), ont manifesté en faveur de l'autonomie.

Rien n'a été tranché durant l'occupation et rien n'indique qu'une solution se dégagera autrement que par un bras de fer pouvant se transformer en confrontation violente. La situation créée aujourd'hui par M. Maliki a le mérite de la clarté : il cherche à concentrer tous les pouvoirs et contrôle directement, ou par l'intermédiaire d'hommes liges, les

ministères de l'Intérieur, de la Défense et de la Sécurité, ainsi qu'une importante partie de l'armée et de la police.

Nouri al-Maliki a consolidé graduellement son pouvoir avec l'appui des Américains au cours des années 2008-2009

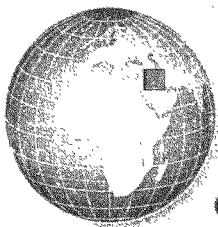
pendant lesquelles il était déjà Premier ministre. Son parti, le Dawa, a remporté 89 sièges sur 325 au Parlement, aux dernières élections de 2010. Maliki s'était d'abord distingué en mettant au pas les chiïtes de la région de Bassora (Sud) et en faisant plier la milice de Moqtada al-Sadr, un dirigeant chiïte radical et fortement opposé à la présence américaine. Ce dernier se repliait alors en Iran et ses milices armées adoptaient un profil bas en attendant le départ des troupes >



Départ des derniers soldats américains d'Irak, le 17 décembre 2011.

Répartition ethnico-religieuse de la population irakienne

- Chiites
- Sunnites
- Kurdes
- Régions désertiques



Source : CIA (2003).

> américaines. M. Maliki, à la satisfaction de Washington, signait un accord de coopération et de sécurité avec les Etats-Unis malgré l'opposition exprimée des autorités iraniennes.

Politiquement, la crise est ouverte. Les membres dirigeants du parti Irakya, qui rassemble essentiellement des voix sunnites, ont fait appel auprès du principal responsable kurde, Massoud Barzani, afin que celui-là joue, comme naguère, un rôle de médiateur. En effet, pour l'instant, M. Maliki a besoin de l'appui des Kurdes non seulement à l'égard des sunnites, mais encore dans le cadre des querelles intestines chiites.

La menace Moqtada al-Sadr

Parmi les diverses factions chiites, qu'il s'agisse du Conseil suprême islamique d'Irak d'Al-Hakim, grand perdant des élections de 2010, du parti Fadhila, relativement bien implanté à Bassora, d'indépendants comme M. Jaafari, le danger pour Nouri al-Maliki vient du perturbateur majeur, Moqtada al-Sadr, qui s'est toujours affiché comme résolument antiaméricain et jouit d'une popularité indiscutable auprès des couches populaires, notamment à Bagdad. Il est largement représenté au Parlement et c'est lui qui a particulièrement insisté pour que les troupes américaines quittent en totalité l'Irak fin 2011 sous peine d'avoir à affronter une insurrection menée par sa milice. Moqtada al-Sadr milite en faveur d'une dissolution du Parlement et pour la tenue de nouvelles élections.

Parmi les chiites, il représente la faction la plus proche de l'Iran.

L'imbroglie irakien n'est compréhensible qu'à la lumière du passé : l'Irak moderne est né en 1920, au lendemain de la défaite de l'Empire ottoman, sous l'impulsion de la Grande-Bretagne. Outre les provinces arabes de Bagdad et de Bassora, la puissance mandataire adjoignait la province de Mossoul, dans le Nord, où elle savait qu'il y avait d'importants gisements pétroliers. Le pays était coiffé d'un souverain appartenant à l'illustre famille des Hachémides. Dès le début du mandat, les Kurdes se révoltèrent et furent vaincus grâce à l'une des toutes premières interventions de la Royal Air Force hors d'Europe. Les chiites étaient tout aussi hostiles à l'occupation étrangère. Les Britanniques s'appuyèrent sur la minorité sunnite et sur des supplétifs assyriens

(chrétiens) qui seront physiquement liquidés après l'indépendance en 1933.

La Turquie kémaliste réclame, entre 1923 à 1925, le retour de la province de Mossoul, en majorité peuplée de Kurdes (58 %). La Société des nations (SDN) tranche le litige et, compte tenu du rapport des forces internationales du moment, la province est accordée à l'Irak, dominé par la Grande-Bre-

tagne. On voit pourquoi, aujourd'hui, la Turquie réémergente s'intéresse de près aux provinces autonomes kurdes. Les sunnites règnent en maîtres à partir de l'indépendance, accordée au début des années 30, et cet état de fait ne sera bouleversé, à partir de 2003, que par la guerre de choix menée par George W. Bush qui les marginalise au profit des chiites - alliés objectifs de l'Iran et considérés comme hérétiques par les sunnites - ainsi que des Kurdes qui, rappelons-le, ne sont pas des Arabes.

Rien n'est réglé non plus en ce qui concerne le partage prévu des revenus du pétrole entre les trois

groupes principaux. Contre la volonté de Bagdad, les Kurdes ont signé des contrats aux conditions attrayantes avec 42 compagnies de taille modeste. Ces accords ont été dénoncés par Bagdad et, par rétorsion, ces compagnies étaient boycottées par le ministère du Pétrole ! Cet état de fait a été rompu en décembre dernier lorsque Exxon Mobil a signé six contrats d'exploration avec les Kurdes. Difficile pour Bagdad de songer à boycotter le géant américain Exxon, d'autant que le Premier ministre a besoin des Kurdes sur le plan politique. Les sunnites, eux, dont le territoire ne recèle pas d'hydrocarbures, ne reçoivent guère de subsides.

L'Irak doit-il être un Etat centralisé, comme le veut le Premier ministre chiite Nouri al-Maliki, ou devenir une fédération, ainsi que le souhaitent les Kurdes ?

Plus de 120 000 civils tués

Selon l'organisation britannique indépendante Iraq Body Count (IBC), environ 162 000 personnes ont été tuées en Irak dans les violences qui ont suivi l'attaque américaine en 2003, dont 80 % de civils. La situation est loin d'être apaisée puisque 4 000 personnes

seraient mortes en 2011, selon IBC, le ministère de l'Intérieur irakien n'en reconnaissant « que » 1 500. Selon une autre organisation indépendante, Icasualties, 4 484 militaires américains sont morts en Irak, ainsi que 318 militaires issus de pays alliés, dont 179 Britanniques. ■ J.-D.M.

Rien non plus n'a été réglé sur un troisième sujet majeur de discordance : Kirkouk. Cette ville, considérée comme la capitale du Kurdistan d'Irak et dont la région est riche en hydrocarbures, a été l'objet d'importants déplacements de population dont les Kurdes ont fait les frais sous Saddam Hussein. En principe, un référendum doit se tenir après un recensement, la ville ayant été assez largement réoccupée par les Kurdes au grand dam des Turkmènes (dont certains soutenus par la Turquie) et des Arabes (surtout chiïtes, dont une petite partie, dédommée, a consenti à retourner dans le Sud). La présence militaire américaine au cours des années écoulées a permis de contenir les débordements éventuels. Dès leur départ, les troupes gouvernementales ont occupé l'aéroport militaire de Kirkouk et il a fallu l'intervention de l'ambassade américaine pour trouver un compromis provisoire.

Chômage et corruption

Dans la région autonome kurde, où la sécurité est grande, l'économie et les échanges sont florissants. Mais, à terme, des tensions sérieuses peuvent y apparaître tant l'enrichissement a creusé les écarts sociaux. La présence turque est importante, tant pour l'achat que pour l'acheminement des hydrocarbures et dans le domaine du bâtiment, où les entreprises turques sont largement majoritaires. Va-t-on vers une vassalisation du nord de l'Irak par la Turquie, dont le poids économique et l'influence sur le

destin de Kirkouk ne peuvent être sous-estimés ? C'est possible, même s'il faut compter aussi sur le fait que les Etats-Unis, la Chine ou la Corée du Sud sont également présents dans la région.

Avec des réserves en pétrole qui se classent tout de suite après celles de l'Arabie saoudite et de l'Iran, l'Irak est potentiellement un pays disposant de gros atouts. Il a cependant connu douze années d'embargo, précédées d'une dizaine d'années de guerre et suivies par huit années d'occupation. L'agriculture et l'industrie n'ont nullement retrouvé le niveau d'il y a une trentaine d'années. Le chômage et le sous-emploi touchent la moitié de la population active. Les trois quarts du budget de l'Etat sont affectés au salaire des très nombreux fonctionnaires.

Au cœur de la crise, on trouve des banques d'Etat où s'étale la corruption. Ainsi le ministre de l'Electricité, Raad Challal al-Ani, a dû démissionner après avoir signé des contrats atteignant 1,3 milliard de dollars avec une firme canadienne qui n'existe pas et une allemande ayant fait banqueroute un mois avant de signer le contrat. Cependant, les investisseurs étrangers - dont les Etats arabes du Golfe -, tout comme des

firmes américaines, font de gros profits dans le pétrole et la reconstruction.

Deux millions de personnes ont quitté l'Irak, dont une importante proportion de chrétiens (Assyriens, Chaldéens) et on compte 1 million de déplacés à l'intérieur du pays, dont une partie non négligeable est réfugiée en région kurde.

Avec près de 25 000 Américains présents en Irak (dont 17 000 employés par l'ambassade et 6 000 hommes dans les compagnies de sécurité), la capacité d'influence des Etats-Unis se trouve réduite mais compte toujours, confortée par les 40 000 hommes cantonnés à proximité, dans le Golfe.

La perspective d'une disparition du régime alaouite en Syrie, remplacé par un pouvoir sunnite, à laquelle s'emploient la Ligue arabe, Arabie saoudite et Qatar en tête, la Turquie et l'Occident, inquiète autant Nouri al-Maliki que l'Iran qui est, lui aussi, dans la ligne de mire. La recomposition de la région visant à

affaiblir les chiïtes, y compris au Liban (Hezbollah), est en cours. Ce n'est pas un gage de paix pour l'Irak. ■ G.C.

* Géopolitologue, spécialiste des conflits armés.

Auteur de *D'une guerre d'Irak à l'autre* (Métailié, 2004) et *l'Amérique en guerre : Irak, Afghanistan* (Le Rocher, 2007).

Avec des réserves en pétrole qui se classent tout de suite après celles de l'Arabie saoudite et de l'Iran, l'Irak dispose de gros atouts.

Le Point

5 janvier 2012

IRAN LES MENACES DE TÉHÉRAN

Le bras de fer entre l'Iran et les Occidentaux se poursuit. Comme chaque année, l'Iran a entrepris des manœuvres navales près du détroit d'Ormuz, cet étroit bras de mer de 50 kilomètres de largeur par lequel transitent 40% du pétrole mondial en provenance du Golfe arabo-persique. Une zone éminemment stratégique où croise la flotte américaine, basée à Bahreïn. L'Iran menace de fermer

le détroit, même s'il n'en a pas véritablement les moyens. Bloquer Ormuz, c'est prendre le risque d'une réplique militaire américaine immédiate.

C'est donc près d'Ormuz que, les 1^{er} et 2 janvier, les Iraniens ont tiré avec succès des missiles de moyenne et courte portée. Parallèlement, Téhéran annonçait avoir testé pour la première fois des barres de combustible nucléaire civil, fabriquées localement. Une provocation pour Washington. Pour l'Iran, c'est la réponse à la signature par Obama, la veille, d'une loi bloquant l'accès au système financier américain de toute banque qui



continuerait à travailler avec l'Iran. Washington prépare aussi un embargo international

contre le pétrole iranien et a livré, le 31 décembre, 84 avions bombardiers à l'Arabie saoudite, l'ennemi des mollahs. Ils'agit d'obtenir de Téhéran l'abandon de son programme nucléaire. Affaiblis sur le plan intérieur, les mollahs ont demandé à relancer les négociations avec Bruxelles, mais entendent montrer, auparavant, qu'ils ont encore des moyens d'action ■

MIREILLE DUTEIL



LES IRANIENS ONT TIRÉ AVEC SUCCÈS DES MISSILES PRÈS D'ORMUZ.



A marketplace in Erbil, the capital of Kurdistan. The region, which is relatively prosperous, has long been a bastion of tolerance and a haven for the aggrieved and oppressed of all stripes.

Kurds wary of Iraqi factional strife

ERBIL, IRAQ

Baghdad power struggle evokes painful memories and threatens stability

BY TIM ARANGO

For the Kurds here in this ancient city, the rewards of war are numerous and obvious. Construction cranes rise from the cityscape. Highway medians are green with shrubbery. A glittering shopping mall with an indoor ice skating rink stands as a totem of U.S.-style consumerism. The only blast walls in sight are those that protect the regional Parliament, decorated by sunflowers painted in muted shades of yellow.

Among Iraqis, the Kurds benefited the most from the war, and now they may have the most to lose if the political chaos that followed the departure of U.S. forces metastasizes into civil war.

"Are we worried? Yes, we are worried," said Barham A. Salih, the prime minister of the Kurdish regional government. "Our national interest as Kurds lies in a democratic, federal, peaceful Iraq. We still have a long way to go before we get there."

The end of the U.S. military role here is an anxious turning point for the Kurds, who were protected by the United States for 20 years, beginning after the Gulf War of 1991, with a humanitarian operation and no-flight zone that halted Saddam Hussein's killing machine.

Now, the consolidation of power by Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki evokes painful memories of Kurdish suffering at the hands of a powerful central government in Baghdad. It also places the Kurds in the delicate position of acting as peacemakers between warring Shiite and Sunni Arab factions, a battle in which their own future is at stake.



"Every Kurd yearns for an independent homeland, no doubt," Mr. Salih said. "But we have also accepted living as part of a democratic, peaceful, federal Iraq. If this hope vanishes, I don't think the Kurds will be willing to risk what we have."

The current crisis, which politicians say has brought the country to the brink of civil war, erupted almost two weeks

ago, just as the last U.S. troops were leaving. Mr. Maliki's government issued an arrest warrant for Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, the top Sunni politician, accusing him of running an assassination squad. Mr. Hashimi fled north, to the semiautonomous Kurdish region, to escape arrest. Mr. Maliki, a Shiite, warned the Kurds that there would be "problems" if they did not turn over Mr. Hashimi.

The Kurds, who have no intention of complying with Mr. Maliki's demand, were not happy about being dragged into the dispute between Sunnis and Shiites. "We are not part of the problem," insisted Massoud Barzani, president of the Kurdish regional government.

But with the future of postwar Iraq hanging in the balance, they cannot avoid being part of the solution. U.S. diplomats, whose influence is vastly diminished here since the U.S. military withdrawal, have called on a Kurdish leader, Jalal Talabani, who is the president of Iraq, to convene a meeting of Iraq's leadership.

But so far there is no agreement even on where the meeting should be held: The Kurds say it should be in the north, while Mr. Maliki is pushing for Baghdad.

A unity government formed last year at the initiative of the Kurds, which included meaningful roles for all three of Iraq's main factions, is now teetering. Mr. Maliki has threatened to form a new government controlled by the Shiite majority that would effectively marginalize the Sunnis. To do so, he would need the support of the Kurds in Parliament, an unlikely prospect.

"This would be the most dangerous step," Mr. Barzani said in an interview at his sprawling palace outside Erbil. "It has to be a partnership between the Shias, the Sunnis and the Kurds. Anything contrary to that would be disastrous."

Mr. Salih, the regional prime minister, said a Shiite-Kurdish alliance that shut out the Sunnis would mean "the end of Iraq as we know it."

Depriving the Sunnis, who dominated under Mr. Hussein's government, of a political voice would probably revitalize the Sunni insurgency, which is already showing new signs of life. Four days after the U.S. withdrawal, coordinated bombings in Baghdad killed at least 63 people, the deadliest attack there in more than a year.

The Kurds have no great love for the Sunnis. Even though the Kurds are mostly Sunni Muslims themselves, it was the Sunni Arab government of Mr. Hussein that was accused of committing genocide against the Kurds. But they would rather have the Sunni Arabs

safely ensconced in a power-sharing government rather than risk renewed violence and instability.

Kurdistan, long a bastion of tolerance and a haven for the aggrieved and oppressed of all stripes, has lately become a sanctuary for Sunnis. Mr. Hashimi re-

mains encamped at Mr. Talabani's guesthouse in the hills outside Sulaimaniya, where he said he alternated wearing the two suits he had packed for a trip he thought would last two days.

Sunni leaders from Diyala Province, a mixed region that has sought greater autonomy from the central government,

**"Are we worried?
Yes, we are worried."**

have also fled to Kurdistan after a crack-down by state security forces.

Kurdish leaders believe in federalism and support the efforts of other provinces, like Diyala and Anbar, both with Sunni majorities, to gain autonomy, a status Mr. Maliki opposes as a threat to Shiite dominance. While most Kurds ultimately wish for their own state, a move toward independence carries the risk of provoking a regional war with Iran, Syria and Turkey, countries with their own substantial Kurdish minorities. These countries would probably view an assertion of statehood by Iraqi Kurds as a provocation.

For now at least, the Kurds see their

best hope in maintaining their autonomy within a united Iraq.

"If Iraq ends up being broken apart, it's not because the Kurds wanted it," said Dr. Najmaldin Karim, a U.S. citizen from Silver Spring, Maryland, who is now the governor of Kirkuk, a city divided by Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen. "It's because the others couldn't get along."

Omar al-Jawshy contributed reporting.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune JANUARY 6, 2012

Iraqi leader courts insurgents

BAGHDAD

Prime minister welcomes group with close ties to Iran and a violent record

BY JACK HEALY
AND MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT

It was one of the deadliest insurgent groups in Iraq, an Iranian-backed militia that bombed American military convoys and bases, assassinated dozens of Iraqi officials and tried to kidnap Americans even as the last soldiers withdrew.

Now, however, the Shiite-led government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal-al Maliki is welcoming the militant group into Iraq's political system, a move that tilts Iraq's center of gravity closer to Iran. The government's support for the militia, which only just swore off violence, has opened new sectarian fault

lines in Iraq's political crisis while potentially empowering Iran at a moment of rising military and economic tensions between Tehran and Washington.

The militant group, Asaib al-Haq, broke away from the fierce Shiite militia commanded by the anti-American cleric Moktada al-Sadr. Led by a former spokesman for Mr. Sadr, Qais Khazali, it was trained and financed by Iran's elite Quds force and was built like a terrorist network, with small cells across the country.

Since the U.S. military withdrawal, Iraq has been convulsed with sectarian violence like the attack Thursday that killed at least 68 people, including 44 Shiite pilgrims in a single bombing in the southern deserts near Nasiriya. So the Iraqi government's overtures could be seen as an earnest attempt to make peace with a powerful armed foe while nudging the country closer to a desperately needed national reconciliation. Indeed, thousands of other militants, both

Sunni and Shiite, have cut deals with the government to stop fighting, and few officials see a meaningful peace in Iraq that does not include reconciling with armed groups.

But some American and Iraqi officials are leery about whether Asaib al-Haq is truly ready to forswear violence, especially with thousands of American diplomats and security contractors still in the country. Mr. Maliki's recent attempts to marginalize the country's Sunni minority and consolidate power — which have precipitated a political crisis — have only amplified their fears.

"To use an Iraqi phrase, they have blood on their hands, and it's not just American blood," said a senior U.S. military official. "I am all for forgiveness and reconciliation but they are — and I think always will be — beholden to their masters in Iran."

In June, Asaib al-Haq and other Iranian-backed militias conducted rocket at-



KARIM KADIM/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Two brothers mourned the death of their father, who was killed Thursday in the Sadr City area of Baghdad amid a countrywide wave of bombings. The attacks killed at least 68 Iraqis, including 44 Shiite pilgrims in a single bombing in the southern deserts near Nasiriya.

tacks on American bases that resulted in the deaths of 13 soldiers, marking the highest number of combat-related deaths for U.S. forces in Iraq since 2008. Military officials also said the group was to blame for the last American combat death in Iraq, a November roadside bomb attack in Baghdad.

During the weeks before the U.S. military's withdrawal, the group sought to kidnap American officials from inside Baghdad's heavily guarded Green Zone, according to Western officials.

"It's not a good sign that Maliki is so keen to work with a group that has been responsible for the deaths of many Americans," said Marisa Cochrane Sullivan, deputy director at the Institute for the Study of War and an expert on Asaib al-Haq. "A.A.H. having a prominent role in the government is not in the interest of the United States."

Critics worry that Mr. Maliki, facing fierce new challenges to his rule from Sunnis and even his fellow Shiites, may now be making a cynical and short-sighted play for Asaib's support. They say Mr. Maliki may use the group's credentials as Shiite resistance fighters to divide challengers in his own Shiite coalition and weaken Mr. Sadr's powerful bloc, which draws its political lifeblood from the Shiite underclass.

By doing so, Iraq's government could embolden a militia with an almost nonexistent track record of peace while handing Tehran greater influence in a country where the United States spent billions of dollars and lost nearly 4,500 soldiers in nine years of war.

"I think it is a dangerous step, this move by the government, to join with groups that do not believe in the peaceful political process," said Osama al-Nujaifi, the speaker of Iraq's Parliament and a Sunni Arab. "They use the political with one hand and military forces with the other hand. This is a violation of the Constitution, a violation of peaceful political mechanism. There is a problem."

Asaib al-Haq's public shift comes at a delicate time for U.S. interests in the region. A political crisis is consuming

Baghdad's government in the wake of the American military withdrawal. Iran,

"Asaib al-Haq having a prominent role in the government is not in the interest of the United States."

wounded by punishing economic sanctions, recently threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial shipping channel for oil in the Gulf, including some 80 percent of Iraq's oil exports.

With U.S. forces gone and new opportunities emerging from Iraq's splintering political landscape, Iraqi officials and political commentators say the leaders of Asaib al-Haq have caught a whiff of the patronage, money and influence that lie in Iraqi politics.

They appear eager to follow a similar path to power as the one blazed by Mr. Sadr's political cohorts, who control 40 seats in Parliament and seven government ministries.

"Maliki has kept at this thing and under the context of the withdrawal has been able to draw them out of the armed conflict," said a Western diplomat familiar with the discussions between Mr. Maliki and the group.

It remains to be seen whether the group will be able to make any mark on the political scene now that their main antagonists have left Iraq. Sunni Muslims are wary of their history, and they are despised by Mr. Sadr and his followers for what they consider to be the group's treasonous public split with Mr. Sadr.

Western officials describe Asaib as a well organized network under the thrall of Mr. Khazali's spiritual and strategic leadership that operates its own television station and maintains close ties to Iran. But that does not necessarily mean influence in Iraq's bruising political culture.

Mr. Maliki's government has embraced the group's vows to disarm while avoiding any overt pledges to support

them in Iraq's next elections. An adviser to Mr. Maliki said it was too early for such questions.

"We welcome those who want to join the political process and give up their weapons no matter whether they are Sunni or Shiite," said Hassan al-Suneid, an Iraqi lawmaker from Mr. Maliki's State of Law coalition.

U.S. officials made efforts to bring a disarmed Asaib al-Haq into Iraq's government as early as 2009, even releasing Mr. Khazali, and his brother, Laith, from prison.

"Khazali was telling us when he was being interrogated that they were ready to lay down their arms," said a Western diplomat, referring to the group's founder. "We released those guys and they went back to Iran and didn't exactly lay down their arms."

At an officially sanctioned rally last week in central Baghdad, hundreds of the group's members and supporters gathered in a public square that was previously the stage for pro-democracy demonstrations. For hours, they celebrated the insurgents who fought American troops in Iraq, waving banners and screening triumphal videos of their deadly attacks on American Humvees, tanks and convoys.

Standing in front of Asaib's emblem — a hand raising two fingers, flanked by silhouetted insurgents — the group's founder and leader, Mr. Khazali, praised the Iraqis who had spilled blood fighting American forces, and said that the insurgents had forced the American withdrawal.

Later, in an interview with the group's television station, Mr. Khazali struck a populist tone as he discussed the role his group might one day play in Iraqi politics.

"We want the people to concentrate on their power, to correct the errors of the politicians," he said. "We know our strength and how much influence we can have."

Yasir Ghazi and Omar al-Jawoshi contributed reporting.

REUTERS

Iraq's Kurds see Exxon deal on track, no obstacles

ARBIL, Iraq, January 12 2012(Reuters)

IRAQ'S SEMI-AUTONOMOUS KURDISTAN government said on Thursday Exxon Mobil Corp's deal with the regional government to develop six exploration blocks was on track and there were no obstacles to it proceeding.

Natural Resources Minister Ashti Hawrami also told Reuters

in an interview the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was in talks with other oil majors and expected further such deals to be agreed in the next few months.

The KRG, he said, had submitted proposed amendments to the long-awaited draft national oil law and the bill was now due to be presented before parliament in Baghdad.

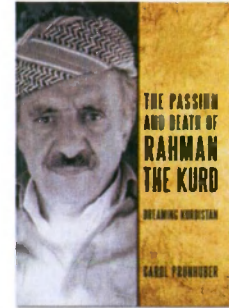
Oil production within Kurdish controlled northern Iraq was expected to be 175,000 barrels per day in 2012, and reach 1 million bpd in 2015, he said.

Meanwhile, Hawrami said a deal with Genel Energy to build a \$400 million oil pipeline to link its Tak Tak oilfield with Iraq's export pipeline to Turkey's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan was very close to being signed.

The Passion and Death of Rahman the Kurd



Carol Prunhuber's book "The Passion and Death of Rahman the Kurd: Dreaming Kurdistan" is an in-depth biography of the Kurdish leader Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, killed by Iranian agents in Vienna in 1989. The book, published in four languages, received several international awards. The Passion and Death of Rahman the Kurd



By Anahit Khatchikian
www.araratnews.net

On 13 July 1989, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) and respected Kurdish intellectual in the West, was assassinated by Iranian agents in Vienna, Austria, while negotiating for a peaceful solution of the Kurdish question in Iran.

Nineteen years later, Carol Prunhuber, the Venezuelan journalist and friend of Ghassemlou, published his biography "The Passion and Death of Rahman the Kurd: Dreaming Kurdistan" in Spanish. Her book is not just a biography; nor is it merely political analysis of the Kurdish question in Iran. Carol Prunhuber's book is an intelligent example of deep investigative journalism, written with love and empathy, but at the same time conducted with surgical precision. Every word, every fact, every testimony and shred of evidence lies in its appropriate place and speaks without its author's subjective involvement. For this is a very engaging book. You can see an inspired and passionate author amidst its lines - who at the same time remains very objective and impartial in analyzing the dramatic circumstances surrounding Ghassemlou's untimely death.

Last but not least, it is a book written with a sense of accomplished moral obligation. The author says that Ghassemlou asked her, "When I die, I would like you to write a book, telling the story of my life and the Kurdish cause." Sadly, at that time Ghassemlou didn't know that Prunhuber's book would be signalled by his assassination.

From the very first pages of this volume, the reader is immediately placed in the heart of the narration - it is the day of the assassination and for first

time, the writer introduces us to the cultivated leader of the Kurdish Revolutionary movement in Iran, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou. He was an intellectual who spoke nine languages, could recite poems in Farsi and translate them instantly in French, loved literature and wine and surprised everyone with his knowledge on Western culture and art.

Ghassemlou was the youngest of seven brothers born in Urmia in Iranian Kurdistan to the family of a rich Kurdish feudal lord and Assyrian mother (the third of his nine wives). He spoke Kurdish at home, studied the Quran and Arabic at school and Assyrian language in the Christian house of worship, where his mother took him to learn religion unbeknownst to his father. Perhaps this rich and unusually mixed environment shaped the sensibility of the cosmopolitan visionary Ghassemlou would become. He was not religious himself, but respected all people from different ethnicities and beliefs.

During his youth, Ghassemlou discovered Marxism. He studied in Paris, lived in communist Prague, taught Economics in the University, married a Czechoslovakian, Helene Krulich, and witnessed the Soviet intervention in Prague in 1968. No matter if he was in his homeland Kurdistan or away in Europe, Ghassemlou continued to ponder and work for the rights of the Kurdish people. Gradually he moved closer to the social-democrat ideas, which also served as the basis of the KDPI ideology. The Kurdish leader believed in a multi-national, multi-religious democratic Iran with autonomy for East Kurdistan.

In 1985 Carol Prunhuber visited Ghassemlou in the daftar, the general headquarters of KDPI established one year earlier along the Iraqi-Iranian border, in a zone controlled by the Kurdish Iraqi guerrillas of Jalal Talabani, who cooperated closely with

Ghassemlou. The diary of Prunhuber from that time recounts the difficult journey to the border, the modest room of the Kurdish leader and his friendly attitude to the Peshmergas. The first seed for the book was planted at that time, the Venezuelan journalist recalls.

Later Prunhuber conducted interviews with more than thirty individuals who were related to the life of Ghassemlou. Among these were: The Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani, current President of Iraq; Abolhassan Bani Sadr, ex-President of Iran; Ahmed Ben Bella, ex-President of Algeria, Bernard Kouchner, former French Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, French journalist Chris Kutschera and many others.

One of the strongest points in Prunhuber's book is namely this "polyphonic" approach. Many different voices speak about Ghassemlou and the facts are retold from an array of perspectives to give a realistic portrait of the reality in all its complexity. This approach, as well as the use of documents, police reports and taped records gives Prunhuber's book the necessary objectivity and impartiality and prevents her book from the risk of sounding propagandist.

The writer sympathises with the Kurdish cause, as have many other foreign intellectuals, writers and journalists who support the struggle of this ancient people divided between four states today. But Prunhuber always keeps a high journalistic standard and lets the facts speak alone.

As a faithful biographer, Carol Prunhuber follows the life of Ghassemlou through the years, analyzing his ideological and political evolution. Today, four years its first publication, Carol Prunhuber continues to follow pressing Kurdish issues and hopes that a person with the intellectual capacity of Ghassemlou will soon

emerge among the Kurdish leaders.

Carol Prunhuber shared her latest observations on the Kurdish developments: "There is one quality that Ghassemlou had which I think is the most difficult for Kurds to attain – due to the tribal tradition – and that is the capacity to leave aside personal, party/family/tribal connections in order to put the Kurdish cause as the main goal. He was able to set aside his personal interests for the best of the Kurds. Ghassemlou knew that the strength of the Kurds lay in the unity among them. He was always trying to end infighting amongst the Kurds – the Achilles heel of the Kurdish movement throughout its history.

Ghassemlou had a tolerance and capacity for dialogue that allowed him to gain respect from all. His stature went beyond his Kurdishness."

Despite all the evidence of the Iranian regime's responsibility in the assassination of Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, to this day no one has been tried and the killers have never been punished. "The Passion and Death of Rahman the Kurd: Dreaming Kurdistan" stands as a faithful testimony which conserves the facts that continue to exist – beyond the dictatorship of the autocratic regimes and the hypocrisy of the complicit European Western governments.

The English version of the book has received several awards among them: Silver Medal Winner Foreword Review's 2009 Book of the Year Awards, Biography; Winner 2010 Next Generation Indie Book Awards, Biography; Finalist in 2011 International Book Awards, Biography General; Winner 2011 London Book Festival, Biography/Autobiography.

More information about Carol Prunhuber's book "The Passion and Death of Rahman the Kurd: Dreaming Kurdistan"
<http://www.carolprunhuber.com/thebook.html>



January 04, 2012

Turkey to Broach Kurdistan Issue in Tehran



Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, right, and Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Salehi, Ankara, Oct. 21, 2011.

Photo: Reuters

Dorian Jones | Istanbul
voanews.com

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu is in Iran for talks that are expected to address the burgeoning political crisis in neighboring Iraq, where Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi has fled to the semiautonomous Kurdistan region to escape a warrant for his arrest.

Al-Hashemi has taken sanctuary in the disputed northern territory in the wake of charges he led Sunni death squads against Shi'ite opponents -- charges he denies. Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shi'ite who ordered the arrest warrant, has demanded the Iraqi Kurds hand over Hashemi. They have refused and are instead calling for talks to resolve the crisis.

According to Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Selcuk Unal, Ankara strongly backs that stance.

"KRG [the Kurdistan Regional Government] has asked for a national meeting concerning all Iraqi parties to discuss recent developments, and we support that call," he says. "We have good relations with the KRG of Iraq, and we continue to do so. We will be continuing our economic relations and other political and social links."

Analysts say Ankara's strong support for the Kurdistan regional government is also affecting Turkey's deteriorating relationship with Iran. There are growing suspicions in Ankara that Tehran is surreptitiously orchestrating some of the political upheaval in Iraq so as to strengthen Shi'ite power there.

Murat Bilhan, a former Turkish ambassador and professor of international relations at Istanbul's Kultur University, says powerful economic forces are also driving the relationship between Ankara and the Kurdistan government.

The region is believed to have massive

energy reserves. And there is trade: Iraqi Kurd leaders say about 60 percent of foreign companies operating in the region are Turkish.

"Turkey has special interests in the Kurdish region, and it has special relations with them," says Bilhan. "We have exchanged visits. They have come to Turkey for advice and to exchange views for future cooperation, so I think we have many things in common."

But Kurdish separatists known as the PKK operating in Turkey often enter the country from bases in Iraqi Kurdistan. Turkish jets regularly bomb the area targeting the separatists, drawing angry responses from the Iraqi Kurdish government.

Soli Ozel, a columnist for the Turkish newspaper Haberturk and professor at Istanbul's Bilgi University, says economic interests ultimately outweigh threats to regional stability from the PKK.

"The Kurds of Iraq said basically they cannot fight against the PKK, but we help you in any other way we can," he says. "And Turkey will have to live with that restriction, but our trade is in billions of dollars, and the logic of geopolitics -- the logic of history, maybe of sociology -- dictates that the Iraqi Kurds will have closer relations than with Arab Iraq."

In his visit to Iran, the Turkish foreign minister is likely to bring up some of the thorny issues concerning neighboring Iraq, and he is likely to reaffirm Turkey's ties with Iraqi Kurdistan. □



6 JANVIER 2012



À CHAUD 68 PERSONNES ONT ÉTÉ TUÉES DANS UNE SÉRIE D'ATTAQUES

Vagues d'attentats antichîites en Irak

Une série d'attentats visant des pèlerins chiïtes dans le sud de l'Irak et à Bagdad a fait au moins 68 morts hier. Le pays traverse une grave crise politique qui ravive les tensions confessionnelles entre sunnites et chiïtes. Ces attentats interviennent moins de trois semaines après le retrait des troupes américaines. A Nassiriya (sud de l'Irak), un kamikaze a fait exploser

une bombe au milieu d'un groupe de pèlerins qui se rendaient à pied dans la ville sainte de Kerbala. L'explosion a fait 45 morts et 68 blessés. A Bagdad, plusieurs attentats au véhicule piégé ont frappé deux quartiers emblématiques: Kazimiya, où se trouve le mausolée du 7^e imam, et Sadr City, le plus grand quartier chiïte de la capitale. Peu de temps après, deux

bombes ont explosé près de l'hôpital. Selon le ministère de l'Intérieur, les attentats de Bagdad ont fait 23 morts et 66 blessés. En une journée, l'Irak connaît son plus lourd bilan humain depuis les événements meurtriers du 15 août, lorsqu'une série d'attentats perpétrés simultanément dans plusieurs villes du pays avait causé plus de 74 morts.



6 JANVIER 2012

Syrie: l'incurie de la Ligue arabe pointée

RÉPRESSION L'opposition syrienne, les Etats-Unis et la France appellent à une intervention de l'ONU.

Dix jours après le début de la mission des observateurs arabes en Syrie, la controverse s'amplifie sur leur mission, qui n'a nullement empêché la poursuite de la répression. Le protocole signé au Caire par Damas et la Ligue arabe appelait pourtant à un arrêt total des violences et au retrait des chars des villes. Mais, à l'évidence, il n'est toujours pas respecté. Hier, ce sont

vingt-cinq civils qui ont encore été tués par balles dans plusieurs villes, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme. De leur côté, les comités locaux de coordination, qui organisent la mobilisation, ont fait état de la mort de 390 personnes depuis le début de la mission arabe, le 26 décembre.

Même si le chiffre est exagéré, force est de constater que les observateurs n'ont pas mis fin à l'effusion de

sang. D'où des critiques virulentes de l'opposition à leur rencontre et le souhait de plusieurs parties de voir l'ONU intervenir pour mettre fin à la répression. C'est le cas de Washington, qui a estimé hier que Damas n'avait pas respecté ses engagements envers la Ligue arabe et qu'il était «largement temps» pour les Nations unies d'agir. Paris a aussi jugé «utile» leur contribution pour «renforcer la mis-

sion» des observateurs.

Ces derniers ont été dénoncés par l'opposition comme «manquant de professionnalisme». «Ils ne se sont jamais écartés des clous. Ils ont été où le régime voulait qu'ils aillent», confirmait hier un diplomate basé en Syrie. D'où une certaine animosité à leur encontre. «Nous et le peuple syrien sommes pour le transfert du dossier à l'ONU car les Arabes ne sont capables de prendre aucune décision réelle sur la Syrie», a renchéri le colonel Riad Assad, chef de l'Armée syrienne libre, basé en Turquie.

Pour les manifestations d'aujourd'hui, les militants pro-démocratie ont lancé sur la page Facebook «Syrian Revolution 2011» des appels à scander des slogans en faveur de «l'internationalisation de la crise». A Damas, où les défections sont rares, un proche du régime a réussi à quitter le pays. Mahmoud Souleiman Hajj Hamad, qui était inspecteur financier auprès du chef du gouvernement et du ministère de la Défense, a accusé sur Al-Jezira le régime de recevoir des «aides financières d'Irak et d'Iran», et d'avoir dépensé 40 millions de dollars (31 millions d'euros) pour payer les miliciens chargés de la répression.

JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN



Extrait d'une vidéo amateur, le 30 décembre à Duma (ouest de la Syrie). PHOTO AP

ETUDIANTS, JOURNALISTES, MILITANTS ARRÊTÉS...

La Turquie à poigne d'Erdogan

L'espoir d'une adhésion à l'Europe avait favorisé des avancées démocratiques. Mais, au nom de la lutte contre le terrorisme, le gouvernement d'Ankara renoue avec les pratiques des années noires

DE NOTRE CORRESPONDANTE

Nesimi Yigit Eryilmaz peut sans doute dire merci à « Time Magazine » qui, en décembre, a sacré le « manifestant » personnalité de l'année 2011. Deux jours après la publication de l'hebdomadaire américain, cet étudiant turc s'appête à apostropher le ministre de l'Énergie, Taner Yıldız, lors d'une conférence sur le nucléaire. Il a à peine le temps de crier « Monsieur le ministre... » que dix gros bras de la sécurité le plaquent au sol. Mais, grand prince, le membre du gouvernement l'invite à exprimer ses doléances à la tribune. 500 étudiants derrière les barreaux, majoritairement accusés de terrorisme, n'ont pas bénéficié de cette mansuétude. Comme Ferhat Tüzer et Berna Yılmaz qui viennent de passer dix-neuf mois en détention provisoire pour avoir brandi une banderole réclamant la gratuité de l'enseignement supérieur lors d'un meeting du Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Accusés de faire partie d'un obscur groupuscule d'extrême gauche, ils risquent quinze ans de prison pour « appartenance à une organisation terroriste ».

Les libertés publiques sont en berne en Turquie. Étudiants, journalistes, militants kurdes, activistes des droits de l'homme sont arrêtés par centaines. Après des avancées démocratiques considérables, encouragées par le démarrage des négociations d'adhésion à l'Union européenne en 2004, l'époque est au tour de vis sécuritaire. En cause, une dérive de la



Manifestation d'étudiants devant l'ambassade de France, le 23 décembre

Paris-Ankara: les dessous d'une crise

Les relations entre Paris et Ankara commencent à s'apaiser. Le vote, le 22 décembre, à l'Assemblée nationale, d'une proposition de loi punissant la négation des génocides d'une peine d'un an de prison et de 45 000 euros d'amende a relancé les hostilités. A moins de trois mois de l'élection présidentielle, ce texte, destiné à séduire les 500 000 Français descendants de rescapés du génocide arménien de 1915, était soutenu par l'UMP et le PS. Niant l'existence d'un génocide pendant la Première Guerre mondiale dans l'Empire ottoman, le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan a reproché à Nicolas Sarkozy d'attiser « la haine du musulman et du Turc » dans un but électoraliste et a accusé la France d'avoir commis un génocide en Algérie. Le thème est porteur en Turquie. Sitôt la loi adoptée en première lecture, le gouvernement islamo-conservateur a annoncé une première salve de sanctions (essentiellement politiques et militaires) et a menacé de mesures supplémentaires si la loi était mise à l'ordre du jour du Sénat. Son examen a été annoncé, mais non confirmé, d'ici à fin février. La crise entre les deux pays risque d'avoir des conséquences durables sur la coopération diplomatique, notamment dans le dossier syrien. L. M.

lutte antiterroriste. Loin devant la Chine, la Turquie détient le palmarès du nombre le plus élevé dans le monde de « terroristes » : sur 35 000 personnes condamnées pour terrorisme depuis dix ans, selon une étude de l'agence Associated Press, un tiers d'entre elles sont turques. La progression est exponentielle : en 2005, il y a eu 273 peines de prononcées, en 2009, 6 345.

Le 20 février 2010 à Kagithane, un faubourg d'Istanbul, Cihan Kirmizigül attend le bus pour se rendre à l'université de Galatasaray. Ce jeune Kurde de 24 ans porte un keffieh. Mal lui en a pris. Non loin de l'Abribus, des manifestants, le visage dissimulé par un keffieh, lancent des cocktails Molotov contre les forces de l'ordre. Un témoin anonyme assure avoir reconnu Cihan grâce à son foulard. Cela suffit pour faire de lui un « terroriste ». Depuis, le témoin s'est rétracté. Mais ce brillant étudiant en ingénierie, qui lit désormais Michel Foucault dans sa cellule, encourt jusqu'à quarante-cinq ans de prison pour appartenance au Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), la guérilla kurde active depuis 1984. « L'acte d'accusation est vide, détaille Mehmet Karli, enseignant en droit à Galatasaray et coordinateur d'une plateforme de solidarité avec les étudiants armés. Son cas est symbolique, il montre les priorités sécuritaires du gouvernement. On assiste au développement d'un système autoritaire qui ressemble à celui de la Russie. »

A écouter la définition du terrorisme que vient de donner le ministre de l'Intérieur, il y a de quoi se faire du mouron. Selon Idris Nahim Sahin, le terrorisme peut prendre la forme d'« un poème », se nicher dans « la peinture » et « les pratiques scientifiques ». Il convient d'être d'autant plus vigilant, assure ce proche d'Erdogan, que les membres du PKK et du KCK – une structure urbaine et administrative de la rébellion kurde – se livrent à « des comportements immoraux », comme « l'homosexualité » ou « manger du porc ». Ce discours moyenâgeux visait à justifier les rafles successives dans les milieux kurdes. Près de 4 000 personnes ont ainsi été arrêtées depuis trois ans. Au nom de la lutte contre le PKK, la justice ratisse large, de plus en plus.



Quarante ans après avoir été incarcéré pour « liens secrets » avec Amnesty International, Ragıp Zarakolu, 63 ans et une trentaine d'arrestations dans sa vie de militant, est de retour en prison. De tous les combats démocratiques, pour le peuple kurde, les minorités, la reconnaissance du génocide arménien, le directeur de la Maison d'édition Belge est emprisonné depuis octobre, et soupçonné d'appartenir au KCK. Un de ses fils, Deniz, doctorant en sciences politiques, subit le même sort. Dans une lettre rendue publique via son avocat, Ragıp Zarakolu dénonce « une campagne qui vise à intimider tous les démocrates de la Turquie ». « La seule bonne nouvelle est que l'administration vient d'accepter de mettre mon père et mon frère dans la même cellule », raconte son autre fils Sinan. Les premiers mois, l'un était incarcéré dans une prison à la frontière bulgare, l'autre en Anatolie, à quatre heures de route. « Les avocats n'ont pas accès aux actes d'accusation, impossible de connaître ce qu'on leur reproche », explique-t-il.

C'est une des spécificités de la loi antiterroriste, élargie en 2006 : l'acte d'accusation peut rester secret jusqu'au procès. L'ONG Human Rights Watch s'alarme des consé-

quences de la modification législative qui établit « une définition vague et trop large du terrorisme ». Les magistrats l'appliquent au bazooka. Ainsi, une femme kurde analphabète a été condamnée à sept ans de prison à cause d'une pancarte en turc à la gloire d'Abdullah Öcalan, le chef du PKK, dans une manifestation !

Dans cette ambiance délétère, les journalistes sont en première ligne. Ils sont désormais une centaine à être emprisonnés, souvent kurdes mais pas toujours. Le rapport annuel de la Commission européenne sur les négociations d'adhésion de la Turquie s'inquiète de « la restriction de la liberté des médias », alimentée par les procès lancés par le gouvernement et qui ont « un effet paralysant » sur les journalistes. Le Premier ministre Erdogan est très procédurier. Il a même porté plainte contre un magazine satirique qui l'avait caricaturé en chat empêtré dans une pelote de laine ! L'autocensure est devenue un réflexe dans les médias qui ne sont pas à la botte du gouvernement. Alors que l'étau s'est desserré autour de certains sujets, comme le génocide arménien, par exemple, d'autres sont devenus tabous. « Ecrire sur l'enrichissement de membres du gouvernement, la corruption, la confrérie religieuse de Fethul-

Le Premier ministre

Recep Tayyip Erdogan et des officiers de l'armée turque, le 15 décembre



L'éditeur militant Ragıp Zarakolu, emprisonné depuis octobre

lah Gülen ou la police est impensable », détaille un journaliste.

Il est à craindre qu'Ahmet Sik, journaliste d'investigation, ne soit une des victimes de ce nouvel ordre. Il est actuellement jugé pour avoir « aidé l'organisation terroriste Ergenekon », une nébuleuse militaro-mafieuse soupçonnée d'avoir cherché à faire tomber le gouvernement islamo-conservateur. Son inculpation repose sur son dernier livre dans lequel il met en cause le puissant réseau Gülen pour son noyautage de la police. « Son arrestation a envoyé un message très clair : un livre peut vous conduire en prison », assène Yonca Sik, son épouse. Son cas est ubuesque. Alors qu'il a mené des enquêtes sur les crimes de l'armée dans l'Est kurde, Ahmet Sik se retrouve sur le même banc que 250 officiers arrêtés et jugés dans le cadre du réseau Ergenekon – du nom d'une vallée turque mythique – et d'autres complots présumés contre le Parti de la Justice et du Développement (AKP) au pouvoir. Mais même ces procès, salués au départ comme une purge salutaire au sein de l'armée, s'attirent de plus en plus de critiques : accusations montées à la va-vite, délais de détention injustifiables, « preuves » suspectes... Ce ne sont pas les procès de Moscou mais d'Istanbul, raillent certains : le gouvernement est accusé de s'en servir pour saquer ses ennemis.

Dans la nouvelle Turquie, l'armée, qui a quatre coups d'Etat à son actif, est rentrée dans le rang. Mais, se désolent les démocrates qui se sont battus pour qu'elle se retire de la vie politique, elle a été remplacée par la police. Signe de sa montée en puissance, ses effectifs ont quasiment doublé entre 2002 – date de l'arrivée au pouvoir de l'AKP – et 2010, passant de 122 000 à 229 965, selon les données de la Direction de la Sécurité. « La police a gagné la confiance du gouvernement en démantelant des tentatives de coups d'Etat de l'armée, décrypte Ahmet Insel, professeur à Galatasaray. Mais le retrait de l'armée ne s'est pas traduit par une modification de la structure autoritaire, seuls les acteurs ont changé. La police est totalement liée au pouvoir civil, c'est contre lui qu'il faut désormais lutter. »

LAURE MARCHAND

Iraq bombings targeting Shiites kill 71, deepening sectarian crisis

The attacks in the south and in Baghdad bear the hallmark of Sunni Arab insurgents. They are the second major wave of violence since U.S. troops left Iraq.

By Raheem Salman and
Alexandra Zavis

Reporting from Baghdad and Beirut

A string of explosions targeting Shiite Muslims that killed at least 71 people bore the hallmark of Sunni Arab insurgents who have a history of trying to capitalize on tensions among Iraqi politicians to reignite the communal violence that nearly tore the country apart.

The bombings Thursday in the south of Iraq and in mainly Shiite neighborhoods of the capital, Baghdad, were the second major wave of attacks since the last U.S. troops departed from Iraq less than three weeks ago.

Sectarian tension has escalated sharply as a political dispute threatens to unravel U.S.-backed power-sharing arrangements among the country's Shiites, Sunni Arabs and ethnic Kurds.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility. But Sunni insurgents linked to Al Qaeda frequently targeted Shiites with coordinated bombings during the bloodshed that pushed the country to the brink of civil war five years ago.

"Definitely ... there is a relationship between these explosions and the political crisis, but it doesn't mean necessarily that one of the sides in the crisis is directly responsible," said Dhiya Shikerchi, an Iraqi political analyst.

Shikerchi raised the prospect that a separate entity was trying to exploit political tensions to return the country to sectarian strife.

So far, there is no sign that Shiite militias are taking the bait. Instead, the political movement of radical Shiite cleric Muqtada Sadr, whose militia was blamed for near-daily kidnappings and killings at the height of the sectarian fighting, called on government forces to improve their security plans.

The risks of sectarian conflict go well beyond Iraq. Turkey's Anatolian news agency quoted that country's foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, as warning that Sunni-Shiite tensions could throw the Middle East into a "regional Cold War." Davutoglu's comments this week were published on the



eve of a visit to Iraq's powerful neighbor, predominantly Shiite Iran.

In Iraq, fear of retaliation has already prompted some Sunnis to flee predominantly Shiite neighborhoods of Baghdad, a reminder of the worst days of the sectarian strife that eased only after the U.S. military increased its troop strength and formed alliances with Sunni tribal leaders to fight Al Qaeda and its affiliates.

"Such incidents increase our fears that the violence will mount," said Ali Mohsen Chiyad, a 31-year-old Shiite day laborer who saw a ball of fire and smoke rising before him from a blast in Baghdad's Sadr City neighborhood. "These political problems and differences among the politicians encourage the terrorists to work, in my opinion."

Despite concerns about Iraq's stability, the Obama administration could not reach agreement with Prime Minister Nouri Maliki's government about a continuing U.S. military role in Iraq. Under an agreement reached by the George W. Bush administration, the last U.S. troops left Iraq on Dec. 18.

National Security Advisor Falah Fayadh sought to deflect criticism that Iraq's security forces weren't up to the task, telling the U.S.-funded Alhurra satellite television network that there were even bigger attacks when U.S. troops were present.

"Such incidents are not connected with the American presence or their withdrawal, but with a terrorist agenda which tries to disrupt the future of Iraq and Iraqis," he said.

Police and hospital officials said the day's toll across the country was at least 71 dead and hundreds injured.

In the deadliest attack, a suicide bomber blew himself up among pilgrims who were walking to the Shiite holy city of Karbala before an important religious holiday, killing 44 people, said Sajjad Asadi, head of the provincial security committee in Nasiriya.

The explosion happened at a rest stop set up at a checkpoint near Nasiriya, which is about 200 miles southeast of the capital, Baghdad. Jaafar Hashim, a 42-year-old English teacher from Nasiriya, was less than 100 yards away.

"Pieces of flesh, clothes and shoes are scattered in the place," he said. "I even saw strands of girls' hair."

Earlier Thursday, four bombs exploded in the Baghdad neighborhoods of Sadr City and Kadhimiya, killing at least 27 people, police and health officials said.

The explosions began about 7 a.m., when a bomb attached to a motorcycle detonated in an area of Sadr City where day laborers wait for work and vendors sell food, police and witnesses said. A roadside bomb then exploded nearby.

At least 12 people were killed and 34 injured in the two blasts, officials said. Security forces also found two unexploded devices in the area, they said.

In Kadhimiya, which is home to a revered Shiite shrine, two car bombs exploded within minutes, killing at least 15 people and injuring 37, officials said.

Thursday's attacks were the deadliest since Dec. 22, when a string of bombings in mostly Shiite neighborhoods of Baghdad killed 71 people.

The violence took place amid a poli-

tical standoff between factions representing the Shiite majority, which dominates the government, and the Sunni minority that ruled under the late Saddam Hussein.

Last month, an arrest warrant was issued for the country's Sunni vice president, Tariq Hashimi, on accusations that he ran a death squad that targeted government officials. Hashimi says the charges are politically motivated. He has retreated to Iraq's semiautonomous

Kurdish region, where he is beyond the reach of the Baghdad security forces.

Maliki, a Shiite, has also called for a vote of no confidence in his Sunni deputy, Saleh Mutlak, who had likened him to a dictator.

Iraqiya, the political bloc to which Hashimi and Mutlak belong, has been boycotting parliament and Cabinet sessions to protest what it describes as Shiite attempts to consolidate power and marginalize Sunnis. But seven

members broke ranks to attend parliament Thursday, saying they respect their oath of office and their voters.

In a bid to defuse tensions, Maliki met Thursday evening with parliament Speaker Usama Nujaifi, a Sunni. Both leaders condemned the bombings. They described the meeting as positive and said they had hopes of finding a political solution.□

TODAY'S ZAMAN

2 January 2012

Ankara urges US to pull the break on Maliki, prevent partition in Iraq

TODAY'S ZAMAN, ANKARA

Concerned with the increasing possibility of a sectarian partition inside fragile Iraq, Ankara has delivered a message to Shiite PM Nouri al-Maliki to "live up to his promises" to equally represent all factions in Iraq, while sending another to Washington to urge the US to "refrain from indulging" the Shiite leader.

In the face of escalating sectarian tension inside Iraq, Ankara has recently issued multiple messages to Baghdad and Washington, sounding the alarm about what might occur in Iraq in the post-US period, the Turkish daily Sabah reported. The daily claimed that Ankara got in touch with US officials, warning them against "spoiling" Maliki, who took charge of the Iraqi government after years of trying to reconcile the Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish blocs in the country.

Turkey also warned the US of "the increasing possibility of Iraq being partitioned," which would seriously jeopardize security in the region, Sabah noted.

In the wake of a Shiite bloc move against senior Sunni officials in what appears to be an attempt to strip them of their power to increase Shiite dominance in the coalition government, Ankara reportedly contacted Maliki to urge him to keep the promises he made when he rose to power and protect the multicultural structure of Iraq. Turkish officials further called on Maliki "not to meddle in Syrian politics," on the grounds that the sectarian situation in Iraq is not connected to the situation in Syria, which is experiencing a bloody uprising to force a change of power in that country.

Maliki promised that he would be the



Iraqi PM Nouri al-Maliki (Photo: AP)

voice of all Iraqis when he became prime minister, comforting the masses that Iraq would not fall into sectarian or ethnic strife when the US left the country. A day after US troops left in early December, Maliki issued an arrest warrant for the top Sunni official, Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, saying he had paid his bodyguards to assassinate rivals some years back, but Hashemi's defense suggested that the charges are politically motivated to defame him.

When Maliki asked parliament to fire his Sunni deputy, blaming him for "Saddam-like aspirations" against the country's unity, the Shiite move to hoard power turned into a campaign that Sunnis interpreted as a threat against the members of the sect. Sunnis started leaving Shiite or mixed population neighborhoods in fear of becoming targets of attacks, the Associated Press news agency reported on Monday. Days after the arrest warrant, multiple bombings rocked Baghdad, killing dozens and injuring even more, all the while giving the initial signal that Iraq could see more deaths as conflict between sects continues.

The sectarian conflict in Iraq also dealt a significant blow to Turkey, which relies

heavily on the Iraqi route for its economic ties to the Middle East, given its measures against Syria, blocking its only other alternative route for transportation.

Warning that Turkey's door in the south might close if Iraq -- already a dangerous area -- becomes more hazardous after a possible partition, expert and academic Mensur Akgün voiced concern that Turkey's ties with the semiautonomous Kurdish administration in the north will need fine tuning, the daily Taraf reported in an interview on Monday.

"If Iraq falls apart for a reason that lies outside the Kurdish bloc, Turkey will have to recognize a Kurdish state in Iraq's north," Akgün was quoted by Taraf as saying, as he justified the logic of such a move on Turkey's increased need for stronger connections with the Kurdish administration when Sunnis and Shiites wage a sectarian war in the rest of the country. Predicting that the Kurdish administration would stay out of the sectarian strife to maintain stability, Akgün suggested that an unlikely alliance has arisen between the Kurdish administration and Turkey, "sides the West did not believe would concur."

Turkey in the past had an icy relationship with northern Iraq, from where outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) members infiltrate onto Turkish soil and launch attacks that have claimed tens of thousands of lives due to the terrorist group's aspirations for an autonomous Kurdish zone inside Turkey. After the US intervention, a politically organized Kurdish administration emerged in the north, warming up relations with Turkey in the fields of economy and politics, while assisting the country's fight against PKK terrorism.■

REUTERS

Kurds to stay clear of Iraq sectarian strife

ARBIL, Iraq- January 5, 2012
By Jon Hemming(Reuters)

IRAQ'S KURDS are determined not to get dragged into a sectarian conflict over Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's attempted arrest of the Sunni vice-president, and the Kurds' leader said failure to implement a federal system would lead to disaster.

Nine years after the U.S.-led invasion, much of Iraq is still plagued by Sunni insurgents and Shi'ite militias, but Iraqi Kurdistan has enjoyed relative peace and prosperity after successfully rising up against Saddam Hussein in 1991 and achieving federal autonomy under Iraq's 2005 constitution.

Unless their interests are directly affected, the Kurds have tried to remain largely aloof from the interminable political wrangling that has beset the central government in Baghdad, attempting to act as a mediator to resolve potential conflicts.

But Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi's flight to Kurdistan last month after an attempt to arrest him on accusations of running death squads has thrust the Kurds centre stage in a political drama that could descend into sectarian violence.

"I don't want to be dragged into this," Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdish region, told Reuters in an interview on Wednesday.

"We are not part of the sectarian struggle that is there. Of course we are part of the political disagreement and political struggle, but not of the sectarian one."

The Kurds have called for a national conference to settle the differences between Maliki and the cross-sectarian Iraqiya bloc which is boycotting parliament and cabinet meetings, accusing Maliki's Shi'ite-led government of concentrating power.

"We are all waiting for the concerned groups to reach an agreement on when and where to meet," Barzani said.

Barzani said he was ready to host the conference, but political sources said Maliki was against meeting in the Kurdish capital Arbil and wanted the issue of Hashemi cleared up first.

"If they decide to have it somewhere else, then it is up to them, but as far as we are concerned, the venue is not a problem," said Barzani, wearing traditional Kurdish costume of khaki baggy trousers, waistcoat and cummerbund.

"I believe many of the concerned groups are not ready to go to Baghdad," he said.

As for the fate of Hashemi, "this something that the judicial system and the courts have to decide," Barzani said. "We will not interfere in whatever proceedings the judicial system



decides."

Hashemi says he is willing to be tried inside the Kurdish zone, and insists a fair trial is not possible in Baghdad.

OIL DEAL, FEDERAL SYSTEM

The crisis put the Kurds in a precarious, but potentially powerful position as brokers if any political deal can be reached, and, if not, both Maliki and the Iraqiya bloc would need Kurdish backing in parliament to overcome the other side.

The Kurds may use this as leverage to win concessions on their own strategic interests, such as control of oil resources and territories disputed between Baghdad and Iraqi Kurdistan.

While relatively secure in the mountains of northern Iraq, the Kurds are upset by the Baghdad's failure to resolve the status of Kirkuk, the city at the centre of large oil reserves, which the Kurdish government claims as part of Kurdistan.

A referendum set in Article 140 of the constitution for 2007 has still not been held.

"We as Kurds we have opted for a voluntary union between Arabs and Kurds and for the system of governance in Iraq to be federal. This is a constitutional right therefore for us and for the people of Iraq, we support a federal system in this country," said Barzani who led Kurdish peshmerga forces fighting Saddam from 1979 after the death of his father who fought Baghdad-rule from the 1940s onwards.

"Preventing the implementation of constitutional articles, this will lead the country to face huge problems," he said. "This will bring about disasters."

With political wrangling in Baghdad also holding up a long-awaited law on the future exploitation of oil riches, the Kurdistan government has gone ahead and signed a series of its own oil deals, most notably with Exxon Mobil, much to the annoyance of others in the central government.

Barzani said there was an agreement with Baghdad that each side could continue signing such contracts until the oil law was passed. The Exxon deal also encompasses areas whose control is disputed by Arbil and Baghdad.

"As for places that are called disputed territories by others, for us they are part of the Kurdistan region," said Barzani. "If they have got any disagreement with this then let them come and implement Article 140 as it says in the constitution." ■



6 January 2012

Iraq's Barzani sends \$40,000 to Uludere victims' families

Justice and Development Party Deputy Chairman Hüseyin Çelik announced on Wednesday that the families of the victims will be paid compensation for the deadly mistake.

worldbulletin.net

Massoud Barzani, leader of northern Iraq's autonomous Kurdish government, has sent \$40,000 to the relatives of the victims of the deadly airstrike that took place in Şırnak's Uludere district on the 28th December 2011.

Serbest Lezgin Sındori, a Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) official, accompanied the gift to Uludere on Thursday, where he met the families of the victims and offered Barzani's condolences. Sındori also delivered \$40,000 to community leaders in Uludere and the nearby villages of Ortasu, Gülyazı and Yemişli, to be distributed to the families of the victims. Sındori passed on the message that Iraqi Kurds are sharing in the sorrow of the people of Uludere.

Justice and Development Party (AK Party) Deputy Chairman Hüseyin Çelik



announced on Wednesday that the families of the victims will be paid compensation for the deadly mistake.

Çelik, who met with the Ankara representatives of various press organizations on Wednesday, said that "an apology would not bring the dead back," in response to questions over whether the government has any plans to apologize. "Compensation could be interpreted as an apology from the state, but the government will also apologize if needed," he

clarified.

The main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) has submitted a proposal that requests that the state pay TL 64,460 in compensation to the next of kin of each victim killed in the airstrike.

CHP Ardahan deputy Ensar Ögüt submitted the proposal on Wednesday, which seeks to amend the current law that regulates the level of compensation to be paid to victims of terrorism. The proposal seeks to increase the amount from TL 22,000 to TL 64,460.

Meanwhile, Customs and Trade Minister Hayati Yazıcı stated on Thursday that the government is considering of opening a duty-free border gate near Gülyazı, Uludere district, that will discourage people in the region from crossing the borders illegally.

☆☆☆

theguardian 3 JANUARY 2012

Turkey to compensate air strike victims

Families of 35 civilians killed in strike meant for Kurdish rebels will receive payments within days, says deputy prime minister

Associated Press

Turkey will compensate the families of 35 civilians mistakenly killed in an air strike meant for Kurdish rebels, the deputy prime minister has said, even as he insisted that military officials followed proper procedures, including firing warning shots.

The air strikes, guided by intelligence from drones and fired by Turkish F-16 jets, hit a group of Kurdish smugglers in northern Iraq last week. The loss of life was one of the highest civilian death tolls in one day in Turkey's conflict with the rebels.

The incident set off violent protests in mostly Kurdish cities and further undermined Turkey's attempts to address the grievances of the Kurds, who make up about 20% of its 74 million people and some of whom want autonomy in the south-east region where they dominate.

The deputy prime minister, Bülent Arınç, did not specify how much money will be paid to the families of the victims, but said on Monday the payments would come within days. He also said the government was exploring ways to increase the amount of the compensation.

Arınç noted that an investigation into the botched air



Family members cry over the coffins of victims killed in the raid by Turkish military jets. Photograph: AP

strike is under way. He added that artillery units fired warning shots ahead of the air strikes but the civilians did not stop. The area was illuminated, he said.

"The occurrence of the incident was in no way intentional," Arınç said. "All the findings here were determined as warranting an operation."

Kurdish rebels have routinely used the border region to launch attacks on Turkish targets, slipping into Turkey on some of the same rugged paths used by fuel and cigarette smugglers.

Since the smugglers' deaths, the rebel Kurdistan Workers' party, labelled a terrorist group by Turkey and the west, threatened retaliation and urged protesters to mobilise. The group has fought for autonomy in the country's largely Kurdish south-east since 1984. The fighting has killed tens of thousands of people so far. ■

A troubled mission to Syria

BEIRUT

Top Arab League observer has used tactics the group seeks to curb, activists say

BY KAREEM FAHIM

The Arab League observer mission charged with helping bring about an end to the violence in Syria has claimed several accomplishments, noting that the government has withdrawn tanks and artillery from cities and has released nearly 3,500 prisoners.

But as the killings have continued, the mission has been mired in controversy, much of it focused on its leader: a Sudanese general who, rights activists say, presided over the same kind of deadly and heavy-handed tactics in Sudan that the Arab League mission is seeking to curb in Syria.

The observer mission, which arrived in Syria on Dec. 26 to oversee Syria's agreement to withdraw troops from its cities and stop killing political protesters, has been criticized by Syrian activists as being weak, understaffed and easily manipulated by the government.

While the observers have traveled to troubled cities, and listened to the pleas of distraught citizens and the explanations of Syrian officials, they have been powerless to stop the bloodshed.

Syrian activists say more than 150 people have been killed since the monitors arrived. On Sunday, an Arab League advisory body, the 88-member Arab Parliament, said the group should be withdrawn because the government was continuing to kill its opponents.

The Arab League has called for an emergency meeting Saturday in Cairo to discuss whether the monitors should leave, The Associated Press reported.

The accusations and concerns about the mission have found a physical embodiment in the group's leader, Lt. Gen. Muhammad Ahmed al-Dabi of Sudan, whose history and recent statements have only deepened the criticism.

Last week, the general spoke dismissively about the damage in Homs, a rebellious city that was shelled by government tanks. "Some places looked a bit of a mess, but there was nothing frightening," he told Reuters.

On Sunday, he publicly contradicted an Arab League observer who told residents in the city of Dara'a that he had seen government snipers and would tell Syrian officials to remove them. "But he didn't see," General Dabi told the BBC,

asserting that the observer was referring to a hypothetical case.

On Monday, the Arab League came to his defense. At a news conference in Cairo, the league's director, Nabil al-Araby, called General Dabi a "capable military man with a clean reputation," The A.P. reported. Several attempts to reach General Dabi on his cellphone or through the observer delegation's office in Damascus were unsuccessful.

In interviews, several people who have dealt with the general called him personally likable and an efficient administrator, and some said it was conceivable that he could run the observer mission with fairness.

Others, though, called him exactly the wrong kind of person to head such a mission: a career enforcer for an authoritarian government who had shown a harsh hand in dealing with opponents.

"I don't know if they looked into his background," said Faisal Mohammed Salih, a columnist with Al Akhbar, a newspaper in Sudan. "This is a human rights mission. They should have chosen someone who is sensitive to human rights issues. Military men in the Arab world should be the last choice for such missions."

For decades, General Dabi played a forceful if quiet role in the government of

"Al-Dabi is not about the truth, or facts. He is about fitting the facts and the truth to the policies."

President Omar Hassan al-Bashir of Sudan. General Dabi was a member of Mr. Bashir's trusted inner circle when Mr. Bashir rose to power in a coup in 1989. Mr. Bashir repeatedly picked General Dabi for important security posts.

His first post in the Bashir government was as head of military intelligence. Reports by Amnesty International from the early 1990s document the role military intelligence agents played in executions, torture and disappearances as the government fought insurgents in southern Sudan.

After serving as the head of the external security agency and then deputy chief of staff in the armed forces, he was assigned by Mr. Bashir to curb a bloody civil conflict in the Darfur region.

The general arrived in Darfur with "two helicopter gunships and a company of 120 soldiers," according to "Darfur: A Short History of a Long War," by Alex de Waal and Julie Flint, making clear to warring Masalit and Arab tribes-

men that their refusal to comply with a cease-fire would be dealt with harshly.

"He ordered the gunship pilots to put on a display of firepower in front of tribal leaders — 'to show what the helicopters could do,'" the book said.

Some activists from Darfur say that General Dabi's four-month tenure in western Darfur was a precursor to the government's counterinsurgency campaign in the region several years later.

Mr. de Waal, who interviewed General Dabi for the book, said in an e-mail: "He took the line that the problems needed a very firm hand, a show of force to demonstrate who was in charge. The Masalit see his months there as a time of repression. General Dabi insists he was evenhanded and effective."

Several years ago, when the Sudanese government needed someone to defend its repeated violations of an arms embargo in Darfur to experts from the United Nations, the president again turned to General Dabi.

As members of a U.N. panel tried to pry information from Sudanese officials about the violations in Darfur, including bombings, General Dabi repeatedly obstructed their investigation, curbing their travel and making sure no one spoke to them without his approval, two members of the panel said.

"Al-Dabi is not about the truth, or facts," said another member, Enrico Carisch, who was the panel's coordinator in 2008. "He is about fitting the facts and the truth to the policies."

The Arab League has not said publicly why it chose General Dabi to head the mission to Syria, though Mr. Salih, the Sudanese columnist, and others have speculated that because of Sudan's friendly relations with Syria he was more likely to be accepted by Damascus.

There is also speculation that he was Qatar's favored choice. The general has served as the Sudanese ambassador to Qatar, a League member that helped drive the action against Syria.

General Dabi is not the only liability in a mission that analysts say suffers from deep flaws. While its members include some respected human rights workers, others are said to be functionaries sent by Arab League governments with their own woeful records of human rights.

When they arrived in Syria last week, after a few hours of training, critics quickly pointed out that the 60-member team was hardly sufficient to monitor a conflict spread across the country of 20 million people.

Isma'il Kushkush contributed reporting from Khartoum, Sudan.

Nouvelle offensive du gouvernement turc contre l'institution militaire

Accusé de tentative de putsch, Ilker Basbug, ancien chef d'état-major, a été placé en détention

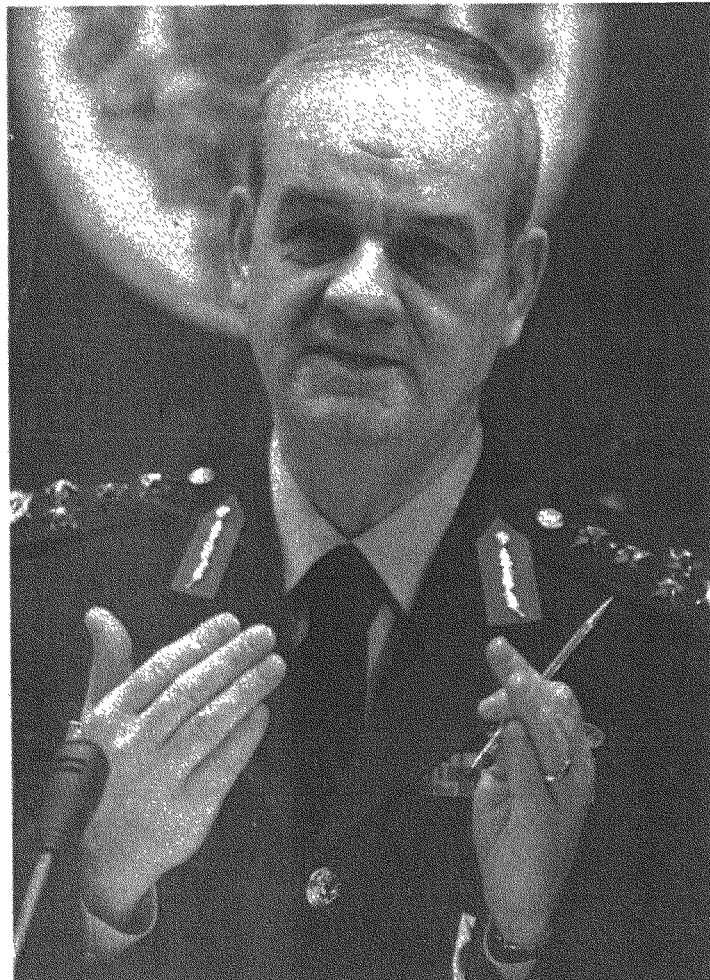
Istanbul
Correspondance

La démarche raide dans un costume sombre, Ilker Basbug est ressorti, jeudi 5 janvier, du bureau du procureur, tard dans la nuit, pour être conduit sous escorte policière, vers la prison de Silivri, près d'Istanbul. Après plus de sept heures d'interrogatoire, l'ancien chef de l'armée turque, à la retraite depuis 2010, a été placé en détention provisoire pour son implication présumée dans une campagne visant à discréditer le parti AKP (Parti de la justice et du développement) du premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

« Le 26^e chef d'état-major des forces armées turques est accusé d'avoir fondé et dirigé une organisation terroriste. Je laisse le soin à la grande nation turque de juger par elle-même », a lancé l'ancien général avant d'être incarcéré, parlant de « tragi-comédie » pour qualifier les chefs d'inculpation. « Devoir affronter une telle accusation est pour moi la pire des peines », a-t-il déclaré à la justice. Le général Basbug est également accusé de « tentative de renversement du gouvernement par la force ».

Pour la première fois dans l'histoire de la République turque, jalonnée de quatre coups d'Etat militaires, un général est envoyé derrière les barreaux par un tribunal civil. Cette arrestation marque une nouvelle étape dans l'affrontement, par institutions judiciaires interposées, que se livrent, en Turquie, les militaires et le pouvoir civil, entre les mains de Recep Tayyip Erdogan, le premier ministre islamiste-conservateur.

Une telle nouvelle aurait pu déclencher, il y a peu, une guerre de tranchées en Turquie et conduire à la démission de l'actuel chef d'état-major, Necdet Özal. Mais ce dernier est resté muet. Le gouvernement non plus ne s'est pas étendu sur le sujet. « Je ne pense pas que cela affectera les relations entre les civils et l'armée. Nous assistons en Turquie à un grand processus de normalisation, les choses changent, et quand quel-



L'ancien général turc des forces armées Ilker Basbug est soupçonné de « tentative de renversement du gouvernement par la force ». REUTERS

qu'un, quel qu'il soit, fait quelque chose de mal, il en assume les conséquences », a déclaré le vice-premier ministre, Besir Atalay.

Même sobriété chez Abdullah Gül, le président de la République, dont la candidature en 2007 avait été l'objet d'une vive opposition de l'état-major. « Tous les citoyens sont égaux devant les lois. Il faut garder la tête froide », a-t-il soutenu. Considérablement affaiblie par les réformes institutionnelles successivement adoptées, depuis 2003, par le gouvernement turc pour se conformer aux normes européennes en matière de gouvernance, l'armée n'est plus en mesure de tenir tête au pouvoir civil.

Plusieurs centaines de personnes, parmi lesquelles une centaine d'officiers et de généraux, ont été traduits en justice depuis l'ouverture de l'affaire Ergenekon, en 2007, du nom d'un réseau militariste présumé, dont les membres sont soupçonnés de complots en vue de renverser le gouvernement civil. En 2007 et en 2009, l'AKP a échappé de peu au couperet des militaires.

Une autre affaire de complot, baptisée « Balyoz », a elle aussi conduit à une série d'arrestations. Mais la machine judiciaire turque fait face à de sérieuses critiques. Elle sera l'objet d'un rapport que doit remettre, la semaine prochaine, le commissaire aux droits de

l'homme du Conseil de l'Europe, Thomas Hammarberg.

« Les tribunaux d'exception ne rendent pas la justice, mais entérinent les décisions prises par les autorités politiques », a précisé pour sa part le chef de l'opposition et leader du parti kémaliste (CHP), Kemal Kılıçdaroglu.

A la tête de l'état-major des armées de 2008 à 2010, Ilker Basbug, 68 ans, était depuis des années dans le collimateur des procureurs chargés de l'affaire Ergenekon. Avant d'accéder au sommet de la hiérarchie militaire, il avait dirigé la première armée turque, considérée par les observateurs comme un foyer radical d'opposition au gouvernement.

« Les tribunaux d'exception entérinent les décisions prises par les autorités politiques »

Kemal Kılıçdaroglu
leader du parti kémaliste (opposition)

Face aux arrestations qui décimaient ses troupes, le général Basbug avait tenté de faire front. Au cours d'une mise en scène devant la presse, il avait dénoncé la fabrication de preuves, après la découverte d'une cache d'armes, et la falsification de documents – « des bouts de papier » – comme faisant partie « d'une campagne de dénigrement de l'institution militaire ». Dans ce dossier, le général Basbug se voit accusé d'avoir organisé un réseau de sites Internet de propagande antigouvernement pour créer un climat d'instabilité.

Le général à la retraite a, sans surprise, rejeté les accusations portées contre lui vendredi. « Si j'avais eu de mauvaises intentions, en tant que commandant ayant le contrôle d'une armée forte de 700 000 hommes, j'aurais pu avoir d'autres moyens d'agir », a-t-il fait valoir. ■

GUILAUME PERRIER

La Turquie craint un atterrissage brutal en 2012

La livre a perdu 22% face au dollar en un an. L'inflation est en hausse à 10,45%.

LAURE MARCHAND
ISTANBUL

CONJONCTURE Il ne reste que la méthode Coué au gouverneur de la Banque centrale turque, persifleront les mauvais esprits. « 2012 sera l'année de la livre », a pronostiqué Erdem Basci. En attendant, la monnaie turque a entamé le mois de janvier en petite forme en dépit des efforts de la banque centrale. Depuis le 30 décembre, elle a vendu massivement des dollars pour la soutenir et doublé les taux d'intérêt qui sont passés de 5,7% à 12,5% depuis octobre. Le résultat est mitigé : le 29 décembre, elle s'échangeait à 1,92 pour un dollar et, hier, elle ne s'était que légèrement appréciée à 1,86 livre. Au total, en 2011, elle a perdu 22% de sa valeur par rapport à la

monnaie américaine. Cette baisse a favorisé l'inflation qui a atteint 10,45% en décembre sur un an, son pic le plus élevé depuis trois ans et qui représente près du double des objectifs gouvernementaux.

Ces deux indicateurs font craindre un atterrissage brutal en 2012 pour l'économie turque, après 7,5% de croissance en 2011. « En défendant la livre, les réserves de la banque centrale ont baissé très vite, rappelle Emre Deliveli, consultant indépendant et disciple turc de Nouriel Roubini. Si les marchés jugent que la démarche n'est pas durable, la livre risque d'être attaquée. »

La stratégie mise en place ces derniers mois par la banque centrale est perçue comme une source d'instabilité. Depuis octobre, l'institution monétaire a fait le choix d'une politique « non or-

thodoxe », les taux d'intérêt pouvant varier désormais au jour le jour. Les autorités turques expliquent que ce choix leur permet de réagir rapidement en cas de problème, notamment en provenance de la zone euro.

Crise de liquidité

L'année 2012 s'annonce d'autant plus délicate que la Turquie pourrait avoir à faire face à un problème de financement d'un déficit courant considérable. L'an dernier, il a représenté 10% du produit intérieur brut (PIB). Or l'économie turque est toujours étroitement imbriquée avec celles des pays de l'Union européenne. Ils absorbent 46% de ses exportations et 70% du déficit extérieur de la Turquie est financé par l'Europe. « Si la situation en Europe dérape, le risque de crise de liquidité est très sérieux, déclare Seyfet-

tin Gürsel, directeur du Centre de recherches économiques et sociales de l'université de Bahçesehir. Dans ce cas, un taux de croissance négatif est envisageable. »

En cas de récession en Europe, la Turquie ne dispose pas vraiment de porte de sortie. Les exportations en Afrique et au Moyen-Orient ont bondi ces cinq dernières années, augmentant de 25%. Mais les événements politiques dans les pays arabes ont fortement réduit les opportunités vers cette zone, au moins à court terme.

En dépit de ces incertitudes, le gouvernement maintenait, jusqu'à la semaine dernière, des prévisions soutenues pour 2012, jugeant que l'inflation pouvait être contenue à 5% et que la croissance pourrait atteindre 4%. Plus pessimiste, le FMI, lui, table sur 2% de croissance. ■

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

JANUARY 7-8, 2012

Former head of Turkey's army held in alleged plot

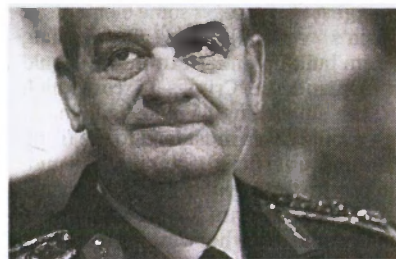
ISTANBUL

BY SEBNEM ARSU

In an unprecedented move, a former head of the Turkish Army was arrested Friday on the orders of a civilian court, charged with leadership of an illegal network accused of seeking to overthrow the government.

Gen. Ilker Basbug, who was the chief of the army's general staff from 2008 until his retirement in 2010, is the highest-ranking officer to be arrested in the case. He denied the charges, calling it a tragicomedy that the former commander of one of the world's strongest armies would be accused of belonging to a terrorist organization, according to NTV, a private television station.

"It is very sad, and hard to understand," he said in a 12-hour interrogation, NTV said. "If authorities have failed to discover any of this misconduct that I am



Gen. Ilker Basbug retired in 2010.

claimed to have committed in active duty, then all is incomprehensible."

The civilian court in Istanbul ruled Thursday that the general should be jailed pending his trial on charges of seeking to overthrow the government.

His arrest appears to be the latest skirmish in a power struggle between the Islamic-inspired governing party, Justice and Development, and the secular establishment, which includes the army.

The government has jailed more than 300 people, including more than 200 active or retired military officers, as part of an investigation into what is said to be a plot in 2003 by the ultranationalist Ergenekon network to bomb mosques, assassinate prominent figures or start wars to stir chaos and prepare the grounds for a military coup.

No one has yet been convicted.

The military, which has long seen itself as the defender of Turkey's secular Constitution, has carried out three successful coups. The governing party, which is rooted in a banned Islamist group, has insisted that the military is no longer beyond the law. The party has said that it is building a religiously tolerant democracy.

The rivalry intensified in July when the chief of the armed forces and the commanders of the navy, army, and air force resigned en masse to protest the arrests of dozens of generals in conspiracy investigations they contend are politically motivated.

Human rights activists say the government is using the courts to intimidate opponents, and have expressed concern that suspects who could be tried in freedom are routinely jailed.

The detainees include 97 journalists, publishers and other members of the media, raising concerns that the arrests are intended to silence critics.

The government's heavy hand in these cases has tarnished Turkey's image as a model of democracy in the Muslim world and raised questions about its candidacy for membership in the European Union.

In the hearing on Thursday, the court also questioned General Basbug's motives for public statements he made discrediting the findings of security operations against those suspected of being coup plotters, one of his lawyers said in a televised statement.

General Basbug reportedly replied that none of his statements had any hidden agenda except to bolster the morale of soldiers under his command.

The general was arrested after a number of other former military officers in a parallel court case claimed that antigovernment Web sites that they had set up had been primarily ordered by General Basbug, claims that he denied.

In Washington, the State Department said that it was monitoring the trial and that Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton had urged the authorities during her visit to Istanbul last fall to address concerns about freedom of expression.

La Ligue arabe ménage Bachar el-Assad

Le premier rapport des observateurs renvoie dos à dos le régime et les insurgés.

Par Pierre Prier

Le premier résultat de la mission de la Ligue arabe en Syrie ne devrait pas rassurer ceux qui l'accusent de tiédeur. Après avoir lu le premier rapport des observateurs, arrivés le 26 décembre en Syrie, le comité ministériel chargé du dossier syrien, réuni dimanche au Caire, renvoie dos-à-dos les forces de sécurité du régime et l'embryon d'«armée libre» formée de déserteurs. La résolution «appelle le gouvernement syrien et tous les groupes armés à stopper immédiatement tous les actes de violence». La formule devrait réjouir le président Bachar el-Assad, qui se dit victime de «gangs armés».

La Ligue arabe préconise la poursuite de la mission mais, autre déception pour les opposants, sans demander le renfort d'experts de l'ONU, comme le souhaitait aussi l'émir du Qatar. Le texte final se contente de réclamer «l'assistance technique» des Nations unies.

Descriptions prudentes

Les observateurs condamnent toutefois la Syrie pour n'avoir pas tenu ses engagements d'appliquer le plan de paix arabe



Le secrétaire général de la Ligue arabe, Nabil al-Arabi (à gauche), dimanche au Caire, lors de la remise du rapport sur la Syrie. Crédits photo : ASMAA WAGUIH/REUTERS

proposé par les 22 États membres. Damas n'a pas mis fin à la répression des manifestations, et l'armée ne s'est pas retirée des villes, assurent les enquêteurs.

En outre, la Syrie n'a que partiellement libéré les prisonniers politiques, dont certains restent détenus dans des sites secrets. Les observateurs font pourtant preuve d'une grande prudence dans leurs descriptions des manifestations. Faisant état de «cadavres dans les rues» ils ne désignent pas le coupable et se contentent de mentionner que le régime et l'opposition s'accusent mutuellement de la

mort des manifestants. Les enquêteurs évoquent aussi l'encadrement sur le terrain par des représentants des services de sécurité.

Les observateurs «harcelés»

Mais là aussi, le rapport dénoncerait un «harcèlement» des deux côtés, du pouvoir comme de l'opposition, selon des fuites. On ne savait pas, dimanche, si le rapport acceptait sans réserve la version officielle sur les attentats terroristes de Damas le 23 décembre et le 6 janvier, attribués par le régime à al-Qaida ou à l'opposition en général.

L'avenir paraît sombre pour les quelque 150 observateurs. «La mission est un échec depuis le début, juge un diplomate arabe. D'emblée, on a mis de côté les trois quarts du plan de paix arabe, qui ne demande pas seulement l'arrêt des violences et la libération de tous les prisonniers, mais aussi, immédiatement, un dialogue avec l'opposition.»

Pour ce diplomate, la faute en revient aux États de la Ligue, «qui auraient dû insister sur ce point. Or ils n'ont fourni aucun accompagnement politique à la mission».

Pendant ce temps, la violence continue. Samedi, 21 civils ont été tués par les forces de sécurité, et 11 militaires de l'armée régulière ont été abattus par des soldats déserteurs à Basr al-Harir, dans la province de Deraa. Des combats se poursuivaient dimanche à Daël, dans la même province.

Un autre événement a marqué le week-end: une importante flotte militaire russe a fait escale dans le port syrien de Tartous, puissant symbole du soutien de Moscou à Bachar el-Assad.■

AFP

Turquie: 33 personnes arrêtées dans une nouvelle rafle anti-Kurdes

ANKARA, 13 jan 2012 (AFP)

LA POLICE TURQUE a entrepris vendredi une nouvelle opération dans le pays contre les milieux soupçonnés de collusion avec les rebelles kurdes, arrêtant 33 personnes, a-t-on indiqué de source officielle.

La police a effectué de descentes dans 123 adresses différentes dans 17 provinces, arrêtant 33 personnes sur les 49 suspects recherchés, a annoncé le parquet d'Istanbul qui a ordonné cette vaste opération policière.

Le parquet a d'autre part démenti que le bureau à Ankara de Leyla Zana, une députée kurde figure emblématique de la cause kurde au Parlement turc, eut été investi par la police, comme l'avaient rapporté les chaînes de télévisions.

Cette nouvelle rafle vise notamment la principale formation pro-kurde du pays, le Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP), représenté au Parlement, selon l'agence Anatolie

Le dirigeant de ce parti Selahattin Demirtas a accusé le gouvernement islamico-conservateur d'avoir ordonné ces arrestations. "On ne peut parler

d'un Etat, d'un gouvernement là où la loi est piétinée", a-t-il dénoncé.

Parmi les gens interpellés à Ankara figurent une ex-député du BDP, Fatma Kurtulan, et l'ex-dirigeant d'un parti pro-kurde, Tuncer Bakirhan.

Des fouilles ont également été effectuées dans des complexes appartenant au BDP à Diyarbakir, principale ville du sud-est anatolien, peuplé majoritairement de Kurdes.

L'opération policière s'inscrit dans le cadre d'une offensive judiciaire visant à sévir contre le KCK (Union des communautés kurdes).

Le KCK, une organisation clandestine, est soupçonnée d'être la branche politique du mouvement armé PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), en lutte depuis 1984 contre le pouvoir central.

Les autorités accusent le KCK de vouloir remplacer les institutions officielles dans l'est et le sud-est anatoliens et de favoriser une insurrection dans ces régions.

Depuis 2009, plus de 700 personnes, selon le gouvernement, et 3.500 dont des députés, des intellectuels, des journalistes et des maires, selon les milieux kurdes, ont été incarcérées et certains actuellement jugés pour collusion avec le KCK.

La Turquie, opposée à toute visée indépendantiste des Kurdes, a mis en oeuvre ces dix dernières années des réformes démocratiques en faveur de cette communauté, dont la population est estimée à 12 millions sur les 73 millions d'habitants.●

From the Arab Spring, Turkey rises

Both the United States and Iran are being outmaneuvered in weakened Arab states by an ascendant Turkey.

**Jason Pack
Martin van Creveld**

During the last decade many right-wing American and Israeli analysts have described the geostrategic struggles unfolding in the Middle East as a new “Cold War” pitting the United States against Shiite Iran. They have warned of an Arab “Shiite Crescent” — stretching from Lebanon to Iraq — connected to Iran via ties of religion, commerce and geostrategy.

The new year has started with an attempted Shiite power play by Prime Minister Nuri Kanal al-Maliki to dominate the Iraqi government, and an Iranian demonstration of missile and nuclear fuel-rod capacity coupled with threats to close the Straits of Hormuz if Iranian oil exports are blocked.

These events can be interpreted as ample evidence of Iranian expansionism and combined with fears that Iran will obtain a nuclear weapon, rendering its present regime and regional clients untouchable.

What this view of the Middle East overlooks is the fact that both the United States and Iran are mired in internal political and economic difficulties. Simultaneously, inside the region, both are being outmaneuvered by an ascendant Turkey.

Moreover, Western observers have missed the primary thread of events — namely, the ongoing asymmetric Turkish-Iranian “soft” partition of the Arab republics. Concomitantly, the American position as regional hegemon is vanishing. Today, only the Arab monarchies and Israel continue to look to the United States as their primary patron.

To investigate how these changing dynamics are seen by actors within the region, one of us (Jason Pack) spent his Christmas holidays in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government, or K.R.G., in Iraq. Following the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, K.R.G. officials bemoaned their need of a regional patron to protect them from dominance by Baghdad.

Landlocked Iraqi Kurdistan also needs a conduit to export its oil to the West. The only country that can fulfill both roles is Turkey. That is why K.R.G. officials, instead of supporting their ethnic brethren inside Turkey, have often sided with Ankara against the separatist Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or P.K.K. All this explains why the bombing on

Dec. 28, in which the Turks killed 35 Kurdish smugglers whom they mistook for terrorists, provoked little outrage in Iraqi Kurdistan. On the streets of Erbil there are no signs of protests against Turkey. Instead, one notices Turkey’s ubiquitous presence in the form of construction, investment, consumer goods and tourists.

Should more pipelines leading from Iraqi Kurdistan to the Mediterranean via Turkey be built, the result will be the de facto creation of an Iraqi-Kurdish buffer state. Dependent on Turkey for its survival, such a state would also form a barrier to Iranian (or American, or P.K.K.) interference in Turkish affairs.

In the southern part of Iraq, the situation is just the opposite. There, a Shiite Arab buffer state, buttressed by Iran as a bulwark against Turkish, American or Saudi encroachments, is being created. The last two weeks’ events have removed any doubt that Maliki is “Iran’s man” in Baghdad. Yet despite this de

facto partitioning of Iraq over the last month, Turkey and Iran are not challenging each other’s spheres of influence.

In post-Arab Spring North Africa, too, Turkey and Iran have essentially partitioned the resurgent Islamist movements between themselves. The Turks support the victorious “moderate” Islamists from Tunisia to Egypt. Iran backs the Salafist spoilers, even though they are Sunni. In the Egyptian and

Western observers have missed the asymmetric Turkish-Iranian ‘soft’ partition of the Arab republics.

Tunisian elections, and in Libya’s inter-militia civil strife, both wings of Islamist opinion have supported each other against Western-backed secularists and neo-liberals.

Since North Africa lacks indigenous Shiite populations and the “moderate”

Islamists have now emerged as the main players in the region, it is Sunni Turkey, along with Qatar, that appears to be the rising political and commercial patron in North Africa.

Turkey’s approach to the problem of Israel/Palestine has also been converging with that of Iran. From the 1950s until 2002, secular military elites in Ankara enjoyed a privileged political and economic relationship with the West. They also developed intimate defense ties with Israel and NATO.

Since then, however, Turkey has drifted out of the Western security orbit.

First it opposed the 2003 Iraq war; next, after the 2010 Gaza flotilla resulted in the death of nine Turks in international waters, it increasingly switched to the Palestinian side of the conflict.

Only in Syria are Turkey and Iran

seemingly on opposite sides of a military conflict. Whereas Iran and its client Hezbollah back the Assad regime, the Turks arm, train and provide safe haven to the Syrian rebels. However, this conflict may be more apparent than real. In a fragmented post-Assad Syria, Turkey will support the Sunnis, while Iran will remain the patron of the Alawites.

Moreover, both will surely find a way to protect their strategic and financial interests in whatever regime emerges.

Throughout 2011, the continued Western obsession with the Iranian nuclear menace prevented policy makers from grasping the most salient dynamic at play in the new Middle East. Those who, like Mohammed Ayoob of Michigan State University, have warned that “beyond the Arab democratic wave” lies a “Turko-Persian future” have been mostly ignored.

The Arab Spring has vastly weakened the Arab states, leaving them open to fragmentation, increased federalism and outside penetration. With hindsight, 2011 may come to represent as sharp a rupture in the political landscape of the Middle East as 1919 did.

Back then, following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the British and French divided the Arab Middle East among themselves, with Britain as the senior partner. In today’s soft partition of the region, the weaker, less stable partner is Iran. The true victor of the Arab Spring is surely a resurgent Turkey.

JASON PACK researches Libyan history at Cambridge University and is president of Libya-Analysis.com. MARTIN VAN CREVELD, an Israeli military historian, is the author, most recently, of “The Age of Airpower.”

GLOBAL VIEWPOINT/TRIBUNE MEDIA SERVICES



DANIEL LETTER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Demonstrators in Istanbul in December protesting the detention of at least 38 people, many of them journalists, who Turkey's government said had links to Kurdish separatists.

Turkish media feel political pressure

ISTANBUL

Crackdown on the press is viewed as contradictory to democratic aspirations

BY DAN BILEFSKY AND SEBNEM ARSU

One year ago, the journalist Nedim Sener was investigating a murky terrorist network that prosecutors maintain had been plotting to overthrow Turkey's Muslim-inspired government.

Today, Mr. Sener stands accused of being part of that plot, jailed in what human rights groups call a political pogrom against the governing party's critics.

Mr. Sener, who has spent 20 years exposing government corruption, was among 14 defendants who appeared last month at the Palace of Justice here on charges of abetting a terrorist organization. The other defendants include the editors of a staunchly secular Web site critical of the government and Ahmet Sik, a journalist who has written that an Islamic movement associated with Fethullah Gulen, a powerful and reclusive cleric living in Pennsylvania, has infiltrated Turkey's security forces.

At a time when Washington and Europe are praising Turkey as a model for Muslim democracy in the Arab world, Turkish analysts say the crackdown is part of an ominous trend. Most worrying, they say, are fresh signs that the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is repressing press freedom through a mix of intimidation,

arrests and financial machinations, including the recent sale of a leading newspaper to a company tied to the prime minister's son-in-law.

There are now 97 members of the news media in jail in Turkey, including journalists, publishers and distributors, according to the Journalists' Labor Union, a number that rights groups say exceeds China. The government denies that figure and insists that with the exception of eight cases, those arrested have all been charged for activities other than journalistic reporting.

Turkey's justice minister, Sadullah Ergin, last month blamed local civic groups for creating the false impression that there were too many journalists in jail in Turkey. He said a new plan to enhance freedom of expression this year would alter perceptions.

In 2011, the European Human Rights Court received nearly 9,000 complaints against Turkey for breaches of press freedom, compared with 6,500 in 2009.

In March, Orhan Pamuk, the Turkish writer and Nobel Literature laureate, was fined the equivalent of about \$3,670 for his statement in a Swiss newspaper: "We have killed 30,000 Kurds and one million Armenians." Six people had sued him on the ground that his words insulted their honor, dignity and race.

Human rights advocates say they fear that with the Arab Spring giving new regional clout to Turkey, the United States and Europe are turning a blind eye to encroaching authoritarianism in the country.

"Turkey's democracy may be a good benchmark when compared with Egypt, Libya or Syria," said Hakan Alt-

inay, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. "But the whole region will suffer if Turkey is allowed to disregard the values of liberal democracy."

Among the most glaring breaches of press freedom, human rights advocates say, was the arrest of Mr. Sener, 45, a German-born reporter for the newspa-

"The whole region will suffer if Turkey is allowed to disregard the values of liberal democracy."

per Posta. In 2010, he won the International Press Institute's World Press Freedom Hero award for his reporting on the murder of Hrant Dink, a Turkish-Armenian journalist who was assassinated in Istanbul in January 2007 by a 17-year-old Turkish nationalist.

Mr. Sener says he believes that he is in jail because he dared to write a book criticizing the Turkish state's negligence in failing to prevent Mr. Dink's murder. He also has shone an uncomfortable light on the secretive Gulen movement.

His defense team says the prosecution's case rests on spurious evidence, including a file bearing his name that an independent team of computer engineers from three leading universities concluded had been mysteriously installed by a virus on a computer belonging to OdaTV, an anti-government Web site. He was held for seven months without charges. If convicted, he faces up to 15 years in prison.

"Nedim Sener is being accused on the basis of rumors and fantasies," said his lawyer Yucel Dosemeci. "He is being targeted to create a culture of fear."

In late December, Turkey drew fresh criticism after the police detained at least 38 people, many of them journalists, in raids across Turkey. The government justified the arrests on the ground that those arrested had possible links to a Kurdish separatist rebel group. But critics say dozens have been arrested whose only crime was to have expressed general support for the rights of Kurds, a long-oppressed minority here.

Over the past year, the government has been arresting prominent critics like Mr. Sener, as well as dozens of current and former military personnel, intellectuals and politicians who have been linked to a purported plot to overthrow the government called Ergenekon.

Four years into the investigation, none among the 530 suspects has yet been convicted after courts have heard more than 8,000 pages of indictments, many of them based on transcripts of surreptitiously recorded private telephone conversations.

While democracy advocates have praised the government for limiting the military's influence over the state, they say that the arrests of journalists like Mr. Sener are undermining the trial's credibility.

After Mr. Erdogan swept to power in 2002, human rights activists initially lauded him for expanding free speech.

But after an unsuccessful attempt by the secular opposition to ban Mr. Erdogan's party in 2008, critics say he embarked on a systematic campaign to silence his opponents.

They say the suppression of press freedom also reflects the fact that Turkey no longer feels obligated to adhere to Western norms at a time when it is playing the role of regional leader and its talks on joining the European Union are in disarray.

Mr. Sener and Mr. Sik were defiant in March as police officers took them into custody at their homes before television cameras. "Whoever touches it gets burned!" Mr. Sik shouted, referring to the Gulen movement, whose members, analysts say, have infiltrated the highest levels of the country's police and judiciary.

In March, the unpublished manuscript of Mr. Sik's book, "The Army of the Imam," was confiscated by the police. But the police proved unable to stop its publication on the Internet, where at least 20,000 users downloaded it after his supporters posted it in protest. A public prosecutor in Istanbul is now investigating who leaked the document.

While the Internet has become the main weapon against censorship, more than 10,000 Web sites have been blocked by the state Internet monitoring agency, according to engelliweb.com, a Web site that tracks restricted pages. Until September, YouTube was banned on the ground that some videos on the site were insulting to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey.

Beyond arresting journalists, press freedom advocates say that the government has moved to mute opposition by using punitive fines as well as seeking to influence the ownership of leading media companies.

In 2009, Dogan, a large media conglomerate, was fined \$2.5 billion by the tax ministry for unpaid taxes. Dogan officials say privately that the real reason was that its publications had given prominent attention to a series of corruption scandals involving senior government officials.

The European Union expressed concerns about the chilling effect of the fine, which was negotiated down to \$1.3 billion as part of a tax amnesty. Now, some journalists who work for Dogan say there is an unwritten rule not to criticize

the governing party. Mr. Erdogan, who has previously called on his supporters to boycott Dogan, strongly denied any political motives behind the fine.

Critics say the government is also using its influence to install pro-government supporters at leading newspapers.

In 2008, the financially struggling but influential newspaper Sabah and the television station ATV were seized by a government agency after improper loans by its then owner were discovered.

In the public auction that followed, the media properties were bought by Calik Holding, whose chairman is Mr. Erdogan's son-in-law Berat Albayrak. The sale aroused controversy in Turkey since the \$1.2 billion deal was partly financed by \$750 million of loans from two state banks. Critics said the bid by Calik — the sole bidder after a rival dropped out — amounted to a government takeover of a media group for political ends.

Rudaw

3 JANUARY 2012

PUK Leaders Confirm KDP Taking Premiership

RUDAW

SULAIMANI, Iraqi Kurdistan -- Senior Kurdish officials close to Prime Minister Barham Salih say he will relinquish power to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) while his Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) party scrambles to fill the vice-president's post.

Arez Abdullah, a PUK leader, Abdullah said the PUK will hand over the premiership to the KDP soon and will try to fill the vice-president's post which has been vacant for two years.

Latif Sheikh Omar, chief of staff for Salih, confirmed that Salih will step down and said the prime minister is planning to focus more on party affairs after leaving office.

A PUK-KDP agreement stipulates that each party gets to run the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) every two years. Salih, a PUK leader, has been prime minister for the past two years but some in the PUK hoped that the embattled prime minister's term would be extended after the KDP held onto the post for nearly four years.

Former Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister and KDP deputy chief Nechirvan Barzani is considered the front-runner for the premiership, but has not officially been nominated.

According to the 2007 PUK-KDP agree-



Senior PUK leader and former speaker of Parliament Adnan Mufti, left, and Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani.

ment, a PUK leader should also be appointed vice-president. But two years after the region's election, the PUK has not been able to nominate a candidate to serve as Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani's deputy.

According to Abdullah, former speaker of Parliament Adnan Mufti is the PUK's strongest candidate for the vice-presidency.

In the July 2009 elections, Barzani was elected president of Kurdistan Region with nearly 70 percent of the votes. Barzani is also the head of the KDP, Kurdistan's most influential political party.

Saadi Ahmed Pira, another PUK politburo member, said PUK nominee and former vice-president Kosrat Rasul has not been re-appointed because of health issues.

Abdullah confirmed Pira's comment, saying that Rasul's poor health was the reason Barzani asked the PUK to put forth another candidate.

According to Abdullah, despite his initial interest in becoming vice-president, Rasul has now suggested that someone else is nominated for the post.

However, in a recent interview with KNN, an opposition television station, Imad Ahmed, a senior member of PUK politburo said the KDP "has reservations over Rasul becoming vice-president."

Ahmed told the KNN that his party might soon nominate another candidate for the position.

Rasul was Barzani's vice-president for nearly four years from 2005 to 2009. Following the parliamentary elections, Rasul stepped down.

Some observers suggest that Barzani does not approve Rasul for the post. Rasul is the second most powerful man in the PUK, after Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, the party's leader.

However, Ahmed dismissed speculation that the KDP has blocked PUK candidates for the vice-president's post.

"We as the PUK have not nominated anyone yet because of our internal situation," Ahmed said of splits within the PUK. "But we might nominate someone soon."

The PUK has witnessed major challenges after many of its veteran leaders headed by party co-founder Nawshirwan Mustafa split from the PUK in 2009 and formed the opposition Change Movement (Gorran). □

Turkey and the Kurds

Death upon death

The latest innocent casualties of Turkey's military escalation against the Kurds

ANKARA AND ISTANBUL



Conspiracy or cock-up? They don't care

A TRAGIC blunder, a cynical massacre or a deliberate attempt to undermine Turkey's government? The question was raised on December 28th, when Turkish F-16 war planes dropped bombs on a group of Kurdish civilians just south of the Turkish border in the mountains of Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq, killing 34 of them. Security officials in Sirnak, a Turkish town near the site, blamed a lack of co-ordination between the civilian and military authorities. "The governor [of Sirnak] had no idea what had happened until hours after the bombing," said one.

The victims, aged between 13 and 28, were smugglers from villages in Turkey's south-east who routinely bring in Iraqi fuel and cigarettes with the full knowledge of local authorities. Nearly 80 mules carrying the contraband also perished. In an ironic twist the smugglers belonged to the "village guards", a pro-state militia that had taken up arms against rebels of the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the ostensible target of the raid.

Thousands of Kurds across the country took to the streets in protest. Selahattin Demirtas, leader of the

pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy (BDP) party, accused the government of deliberately massacring innocent civilians to intimidate his people. A huge banner calling Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's prime minister, a "murderer" was draped across a tent in one of the smugglers' villages.

Until recently some would have suspected a different sort of conspiracy: one carried out by coup-plotting army officers bent on discrediting the mildly Islamist Justice and Development (AK) government. Hundreds of such alleged miscreants, including around 30 serving generals, are in prison awaiting trial in connection with the so-called Ergenekon conspiracy to overthrow Mr Erdogan. This week a former chief of general staff, Ilker Basbug, was called in for interrogation over the affair. Rumours abound that he too will be jailed.

Yet Mr Erdogan has rushed to the defence of the current chief of general staff, Necdet Ozel, thanking him for his pledge to pay compensation to the families of the Sirnak victims. A flurry of investigative probes are under way, but no heads have yet rolled. Mr Erdogan has not visited the

victims' families, nor has he apologised for the deaths. He has, moreover, suggested that the group may have been targeted on the assumption that there were rebels and guns concealed in their midst. Smugglers usually travel in groups of three or four, he said, not 40. In 2010 the army was pilloried when news emerged that it had failed to prevent two deadly attacks on Turkish troops in the same area, even though images from unmanned drones had clearly shown the presence of large numbers of PKK rebels along the border. "[T]he prime minister is saying, 'It's OK to kill innocent civilians if there are some bad guys in the mix,'" observes Sezgin Tanrikulu, a deputy from the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP).

Such claims may be exaggerated, but Mr Erdogan has certainly become a lot tougher on the Kurds. Thousands of pro-Kurdish activists, including serving BDP mayors, journalists and lawyers, have been jailed in recent months as part of a campaign to cripple the PKK. The army has intensified its operations inside Turkey and northern Iraq, killing hundreds of rebels, including senior commanders. Last summer secret talks between the government and the PKK, including its imprisoned leader, Abdullah Ocalan, broke down. Mr Ocalan has been denied access to his lawyers, most of whom are now in jail, in violation of international conventions on the treatment of detainees. The Council of Europe is expected to issue an official complaint in the coming weeks.

Sources close to the PKK admit that the military campaign has left it weakened. The rebels' traditional backers, Iran and Syria, are bogged down in their own troubles. Some think the PKK could even be forced back to the negotiating table. This in turn could pave the way for Mr Erdogan to launch his long-promised new democratic constitution, which would properly embrace the Kurds for the first time in modern Turkish history. For now, however, apologising for the Sirnak killings and punishing those responsible would be a good start.

Les alaouites redoutent la chute du régime d'Al Assad

La mainmise de cette communauté sur l'appareil d'état est une revanche sur l'histoire.

JULIEN COUTURIER

Qui sont les alaouites ?

Une secte issue du chiisme, une minorité qui tient toute la Syrie en respect, le bras armé de la répression qui s'abat aujourd'hui sur le pays : ce sont autant d'images qui colent aux alaouites.

Cette communauté représente 10 % de la population syrienne, les Arabes sunnites 65 %, les Kurdes 15 %, les chrétiens 5 %, les druzes, ismaéliens, chiïtes et autres constituent les 5 % restants.

Rattacher les alaouites aux chiïtes ne va pas de soi. Connus pour leurs mœurs libérales, ils boivent de

l'alcool, leurs femmes ne portent pas le voile et ils ont longtemps été considérés par les autres musulmans comme des hérétiques.

Une fatwa rendue en 1936 par le mufti de Jérusalem les reconnaît formellement comme des musulmans. Il s'agissait alors de resserrer les rangs pour faire face au colonialisme franco-britannique au Moyen-Orient, les missionnaires français songeant à convertir les alaouites au christianisme. Rien n'y fera : il faudra une seconde fatwa, commandée par Hafez Al Assad (le père de l'actuel président), en 1973 à l'imam libanais Moussa Al Sadr, pour que l'appartenance des alaouites au chiisme soit une fois de

plus réaffirmée.

Pourquoi ont-ils été considérés comme des citoyens de seconde zone ?

Les origines modestes des alaouites n'ont favorisé en rien leur intégration à la société syrienne. Ce n'est qu'au début du XXe siècle qu'ils commencèrent à descendre de leurs villages de montagne dans la vallée de l'Oronte, pour travailler comme métayers au service des grands propriétaires terriens de Homs et de Hama (nord-ouest).

Considérés en ville comme des parias, ils en étaient tout simplement exclus. La situation s'inverse sous le mandat français, durant l'entre-deux-

guerres. La France s'appuie alors sur les alaouites, qui trouvent dans l'armée une chance de promotion sociale. En 1946, la Syrie indépendante hérite d'une armée composée d'un nombre important d'alaouites.

Quel est aujourd'hui leur poids politique ?

Omniprésents dans les services de renseignements et dans l'armée, leur mainmise sur l'appareil d'État est une revanche sur l'histoire. Cependant, leur sort étant de plus en plus lié à celui de la famille au pouvoir, ils en sont aujourd'hui davantage les otages que les premiers bénéficiaires.

Nombre d'entre eux vivent chichement et auraient tout à gagner à la chute du régime, s'ils ne craignaient pas d'être les premières victimes compte tenu du ressentiment qu'éprouve la majorité sunnite à leur égard. □

TURQUIE • Le pouvoir politique renforce sa suprématie sur l'armée

Ilker Basbug, ancien chef d'état-major, a été incarcéré le 5 janvier pour avoir fondé et dirigé une organisation terroriste, ainsi que pour tentative de putsch. Une première dans l'histoire de la République turque.

Pierre Vanrie

L'emprisonnement d'Ilker Basbug, chef de l'armée turque de 2008 à 2010, entérine la perte d'influence et la fin de l'inviolabilité de l'armée, responsable de quatre coups d'État en cinq décennies. Une terrible nouvelle pour l'aura des militaires. Certains éditorialistes s'en réjouissent, à l'instar de Gülay Gökçürk du quotidien Bugün : "Lorsqu'il est devenu chef d'état-major de l'armée turque, le général Ilker Basbug avait deux possibilités : soit il comprenait que la période où l'armée exerçait une tutelle sur la société était révolue et il lançait le chantier de rénovation de l'institution qu'il avait en charge pour l'adapter à la "Turquie nouvelle", soit il tentait en vain de maintenir ce système sclérosé d'assujettissement de la société.

Si l'on a initialement pu croire qu'il allait opter pour la première solution, on s'est vite rendu compte qu'il n'avait pas tiré la leçon des élections législatives de 2007 où la population avait voté en masse

pour le Parti de la justice et du développement [AKP, islamiste] en réaction au message anti-AKP posté alors par son prédécesseur sur le site Internet de l'état-major [et qui fut alors considéré par certains comme les prémisses d'un coup d'État].

"Ainsi, dès sa première conférence de presse, rappelle Bugün, il a nié la réalité des tentatives de putsch élaborées au plus haut niveau de l'état-major en 2003-2004 qui avaient été révélées par la presse. Il a donc clairement choisi son camp en niant l'implication de l'armée - ainsi que la sienne - dans la création de dizaines de sites dont l'objet consistait à diffamer le parti au pouvoir. Son attitude et son rôle dans ces affaires ont achevé de le discréditer auprès de l'opinion publique turque.

Cette arrestation marque ainsi la fin d'une ère dominée par la figure du général putschiste. Désormais, dans les académies militaires, les élèves officiers ne se considéreront plus comme "les dirigeants de l'ombre" de la Turquie. Dorénavant, les officiers supérieurs sauront que leurs étoiles n'empêcheront plus qu'ils puissent



être traduits devant une cour de justice. L'armée s'attellera donc à sa fonction principale et acceptera les critiques. Les chefs d'état-major admettront dès lors qu'ils sont aux ordres d'un pouvoir politique civil élu. Plus personne ne pourra prétendre incarner le rôle de "véritable propriétaire et de gardien de la république". Cette évolution ne se fera certes pas sans heurts, conclut le quotidien, mais il s'agit bien là d'un processus irréversible.

Cette vision n'est pas unanimement partagée, comme l'exprime Ahmet Hakan, dans Hürriyet : "La première fois qu'un général a été écroué, je me suis vraiment réjoui en me disant que même les mili-

taires de haut rang ne bénéficiaient plus d'une immunité totale. Maintenant que c'est carrément un ancien chef d'état-major qui se retrouve en prison, je devrais en principe faire des bonds de joie. Or ce n'est pas le cas, parce que je ne parviens pas à inscrire cet événement dans le cadre d'une pratique démocratique exemplaire."

Cette affaire, estime-t-il, "sonne plutôt comme un avertissement du style : 'Sachez que s'il le faut nous pouvons

même arrêter des chefs d'état-major, donc faites attention et surveillez vos mouvements !' En effet, tant que la liberté d'expression sera limitée par des opérations de police et des arrestations, tant que l'on privilégiera l'option sécuritaire pour résoudre la question kurde, tant que celui qui veut s'opposer et défendre un point de vue alternatif pensera qu'il risque d'avoir des problèmes, tant que cette ambiance délétère se perpétuera

dans notre pays, l'arrestation d'un chef d'état-major ne donnera pas l'impression que l'on touche à des personnes qui étaient jusque-là intouchables."

"Au contraire, conclut le commentateur, ce genre d'évènement sera perçu comme le message suivant : "Réfléchissez bien avant de faire quoi que ce soit, parce que comme vous le voyez nous pouvons nous en prendre à n'importe qui. Mieux vaut donc que vous vous soumettiez." ♦

L'Humanité

LUNDI 16 JANVIER 2012

Ankara, ou l'obsession répressive anti-kurde

Le régime turc multiplie les arrestations arbitraires contre la communauté kurde et ses représentants légitimes sous couvert de lutte contre le terrorisme. L'Europe ne dit mot.

La Turquie, qui souffre sur les braises du conflit de son voisin syrien, n'est pas en reste chez elle. Les autorités ont renforcé leurs opérations anti-kurdes sous couvert de lutte contre le terrorisme du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). Le gouvernement du premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a ainsi déployé un arsenal répressif et législatif contre les représentants légalement élus de la communauté kurde : vendredi, sur ordre du parquet d'Istanbul, la police a mis aux arrêts, dans 17 provinces du pays, 33 personnes, principalement des membres ou des proches de la formation politique kurde, le Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP), forte de ses 36 députés depuis les élections législatives de 2011. Un succès d'autant plus dur à avaler pour Erdogan que ce dernier livre, depuis 2009, une guerre sans merci contre les élus kurdes qui s'est traduite par l'arrestation de 700 personnes de cette communauté; selon le gouvernement, contre 3 500 pour les organisations kurdes. D'après le régime, elles seraient responsables de « collusion » avec le KCK (Union des communautés kurdes), une organisation clandestine présentée comme la branche politique



Adem Altan/APP

La police turque a procédé vendredi à une vaste opération contre des élus du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (sur notre photo, des policiers à la sortie du domicile de la députée kurde Leyla Zana).

Le raid aérien a tué, fin décembre, à la frontière turco-irakienne 34 civils, dont 19 jeunes.

du mouvement armé PKK, en rébellion contre Ankara depuis 1984. « Comment le chef du gouvernement de Turquie peut-il prétendre qu'il lutterait ainsi contre le terrorisme, alors qu'il attise lui-même les tensions et la violence dans son propre pays ? » s'est indigné Pierre Laurent, secrétaire national du

PCF. Les 10 et 12 janvier déjà, 92 personnes – élus, parlementaires, intellectuels, étudiants – ont été incarcérées ainsi que 12 journalistes, portant à 97 le nombre de professionnels arrêtés au motif « d'activités terroristes ou criminelles ».

Le plan de choc à l'œuvre ne vise pas seulement à briser les indépendantistes. Il cherche en premier lieu à saper l'expression démocratique de cette communauté, qui revendique une autonomie pleine et entière dans le cadre de la Turquie. Le raid aérien qui a tué, le 28 décembre, à la frontière

turco-irakienne 34 civils, dont 19 jeunes, au motif de viser un campement, participe de cette stratégie de la terreur. « Les autorités turques cherchent-elles la guerre civile ? La question se pose », estime Pierre Laurent, qui interpelle l'Europe et la France, étrangement muettes sur les exactions en cours : « Se contenteront-elles, une fois encore, d'un silence complice et coupable face à cette violence consternante et face au refus obstiné de laisser un peuple vivre en liberté et en paix dans le respect de ses droits ? »

CATHY CEÏBE



L'Iran défie l'Amérique

Nucléaire, sanctions, espionnage : la guerre froide s'intensifie entre Washington et Téhéran, d'où le guide suprême, Ali Khamenei (sur cette photo non datée d'une manœuvre navale), a assuré que la République islamique ne céderait pas aux pressions occidentales.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

MOYEN-ORIENT Nucléaire, sanctions, espionnage : la guerre froide s'intensifie entre Téhéran et Washington. Après le brusque accès de tension de ces dernières semaines lié aux menaces iraniennes de fermer le détroit d'Ormuz si l'Occident adoptait de nouvelles mesures contre le pétrole vendu par Téhéran, la justice révolutionnaire de la République islamique a franchi un nouveau pas en condamnant à mort hier un Américano-Iranien.

L'Iran aurait déjà produit suffisamment de combustible pour équiper quatre ogives

Ancien marine de 28 ans né aux États-Unis d'une famille iranienne, Amir Mirzai Hekmati a été « reconnu coupable de collaboration avec un pays hostile et espionnage pour la CIA », selon l'agence iranienne Fars. La justice l'a également déclaré « moharab », c'est-à-dire « en guerre contre Dieu », ce qui le rend, là encore, passible de la

peine capitale. Est-ce une réponse aux déclarations du secrétaire d'État à la Défense, Leon Panetta, qui, au cours du week-end, prévenait l'Iran qu'une tentative de fermer le détroit d'Ormuz - par où transite un tiers du pétrole mondial - serait considérée comme « une ligne rouge » à ne pas franchir.

Alors que les États-Unis et l'Union européenne s'activent pour sanctionner le pétrole iranien (70 % des recettes d'exportation), Téhéran multiplie les

menaces de bloquer ce goulet stratégique pour l'écoulement de l'or noir, donc pour l'économie mondiale. Et pour alimenter encore la tension, l'Iran a choisi de replacer le dossier nucléaire au centre de son différend avec les Occidentaux. Hier, à Vienne, des sources diplomatiques proches de l'Agence internationale à l'énergie atomique (AIEA) confirmaient que Téhéran avait bien commencé d'enrichir de l'uranium sur un nouveau site souterrain, très bien protégé contre d'éventuelles frappes aériennes. Dimanche, le patron de l'agence iranienne à l'énergie atomique, Fereidoun Abbasi, cible d'un mystérieux attentat en 2010, avait laissé entendre que son pays était sur le point d'activer le site de Fordow, près de la ville sainte de Qom. Une annonce qui

place Israël et les États-Unis devant un choix difficile. En effet, cette installation est profondément enterrée sous la montagne, donc difficilement atteignable par des bombes même ultrapuissantes, qui devraient également faire face à un système de défense aérien sophistiqué autour du site. Selon Abbasi, cet emplacement, récemment inspecté par les experts de l'AIEA, est équipé d'une nouvelle génération de centrifugeuses, permettant d'accélérer la vitesse d'enrichissement de l'uranium.

Le Mossad actif au Kurdistan

L'Iran aurait déjà produit suffisamment de combustible pour équiper quatre ogives. Mais encore faudrait-il que ce combustible transite par les nouvelles centrifugeuses de Fordow. Or nul ne sait si Téhéran a pris une telle décision, lourde de conséquences. En tout cas, pour les États-Unis, la priorité ne semble plus de stopper une quelconque ca-

pacité nucléaire iranienne, mais plutôt d'arrêter la fabrication d'une arme atomique. « Sont-ils en train de développer une arme nucléaire ? » s'est demandé Leon Panetta dans l'émission « Face à la nation » sur CBS. « Non. Mais nous savons qu'ils essaient de développer une capacité nucléaire. Cela nous préoccupe. (Mais) notre ligne rouge, c'est que l'Iran ne développe pas l'arme nucléaire », a tenu à souligner Panetta, qui s'exprimait après le responsable nucléaire iranien. Toujours au cours du week-end, Téhéran a annoncé l'arrestation d'un nombre « indéterminé d'espions » qui

travailleraient pour Washington. Vraie ou fausse accusations ? Toujours est-il que les États-Unis et Israël ont multiplié les actions de sabotage contre des installations nucléaires sensibles, tout en téléguidant des assassinats ciblés d'experts nucléaires iraniens. « Le Mossad utilise pour cela la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, où ses agents ont renforcé leurs infiltrations », affirme une source sécuritaire à Bagdad. « Les Israéliens, ajoute-t-elle, utilisent les opposants kurdes au régime iranien qui sont réfugiés dans les régions kurdes d'Irak. » ■

Le Monde

Mercredi 11 janvier 2012

Téhéran sanctuarise l'enrichissement d'uranium

L'ouverture du site de Fordow, à l'abri des bombes, accroît les tensions, sur fond de sanctions occidentales

Le calendrier judiciaire, en Iran, s'adapte bien souvent aux impératifs diplomatiques du moment. L'annonce, lundi 9 janvier, de la condamnation à mort pour « espionnage » d'Amir Mirza Hekmati, un citoyen irano-américain, donne la mesure de l'extrême tension qui règne entre la République islamique et les Etats-Unis.

Ce verdict soudain rendu public – on ne sait quand il a été prononcé – intervient dans un contexte où Téhéran continue de brandir la menace d'une fermeture du détroit d'Ormuz si les Occidentaux mettent à exécution leur menace d'un embargo sur le pétrole iranien. Elle intervient aussi au moment où l'Iran a fait entrer en service le site controversé d'enrichissement d'uranium de Fordow.

Cette installation avait été longtemps dissimulée par Téhéran, jusqu'à ce que les Occidentaux la dénoncent, en septembre 2009. Située près de Qom, elle est, contrairement à l'usine de Natanz, profondément enfouie dans une montagne et, en conséquence, difficile à détruire par voie aérienne.

L'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA) a confirmé lundi le début, à Fordow, d'opérations d'enrichissement d'uranium à 20 %, un niveau qui s'approche du domaine militaire. Ces travaux ont été aussitôt condamnés par Washington et Paris, qui ont, de concert, souligné la gravité de cette « violation supplémentaire » des obligations internationales de l'Iran, et mis en exergue le fait que l'activité menée à Fordow n'avait « aucun usage civil possible ». Mais les deux capitales ont aussi indiqué que la « voie du dialogue » demeurerait une possibilité, pour peu que l'Iran se conforme aux résolutions de l'ONU.

Les Occidentaux semblent ainsi s'emparer de cet épisode technologique non pas pour en faire un casus belli contre l'Iran, mais pour conforter leur campagne diplomatique en faveur d'un embargo sur les achats de brut iranien. Le secrétaire américain au Trésor, Timothy Geithner, a commencé une tournée

en Chine et au Japon, pays-clefs pour que l'embargo soit efficace. Le premier ministre chinois, Wen Jia-



bao, est par ailleurs attendu en fin de semaine en Arabie saoudite, pays que les Occidentaux voudraient voir compenser un éventuel embargo du brut iranien sur les marchés internationaux.

Cet activisme diplomatique, couplé avec l'imminence apparente d'un boycottage décidé au niveau de l'Union européenne, rend nerveux les dirigeants iraniens. Les échanges verbaux acrimonieux entre Téhéran et Washington à propos du risque de fermeture du détroit d'Ormuz, essentiel pour le commerce mondial du pétrole, ont accru la crainte d'un incident naval dans le Golfe pouvant dégénérer en escalade militaire.

Dans ce contexte tendu, les Etats-Unis ont cependant cherché à tirer profit, au plan médiatique et auprès de l'opinion iranienne, d'un étonnant épisode en mer : le sauvetage, le 6 janvier, par l'US Navy de treize pêcheurs iraniens, qui étaient depuis des mois retenus en otage par des pirates somaliens, en mer d'Arabie. Ironie de l'histoire, le sauvetage a été conduit par le même porte-avions américain (le John C. Stennis) que l'Iran avait récemment menacé s'il revenait

« La décision ferme du régime est de résister face aux pressions des grandes puissances »

L'ayatollah Ali Khamenei
le Guide suprême iranien

dans les eaux du Golfe. Le ministre iranien des affaires étrangères a salué un « pas positif » de la part



Le Guide suprême iranien, l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei, s'adresse à ses partisans, le 9 janvier, à Téhéran. REUTERS

des Etats-Unis, avant de préciser que cela ne diminuerait pas les tensions entre les deux pays. Une agence de presse proche des Gardiens de la révolution a par ailleurs dénoncé une opération de « propagande » américaine.

S'agissant du dossier nucléaire, Téhéran a répondu aux pressions par le défi et la bravade. « La décision ferme du régime de la République islamique est de résister face aux pressions des grandes puissances », a déclaré lundi soir le Guide suprême, l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

L'annonce de la condamnation à mort par un tribunal révolutionnaire d'Amir Mirza Hekmati, un ex-marine américano-iranien de 28 ans accusé par Téhéran d'être en mission pour la CIA, fait partie de cette riposte iranienne. M. Hekmati, dont la famille nie tout lien avec l'espionnage américain, a vingt jours pour faire appel. Son sort va faire l'objet d'un âpre marchandage, mettant potentiellement Barack Obama sous pression dans le cadre de la campagne électorale.

L'entrée en fonction du site de Fordow s'inscrit dans une stratégie où l'Iran continue de grignoter du terrain technologique, sans aller jusqu'à expulser les inspecteurs de l'AIEA comme l'avait fait la Corée

du Nord en 2003, avant de poursuivre sa course vers des tests nucléaires. L'Iran dispose d'un stock d'uranium enrichi qui lui permettrait, en théorie, d'équiper quatre engins nucléaires. Mais il faudrait pour cela que l'enrichissement soit poussé à des degrés militaires (à 90 %), déclenchant une crise certaine. Avant d'être dévoilé, le site de Fordow était destiné à cette dernière étape.

En augmentant son stock de matière nucléaire, qui plus est dans un site à l'abri de bombardements, l'Iran se donne les moyens d'une course vers l'arme atomique qui laisserait peu de temps de réaction aux Occidentaux. Mais ira-t-il jusqu'au bout ? Leon Panetta, le secrétaire américain à la défense, a établi dimanche une distinction entre l'ambition iranienne d'acquiescer une « capacité nucléaire » et la décision politique de fabriquer la bombe. Cette décision, estime-t-il, n'a pas été prise. Le commentaire montre que l'équipe Obama espère encore un règlement négocié, en misant, semble-t-il, sur un rôle russe de médiation. Le président Medvedev a téléphoné, le 5 janvier, à son homologue iranien. ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD
ET NATALIE NOUGAYREDE

Istanbul: Big Trouble in Little Kurdistan



Pro-Kurdish demonstrators chant slogans during a protest in Istanbul on Dec. 29, 2011, against a Turkish air strike that killed 35 Kurdish smugglers in southeast Turkey

By Piotr Zalewski / Istanbul

In Karayollari, a Kurdish-majority neighborhood in Istanbul, the locals are seething. On Dec. 28, Turkish warplanes flying over Uludere, close to the Iraqi border, rained bombs on what pilots believed to be a column of militants from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a Kurdish separatist group. It turned out to be civilians smuggling diesel. Thirty-five people lost their lives in the attack. Karayollari might be over a thousand miles away from Uludere, but the impact of the tragedy on local Kurds is palpable. Since the beginning of the year, protests have erupted there and in surrounding neighborhoods on an almost daily basis.

The recent surge in fighting between the Turkish military and the PKK — punctuated by the Uludere massacre and the killing of 24 Turkish soldiers by the Kurdish rebels two months earlier — has revived fears of an imminent return to the bloody 1990s, when civil war ravaged Turkey's Kurdish-populated southeast. Today, not only does the violence threaten to intensify, it also threatens to spread. With interethnic tensions and clashes on the rise across the country, there is increasing evidence that Turkey's cities, home to millions of Kurds, may be becoming a new front in the conflict.

"Unless the government can manage the situation, there is a risk of ethnic tension at the societal level," says Nihat Ali Ozcan, a retired army officer. In Istanbul, the Turkish city with the largest population of Kurds — with an estimated 2 million to 4 million out of the city's total of 12 million — the risk of conflict appears more acute than anywhere else.

Mustafa, like many residents of Karayollari, hails from Siirt, a city in the southeast. He arrived in Istanbul about 20 years ago, he says, part of an entire generation of Kurds displaced by the Turkish military's scorched-earth tactics. We meet

at a local teahouse among men in plaid sweaters and leather jackets playing backgammon, fingering Islamic prayer beads and blowing vast rain clouds of smoke from contraband cigarettes. Roj TV, considered a PKK mouthpiece, banned in Turkey and broadcast via satellite from Denmark, blares in the background. Conversation is sparse. If and when it takes place, it is almost exclusively in Kurdish. (As late as two decades years ago, speaking that language in public was considered a crime.) The choice of programming, as well as the men's blissful disregard of Turkey's two-year-old smoking ban, is telling. Karayollari, an hour's bus ride from the city center, is something of a world unto itself. "The cops don't venture here," Mustafa says, "unless it's to arrest activists or to crack down on protests."

In the past few months, dozens of Karayollari locals have been detained in raids against the Union of Kurdistan Communities (KCK), which the authorities regard as the PKK's urban wing. (The PKK itself is considered a terrorist organization by Turkey, the U.S., and the European Union.) This has not deterred other residents from staging protests. With stations like Roj TV reporting nonstop from the Kurdish areas of Turkey, Mustafa says, "people here are more aware of the Kurdish problem. Whenever we feel our people are being suppressed, we react." A young man sitting at our table helpfully points out that the streets around the teahouse make good getaway routes during battles with the police. "If something goes down in the southeast today," Mustafa says, "something will go down in Karayollari tomorrow."

On the other side of a highway overpass that separates Karayollari from Gazi Mahallesi, an ethnically mixed neighborhood reputed to be one of Istanbul's poorest and most dangerous, signs of tension are rife. On the road leading up to the local

police station, ATMs belonging to the local branch of Ziraat Bankasi, a state bank, have been vandalized in protests that have united Kurds, radical leftists and anarchists. The police station itself — perched atop a hill overlooking the neighborhood, an enormous Turkish flag raised overhead — looks like a fortress. Antigovernment graffiti is everywhere. "Revolution or Death, the Only Solution for Kurdistan," reads one sign, spray-painted onto the side of a building. Mazlum Poyraz, a student, says that municipal buses have been pelted with stones so often the transport authority no longer routes its modern, air-conditioned vehicles through the area.

In this Istanbul neighborhood, as in the southeast, poverty and unemployment help nourish the cycle of violence. So does urban displacement. These days, Gazi is buzzing with rumors that a neighboring shantytown, home to Turks and Kurds, may soon be leveled to make way for an upscale housing development. In Karayollari, this is already fact. Within a short walk from the teahouse, a large slum area has been razed, its Kurdish and Roma residents evicted, to make way for Avrupa Konutlari, a gated community comprising more than 30 high-rise buildings.

To the Kurds of Karayollari, the adjacent high-rises, home to mostly middle-class Turks, have become something of a symbol. "Avrupa Konutlari, for us, is the state," says Mustafa. On some occasions, the buildings themselves have come under attack. When Turkish soldiers die in combat against the PKK, "many of the Turks living there hang national flags from their balconies," says Sercan, an abbreviated version of his name tattooed in ink across his knuckles. In response, he says, Kurdish protesters from Karayollari "sometimes throw stones or Molotov cocktails at their windows."

"With these buildings, once again they're uprooting the Kurds," says Mustafa. "When the state does this, when it creates these kinds of divisions, people from our part of the neighborhood, they get upset. So if you're in a protest and you have a stone in your hand, you'll throw it at one of the skyscrapers."

More unrest may soon be in store. On Tuesday, a Danish court will rule on whether to shut down Roj TV, the Kurds' biggest television station, on account of its links with the PKK.

The conflict in the southeast, which began with a PKK insurgency in 1984, has so far claimed around 40,000 lives, victims of armed battles, terrorist attacks by the Kurdish rebels and often savage reprisals by the Turkish army and security forces.

○○○

Kurdish station fined 2.6m kr for promoting terrorism

Roj TV hangs on to broadcasting license in spite of being judged the voice of the PKK

By Ray Weaver

Copenhagen-based Kurdish TV station Roj TV was found guilty today of charges that it promoted terrorism. Roj TV, which transmits news cultural and children's programming to an estimated 30 million Kurds worldwide, had been charged with promoting the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is listed as a terrorist organisation by the US, Canada and the EU.

But while the court found the station violates anti-terror law and will be fined 2.6 million kroner, it said the license cannot be revoked because of a technicality in how the charges were brought.

Prosecutors had demanded immediate closure of the station along with a fine of 20 million kroner for Roj TV and its parent company, Mesopotamia Broadcasting.

Roj TV's attorney Bjørn Elmquist had first requested an acquittal. He subsequently argued that the station only be required to pay the fine under today's judgment and be allowed to retain its license until the appeals process is over.

The decision drew protests from Turkey's ambassador to Denmark, Ahmet Berki Dibek, who was in Copenhagen City Court to witness the verdict.

Roj TV was indicted on August 15 on



Kurds gathered in front of Copenhagen City House today to show their support for the embattled Roj TV (Photo: Scanpix)

charges that it promoted terrorism through propaganda. The case marks the first time a Danish media organisation was prosecuted for terrorism.

Roj TV began broadcasting in Denmark in 2004. Broadcast authorities began looking into its possible ties to the PKK in 2005. Two years later the national broadcasting authority Radio- og Tv-nævnet, found that the station had incited to hatred or violence.

Former Roj TV head Manouchehr Zanoobi, who had originally admitted that Roj TV had connections to the PKK, but was not controlled by it, came forward in 2009 with incriminating photos and



documents that demonstrated a strong connection between the two organisations, including an offer by the PKK to invest several million kroner into the broadcaster.

During the trial it emerged that PKK guerrillas had appeared as journalists and used the station to broadcast the names of and threaten specific Turkish soldiers. The station was also found guilty of accepting money from the PKK.

The station had been sore spot in the relationship between Turkey and Denmark. The Turkish government has long claimed that the station is a mouthpiece for the PKK, and Turkish authorities had repeatedly made formal complaint about Roj TV to Radio- og Tv-nævnet. Turkey banned the station in 2005 and accused Denmark of dragging its feet in the case.

Denmark's decision to prosecute the case was revealed as being a reward for Turkey's support of the appointment of Anders Fogh Rasmussen as Nato secretary general in 2009.

A leaked US embassy cable from 2010 revealed that "Denmark had promised to clarify its legal requirements prerequisite to acceding to Turkey's request for the closure of Roj TV" in exchange for Turkey withdrawing its objection to Rasmussen.

○○○

Kurdish Opposition Proposes Commission on Baghdad Politics

By NAWZAD MAHMOUD and KAWA ABDULLA

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan – The Kurdistan Region's opposition is proposing an independent commission to resolve the political turmoil between Erbil and Baghdad as well as Sunni and Shiite leaders in Baghdad.

While the proposal has not raised controversy, it challenges the power of the region's two ruling parties -- the

Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, (PUK) - which have set Iraqi Kurdistan's policies for decades and lead Kurdish representation in Baghdad. Iraqi Kurdistan's opposition has sparred with the ruling parties and has boycotted the region's government since last summer.

On Gorran's KNN satellite TV station, Nawshirwan Mustafa, the movement's leader, said an independent commission should supervise relations bet-

ween Iraqi Kurdistan and Baghdad.

"We must change Iraqi Kurdistan's current relationship with Baghdad, which is being decided by Kurdistan's two ruling parties, to a national level and for that we need an independent joint commission similar to the independent elections commission," Mustafa said.

Shaho Saeed, a high-ranking member of the Change Movement (Gorran) said his group is concerned about Iraq's political crisis.

"In the proposal we do not differentiate between the problems in Iraqi Kurdistan and the problems of Iraq," Saeed said. "We will later forward the project to KDP and PUK and the other blocs in the Kurdish Parliament in order to create a (united) stance on it."

Saeed added, "This idea belongs to the Gorran Movement and we want that commission to be and belong to the Kurdish Parliament and include members from all the different parties."

Leaders of the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), the second biggest opposition party, back Gorran's proposal.

Abu Bakir Ali, a KIU politburo member, said, "The creation of this commission has become one of our proposals in the efforts to solve issues in Iraq. All parties should agree to it and the Kurds should have a united (Kurdish) position in dealing with the issues in Iraq."

Najmaddin Karim, a PUK politburo member, believes the current administrative system between the French-speaking Québec province and the Canadian central government could be the best model for Iraqi Kurdistan.

"I suggest that this commission be created to regulate the security, economy, political and military issues and its bylaws and activities are regulated by the Kurdish Parliament accordingly," Karim said.



Leaders of Kurdistan Region's opposition parties in a meeting in Sulaimani. Photo Rudaw (Archives)

The KDP "has issues with crisis management with Baghdad, not problems with the relationship," said party spokesperson Ibrahim Jaafar.

Jaafar added that the KDP is open to the idea of a commission.

"We as the KDP won't refuse this kind of commission being created and we'll study this proposal," he said.

Meanwhile, Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani are currently meeting with Iraqi parties and US officials to

find a solution for the country's political crisis.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki issued an arrest warrant for Vice-President Tariq Al-Hashimi last month on terrorism-related charges.

Hashimi, a Sunni, has been a fierce critic of Maliki. He fled to the Kurdistan Region where he is under the protection of the Kurdish authorities. ●

Los Angeles Times

JANUARY 17, 2012

Turkey, State Department blast Rick Perry's 'Islamic terrorist' remarks

BY JAMES OLIPHANT

Both the U.S. State Department and the government of Turkey have registered their dismay with Rick Perry, who claimed at Monday night's GOP presidential debate in South Carolina that the Middle Eastern nation and longtime NATO ally was run by "Islamic terrorists."

In responding to a question from Fox News' Bret Baier, the Texas governor, who has struggled with foreign policy while on the campaign trail, suggested that all U.S. foreign aid to Turkey should be cut off, that the nation should be kicked out of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and, for good measure, seemed to lump it with Iran and Syria as an existential threat to the United States.

"Well, obviously when you have a country that is being ruled by, what many would perceive to be Islamic terrorists, when you start seeing that type of activity against their own citizens, then yes. Not only is it time



for us to have a conversation about whether or not they belong to be in NATO, but it's time for the United States, when we look at their foreign aid, to go to zero with it," Perry said.

"And you go to zero with foreign aid for all of those countries. And it doesn't make any difference who they are. You go to zero with that foreign aid and then you have the conversation about, do they have America's best interest in mind? And when you have countries like Turkey that are moving far away from the country that I lived in back in

the 1970s as a pilot in the United States Air Force that was our ally, that worked with us, but today we don't see that," he said.

State Department spokesman Mark Toner was asked at his daily briefing about whether the U.S. considered the Turkish government to be populated by "Islamic terrorists."

"We absolutely and fundamentally disagree with that assertion. You know, Turkey, as I said, is a -- is a strong partner in the region. We've seen it make a very courageous stand against what's going on in Syria, for example. It continues to play a very positive and constructive role in the region. And it is often cited -- an example of a so-called Islamic democracy in action," Toner said.

"Turkey is one of the oldest members of NATO and it's been a stalwart member of NATO and a strong ally to the United States. And, you know, we stand by our relationship," Toner said.

Turkey's ambassador to the United States, Namik Tan, released a statement

expressing his disappointment with Perry's criticism, which he termed "misplaced" and "ill-advised."

"Needless to say, the Turkey described in the debate simply does not exist," Tan said. "Turkey is a secular democracy that has for decades been an essential and trusted partner of the U.S. Our bilateral relations are based on the common values of democracy and respect for human rights, rule of law, and free market economy. Whether in the fight against terrorism or violent extremism, in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria or against the proliferation of [weapons of mass destruction] we stand side by side to tackle the many common threats and challenges of our times. Through NATO and bilaterally,

Turkey and the U.S. will continue to cooperate day in, day out to establish peace, security and prosperity around the world."

And in a clear shot at Perry, Tan wrote that Turkey's economy doesn't need aid from the United States and in fact has helped create "thousands of jobs" in Perry's home state of Texas through trade.

Turkey joined NATO in 1952 and was elected to a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council in 2008. The two countries have been partners in the war in Afghanistan. The nation, however, has yet to be admitted into the European Union in part because of concerns over its human-rights record, including the treatment of women and the Kurdish minority.

Some American conservatives have warned about what they see as a rising tide of Islamic fundamentalism in the secular nation because the ruling AKP government has more openly embraced the country's Islamic-based culture.

Perry stood by his comments at a press conference Tuesday, saying in response to the Turkish government's criticism, according to CBS News: "When you see the number of actions against your citizens that we would consider to be terrorist acts, I stand by my statement." □□□



17 JANUARY 2012

Iraq car bomb targets Kurdish community

Attack inside camp for displaced members of Shabak community near northern city of Mosul kills at least 11.

At least 11 people have been killed and six others injured in a car bomb explosion near Iraq's main northern city of Mosul, according to officials.

The bomb on Monday morning targeted an internally displaced persons camp for a small minority group in the town of Bartala, officials said.

A member of the provincial council has told Al Jazeera that police found a second car bomb at the scene and closed the area for several hours to defuse it.

The blast occurred inside the Al-Ghadir camp housing displaced members of the Shabak community, a sect of Kurdish origin, according to an army official and a medic at Mosul General Hospital.

The medic said women and children were among the fatalities, but did not give further details. He said some of the injured had been transferred to a hospital in the nearby Kurdish regional capital Erbil.

The Shabak community numbers about 30,000 people living in 35 villages in Nineveh, and many want to become part of the autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq.

They speak a distinct language and largely follow a faith that is a blend of Shia Islam and local beliefs.

SHABAK COMMUNITY

The Shabak community was persecuted under former Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein, and after the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq they were targeted on a number of occasions.

Levels of violence have declined dramatically in Mosul and nearby towns and villages.

Monday's violence came a day after fighters mounted a wave of attacks in the western city of Ramadi before laying siege to a police compound, raising doubts about security forces' capabilities after US forces completed their withdrawal last month.



The attack left seven policemen dead and 16 wounded, the latest in violence that has killed more than 200 people in less than a month.

POLITICAL TENSIONS

Political tensions in Iraq have been high since December, prime minister Nouri al-Maliki's government ordered the arrest of a vice-president, touching off a crisis that many fear will bring a relapse into sectarian conflict.

On Saturday, a suicide bomber disguised as a policeman killed at least 53 people and wounded scores in an attack on pilgrims at a checkpoint in the southern city of Basra

Mosul, in northern Iraq, was once an al-Qaeda stronghold, and witnessed some of the fiercest fighting during the war that followed the 2003 US-led invasion.

The eastern outskirts of Mosul form part of the disputed areas between the central government and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region Government in the north.

The disputed territories between Iraqi Arabs and Kurds are seen as a flashpoints for possible conflict after the last American troops left Iraq in December, nearly nine years after the invasion that ousted Saddam Hussein.○

Syrian Kurds Claim They're Sidelined in Opposition Again

RUDAW

QAMISHLI, Syria – Kurdish leaders say they are again being sidelined in decision-making for Syria's future, claiming two major Syrian opposition groups did not consult them when drafting a pledge to honor Kurdish rights.

The resolution, which was tentatively agreed upon between the Syrian National Council and the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change in Syria (NCB) in Cairo last month, identifies the Kurds as an ethnic minority in Syria and states that their rights must be enshrined in drafting a new constitution.

Kurdish parties say they have been sidelined and weren't consulted by the national council, the leading opposition group that is creating an interim leadership for Syria if the regime falls. One Kurdish leader, however, said Kurds decided to walk out of the conference.

Abdul-Hakim Bashar, the head of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria and chair of the Kurdish National Council, told Rudaw, "This was never our demand," Bashar said. "They have not mentioned that the Kurds live on their own land. We are not guests in Syria. This issue must be addressed -- that Syria isn't just an Arab country but is a country of both Arabs and Kurds."

Bashar called on Kurdish parties and political figures to withdraw their representatives from the Syrian National Council.

Some other Syrian opposition leaders are also concerned about the new resolution.

Muhyaddin Lathaqi, a member of the Syrian National Council, told Rudaw, "Some of the issues are not clear in the agreement."

But Burhan Ghalioun, the head of the Syrian National Council, said in a statement, "What was signed in the agreement is just a draft and we haven't yet reached the final agreement."

According to Abdulbasit Saida, a member of the council's implementation committee, there is disagreement



Protesters carrying the flag of Kurdistan in a demonstration in the city of Amude, Syria. Photo alquds.com

among council members.

"The agreement will be discussed by the council's leadership and the implementation committee," Saida said. "There are many controversial points in the agreement."

Saida believes the agreement won't be welcomed by the majority of the council.

Ghalioun and Haitham Manna, the head of the NCB, signed the new resolution in the presence of only seven council members.

To ease the anger of some opposition figures, Ghalioun said, "What was being signed is only a proposal and later will be discussed by the council and the council will make the final decision."

He said the draft was not supposed to be made public.

The Kurdish National Council, which is made up of ten Kurdish political groups and a number of political and intellectual figures, blames the Syrian National Council for keeping the Kurds in the dark regarding decisions and plans for the future of Syria.

Salih Muslim, a Kurd and deputy head of the NCB, said the Kurdish National Council is responsible for not being involved in drafting from the recent agreement.

"The Kurdish National Council delegation decided to leave Cairo; that's why they were not present in signing the agreement," Muslim said.

Muslim maintained that the Kurdish National Council will participate in the Syrian opposition convention and they will have members in the preparation committee.

"However, the Kurdish National

Council is not the only one who represents the Kurds," he said. "There is also a National Council, which is created by PYD and some other Kurdish political parties outside of the Kurdish National Council."

The Democratic Union Party (PYD) is a Syrian Kurdish party that has stayed away from the mainstream opposition only to drift closer to the Syrian National Council in Cairo last month.

Lathaqi maintained that the council embraces all Syrians.

"The Syrian opposition doesn't include only the Syrian National Council and the National Coordination," he said. "It also includes Kurdish blocs, tribal blocs, and many other independent figures as well."

Lathaqi rejected claims that Kurds are being isolated, saying, "Any attempts to isolate one of these groups from the Syrian National Council will make us dictators and no one will trust us in the future. Everyone should participate in the Syrian opposition's agreement."

Saida, a member of the Syrian National Council, said the constitutional right was established during a pledge for Kurdish rights at a conference in Tunisia.

"Our opinion and the opinion of the entire Syrian National Council was clear in the first convention in Tunisia which we acknowledged the constitutional rights of the Kurds on their own land," he said. □

Téhéran accuse les Etats-Unis et Israël de l'assassinat en Iran d'un chercheur spécialiste du nucléaire

Washington nie toute implication dans l'attentat, le quatrième en deux ans contre un scientifique

Mercredi matin 11 janvier, Mostafa Ahmadi-Roshan est parti travailler comme tous les jours. Son chauffeur est passé le prendre à son domicile pour se rendre à son bureau. A 8 h 30, alors que son véhicule empruntait la rue Golnabi, dans le nord-est de Téhéran, une moto avec deux passagers s'est portée à sa hauteur. Arrivé près de la voiture, l'un des motards a collé une bombe magnétique sur l'habitacle de la 405 Peugeot. Puis la moto a accéléré. Lorsqu'elle a pris 200 mètres d'avance, l'explosion s'est déclenchée. Suffisamment forte pour tuer le passager et son chauffeur, mais sans détruire l'habitacle.

Cet assassinat, qui semble tout droit sorti d'un film d'espionnage, est le quatrième, en deux ans, d'un scientifique spécialiste du nucléaire iranien.

Le 29 novembre 2010, Fereydon Abbassi-Davani avait échappé de peu à une tentative d'assassinat similaire, qui l'avait blessé ainsi que sa femme. Il avait sauté à temps de son véhicule. Depuis, il a été nommé vice-président par le président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad et promu à la tête de l'organisa-

tion iranienne de l'énergie atomique. Le même jour, Majid Shariati, un autre spécialiste du nucléaire, avait été tué dans une explosion criminelle qui avait blessé sa femme. Le premier assassinat de ce type remonte au 12 janvier 2010 : il avait visé Massoud Ali Mohammad, un physicien internationalement reconnu.

Le vice-président iranien, Mohammad Reza Rahimi, a attribué l'attentat du 11 janvier à « un terrorisme d'Etat »

Mostafa Ahmadi-Roshan, 32 ans, était vice-directeur du département commercial de l'usine de Natanz, le principal site d'enrichissement d'uranium irakien, près d'Isfahan, selon l'agence de presse iranienne Mehr. D'après une autre agence de presse, Fars, il s'occupait d'un projet de membranes polymères utiles dans la séparation de gaz, un processus

nécessaire à l'enrichissement de l'uranium.

Le site de Natanz compte 8 000 centrifugeuses. Mais le rôle exact de Mostafa Ahmadi-Roshan reste difficile à établir. Ce jeune scientifique avait fait des études d'ingénierie chimique à l'université Sharif de Téhéran, l'un des meilleurs établissements scientifiques du pays. Toujours selon Mehr, les inspecteurs de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique de Vienne l'auraient rencontré très récemment.

L'Iran et la communauté internationale s'affrontent sur la question du programme nucléaire de la République islamique. Plus encore depuis l'annonce de l'ouverture imminente de l'usine d'enrichissement de Fordow, profondément enterrée dans une montagne près de Qom. Les pays occidentaux soupçonnent Téhéran de vouloir se doter de l'arme atomique, tandis que les dirigeants iraniens assurent poursuivre des objectifs civils.

Outre les sanctions adoptées par les Nations unies ou celles spécifiques aux Occidentaux (Etats-Unis, Union européenne, Canada), une guerre secrète se joue en Iran.

Elle a débuté avec le vrai-faux enlèvement de Shahrām Amiri par des agents américains : après un séjour aux Etats-Unis, le physicien était rentré en Iran en juillet 2010. Cette guerre de l'ombre inclut la diffusion de virus informatiques comme Stuxnet, et de mystérieuses explosions sur des bases militaires des *pasdaran*, les Gardiens de la révolution.

Le vice-président iranien, Mohammad Reza Rahimi, a attribué l'attentat de mercredi à « un terrorisme d'Etat ». Une allusion aux Etats-Unis qui ont nié toute implication et condamné l'attentat, et à Israël qui, comme à son habitude, n'a pas réagi.

Toutefois, M. Reza Rahimi a assuré que cet assassinat « ne stopperait pas » le programme nucléaire iranien. Le chef d'état-major israélien venait juste de déclarer, mardi, devant des parlementaires à la Knesset : « 2012 s'annonce une année critique en Iran avec la poursuite du programme nucléaire, des changements au sommet du pouvoir, une pression continue, voire accrue, de la communauté internationale, et des incidents inaccoutumés. » ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD

Iran, le scénario d'une guerre possible L'escalade a atteint un point critique

François Géré

Directeur de l'Institut français d'analyse stratégique

Depuis septembre 2011, la tension entre Téhéran et Washington s'aggrave. Le dernier épisode en date est la menace iranienne du blocus du détroit d'Ormuz en cas de sanctions sur ses exportations énergétiques. Or la libre circulation des

flux énergétiques a toujours constitué pour Washington un casus belli. L'escalade des sanctions glisse vers une guerre, évoquée depuis six ans. Faisant la part de l'amplification médiatique voulue de part et d'autre, mesurons quels gains peuvent espérer les acteurs et quels risques de pertes leur feraient contre-poids.

En Iran, il paraît avantageux de surenchérir dans la lutte entre les factions et les clans tant religieux que laïques (le Guide suprême, Ali Khamenei, le président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad et son beau-frère, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaie, la puissante famille d'Ali Larijani, prési-

dent du Majlis, le Parlement) qui se disputent le pouvoir dans la perspective des élections législatives et de la présidentielle de 2013. Les *pasdaran* (gardiens de la révolution) jouent aussi leur prestige et leur crédibilité de maîtres de la haute technologie militaire.

Ce serait l'occasion de renforcer une unité nationale entamée en plaçant au second plan le mécontentement général à l'égard d'une mauvaise gestion économique qui, aggravée par les sanctions, rend difficiles les conditions de vie. Enfin, un affrontement direct permettrait de rompre l'isolement diplomatique régional dû à la crainte de

l'arme nucléaire et à la dynamique des changements de pouvoir dans le monde arabe qui favorise le sunnisme. Se présenter comme le seul Etat qui ose défier la suprématie américaine se révélera payant.

Aux Etats-Unis, le président Barack Obama est sous la pression des républicains mais aussi de nombreux parlementaires démocrates soucieux de la protection d'Israël. Il est temps pour l'administration américaine de faire preuve de fermeté au-delà des mots, même si l'option de l'*endiguement* a sa préférence.

Il lui faut aussi rassurer les alliés

régionaux et donner plus de consistance à cette stratégie d'endigement, mise en œuvre depuis deux ans, fondée sur le redéploiement des troupes d'Irak et d'Afghanistan vers la péninsule arabique, la défense antimissiles et, plus discrètement, la garantie nucléaire. Enfin, calmer les impatiences belliqueuses du gouvernement israélien.

Embrassement régional

Au regard de ces incitations, quels sont les risques? Washington doit envisager une flambée des prix énergétiques qui aggraverait la crise économique, non sans répercussions sur la croissance des Etats émergents. Il faudra surmonter une forte opposition liée à l'in-

quiétude des pays importateurs (Japon, Inde, Chine) et celle des Etats riverains exportateurs. Autre risque, la radicalisation des gouvernements arabes islamiques modérés nouvellement élus. Faut-il envisager un embrassement régional? Ce terme souvent utilisé par Téhéran paraît excessif: ni au Liban (Hezbollah), ni en Irak (armée du Mahdi de Moqtada Al-Sadr), ni à Gaza, et moins encore en Afghanistan, il n'y aurait d'engagement armé automatique en soutien de l'Iran. Par-delà les déclarations enflammées, chacun pèsera son intérêt local.

Le risque terroriste, en revanche, augmentera. Enfin, une action militaire, fût-elle limitée, fournirait à

Téhéran un prétexte pour faire jouer la clause de retrait du traité sur la non-prolifération des armes nucléaires au nom de ses intérêts suprêmes.

Le risque pour l'Iran serait de se retrouver en situation d'Etat paria comme la Corée du Nord, ce que Téhéran a pris garde d'éviter. En outre, le régime pourrait essuyer une défaite, eu égard à un rapport de forces conventionnelles favorable aux Etats-Unis. Cette humiliation bouleverserait la donne politique intérieure. Deux options se dégagent: s'en tenir à un affrontement verbal; faire une démonstration militaire limitée et confuse permettant à chacun de s'attribuer le beau rôle.

Ce dernier scénario peut-il contribuer à résoudre la crise nucléaire en favorisant une reprise du dialogue, chacun ayant sauvé la face? Tel fut le cas en 1987. L'Iran faisait alors face à l'Irak. Il n'existait pas de programme nucléaire iranien. Une escalade incontrôlée conduirait à une campagne aérienne contre les sites nucléaires et les missiles. Le potentiel iranien en serait amoindri sans être éradiqué.

La situation incite donc à la prudence. La France, non sans ambiguïté, met en garde contre «*les risques d'une attaque préventive*» porteuse d'une crise dont «*elle ne veut à aucun prix*». Après dix ans de vaines négociations, l'épreuve de vérité approche. Mais quelle vérité? ■

Observateur

13 janvier 2012

Les Kurdes de Syrie à l'écart du soulèvement

PAR JON HEMMING

ERBIL, IRAK (REUTERS) - Ni Bachar al Assad ni l'opposition syrienne ne trouvent grâce aux yeux de la communauté kurde de Syrie, première minorité ethnique du pays, qui s'est tenue largement à l'écart du soulèvement entamé il y a dix mois.

Ses membres voient en outre d'un mauvais oeil l'influence croissante de la Turquie auprès des mouvements qui cherchent à renverser le chef de l'Etat, craignant que leur succès ne mette fin à leurs espoirs d'autonomie, du fait de l'opposition d'Ankara à l'émancipation de sa propre minorité kurde.

"Les Kurdes et l'opposition arabe ne se font pas confiance, c'est pourquoi il n'y pas de grandes manifestations dans les villes kurdes", explique Madjid Youssef Daoui, membre du Conseil national syrien mis sur pied par les adversaires d'Assad et Kurde lui-même.

"Nous n'avons aucun accord avec l'opposition arabe en ce qui concerne les droits des Kurdes. Nous n'avons pas d'accord sur la marche à suivre pour changer de régime (...) Les déclarations des chefs de file de l'opposition ne nous donnent par ailleurs aucune raison de leur accorder notre confiance", ajoute-t-il, interrogé par Reuters à Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan irakien.

Après quelques rassemblements au début du mouvement de contestation, les villes à majorité kurde du nord-est de la Syrie ont retrouvé le calme alors que des manifestations quotidiennes ont lieu dans les grands pôles sunnites.

"Les Kurdes ne soutiennent pas le régime. Nous, Kurdes, sommes hostiles au régime depuis plus de vingt ans et les Kurdes ont été parmi les premiers à descendre dans la rue", dit Sarbast Nabi, Kurde de Syrie et professeur de sciences politiques à l'université Saladin d'Erbil.

Des heurts ont opposé pendant des jours les forces de l'ordre syriennes à des membres de la communauté kurde en 2004, à Qamichli, après un incident lors d'un match de football.

ARABISATION

"A ce moment-là, je me trouvais à Damas", se souvient Sarbast Dabi. "Je ne veux pas citer de noms, mais ceux qui sont maintenant à la tête de l'opposition étaient hostiles aux revendications concernant les droits des Kurdes (...) Ils sont toujours favorables à l'arabisation et à l'islam politique."

Outre cette défiance à l'égard de l'opposition, les Kurdes de Syrie sont très divisés. Certains mouvements sont liés aux Kurdes d'Irak, d'autres aux rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), actifs en Turquie, disent les observateurs.

Damas accorde à ces derniers un soutien de plus en plus marqué pour compenser celui d'Ankara à l'opposition syrienne, ce qui explique que les proches du PKK en Syrie n'aient pas rejoint les rangs de la contestation.

Bachar al Assad exploite à la fois la crainte que le séparatisme kurde inspire aux arabes et celle que le nationalisme arabe inspire aux Kurdes, estime

Mahmoud Mohammad Bave Sabir, membre de la direction de l'Union démocratique kurde de Syrie, l'un des plus vieux partis kurdes d'opposition.

Les manifestations kurdes, dit-il, n'ont pas été réprimées aussi violemment que les autres parce qu'Assad redoute la réaction des milliers de Kurdes installés à Damas et à Alep, les deux plus grandes agglomérations, qui sont plus calmes que les villes voisines.

PUISSANCES RÉGIONALES

Avant de trouver refuge au Kurdistan irakien, Madjed Youssef Daoui, militant étudiant, a passé deux mois en prison. Il est aujourd'hui en contact quotidien avec les dissidents kurdes de Syrie et fait pression pour une reconnaissance des droits de sa communauté auprès du mouvement le plus représentatif de l'opposition, établi à Istanbul.

L'appui de la Turquie à cette coalition de partis issus de la mouvance religieuse clandestine, a placé les islamistes à la pointe de la contestation, selon les représentants kurdes de Syrie.

S'ils s'emparaient du pouvoir, disent-ils, ils resteraient sans doute fidèles au nationalisme arabe de Bachar al Assad et s'opposeraient par conséquent à l'autonomie des zones kurdes.

"Je pense que la révolution syrienne n'est plus entre les mains du peuple syrien, mais qu'elle est devenue un conflit entre puissances régionales. On ne peut pas faire confiance à ces grands Etats parce que ce sont leurs intérêts qui priment", ajoute Madjed Youssef Daoui.

"Nous craignons que la Turquie ne joue un rôle en Syrie. Je suis sûr que la Turquie fera face à une forte résistance kurde en Syrie", prédit quant à lui Sarbast Nabi. □

Syrie : l'économie s'approche du point de rupture



Confrontés aux pénuries, des Damascènes font la queue, dans une rue de la capitale, en décembre 2011, pour acheter de l'essence. REUTERS

L'hiver est rude en Syrie et pas seulement dans les foyers d'opposants. Les moyens de chauffage comme le fioul et le gaz domestique commencent à manquer. Les coupures d'électricité se multiplient au point que, dans la banlieue de Damas, elles atteignent 7 à 8 heures par jour. Les prix des produits de première nécessité flambent, avec une inflation de 37% en 2011 pour certaines denrées.

Sous l'effet conjugué de la crise politique et des sanctions internationales, l'économie, qui avait jusque-là bien résisté, donne désormais des signes de dépression avancée. « Ce n'est pas le marasme généralisé, la population ne meurt pas de faim, mais c'est vrai que l'économie est dans un mauvais état », dit Yazid Yizagi, rédacteur en chef du Syria Report, un site d'information économique basé à Damas. La détérioration s'est accélérée à la fin de l'année, au moment où les sanctions sont entrées en application.

Toujours enclin à minimiser l'importance de la rébellion qui le vise, le régime du président Bachar Al-Assad est en revanche beaucoup plus prolix sur la crise économique. Outre que les mesures prises par la communauté internationale dans ce domaine alimentent sa thèse du « complot de l'étranger », le maître de Damas se plaint à brandir la peur du chaos pour mieux se maintenir en place.

En juin, il avait évoqué « un risque d'effondrement » de l'écono-

mie. Quelques mois plus tôt, il avait décrété une hausse de 20% à 30% du traitement des fonctionnaires, dans le but évident d'acheter la paix sociale. En début de semaine, c'est Mohamed Nidaal Al-Shaar, le ministre de l'économie, qui a parlé d'un secteur « gravement endommagé ». Le taux de chômage, officiellement de 11% avant le début du soulèvement en mars, est désormais placé « entre 22% et 30% » par le ministère des affaires sociales.

C'est dans le secteur pétrolier – 25% du produit intérieur brut (PIB) – que la crise est la plus sensible. La Syrie, qui exportait la quasi-totalité de son brut vers l'Union européenne (UE), se heurte depuis la mi-novembre à l'embargo mis en place par les ministres des affaires étrangères des Vingt-Sept. L'hypothèse d'une réorientation des ventes vers les pays d'Asie est jugée peu crédible par les spécialistes, du fait du surcoût qu'entraînerait ce choix, notamment à cause des frais de la traversée du canal de Suez.

Le secteur touristique est, quant à lui, au point mort. En forte hausse ces dernières années, il ne représentait que 10% du PIB mais assurait une grosse part des rentrées de devises du régime. Signe que la situation monétaire du pays se fragilise, la livre syrienne commence à décrocher face au dollar. Alors qu'elle s'échangeait à 1 dollar pour 50 livres il y a quelques mois, le taux est passé officiellement à 1

pour 57 et pointe à 1 pour 63 au marché noir.

L'autre volet des sanctions européennes, celui qui consiste à geler les avoirs des hommes d'affaires jugés trop proches du pouvoir et désormais persona non grata en Europe, commencera également

**« L'alliance entre le capital sunnite et le pouvoir alaouite est en train de craquer »
Un analyste étranger basé à Damas**

à porter ses fruits. La Bourse a perdu 50% de sa valeur en dix mois et de nombreuses entreprises ont dû mettre la clé sous la porte. « Le risque « réputationnel » est terrible pour ces gens qui frayent certes avec le régime mais sont avant tout dans la mondialisation », affirme un diplomate européen très au fait de la liste noire établie par l'UE, qui comprend 74 noms.

« L'alliance entre le capital sunnite et le pouvoir alaouite [une branche du chiisme dont est issu le clan Assad] est en train de craquer, confirme un analyste étranger basé à Damas. Tous les hommes d'affaires souffrent et se retournent peu à peu contre le régime. Certains d'entre eux donnent de l'argent ou des médicaments aux familles des victimes. Ils perdent beaucoup d'ar-

gent et réagissent en hommes d'affaires : en se positionnant dans l'optique d'une chute de Bachar. »

Et après ? Le travail de sape des capitales occidentales peut-il modifier la donne politique ? Le délabrement de l'économie profite-t-il vraiment à ceux qui manifestent contre le régime, jour après jour, dans les rues d'Homs ou d'Hama ? Et n'y a-t-il pas de risque de répéter le fiasco de l'embargo contre l'Irak de Saddam Hussein, dans les années 1990, qui avait davantage pénalisé l'homme de la rue que le tyran de Bagdad et ses fidèles ?

« On tient compte des leçons du passé, affirme un diplomate européen. On traque les hommes de paille, comme Mohamed Hamsho, qui est le paravent de Maher Al-Assad [le frère cadet du président, commandant de la 4^e division de l'armée et cerveau de la répression]. On fait du ciblé, du sur-mesure. Le reste, après, nous échappe. »

D'autres sources sont plus mesurées. Elles estiment que le premier cercle du pouvoir demeure encore à l'abri des sanctions, qui frappent certes la bourgeoisie d'affaires, mais aussi le petit peuple. « La clique de Bachar a mis ses fonds au frais depuis longtemps, soutient un diplomate en poste à Damas. Les jeux de capitaux deviennent plus difficiles mais pas impossibles. »

L'annonce faite au mois de juin, par Rami Makhlouf, le cousin honni du président syrien, qu'il renon-

çait à son empire industriel pour se consacrer aux œuvres caritatives n'a pas convaincu les experts européens. Le propriétaire de Cham, une holding tentaculaire qui contrôle notamment Syriatel, le plus gros opérateur de téléphonie mobile syrien, figure toujours sur la liste noire de Bruxelles. « La formule en vogue ces temps-ci dans les rues de Damas, c'est que "Maher [Al-Assad] est toujours en pyjama", poursuit le diplomate basé en Syrie. C'est une façon de dire que les

« Le régime a les reins suffisamment solides pour tenir encore quelques mois »
Un diplomate en poste à Damas

choses sérieuses n'ont pas encore commencé. Le régime joue la montre avec une grande habileté. Il a les reins suffisamment solides pour tenir encore quelques mois. »

Difficile de se faire une idée précise de l'état de désagrégation du pays. A mesure que la Syrie sombre, l'opacité structurelle du système Assad se renforce et, avec elle, le désarroi qui règne dans les chancelleries occidentales, confrontées à l'obstruction de la Russie et de la Chine au Conseil de sécurité des

Nations unies.

Pour les petits malins, quelques bonnes affaires économiques subsistent, notamment dans le domaine immobilier. Dans la banlieue sud de Damas, les chantiers de construction de nouveaux immeubles se multiplient. Et pour cause : soucieux de soigner son image en interne, le régime fermerait désormais les yeux sur les constructions illégales ! ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE

Le Monde
12 janvier 2012

En Syrie, le président Bachar Al-Assad persiste à traiter les insurgés par le mépris

Dans un discours fleuve, le maître de Damas a attribué à un complot de l'étranger le mouvement de protestation qui demande sa démission

Des poches d'ignorance», « une poignée d'égarés », « des terroristes ou des écervelés » : pour son premier discours public depuis plus de six mois, le président syrien, Bachar Al-Assad a fait montre, mardi 10 janvier, à l'égard de ses opposants du même mélange de dédain et de déni, déjà manifeste dans l'entretien qu'il avait donné en décembre 2011 à la chaîne de télévision américaine ABC.

Ces propos ont suscité l'indignation du Conseil national syrien (CNS), qui regroupe la majorité de l'opposition. « Un tel discours est une indication que nous allons vers un comportement encore plus criminel et irresponsable du régime », a déclaré Bassma Kodmani, la porte-parole du CNS.

Dans son intervention d'une heure quarante-cinq, le maître de Damas a une nouvelle fois brandi l'épouvantail du complot de l'étranger, le leitmotiv de la propagande syrienne. Conscient que la population commence à pâtir des sanctions mises en place par l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis, il a stigmatisé « le rêve de la division [de la Syrie] », présent selon lui « dans les esprits de la progéniture de Sykes-Picot », une référence aux deux concepteurs du plan de partage du Proche-Orient arrêté en mai 1916 par la France et la Grande-Bretagne.

En réponse aux capitales occidentales, qui le pressent de s'effacer, Bachar Al-Assad a écarté toute perspective de démission. « Je gouverne avec la volonté du peuple et si je renonce au pouvoir, ce sera aussi avec la volonté du peuple »,

a-t-il déclaré, plus sourd que jamais aux revendications de la rue, qui demande depuis dix mois son départ du pouvoir. De la même manière, le chef d'Etat syrien a répété que ses forces de l'ordre n'avaient jamais reçu l'ordre d'ouvrir le feu contre les manifestants, avant de promettre de frapper « les terroristes » d'une « main de fer ».

Parallèlement à cette démonstration de force à destination des puissances occidentales, qu'un diplomate européen a qualifié de « trompe-l'œil sans surprise », le dirigeant syrien a tenté de donner le change en interne, en dévoilant un calendrier de « réformes » : loi

Paris comme Washington pointent du doigt un « déni de réalité »

sur la libéralisation des médias, mesures anticorruption, nouvelle Constitution qui serait soumise à un référendum au mois de mars, et trois mois plus tard, en juin, de possibles élections législatives.

Al'intention des pays du Golfe et notamment du Qatar, en pointe dans les efforts d'isolement de Damas, M. Assad a eu ces mots sarcastiques : « Le premier Parlement en Syrie date de 1917. Où étaient-ils à cette époque ? »

Cette esquisse d'ouverture n'a cependant pas convaincu les opposants, y compris le Comité national pour le changement démocratique, la plate-forme rivale du CNS, qui refuse, contrairement à celle-

ci, toute internationalisation de la crise. « Il semble que le pouvoir tienne à sa politique sécuritaire et répressive face au soulèvement populaire », a déploré son chef, Hassan Abdel Azim.

A Paris comme à Washington, les réactions officielles ont été similaires, pointant un « déni de réalité », selon les mots d'Alain Juppé, le chef de la diplomatie française. « C'est un discours aux antipodes de ce que l'on pouvait attendre, a-t-il ajouté. Il incite à la violence et à la confrontation entre les deux parties. »

Sur le terrain, l'Algérien Anouar Malek, l'un des observateurs mandatés par la Ligue arabe, a annoncé sa démission, qualifiant de « farce » la mission en place depuis le 26 décembre, qui se heurte à la mauvaise volonté manifeste des autorités syriennes.

Sur la chaîne de télévision qatarie Al-Jazira, il a affirmé que les prisonniers politiques censément libérés ces derniers jours par le régime de Damas sont des personnes arrêtées quelques jours plus tôt et relâchées pour faire bonne mesure devant les caméras de télévision. « Ils n'ont répondu à aucune de nos demandes, a déclaré Anouar Malek, ils essaient de nous tromper et de nous écarter de ce qui se passe réellement sur le terrain. »

Lundi 9 décembre, deux observateurs ont été légèrement blessés, près de Lattaquié, sur la côte. Selon l'ONU, 400 personnes ont été tuées en Syrie depuis le début de la mission arabe, soit 40 morts en moyenne par jour, une estimation plus élevée qu'auparavant. ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE



Iraq's Kurds unwilling to hand Hashemi to Baghdad

January 11, 2012 - By Jon Hemming (Reuters)

ARBIL, Iraq - Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region is unwilling to hand over Iraqi Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi despite a formal demand from the central government that he be sent to Baghdad to face charges of running death squads.

While not refusing outright to arrest the Sunni leader and send him to face trial, Iraqi Kurdish officials said the Baghdad government should accept Hashemi's demand to be tried outside the capital.

Hashemi, who denies the charges, travelled to the Kurdish region after the central government sought his arrest. He says he is willing to face the charges but does not want his trial held in Baghdad where he believes the judiciary is controlled by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

Iraq's Shi'ite-led government issued an arrest warrant for Hashemi in mid-December, just as the last U.S. troops were leaving the country. That triggered a political crisis that threatens Maliki's fragile governing coalition, which is led by Shi'ites but claims support of Kurdish and Sunni factions.

Hashemi is a senior figure of the main Sunni-backed bloc. The move against him, and the isolation of other Sunni leaders, have raised fears of a return of the extreme sectarian violence between Shi'ites and Sunnis which killed tens of thousands of Iraqis in 2006-07.

A string of bombings in mostly Shi'ite areas of Baghdad have killed scores of people in the weeks since U.S. troops left.

"The vice-president said he is ready to go to the court and if he is ready to go to the court, why must he be arrested?" said Dr. Fuad Hussein, chief of staff to the president of the Kurdistan region.

"They must prepare a secure and fair place for the trial and if they do that, he will go there himself," he told Reuters.

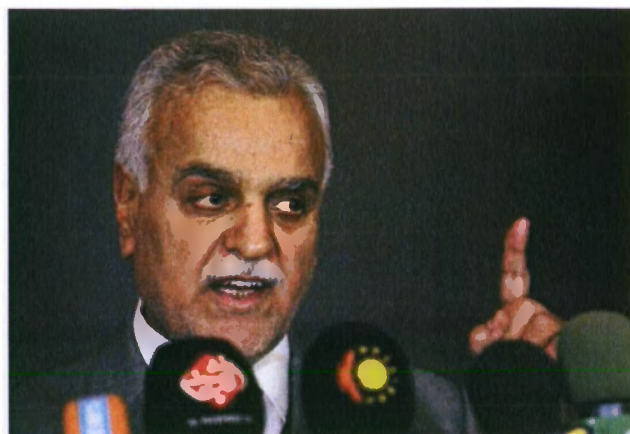
Hashemi has suggested he be tried either in the Kurdish zone, or in Kirkuk, a city outside the Kurdistan region but where Kurdish and Sunni parties wield great power.

"Kirkuk is a shared area between myself and them. There are decent and just courts there. I am awaiting a reply from Baghdad on this issue," Hashemi told the Turkish privately owned Cihan news agency.

KURDS CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Hashemi is currently living at a guesthouse of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, himself a Kurd, in the province of Sulaimaniya, inside the Kurdish controlled north.

"Hashemi is not a fugitive," Talabani said. "He is still a vice president. Secondly, he is accused but not convicted and according to the law the accused is innocent until proven otherwise. He has not been convicted."



Iraq's Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi speaks at a news conference in in Arbil, about 350 km (220 miles) north of Baghdad, December 20, 2011.

"He does not disagree with attending court. All he asks ... is to transfer the place of trial from Baghdad to Kirkuk and he is ready to go to court in Kirkuk. This is an Iraqi city which belongs to the central government."

Kurdistan judicial officials insist the central government does not have the right to send security forces to arrest Hashemi in Kurdistan, which has its own military and police.

After rising up against Saddam Hussein during the 1991 Gulf War, the Kurds won de-facto self-rule from Baghdad, a status formalized under the new Iraqi constitution drawn up after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion.

Largely insulated from the sectarian conflict in the rest of Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan has transformed itself from the poorest region of the country to its most prosperous.

Fiercely jealous of their hard-won autonomy, Kurdish leaders are reluctant to get sucked into the deadly squabbles between Iraq's Shi'ite and Sunni Arabs, and have largely either stood aside, or attempted to mediate between the many factions.

The flight of Hashemi to their midst has thrust the Kurds reluctantly center stage in the unfolding political drama.

During the Saddam era, Iraq's Kurds had closer relations with the Shi'ite leaders now in power who shared their goal of toppling the dictator, but Iraq's Sunni Arabs, clustered in the center of the country, are the Kurds' immediate neighbors.

Bearing in mind Hashemi's previous vocal hostility to Kurdish aspirations, Kurdistan authorities are unlikely to sacrifice their own interests for the sake of the vice-president, analysts said, but may try to use his presence on their soil as a bargaining chip to further their strategic goals such as gaining full control of Kirkuk and its oil wealth.

Masoud Barzani, the president of the Iraqi Kurdish region, proposed a conference to resolve the political differences around the issue of Hashemi, an idea later taken up by Maliki.

"Of course the place, the agenda, who will be invited these are all issues," said Hussein, Barzani's chief of staff. "The government in Baghdad is saying, the prime minister the president are saying that they are going to invite people, but they didn't decide when and how." □

Syria leader taunts rebels and assails Arab League

BEIRUT

Assad vows 'iron fist' to crush 'conspiracy'; monitors are attacked

BY ANTHONY SHADID

In his first public address in months, President Bashar al-Assad of Syria lashed out on Tuesday at the Arab League for isolating his country, mocked Syrian rebels as traitors and vowed to subdue what he said was a foreign-backed plot against his country.

"We will defeat this conspiracy," Mr. Assad said in a speech that lasted nearly two hours.

The address repeated what has become a familiar refrain as Mr. Assad faces his greatest challenge in more than 11 years of authoritarian rule. He pledged to crush what he has cast as terrorism and sabotage, while offering somewhat vague promises of reform.

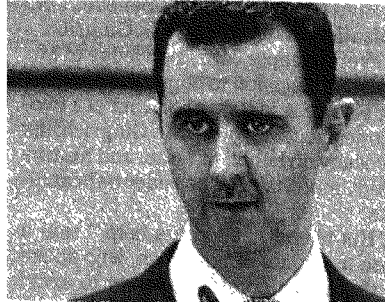
The tenor of his remarks, and his seeming show of confidence, underscored the irreconcilable nature of Syria's crisis, which pits a protest movement demanding that Mr. Assad leave office against a government that rarely acknowledges their grievances.

Mr. Assad denied that his government had ordered security forces to fire on anyone, despite a death toll that the United Nations says has spiraled beyond 5,000 in a relentless crackdown. He promised to hold a referendum on a new constitution in March, a step that seemed pale before the enormity of the crisis, one of the bloodiest of the uprisings that began to sweep the Arab world more than a year ago.

"When I rule, I rule because that it is the people's will, and when I leave office, I leave because it is the people's will," Mr. Assad said.

Syria's uprising seems to have moved into a more complicated, confusing phase in recent weeks. Protests have appeared to revive in some areas, and armed elements of the opposition have seemed emboldened by defections from the security forces.

Meanwhile, bombing attacks in Damascus, the capital, have killed scores of people over the past month. The government has said that foreign-backed terrorists were responsible; the opposition claims the government carried



President Bashar al-Assad speaking on Tuesday at the University of Damascus.



Nabil el-Arabi, the Arab League's secretary general, denounced attacks on observers.

them out itself in a cynical effort to sully the protesters' image.

In the latest turn, the Arab League on Tuesday denounced attacks on its observers in Syria, who arrived last month to monitor an agreement brokered by the league that was meant to end the violence. The league's secretary general, Nabil el-Arabi, said that both loyalists and government opponents had carried out attacks, but that in the end the Syrian government was to blame for failing to provide for the security of the mission. He said the government was "totally responsible" for protecting its 165 observers.

Arab League officials said that in the worst episode, 11 observers were injured Monday in the port city of Latakia when their vehicles were attacked in circumstances that remained unclear. The official news agency of Kuwait, which said two Kuwaitis were among the 11 injured, described the assailants as "unknown protesters," and the foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates blamed "non-opposition elements."

In his speech, given at the University of Damascus and broadcast on Syrian television, Mr. Assad sought to cast the violence in the country as solely a question of terrorism, and he drew parallels between the bombings in Damascus and an Islamist revolt in Syria in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which threatened the hold on power of Mr. Assad's father, Hafez, who ruled for three decades.

"There can be no let-up for terrorism — it must be hit with an iron fist," he said. "The battle with terrorism is a battle for everyone, a national battle, not only the government's battle."

Occasionally interrupted by applause from a friendly audience of members of the ruling Baath Party, university professors and members of Syria's feeble Par-

liament, he added that "victory is near." "There's no tolerance of terrorism or of those who use weapons to kill," he added.

In some ways, the speech was a rhetorical settling of accounts.

Mr. Assad ridiculed the Arab League, which suspended Syria's membership in November, a humiliation for a country that has long seen itself as a fulcrum of the Arab world. "Who lost with Syria's suspension from the Arab League? Syria?" Mr. Assad asked. "No. The Arab League did."

He dismissed the wealthy oil-producing Arab states of the Gulf as countries without culture. Qatar, in particular, has led the region's attempts to further isolate Mr. Assad's government.

"Countries can rent and import some history with their money, but money does not make nations and cultures," Mr. Assad said, in a veiled reference to the Gulf emirates.

He also mocked the Syrian protesters' characterization of themselves as revolutionaries.

"This is not a revolution," Mr. Assad said to an audience that chanted his name at the speech's end. "Is it possible that he is a revolutionary and a traitor at the same time? This is impossible. If there were true revolutionaries, we would be walking together."

Reactions to Mr. Assad's speech predictably broke along lines hardened by the uprising and the crackdown.

"No Syrian can be neutral any more," said a 23-year-old student at the university, who supported Mr. Assad and gave his name as Ali.

"I wasted about two hours of my time listening to meaningless words," said a 30-year-old anti-government activist in Damascus who gave his name as Mazen.

Mr. Assad's speech came at a time of feuding among his opponents in exile, who are deeply divided over the prospect of foreign intervention and the persistent gaps between opposition groups within Syria and those abroad.

"He's becoming stronger with our weakness," Haytham Manna, a prominent Syrian dissident based in Cairo, said of Mr. Assad. "If the opposition doesn't unify, the regime will gain strength."

Omar Idlibi, a spokesman for the Local Coordination Committees, an opposition group, called Mr. Assad's speech another instance of the government's obliviousness to the depth of the challenge it faces from protests and discontent.

"For 10 months, the regime is living in denial," Mr. Idlibi said in a telephone interview. "They're denying reality. He doesn't want to recognize the changes that occurred until today."

Even as Mr. Assad spoke, the death toll appeared to rise again. The Local Coordination Committees said on Tuesday that 30 people were killed, including 16 in the eastern city of Deir al-Zour; there was no way to independently confirm the figures. Opposition groups say hundreds of people have been killed in Syria since the Arab League observers began their work on Dec. 21.

2012: Springtime for Kurdistan?

Can 2012 be the year that Kurdistan will finally regain its place on the geopolitical map?

By Name Change

The Jerusalem post

In 2009, thousands of Iranians took to the streets to protest a fraudulent presidential election that restored Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power. Bereft of any real external support, the demonstrators were beaten and intimidated into submission, although public signs of disapproval toward the regime continue to re-emerge periodically.

For much of this year, the biggest news story of the Middle East has been the so-called "Arab Spring" as massive waves of civil disobedience, general strikes and protest marches toppled dictators from Tunisia to Yemen. Recent electoral results in Tunisia and Egypt show signs of an Islamist revival, leading some commentators to warn of an impending "Islamist Winter".

2012 may prove to be a turning point for yet another of the Near East's great peoples: the Kurds.

But who exactly are the Kurds? Their language, Kurdish, belongs to the broader language family of Persian or Farsi. Yet Kurdish history is shrouded in mystery, with some historians linking them to mountain tribes mentioned by classical Greek authors. Kurdish nationalists themselves claim a more august past, asserting their descent from the powerful Median Empire that dominated the Near East in the sixth century BCE. Promised a state by the victorious Entente powers at the end of the First World War, the Kurds have successfully resisted assimilation by the Persian, Turkish and Arab conquerors, despite the powerful pull of these storied civilizations.

Given the obsessive attention paid by the international media

to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one would be forgiven for supposing that the Palestinians constitute the largest stateless population of the Middle East. But while generous estimates count 11 million Palestinians worldwide, there are well over 20 million Kurds dwelling in the volatile region where Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria meet. In all four of these countries, there are already signs that the Kurds will play a starring role in the key regional events of 2012.

Alone amongst their dispersed brethren, the Kurds of Iraq have their own autonomous region, complete with a flag, a parliament and official borders, which, www.ekurd.net in classic Middle Eastern fashion, are disputed with the Iraqi central government. Since the fall of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, Iraqi Kurdistan has quietly prospered and was largely spared from the civil war that ravaged the rest of Iraq. Kurdish President Massoud Barzani has overseen a boom in oil production and a renaissance of Kurdish culture, although minorities such as Assyrians and Arabs sometimes complain of discriminatory treatment. Overall, the relative security and prosperity of Iraqi Kurdistan serves as a hopeful model for an enlarged Kurdish state.

In recent weeks, Iraqi Kurdistan has been unwillingly thrust into the spotlight by Iraq's sectarian political squabbles. As the last US troops withdraw from the country, Iraq's mercurial Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, is taking steps to set his house in order and emerge from the American orbit. Although he and his party profess Iraqi unity and neutrality, al-Maliki is clearly drifting into an alliance with Iran, his natural Shi'a protector and patron during his years of exile.

To further this goal, he has

ordered the arrest of Sunni Vice-President Tariq al-Hashimi, for allegedly plotting an assassination attempt. Al-Hashimi has since fled to Iraqi Kurdistan, begging and receiving refuge from President Barzani. If the current impasse continues, expect Iraq's Kurds to bolster their de facto independence from Baghdad, flouting central government laws and decrees and quietly inviting American "advisers" to remain in the region.

Meanwhile, Syria's Kurds have been swept up in the torrent of revolution shaking the Assad regime. Long denied citizenship and constantly harassed, Syria's Kurds dwell in the country's only oil-producing region, underlining their strategic importance. After the murder of a local Kurdish strongman in October, his followers seized control of Qamishli, the nerve centre of Syrian Kurdistan.

Nevertheless, the Kurds have been oddly quiet since then, playing no prominent role in the wider Syrian Uprising. Local Kurds are uneasy with Turkish backing for the Syrian rebels, as Turkey has long been a foe of Kurdish aspirations. Indeed, Kurdish representatives stormed out of a Syrian opposition conference in Turkey in May, denouncing their erstwhile hosts. If Syria's budding civil war drags on much longer, the country's Kurds may opt for separatism, hoping to join their comrades in Iraq.

Turkey is home to the world's largest Kurdish population, and also its most restive. Comprising 20% of the population, they have long been targets of repression and forced assimilation. This has sparked a number of revolts since Turkey's birth after the First World War, with the most recent coming under the banner of the PKK, considered a terrorist group by the US

and EU.

Although Turkey's mildly Islamist government of Prime Minister Recep Erdogan stormed to power in part via a promise to respect Kurdish culture and language, it has since backtracked on many of its pledges and faces a renewed PKK insurgency. Last week, Turkey killed 35 of its own Kurdish citizens in a botched airstrike, sparking protests by Kurds throughout Turkish Kurdistan and even in Istanbul, home to many Kurdish migrants.

While the current torpor will probably subside in short order, Turkey has a serious long-term problem with its Kurdish population. Some analysts are predicting that Erdogan's "economic miracle" will come to a crashing halt in 2012 as Europe, Turkey's traditional export market, suffers from increased austerity and financial turmoil. Economic prosperity that benefited all Turkish citizens would come to a sudden end, propelling disgruntled Kurds from the political sidelines directly into the arms of the insurgents.

Moreover, Turkey may soon face its own version of Israel's dreaded "demographic threat". The birthrate in Turkey's rural, agricultural East, populated mainly by Kurds, is rapidly outstripping that of its more urbanized West. At some point, the Turkish military may be stretched far past its limits, attempting to hold down up to a third of the country's citizenry.

Iran's Kurds have been the quietest in the region, receiving little media attention with all the scrutiny applied to their country's potentially catastrophic drive for nuclear arms. Briefly granted sovereignty as a Soviet puppet state in 1946, Iranian Kurds chafed under the Shah's heavy-handed rule. Fervent

supporters of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, many were soon put off by the new regime's discrimination against Sunni Islam, of which most Kurds are adherents.

In 2011, the mullahs crushed the PJAK, a local Kurdish militia group, in a tit-for-tat guerrilla warfare campaign. Nevertheless, 2012 may yet represent a year of opportunity for Iran's Kurdish population. If the Islamic Republic falters, due to either crippling economic sanctions or an American

strike to disable its nuclear program, ethnic minorities such as Kurds, Azeris and Arabs may renew their calls for cultural autonomy and equal rights.

Although the Kurds seem marginalized and far removed from the Middle East's halls of power, prolonged periods of chaos and crisis often bring previously hidden forces to prominence. After all, who had heard of Khomeini before the Islamic Revolution? Who spoke of Lebanon's Shi'a before that country's civil war and the rise

of Hizballah? As the Arabs, Turks and Iranians totter on the edge of political Armageddon, the hour has finally arrived for a Kurdish resurgence.

Emil Fackenheim, one of the greatest Jewish philosophers of modern times, became a staunch advocate of Zionism, especially after the the immense tragedy of the Holocaust. Through the State of Israel, he saw a Jewish "return to history," a drive to reclaim the nation's fate and become actors, rather than

mere observers, in the high-stakes game of international affairs.

No one knows what changes or surprises 2012 will yield. At this point in time, a viable, independent Kurdistan seems little more than a pipe dream. But if they act wisely, boldly and opportunistically, this coming year might be remembered as the year when the Kurds finally returned to take their place in the annals of history. □

Rudaw

11 JANUARY 2012

Experts Analyze US-Kurdish Relationship

By HAWAR ABDULRAZAQ ALI

rudaw.net

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan -- With a new wave of political tension gripping Iraqi politics, the Kurds are trying to strengthen their position by creating an even tighter relationship with Washington.

But some Western experts interviewed by Rudaw via email are skeptical about US-Kurdish ties, asserting that Washington is not necessarily a reliable partner.

William O. Beeman, a professor at the University of Minnesota and a Middle East expert, believes the Washington-Erbil relationship has long been about US interests.

"The United States sadly does not care very much about the Kurds. The Kurds only have strategic value for the United States. As long as the strategic value of Kurdistan and the Kurds remains aligned with American interests the relationship will be positive," he told Rudaw.

Last week, chief of staff of Kurdistan Region President Fuad Hussian told Rudaw in an interview that Kurdish leaders are trying to formalize their relationship with the US through an agreement to ensure Washington's support.

"We asked that the US explain on paper its view regarding its relations with Kurds, especially since they call it "special." We'll put our views on paper and then meet with them so as to formalize the US-Kurdish relationship. Now, we Kurds are drafting that document on our side," Hussein said.

Kurdish leaders became a key US ally

An official delegation from the Kurdistan Region (left) meeting with US senators Joe Lieberman and John McCain.

Photo from Falah Mustafa/Facebook.



in removing Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. That alliance however, was often considered verbal agreement and criticized by some leaders and ordinary Kurds as fragile.

Despite almost one century of hostilities between Kurds and Turks, their long-term common interests have now come to the forefront. With Syria in turmoil, Iran attempting to dominate Baghdad through Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki and US troops out of the country, some believe that only Turkey can offer the Kurdistan Region political protection, sufficient technical expertise, and access to Western markets for its hydrocarbons.

Brendan O'Leary, a political science professor at the University of Pennsylvania and a former Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) adviser, thinks that Kurdish-US relationship should be "a constructive one, based on mutual respect. The KRG must insist that the US respect the Kurdistan Region's full constitutional rights in Iraq and not cherry-pick them. The KRG should have

its Peshmarga officers trained in US and EU armies and police services to build long-term relationships."

The withdrawal of US forces from Iraq and the new political tensions along sectarian lines has also raised questions over whether Iraq will split apart.

Some experts believe that the US will only support an independent Kurdish state if Baghdad becomes hostile toward US interests in the region.

"Since the perception in Washington is that an independent Kurdistan would contribute to instability in the region, the United States will probably continue to oppose outright independence," said Stephen Zunes, chair of the Middle Eastern Studies program at the University of San Francisco. "The only scenario I see in which the United States would support the Kurds would be if US relations with the Baghdad government seriously worsened and they hoped that support for the Kurds could be used as leverage against them." ●

The Kurds' Opportunity

Sectarian tension is already threatening to rend the post-American Iraq.

By RANJ ALAALDIN

In the three weeks since the U.S. withdrew from Iraq, the country has suffered terrorist attacks among the worst it has seen in recent times. One followed just days after the U.S. withdrawal on Dec. 18; another in Baghdad on Monday killed at least 11, in a suicide attack similar to one just four days earlier that killed 70.

The deterioration in security follows a political crisis that engulfed the country and inflamed existing sectarian tensions just hours after the last U.S. convoy left last month. The crisis revolves around an arrest warrant issued against Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, an important representative of Iraq's Sunni community. The warrant was issued by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki on the basis of Mr. Hashimi's alleged complicity in terrorism and death squads.

The vice president denies these charges and accuses Mr. Maliki of concocting the allegations as part of an attempt to increase the Shia hold on power. Mr. Maliki is head of the Shia Islamic Dawa Party and leads a Shia-dominated but vulnerable coalition government. Unless a national conference proposed by Kurdistan President Masoud Barzani takes place and reconciles the differences between the warring factions in Baghdad, the coalition is likely to schism or fall apart completely.

Hence the Kurds, an important U.S. ally in Iraq, have an opportunity to determine the country's fate now that American troops have left it, and to help the country avoid another Sunni-Shia sectarian war. As well as being outsiders to the Arab conflict in Baghdad, the Kurds have also given sanctuary to Mr. Hashimi, who fled to the Kurdish north after the warrant was issued against him.

The Kurds can exploit the divisions in Baghdad by handing Mr. Hashimi

over to Mr. Maliki in return for vital concessions, or they can play nice and promote a process of reconciliation. Neither option is likely to resolve the underlying issues entirely, but the opportunities presented by the crisis exposes what are likely to be important dynamics in Iraq after the U.S. military withdrawal.

Capitalizing on sectarian divisions in Baghdad is tempting for the Kurds, abandoned in many ways by President Obama. Iraq is still dominated by fiercely anti-Kurdish sentiments and hostile neighbors keen on limiting the Kurds' autonomy. Despite repeated requests for viable, long-term protection, Washington has given them nothing.

The U.S. acquiescence has emboldened Baghdad to renege on a series of commitments that were made to the Kurds in exchange for backing Mr. Maliki's return to power in November 2010. Among these is resolving a long-simmering dispute over the constitutional status of historically Kurdish territories. Oil-rich Kirkuk and other territories in Diyala and Mosul provinces are yet to be integrated within Kurdistan's boundaries, largely because Baghdad is intent on restricting Kurdish autonomy with the help of neighbors like Turkey.

The Kurds were also promised independence to sign oil and gas contracts with foreign investors without those investors being penalized by Baghdad. Kurds argue that Baghdad's preferred model of doing business with international oil companies is a failed one because it fails to properly compensate these companies for the risks they take in investing in the country.

Kurds point toward the divergence in electricity supplies across different parts of the country: Kurdistan enjoys 24-hour supply almost all the time, while Baghdad and the rest of Arab Iraq spend much of each day cut off from power. The tide further shifted in the Kurds' favor in November,

when Exxon was confirmed to have acquired interests in Kurdistan, despite already having a contract in the South and repeated threats from Baghdad that the company's operations there would be suspended.

The Kurds need Baghdad to fulfill these commitments because the national government still controls the national pipeline necessary to export oil efficiently and effectively. It also has a military presence in the disputed areas and controls a national budget, 17% of which is constitutionally guaranteed to the Kurds.

But now the tables are turned. With the Hashimi affair, Kurds have a momentous opportunity and could have everything for the taking. Mr. Hashimi, who hails from the former Baath regime, is hardly a Kurdish ally, and has outspoken ultra-nationalist views toward the country's Kurdish and Shia population. The task of feeding Mr. Hashimi to Mr. Maliki is made even easier because Mr. Hashimi, a member of the Iraqiyah bloc that won last year's elections but failed to foster a majority to govern, has little support from within his own bloc.

The incident has created a host of opportunities across the political spectrum, but it also means that the window of opportunity for the Kurds will close precisely when others commit themselves to exploiting the affair. Although the U.S. will oppose any attempt to exploit these divisions, the Kurds may feel that the time is nigh to do the pragmatic thing to help guarantee their long-term political and security interests.

—Mr. Alaaldin is a senior associate at CertusIntelligence and a doctoral candidate at the London School of Economics.■

Bomb kills at least 53 pilgrims in south Iraq

A bomb tore through a procession of Shiite pilgrims heading toward a largely Sunni town in southern Iraq on Saturday, killing at least 53 people in the latest sign of a power struggle between rival Muslim sects that has escalated since the American military withdrawal.

By ADAM SCHRECK and NABILAL-JURANI | Associated Press



ZUBAIR, Iraq — A bomb tore through a procession of Shiite pilgrims heading toward a largely Sunni town in southern Iraq on Saturday, killing at least 53 people in the latest sign of a power struggle between rival Muslim sects that has escalated since the American military withdrawal.

Fears of more bloodshed have risen in recent weeks, with the U.S. no longer enjoying the leverage it once had to encourage the two sides to work together to rein in extremists. Most of the latest attacks appear to be aimed at Iraq's majority Shiites, suggesting Sunni insurgents seeking to undermine the Shiite-dominated government are to blame.

Saturday's blast happened on the last of the 40 days of Arbaeen, when hundreds of thousands of Shiite pilgrims travel to the Iraqi city of Karbala and other holy sites. The end of Arbaeen is one of the most sacred times for Shiites, and public processions to commemorate it were banned under Saddam Hussein.

The blast occurred near the town of Zubair as pilgrims marched from the nearby port city of Basra toward the Imam Ali shrine on the outskirts of the town, said Ayad al-Emarah, a spokesman for the governor of Basra province.

The shrine is an enclave within an enclave - a Shiite site on the edge of a predominantly Sunni town in an otherwise mostly Shiite province

There were conflicting reports of what caused the blast, with some officials saying a roadside bomb was to blame.

But witnesses at the scene described the perpetrator as a suicide bomber disguised as a volunteer handing out juice and food to pilgrims. Ali Ghanim al-Maliki, the head of the Basra provincial council, corroborated that account in an interview with Iraqiya state television.

Arbaeen marks the end of 40 days of mourning following the anniversary of the death of Imam Hussein, a revered Shiite figure who is the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad.

Pilgrims who cannot make it to Imam

Hussein's grave in the holy city of Karbala, south of Baghdad, often journey to other sacred sites such as the shrine near Zubair.

"I saw several dead bodies and wounded people, including children on the ground asking for help. There were also some baby strollers left behind at the blast site," said Majid Hussein, a government employee, who was one of the pilgrims heading to the shrine.

At least 53 people were killed and more than 130 wounded in the blast, said Dr. Riyadh Abdul-Amir, the head of Basra Health Directorate

The U.S. Embassy strongly condemned the attack, saying such acts of violence "tear at the fabric of Iraqi unity."

Many pilgrims were undeterred, and continued on the bloodstained road despite the explosion. Shoes and slippers, as well as the remains of abayas, the long black cloaks most women wear in public, littered the side of the road.

The attack bore the hallmarks of Sunni extremists, who believe Shiites are not true Muslims. It was the latest in a series of deadly strikes during this year's Arbaeen.

More than 145 people have been killed in attacks seen to be aimed at Shiites since the start of the year.

The largest of the Arbaeen attacks - a wave of apparently coordinated bombings in Baghdad and outside the southern city of Nasiriyah - killed at least 78 people on Jan. 5. It was the deadliest strike in Iraq in more than a year.

So far there has been little sign of the revenge attacks by Shiite militias that brought the country to the edge of civil war in 2006. The Shiite prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, has tried with some success to bring the militias' supporters into the political process, but many of their members retain their weapons and could again take up arms.

In the evening, a parked car bomb exploded near a security checkpoint in Saddam's hometown of Tikrit, killing one policeman and wounding four, police said.

The latest violence comes at a particularly tense time.

The last U.S. combat troops left Iraq on Dec. 18. Many Iraqis resented the foreign presence, but the Americans also guaranteed the status quo.

Many of Iraq's minority Sunnis, who dominated the government under Saddam's dictatorship, now fear being marginalized in the now Shiite-led country following the U.S. departure. They also resent what they see as Shiite heavy-weight Iran's meddling in the country's domestic affairs.

"The whole situation is very tense. Sectarianism is coming back in force in this country," said Ayad Allawi, a secular Shiite who heads the Sunni-backed Iraqiya party, in an interview with CNN's "Fareed Zakaria GPS" set to air Sunday. "Iraq is passing through the most dangerous phase through its history now," he added.

Just as the American troops were leaving, a political crisis erupted that has paralyzed Iraq's government, pitting the country's mostly ethnic- and religious-based political blocs against one another.

The spat began when al-Maliki's government called for the arrest of the country's top Sunni politician, Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, accusing him of running a hit squad targeting government officials. Al-Hashemi denies the allegations.

Al-Hashemi's Iraqiya party, meanwhile, is boycotting parliament and Cabinet meetings since last month to protest what it sees as efforts by al-Maliki to consolidate power, particularly over state security forces.

On Friday, Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq of Iraqiya called on al-Maliki to step down or face a parliamentary vote of no-confidence. He accuses the prime minister of creating a new dictatorship.

Iraq's Kurdish president, Jalal Talabani, condemned the Zubair attack as an effort by terrorists to undermine efforts to "heal the rift" dividing the country's

parties.

American officials have been pushing Iraq's squabbling factions to resolve their differences in a way that will benefit all Iraqis. But Washington's influence has been seriously diminished now that

American troops are gone.

Deputy Secretary of State William Burns and other U.S. officials met with al-Maliki on Saturday. The State Dept. had said Burns would encourage Iraqi politicians to resolve their differences.

A statement released by al-Maliki's office about their meeting made no reference to the domestic political crisis, focusing instead on relations between the two countries and Iraq's neighbors.●

Khaleej Times January 11, 2012

SYRIA'S KURDS MISTRUST GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION

By Jon Hemming
(Reuters)

ARBIL, Iraq - Syrian Kurds, the country's largest ethnic minority, do not trust President Bashar al-Assad, nor the opposition, so for now have largely kept out of the uprising against the government, exiled Kurdish opposition representatives said.

The Kurds are also wary of Turkey's growing influence on the Arab groups trying to overthrow Assad, fearing that if they succeed, they will crush Kurdish hopes for autonomy in Syria, due to Ankara's opposition to home-rule for its own Kurds.

"There is no trust between the Kurds and the Arab opposition that's why there are not huge protests in the Kurdish cities," said Majed Youssif Dawi, a Kurdish member of the Syrian National Council main opposition umbrella group.

"We don't have any agreements with the Arab opposition in terms of Kurdish rights," he told Reuters in the Iraqi Kurdish capital Arbil. "We don't have any agreement on how to change the system ... also the statements of the heads of the Arab opposition do not give us any reason to trust them."

While mainly Sunni Arab cities in Syria have seen 10 months of large, almost daily demonstrations against Assad, the mainly Kurdish

towns and cities in northeast Syria, after initial protests, have remained much more calm.

"The Kurds don't support the regime. We Kurds have been against the Syrian regime for more than 20 years and the Kurds were the one of first who came out onto the streets," said Dr. Sarbast Nabi, a Syrian Kurdish politics professor at Salahaddin University in northern Iraq's autonomous region of Kurdistan.

Syrian Kurds clashed with security forces for days, leaving several dead, after an incident at a football stadium in the main Syrian Kurdish city of Qamishli in 2004.

"At that time I was in Damascus," said Nabi. "I don't want to mention any names, but those who are now the heads of the opposition stood against the demands for Kurdish rights ... They still support the ideology Arabisation and political Islam."

As well as the lack of trust between the Kurds and the main opposition groups, the Syrian Kurds have deep divisions among themselves and are backed by different regional players, some by the Iraqi Kurds, and another by the Turkish Kurd rebels, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), independent analysts said.

The Syrian government has increased its support for the PKK as a counterweight to Turkey's backing of the

Syrian opposition, the analysts said, and therefore the PKK's proxies inside Syria had not joined in the struggle to overthrow Assad.

KURDS WARY OF TURKEY'S ROLE

Mahmoud Mohammad Bave Sabir, a leading member of the Democratic Union Kurdish Party of Syria, one of the oldest Kurdish opposition groups, said Assad was playing on Arab fears of Kurdish separatism and Kurdish fears of Arab nationalism.

Any Kurdish protests, he said, had not been met with the same level of forces as elsewhere, where security forces have used live ammunition and killed hundreds of demonstrators.

That, he said, was because Assad feared the reaction of the many thousands of Kurds living in the capital Damascus, and the commercial hub Aleppo, which have until now remained much quieter than outlying smaller towns and cities.

But Kurdish activists inside Syria are still mobilizing the youths who took to the streets regardless of the Kurdish opposition parties, said Dawi, a student activist imprisoned for two months in Syria before fleeing to Iraqi Kurdistan.

He is now in daily contact with fellow activists in the Kurdish towns and cities inside Syria as well as lob-

bing for greater recognition of Kurdish rights from within the main opposition umbrella group based in the Turkish city of Istanbul.

The support for the opposition by Turkey's government, which evolved from a series of banned Islamist parties, has led to Sunni Arab Islamist groups coming to the fore of the protests, the Syrian Kurdish representatives said.

If those groups came to power, the Syrian Kurds said, they would likely still pursue the Arab nationalist policies of the Assad government and stand in the way of Kurdish demands for self-rule, similar to that of Iraq's Kurdish autonomous zone.

"I think the revolution in Syria has not remained in the hands of the Syrian people, but has become a conflict between the regional powers," said student activist Dawi. "We should not trust those big countries because they are putting their own interests first."

"We are afraid of any Turkish role inside Syria," said Professor Nabi. "I am sure Turkey will face strong Kurdish resistance in Syria."

For now, he said, Syria's Kurds were keeping their powder dry, awaiting the outcome of the uprising, but were ready to fight to defend their rights when needed.

"I don't believe they will remain neutral because they are obliged to defend themselves, either against the regime, or after it changes because then the struggle will become multi sided."

☆☆☆

LE FIGARO

19 janvier 2012

L'Iran résolu à soutenir Bachar el-Assad jusqu'au bout

Des officiers de la garde républicaine syrienne sont en formation à Téhéran.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

MOYEN-ORIENT Sauver son allié syrien en l'aidant, même aux prix de douloureuses réformes : après dix mois de révolte contre le régime de Bachar el-Assad, l'Iran reste plus que jamais fidèle à son appui stratégique vis-à-vis de Damas, conscient que les Occidentaux et les monarchies sunnites du Golfe vont continuer à tout faire pour priver Téhéran de son principal soutien dans le monde arabe.

Depuis le mois dernier, les gardiens de la révolution (pasdarans) ont commencé à entraîner en Iran une cinquantaine d'officiers de la garde républicaine syrienne, a-t-on appris de bonne source. L'instruction doit durer neuf mois, au profit notamment de l'unité 101 de cette structure d'élite, forte de 15 000 hommes, parmi les mieux armés des centurions d'Assad. Ils sont issus le plus souvent de la même minorité que lui, les alaouites.

Alors que la IV^e division est déployée à la périphérie sud de Damas, la garde républicaine verrouille, elle, les accès nord d'une capitale dont le centre a été épargné jusqu'ici par l'insurrection.

Cette coopération intervient alors

que les États-Unis sont « persuadés » que l'Iran continue à fournir des armes pour aider la répression des manifestants par le régime syrien. La visite à Damas, début janvier, du général Qassem Soleimani, patron de l'unité al-Qods, le bras armé des gardiens de la révolution hors d'Iran, est, selon Washington, le signe le plus concret que cette aide comprend du matériel militaire (des munitions, notamment).

L'aide militaire se poursuit

« Nous sommes certains qu'il (Soleimani) a été reçu par les plus hautes instances du gouvernement syrien, y compris par le président Assad », déclarait récemment un responsable américain. En juin, l'Union européenne avait sanctionné Soleimani, ainsi que le patron des pasdarans, le général Mohammad Ali Jafari, et Hossein Tayyeb, le coordinateur du soutien logistique à Damas. À deux reprises, quelques semaines auparavant, des armes iraniennes à destination de la Syrie avaient été interceptées par Israël, via l'aéroport turc de Diarbakyr et par mer. L'Iran est également soupçonné d'avoir épaulé la Syrie dans sa cyberguerre contre les insurgés.

« L'Iran aidera la Syrie en cas de

frappe militaire étrangère contre Damas », a affirmé hier à la chaîne al-Arabiya un dirigeant des gardiens de la révolution. Il répondait à l'émir du Qatar, Cheikh Hamad al-Thani, qui, samedi dernier, a été le premier leader arabe à appeler à l'envoi de troupes arabes en Syrie. Comme si Iraniens chiïtes et Arabes sunnites marquaient leurs positions sur le dossier syrien.

Mais l'aide iranienne à Damas ne se

limite pas aux armes. Via l'Irak, Téhéran aurait promis à Damas d'écouler en sous-main le pétrole que l'Europe a décidé de ne plus lui acheter. Régulièrement depuis six mois, des intermédiaires iraniens approchent également des opposants syriens en exil. C'est ce que vient de révéler un dirigeant des Frères musulmans, Mohammad Farouk Tayfour, au journal saoudien *al-Hayat*. « Ils nous ont proposé (...) de diriger un

gouvernement à condition que nous renoncions à notre demande de remplacer Bachar el-Assad », a dit Tayfour.

À Paris, un autre dirigeant syrien, laïc celui-là, a été recontacté à deux reprises ces derniers mois par des émissaires iraniens qui l'avaient déjà rencontré l'été dernier. N'ayant pas reçu de réponse de Téhéran aux demandes qu'il avait formulées, l'opposant a décliné les sollicitations iraniennes. ■



Des blindés de l'armée syrienne stationnent à Homs le 17 janvier. REUTERS

Paris redoute des frappes sur l'Iran pendant l'été

A lors que les périls s'accroissent dans la région du Golfe, où Etats-Unis et Iran semblent au bord de la confrontation, la France est engagée dans un effort diplomatique dont l'objectif se résume ainsi, selon l'entourage de Nicolas Sarkozy : « *contraindre l'Iran à faire un choix binaire : l'avenir du régime, ou la bombe nucléaire* ».

On estime, à Paris, qu'une campagne de sanctions internationales paralysantes pour l'économie iranienne s'impose de manière urgente, car le risque est grand de voir Israël procéder à des frappes aériennes contre des sites nucléaires iraniens « *durant l'été 2012* ».

Les responsables français considèrent de longue date qu'ils sont investis d'un rôle particulier de vigilance sur cette crise mettant en cause la paix au Proche-Orient ainsi que l'ordre nucléaire mondial. Chose frappante, la récente dramatisation des enjeux donne lieu à de nouvelles tensions feutrées entre l'équipe de M. Sarkozy et celle de Barack Obama.

Rien n'en paraît publiquement, et les deux dirigeants affichaient une bonne entente lors de leur prestation télévisée conjointe, début novembre 2011, en marge du G20 de Cannes. Mais derrière cette façade, les responsables français reprochent à l'administration Obama d'avoir été hésitante pour la mise en œuvre de sanctions radicales contre l'Iran, alors que, selon eux, un compte à rebours est engagé.

« *Obama s'est fait imposer par le Congrès américain les mesures qu'il a signées le 31 décembre* », portant sur un étouffement progressif des transactions internationales avec la Banque centrale iranienne, relève-t-on à Paris. « *Il l'a fait à son corps défendant* », souligne un officiel, rappelant que le Sénat américain avait voté par « *100 voix contre zéro* » pour imposer une politique plus stricte sur l'Iran, alors que la Maison blanche voulait diluer ou retarder certaines mesures.

Un diplomate français de haut rang souligne qu'il a été difficile pour M. Obama d'envisager des mesures contre le pétrole iranien car le président américain serait prisonnier de considérations électoralistes : une flambée des cours du brut rejaillirait négativement sur sa campagne de réélection.

Placé sous la pression du Parti républicain, dont tous les candidats ne cessent d'agiter le danger iranien, Barack Obama aurait par ailleurs du mal à reconnaître ce qui est perçu, à Paris, comme « *l'échec de sa politique de la main tendue* » à Téhéran. Une politique qui avait suscité de fortes réserves, côté français, notamment à propos d'une offre d'échange d'uranium enrichi faite, en vain, fin 2009.

Encore aujourd'hui, certains officiels français se méfient d'une propension d'une partie de l'administration américaine à rechercher un compromis « bancal » avec Téhéran. C'est pourquoi Paris insiste, au sein du groupe des grandes puissances traitant cette crise, pour que l'exigence de la suspension de l'enrichissement d'uranium, inscrite dans les résolutions de l'ONU depuis 2006, soit constamment rappelée.

Alors que Washington hésitait à frapper le secteur des exportations iraniennes de pétrole, l'Elysée avait rendu publique, le 21 novembre 2011, une lettre de M. Sarkozy aux autres dirigeants occidentaux, appelant à des mesures plus décisives : interruption des achats de brut iranien et gel des avoirs de la Banque centrale. Ce sont ces mesures – en particulier l'embargo pétrolier – que la France estime avoir réussi à imposer au niveau de l'Union européenne, qui devrait annoncer des décisions en ce sens le 23 janvier.

La France, par son activisme en faveur de sanctions d'un registre nouveau, veut s'inscrire dans un triangle diplomatique avec Washington et Israël, dans l'espoir d'occuper un rôle central. Les responsables français ont ainsi relayé le message israélien au sein de l'Europe et auprès de l'équipe Obama, pour la mise en place d'un embargo pétrolier. Non sans, d'ailleurs, s'appuyer sur des contacts au sein du Congrès américain, manifestement perçu à Paris comme un allié, ainsi qu'il l'est par le premier ministre israélien, Benyamin Nétanyahou.

Mais la France n'endosse pas pour autant la ligne des « *faucons* » du Likoud, insiste-t-on à Paris, car elle continue de faire l'analyse que le scénario militaire contre l'Iran serait une « *catastrophe* », comme l'avait dit M. Sarkozy dès août 2007.



Le président Nicolas Sarkozy accueille, sur le perron de l'Elysée, le premier ministre israélien, Benyamin Nétanyahou, en mai 2011.

Des frappes aériennes auraient pour effets de « *souder les Iraniens derrière [le Guide] Khamenei, sou-*

der tous les chiites derrière l'Iran, et elles ne feraient que retarder le programme nucléaire iranien, sans lui porter un coup d'arrêt définitif », dit un officiel, catégorique. Et c'est précisément pour « *chercher une alternative à ce qui serait une grosse bêtise israélienne* » que la France déploie tant d'efforts en faveur des sanctions.

Celles-ci visent à convaincre l'Iran qu'il vaudrait mieux arrêter – avant qu'il ne soit trop tard – son programme nucléaire, plutôt que d'encourir des mesures susceptibles de provoquer un effondrement économique du pays, et donc, de mettre en péril le régime. Il ya urgence à faire aboutir cette stratégie car l'année 2012 est « *crucia-*

nucléaire iranien pour régler le problème », commente un responsable français. Un tel délai correspond à celui évoqué par le ministre israélien de la défense, Ehoud Barak.

Selon un diplomate français de haut rang, « *si les Israéliens veulent "taper" avant qu'un stade irréversible soit atteint, le meilleur moment, c'est avant l'élection présidentielle américaine* ». Car, en pleine campagne électorale, Barack Obama « *serait soumis à une pression politique irrésistible pour ne pas laisser Israël seul face à la tentation de frapper militairement* ». « *Si Israël frappe, souligne cette source, ce sera avant le 6 novembre* ». En précisant : « *Le moment de tous les dangers, c'est l'été 2012.* »

Nicolas Sarkozy est « *le président le plus engagé, dans le monde* » sur le dossier iranien, souligne-t-on dans son entourage. La montée des tensions régionales ainsi que l'avancée des travaux scientifiques iraniens, décrite dans le dernier rapport des inspecteurs internationaux, favorisent une nouvelle mobilisation. Certains, à Paris, anticipent que le chef de l'Etat s'emparera de ce thème dans sa campagne électorale, pour valoriser sa fermeté et sa constance face à une crise de prolifération qui comporte désormais de lourds dangers de dérapage militaire. ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

Les responsables français reprochent à l'équipe Obama ses hésitations sur le dossier du nucléaire iranien

le ». « *Nous sommes convaincus qu'il reste à peu près un an avant la bombe* » iramienne et que « *les Israéliens n'attendront pas un essai*

L'Etat turc reste arc-bouté sur la négation du génocide arménien

Istanbul
Correspondance

Une « monstruosité ». D'un mot, le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, avait condamné le Monument de l'humanité, une statue colossale inachevée symbolisant la réconciliation entre la Turquie et l'Arménie, à Kars, dans l'est du pays, en janvier 2011. La sculpture a été démembrée quelques mois plus tard. Les grues sont entrées en action le 24 avril... jour anniversaire du déclenchement du génocide arménien de 1915.

A Igdir, plus au sud, le long de cette frontière close entre la Turquie et l'Arménie, une autre « œuvre » se dresse face à Erevan, sans être inquiétée par les bulldozers : le Monument du génocide contre les Turcs, érigé à la mémoire des Turcs massacrés par des Arméniens, caricature à l'extrême le déni officiel, toujours omniprésent dans le paysage.

Un boulevard du centre de la capitale, Ankara, et une école à Istanbul portent ainsi le nom du principal ordonnateur des crimes de 1915, Talaat Pacha, tué en 1921 à Berlin par un rescapé du génocide. Et sa dépouille, rendue par Adolf Hitler en 1943, repose dans un mausolée sur la colline de la Liberté, à Istanbul, aux côtés d'autres héros du modernisme turc.

Près d'un siècle après les faits, la Turquie refuse toujours de qualifier de « génocide » la déportation et les massacres organisés de 1 à 1,5 million d'Arméniens par le gouvernement nationaliste Jeunes-Turcs. Elle admet des « déplacements de populations » et des massacres réciproques, où 300 000 à 500 000 Arméniens périrent, dans le contexte de la première guerre mondiale.

« Il n'y a aucun génocide dans notre histoire », a proclamé récemment M. Erdoğan, fidèle à la doctrine instaurée par ses prédécesseurs. La Turquie mobilise toujours d'importants moyens pour lutter contre ce qu'elle nomme « les allégations arméniennes d'un prétendu génocide ».

« La négation du génocide arménien est une industrie », lance l'universitaire Taner Akçam, l'un des premiers intellectuels turcs à avoir dénoncé la version officielle de l'histoire. « C'est une structure, une poli-

tique d'Etat de première importance, continue-t-il. Il faut réaliser que l'on n'est pas face à un simple déni, mais à un régime négationniste. La négation va bien au-delà de la défense d'un ancien régime, dont les institutions et l'idéologie se sont traduites par un génocide. Le déni nourrit jusqu'à aujourd'hui une politique d'agression continue, à l'intérieur comme à l'extérieur de la Turquie, contre tous ceux qui s'opposent à cette idéologie négationniste. »

Il suffit de naviguer sur les sites gouvernementaux turcs pour en avoir un aperçu. Celui du ministère de la culture consacre la moitié de ses dossiers historiques à la négation du génocide de 1915. Quant aux services de renseignements, le MIT, ils revendiquent eux-mêmes la filiation directe avec l'Organisation spéciale (Teskilat-i-Mahsusa), fondée en 1914 et dont le rôle fut central dans les massacres.

M. Akçam rappelle aussi la création, en 2001, par le Conseil national de sécurité, la plus haute instance constitutionnelle turque, d'un

Comité de coordination de la lutte contre les accusations infondées de génocide (Asimkk), rassemblant des représentants des grands ministères régaliens (défense, justice, intérieur, affaires étrangères, éducation, culture) et des militaires.

« La Turquie n'aime pas qu'on lui rafraîchisse la mémoire »

Taner Akçam
historien et sociologue turc

Ce comité, mis sur pied à l'époque du vote en France de la loi reconnaissant le génocide arménien, était plus ou moins en sommeil depuis 2006, mais risque de reprendre du service.

Autre exemple de ce négationnisme d'Etat, le département de recherches arméniennes de l'Institut d'histoire turque (TTK), une institution fondée sous Kemal Ata-

türk et chargée de nourrir la rhétorique historique officielle.

Pour cet organe, les Arméniens de l'Empire ottoman en 1915 sont assimilés en bloc à des « traîtres » ou à des « terroristes », alliés aux troupes russes. C'est cette version de l'histoire que l'on retrouve, jusqu'à aujourd'hui, dans tous les livres scolaires, et qui baigne chaque écolier turc de la maternelle à l'université. « La Turquie a poursuivi une politique d'amnésie volontaire et de tactique dilatoire. Elle a poussé le sujet sous le tapis, prétendu qu'il n'existait pas et espéré que tout le monde aurait la mémoire courte. C'est pour cela qu'il y a tant de colère contre la France. La Turquie n'aime pas qu'on lui rafraîchisse la mémoire », estime M. Akçam.

Mais le centenaire du génocide, en 2015, approche et la Turquie s'inquiète de la campagne internationale qui s'annonce. La proposition de loi présentée en France, adoptée par l'Assemblée nationale le 22 décembre 2011 et sur laquelle le Sénat doit se prononcer lundi 23 janvier, n'en est qu'une première étape. D'autres pays pourraient à leur tour reconnaître officiellement le génocide de 1915, notamment les Etats-Unis, où la question est régulièrement soulevée.

Pour contrer ces revendications dans les pays où vivent de fortes communautés arméniennes, la Turquie ne lésine pas sur les moyens. « L'Etat déploie des ressources incalculables pour que la Turquie ne soit pas accusée de génocide », explique Samim Akgönül, professeur à l'université de Strasbourg.

Aux Etats-Unis, la puissante Turkish Coalition of America dispose de 3,5 millions de dollars par an (2,5 millions d'euros) pour financer des actions de lobbying auprès d'élus, des chaires universitaires ou des campagnes publicitaires.

En France aussi des associations et des sites Internet sont créés pour propager les thèses de l'histoire officielle. Le Fonds gouvernemental de promotion de la Turquie édite brochures et livres promotionnels. Et, pour porter le message, un comité Talaat-Pacha a été créé en 2006 autour de politiciens tels que l'ancien leader chypriote turc Rauf Denktaş. Ce rassemblement nationaliste a organisé des défilés à Berlin, à Lausanne et, en 2011, à Paris. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER



A Istanbul, le mausolée de Talaat Pacha, ministre de l'intérieur à partir de 1913 et organisateur du génocide arménien en 1915. MATHIAS DEPARDON

Privately, U.S. gives Iran a stern warning

WASHINGTON

Using secret channel, ayatollah told that closing strait would elicit action

BY ELISABETH BUMILLER, ERIC SCHMITT AND THOM SHANKER

The Obama administration is relying on a secret channel of communication to warn the supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, that closing the Strait of Hormuz is a "red line" that would provoke a response from Washington, according to U.S. government officials.

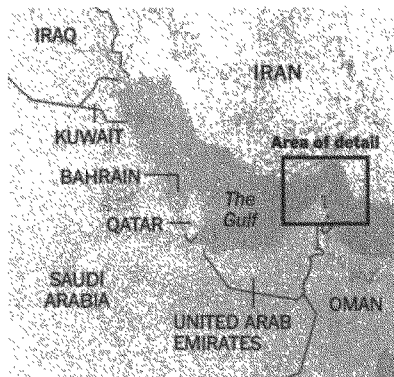
The officials declined to describe the unusual contact between the two governments or say whether there had been an Iranian reply. Senior Obama administration officials have said publicly that Iran would cross a "red line" if it made good on recent threats to close the strait, a strategically crucial waterway connecting key oil producers to the Gulf of Oman and beyond, where 16 million barrels of oil — about a fifth of the world's trade — flow through every day.

Administration officials and Iran analysts said they continued to believe that threats from Iran to close the strait were bluster, coming as sanctions over its nuclear program take a deeper bite out of its economy and what appears to be a covert war against it escalates.

The latest victim of that presumed war, Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, an Iranian nuclear scientist, was buried Friday as hundreds of chanting mourners carried his flag-draped coffin, Reuters reported. The United States has denied responsi-

A narrow and vulnerable strait

The shipping lanes through the Strait of Hormuz are only about ten kilometers, or six miles, wide and are vulnerable to attack by missiles. The strait could also be mined, and ships could easily be attacked by armed Iranian speedboats.



bility, though Israel has not. Despite the sanctions, Iran has continued to pursue its nuclear program, which it says is entirely peaceful and is protected under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. The West suspects it is pursuing a bomb.

Citing unidentified diplomatic sources, Reuters also reported that a high-level United Nations team from the International Atomic Energy Agency was expected to visit Tehran soon to discuss the agency's growing concerns. Its chief safeguards inspector, Herman Nackaerts; its assistant director general, Rafael Grossi; and other senior officials will probably visit around Jan. 28, it was reported.

The secret communication channel between Washington and Tehran was chosen to underscore privately to Iran the depth of U.S. concern about rising tensions over the strait, where U.S. naval officials say their biggest fear is that an overzealous naval captain from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps could do something provocative on his own, setting off a larger crisis.

"If you ask me what keeps me awake at night, it's the Strait of Hormuz and the business going on" in the Gulf, Adm. Jonathan W. Greenert, the chief of naval operations, said in Washington this past week.

Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, said last weekend that the United States would "take action and reopen the strait," which could be accomplished only by military means, including minesweepers, warship escorts and, potentially, airstrikes. Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta told troops in Texas on Thursday that the United States would

not tolerate Iran's closing of the strait.

For Iran, blocking the route for the vast majority of its petroleum exports — and for its food and consumer imports — would amount to economic suicide. "They would basically be taking a vow of poverty with themselves," said Dennis B. Ross, who until last month was one of President Barack Obama's most influential advisers on Iran. "I don't think they're in such a mood of self-sacrifice."

But Pentagon officials, who plan for every contingency, said that, however unlikely, Iran does have the military capability to close the strait. Although Iranian naval forces are hardly a match for those of the United States, for two decades Iran has been investing in the weaponry of asymmetric warfare: mines, fleets of heavily armed speedboats and anti-ship cruise missiles hid-

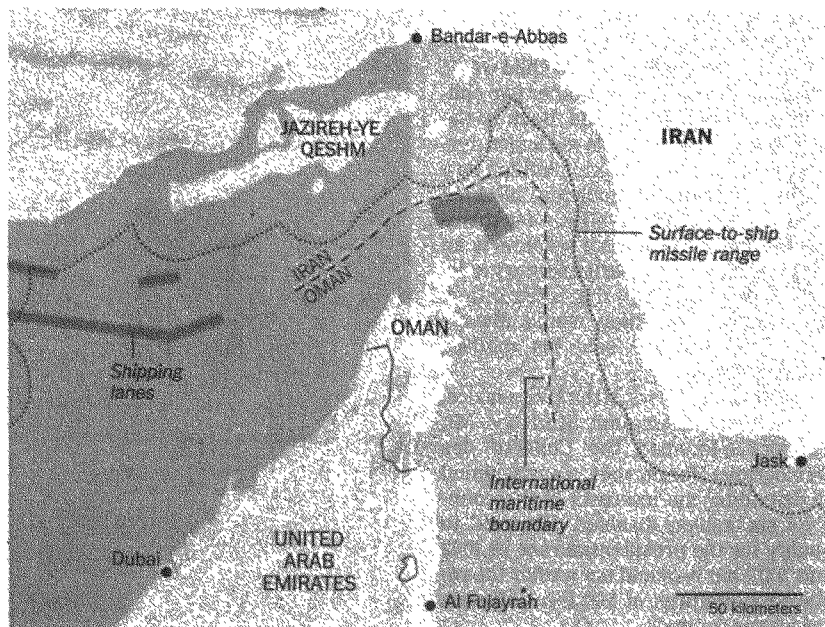
"The simple answer is yes, they can block it."

den along Iran's 1,600 kilometers, or 1,000 miles, of Gulf coastline.

"The simple answer is yes, they can block it," General Dempsey said on CBS last Sunday.

Estimates by naval analysts of how long it could take for U.S. forces to reopen the strait range from a day to several months, but the consensus is that while Iranian naval forces could inflict damage, they would ultimately be destroyed.

"Their surface fleet would be at the bottom of the ocean, but they could score a lucky hit," said Michael Connell, the director of the Iranian studies pro-



Sources: University of Texas; U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence

gram at the Center for Naval Analysis, a research organization for the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps. "An anti-ship cruise-missile could disable a carrier."

Iran has two navies: one of big ships dating from the era of the shah, and the other of fast-attack speedboats and guerrilla tactics under the politically favored Revolutionary Guards. Senior U.S. naval officers say that the Iranian Navy is for the most part professional and predictable but that the Revolutionary Guards Corps, which has responsibility for operations in the Gulf, is not.

"You get cowboys who do their own thing," Mr. Connell said.

The Revolutionary Guards Corps has been steadily building and buying faster missile boats and stockpiling what U.S. experts say are at least 2,000 naval mines. Many are relatively primitive and easy to slip into the water.

"Iran's credible mining threat can be an effective deterrent to potential en-

emy forces," an unclassified report by the Office of Naval Intelligence, the U.S. Navy's intelligence arm, concluded in 2009. "The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow choke point that could be mined effectively in a relatively short amount of time."

Although the United States would respond with minesweepers, analysts said U.S. naval forces might encounter layers of simultaneous attacks. The Iranians could launch anti-ship missiles from their coastline, islands or oil platforms and at the same time surround any U.S. ship with missile-armed speedboats. "The immediate issue is to get the mines," Mr. Connell said. "But they're going to have to deal with the anti-ship cruise missiles, and you'll have small boats swarming, and it's all going to be happening at the same time."

The United States could take out the anti-ship missile launchers with strikes

from fighter jets or missiles, but analysts said it could take time to do so because the launchers on shore were mobile and often camouflaged.

The tight squeeze of the strait, which is 54 kilometers wide at its narrowest point, offers little maneuvering room for warships. "It would be like a knife fight in a phone booth," said a senior U.S. Navy officer. The strait's shipping lanes are even narrower: The inbound and outbound lanes are each just over three kilometers wide, with only a similarly wide stretch separating them.

U.S. officials indicated that the recent and delicate messages expressing concern about the Strait of Hormuz were conveyed through a channel other than the Swiss government, which the United States has often used as a neutral party to relay diplomatic messages to Tehran.

International Herald Tribune

JANUARY 14-15, 2012

KEEP PRESSING IRAN

With tensions rising over Iran's nuclear program, the Obama administration has warned Ayatollah Ali Khamenei that Iran's threat to close the Strait of Hormuz would provoke an American response. Earlier this week, international monitors confirmed that Iran has begun enriching uranium at a new underground plant. The United States and Europe are tightening sanctions to choke off Iranian oil revenues. On Wednesday, an Iranian nuclear scientist died in a bomb attack en route to work, and a government newspaper signaled that the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps might retaliate.

Many officials, experts and commentators increasingly expect some kind of military confrontation. No one should want to see Iran acquire a nuclear weapon. But a military strike on the nuclear facilities would be a disaster.

It is unclear whether any mix of sanctions and inducements could persuade Tehran to abandon its nuclear ambitions. There is another option besides force: negotiations with the United States and other major powers over curbing Iran's program in exchange for ending sanctions and diplomatic isolation.

The United Nations Security Council demanded that Iran stop enriching uranium more than five years ago. Iran claims it only wants access to nuclear technology for electricity and other peaceful purposes. But that excuse is hollow. The major powers have said that power generation would be guaran-

teed if Iran abandons its weapons ambitions. Instead, Iran is still enriching uranium and mastering other technologies that would allow it to build a nuclear weapon. According to the latest report from U.N. inspectors, Iran has created computer models of nuclear explosions, conducted experiments on nuclear triggers and completed advanced research on a warhead that could be delivered by a medium-range missile.

Economic pressure could be more effective if the Security Council ratcheted up its existing sanctions. A new round has been delayed by opposition from Russia and China.

A new U.S. law that would penalize foreign companies that do business with Iran's central bank and an oil embargo that European Union foreign ministers plan to approve on Jan. 23 could have an even bigger impact. The Obama administration and European officials seem likely to phase in these sanctions in a way that limits the damage to the world economy. Japan has pledged to buy less Iranian oil, China and South Korea are looking for alternative suppliers, and India's intent is unclear. Tehran is more likely to respond if all the major importers apply pressure together.

The Americans and Europeans are working with Turkey to set up a new round of negotiations with Iran in Istanbul. The Iranians need to know that the economic pressure will not let up until they stop the nuclear program.

International Herald Tribune JANUARY 14-15, 2012

Arab League chief voices fear of civil war in Syria

AMMAN

REUTERS

Protests against President Bashar al-Assad erupted in several Syrian cities on Friday, activists said, and the Arab League chief said he feared the unrest could degenerate into a civil war.

Security forces killed a demonstrator in the northwestern town of Idlib and a 17-year-old youth in the central city of Hama, the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said, adding that five people had been wounded when security forces fired on demonstrators in the town of Kafr Shams, outside Damascus. The Local Coordination

Committees, another activist group, put the death toll at eight, including two in Homs and two in Hama.

Armed clashes now punctuate what began in March as a nonviolent protest movement.

"Yes, I fear a civil war, and the events that we see and hear about now could lead to a civil war," Nabil al-Araby, head of the Arab League, said in an interview with Al Hayat Television in Egypt. "Any problems in Syria will have consequences for the neighboring states."

Mr. Araby said the bloodshed had abated somewhat since the observers arrived.

The United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, starting a visit to Leb-

anon, told An Nahar, a Beirut daily, that he had repeatedly urged Syria to halt killings that have turned unrest against Mr. Assad into one of the bloodiest of the Arab uprisings.

"The Syrian authorities must respond to the legitimate democratic aspirations of the Syrian people," he said, adding that the Security Council, so far divided over Syria, should find a way to speak with one voice on the issue.

Protests flared after Friday Prayer in some areas of Damascus. In Latakia, a port city, one activist said that people near a mosque chanted, "The people want the fall of the regime," the phrase popularized in the Arab Spring, beginning with the Tunisian revolution.

Iranian Kurdish Opposition Groups Push Unity

By NAWZAD MAHMOUD and KAWA ABDULLA

SUALIMANI, Iraqi Kurdistan – For years, more than 400 Kurdish families affiliated with or members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) have been living in a small refugee camp in Koya city in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

At a party convention in 2006, a faction split from KDPI and formed the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (DKP). The division is reflected in the camp of some Kurdish cities.

Now, however, mounting international pressure on Iran has presented Kurdish dissident groups with an opportunity to set aside their differences and unite.

One member of the KDPI speaking on condition of anonymity, said, “We are supposed to be the hope of a nation, but look at what we are doing here. I am sure Iranian Kurds have lost hope in us.”

The KDPI member expressed disappointment at the attitude of Iranian Kurdish parties, saying, “Their domestic disagreements have halted their struggle against the Iranian regime for the past six years.”

For his part, Shaho Faraj, a KDPI leader, said, “I have no hope for any ties bet-

“I am sure Iranian Kurds have lost hope in us.”

ween both sides. Even if we are untied now we will soon be divided again.”

Like many other Kurdish dissidents in Iran, Faraj agreed that the parties are paying the price for their split and that now more than ever, unity is needed.

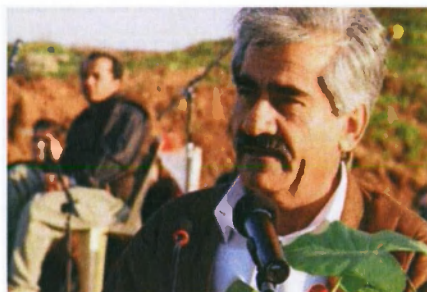
Faraj, who left Iranian Kurdistan 13 years ago to join the struggle against the Islamic Republic, said, “Even if there are attempts for ties between both sides, there isn’t a framework for it.”

Mustafa Mawludi, deputy leader of Democratic Party of Kurdistan (DPK), blamed his former colleagues at KDPI for the division.

“The division cost the Democratic Party many supporters,” he said.

Mawlud argued that unification shouldn’t be difficult if both sides are willing to work on it.

“But unfortunately, we keep growing further and further apart,” he said.



Leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) Mustafa Hijri.

Since the split in 2006, the only common ground between KDPI and DPK appears to be a picture of the founder of the party in 1945, Qazi Muhammad, who declared a Kurdish Mahabad Republic in western Iran in 1946 with the help of the Soviets following the Second World War.

The dispute between the two groups reached a point where former colleagues clashed inside the camp on several occasions.

“The real solution is to become one again,” Mawludi maintained. “If we

“we struggle for a nation’s freedom but we cannot get along in a small camp.”

won’t do so, then we should at least act like two responsible political parties and work together.”

Mutasam Nurani, a member of KDPI, fears that his party’s image is tainted in the eyes of ordinary Kurds in Iran.

“The Iranian Kurds are the most disappointed in us,” he said. “Without any doubt, that is very bad for our reputation. Imagine we struggle for a nation’s freedom but we cannot get along in a small camp.”

Nurani, who was for years a senior KDPI leader, said, “We are very tired of this. There are no more excuses to continue this way. We have a bad reputation. The fighters of both sides have become very pessimistic in this situation.”

Members and fighters on both sides have started to talk to each other and the tensions seem to have eased.

Rambud Lutfpour, a former leader of DPK, said, “The situation is better now. We exchange condolences and greet each other. The people of the camp have a better understanding of the issues now.”

Lutfpour said that he is hopeful that

both parties are stepping towards reconciliation.

“In the past, the personal interests of some leaders from both sides had created this division,” he said. “The issues must be resolved between both sides because if this continues Iranian Kurds won’t accept us anymore.”

Qazi Muhammad, the founder of KDPI, was hanged by the Iranian authorities in 1946. Abdolrahman Ghassemlu led the party until he was assassinated in Vienna in 1989, allegedly by Iranian agents. The party’s third leader, Sadiq Sharafkandi, was also assassinated in a restaurant in Germany in 1992.

At the 2006 convention, party members elected Mustafa Hijri as their leader which forced the split, with the creation of DKP under Khalid Azizi’s leadership.

In a television interview, Hijri, the head of KDPI, called on his former colleagues to meet for reconciliation talks possibly at the party’s next convention.

In response, Azizi, the head of DKP said, “Instead of us going to their convention and them coming to ours, let’s have a joint convention. In order to do this we will have to form a committee from both sides.”

According to Muhammad Nazifi, a leader at the KDPI, authorities of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq have urged the Iranian Kurds to solve their disputes.

“Two years ago, we met with the Kurdistan Region president’s office and they asked us to resolve the issues between us,” Nazifi said. Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani’s office “tried hard to unite us, and there is currently a glimpse of hope in Hijri’s suggestion, but the other side isn’t responding to it.”

But Qadir Wirya from the DPK dismissed the claims that his group is ignoring calls for unity.

“We have always suggested new ideas for ties between us,” he said. “We suggest the leaders of both parties meet and discuss Hijri’s ideas.”

“The situation is better now. We exchange condolences and greet each other.”

Hijri has suggested that both groups start talks where they left off at the 2006 convention, but Wirya disagrees.

“Why do we have to return to the 13th (2006) convention? They even themselves held their 14th convention. The only solution is to hold a joint convention and resolve our issues.”●

Iraq's Turmoil: Likelihoods to Open up Pandora's Box for Turkey

The polarization of Iraq's Arabs, which is a result of the current turmoil, would lead to dangerous consequences for Turkey, warns Idrees Mohammed.

Middle East Online

The rift rises between Iraq and Turkey as Iraq summons Turkish ambassador to call on his government to consider the "necessity of avoiding anything that might disturb" the ties. The move comes amid the already chilly atmosphere between Ankara and Baghdad due to the former's attitude to the latter's Shiite-led government's action to arrest Iraq's Vice President. Turkish Prime Minister warned his Iraqi counterpart over the action, warning that his action will hurt the country's democracy and urging him to reduce the tension. His calls were harshly slammed by Iraqi Prime Minister who expressed surprise of Turkey's "interference" in his country's internal affairs, declaring his determination not to "allow that absolutely."

Iraq passes through a dangerous period as the "big mosaic rock" between Shiite and Sunni ultimately exploded, causing an unprecedented political turmoil and uproar in "new Iraq." The Kurds found themselves automatically involved in the game which as well attracted several countries including the United States, Turkey and Iran primarily. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Syria are reckoned sides to the turmoil. Unless a compromise is reached, the domestic, regional and even international risks are high.

Much of the turmoil is attributed to the Syrian epic and the emerging authoritarianism in Iraq. Iraq's Shiite-led government sided with Iran and Syrian government on several occasions including its allegedly financial support to the Syria regime and the objection to the Arab League's decision in order to maintain the regime in power. Rather to contain the regional Sunni powerhouse's

anger, Iraq's attitudes flew them into fury. Most of the Gulf countries and Turkey have felt discomfort against Syria's partnership and Iraq's close relations with Iran.

The League's strong activism in conjunction with Turkey's support on Syria is partially considered within this context. Together with Turkey, the influential Arab countries are yet to yank Syria out of Iran's satellite of influence; Baghdad travels closer to Iran, making them furious.

In addition to that, Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has a tendency to strengthen Shiite's grasp on power which is perhaps aimed at buttressing the "Shiite Crescent." Since the Obama administration decided the withdrawal of troops from Iraq, Maliki has reportedly increased the already launched underlying campaign, mainly targeting the Sunni. The broad campaign of arrests and dismissal is excused by allegations that the former Ba'ath members plot to overthrow the government, or the continuation of de-Ba'athification, or a deal agreed with Syrian government by which it provided information about Ba'ath members to Iraqi government in return for political and economic support.

However, most of the observers are skeptical about these allegations. There is one logical reason that explains the reality behind the campaign: Maliki's ambitions to neutralize Iraq's Sunni figures and their regional allies as well as his other political rivals.

That makes the Kurds extremely worry: the arrest warrant against Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi is politically motivated. Should that not be the case, the Kurds would react differently while hoping to prevent being involved in any

inter-sectarian tension. Yet, they cannot remain bystander to the ongoing efforts that are principally aimed at marginalizing political factions and disturbing the power distribution. The Kurds have always pushed for decentralization in power, converse to Maliki's ambitions to centralize it. All in all, the Kurds expect the worst scenario in which Maliki's campaign extends to include them.

Turkey is particularly concerned about Iraq's turmoil. Iran and Maliki have a genius for getting on Turks nerves. Iraq's territorial integrity and the establishment of a potent broad-based government in Baghdad are considered Turkey's top priorities.

The polarization of Iraq's Arabs, which is a result of the current turmoil, would lead to dangerous consequences for Turkey. Though Turkey considers Sunnis a bulwark against Iran's influence and a balancing factor against the Shiite, a Turkish-Sunni-Kurdish axis would be good to practice pressure on the Shiite and Iran but might not be effectively favorable to Turkish policy on Iraq.

Turkey's exclusion or marginalization of Shiite would greatly affect Turkish interests in Baghdad, deepen the division of the region and Iraq's society on ethnic or religious bases and increase the likelihood of Iraq's territorial dismantlement. In either case, its national interests are at stake. As far as Turkey has to involve in Iraq's politics, it should seek to achieve a sort of balance in its attitudes towards Iraq's different religious and ethnic segments and successfully engage them in a power-sharing process.

In this regard, Iran's position is quite important to Turkey. It would not be surprise to expect that Iran had an upper hand behind the

current turmoil in Iraq not only to hit Iraq's Sunni but to convey a clear message to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. Indeed, Turkey scrambled to believe that Iran played this role. Earlier, Iran has several times expressed a deep dismay to Turkey's policy towards Syria and its alignment with the West.

In the meantime, Iran faces tough sanctions and is coming under increasing pressure from the West. To strengthen the position in defending its interests, Iran made regular threats against Turkey and the West. For Turkey, Iranian manipulation greatly endangers Turkish national interests and vice versa. Accordingly, striking an agreement with Iran is crucial to Turkey's policy towards Iraq, thereby its stability. This was a key reason of Davutoğlu's late visit to Iran.

Iraq's turmoil can have critical ramifications for the whole region. It would especially be dangerous, not if al-Hashmi is convicted of running death squads, but if certain regional countries are convicted of supporting such squads through him. On the other hand, deepening the polarization of Iraq's Arab society, the emergence of authoritarian rule and a narrow-based government in Baghdad would have unintended consequences to Turkey. Unless Turkey manages otherwise, its prioritized interests are in jeopardy, including the opening up of a Pandora's box of domestic situation.

☆☆☆

*Idrees Mohammed
Observer of Turkey's foreign policy.*

Iraq Lashes Out at Turkey as Sunni-Shiite Rift Grows

By JOE PARKINSON in Istanbul and SAM DAGHER in Erbil, Iraq

Iraq summoned Turkey's ambassador on Monday to protest what it called Ankara's meddling in Iraqi politics, the latest sign of a rising rift between Sunni Turkey and its Shiite neighbors.

Iraq's government was angered by recent warnings from Turkish leaders that Sunni-Shiite tensions in Iraq could engulf the entire Islamic world, as well as by Turkey's support for a Sunni rival to Iraq's Shiite prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki.

"Turkey interferes by backing certain political figures and blocs" in Iraq, Mr. Maliki told The Wall Street Journal last month. "I believe Turkey is unqualified to intervene in the region's flash points." In a weekend interview with Arabic language Al-Hurra TV station, Mr. Maliki went further. "Unfortunately, Turkey is playing a role that could lead to a catastrophe or civil war in the region," he said.

Iraqi officials were particularly angered by public Turkish comments on the case of Tariq al-Hashemi, Iraq's Sunni vice president. Mr. Hashemi took refuge in Kurdish-ruled northern Iraq late last year, after the government accused him of leading death squads against Shiites.

But analysts say the rapid deterioration of relations between Ankara and Baghdad also reflects the wider conflicting interests of Sunni Turkey and Shiite Iran in the wake of the U.S. drawdown from Iraq and of the Arab Spring, now lapping at the borders of both Iraq and Turkey, in Syria.

Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu warned on the eve of a visit to Tehran earlier this month against the risk of a "Cold War" developing between Shiites and Sunnis across the Middle East.

"Tension is now rising between Turkey

and Iran and it will be increasingly difficult to manage as it's being aggravated by sectarian tensions. These problems are likely to be long-term; I don't see an easy solution," said Sinan Ulgen, a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Baghdad's concerns also have been fueled lately by fears that Syria's uprising is developing into a Sunni insurgency that Mr. Maliki has said could spread "like a house on fire," into Iraq. A fresh wave of violence has killed more than 200 Iraqis since the end of the U.S. military mission on Dec. 18.

Unlike Iraq, which is majority Shiite, Syria is about 75% Sunni, but it is governed mainly by a minority of Alawites, a Shiite sect. Syria's President Bashar al-Assad's Tehran-backed regime has expressed deep anger and distrust of Ankara due to its decision to provide haven to mainly Sunni Syrian rebels.

Turkey says its actions are purely humanitarian, made in the face of Syria's brutal crackdown on protesters. It also denies any effort to meddle in Iraqi politics.

Turkish analysts say Ankara is a reluctant hard-power player in the region. for all its neo-Ottoman pretensions, Only a year ago, Mr. Assad was Exhibit A in Turkey's "zero-problems-with-neighbors" foreign policy. That approach boosted relations and trade with neighboring Muslim regimes, while downgrading ties with former ally Israel. The Arab Spring, however, upended that policy as allies such as former Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi were pushed aside and Shiite-Sunni tensions rose across the region. In a major change, Turkey agreed last fall to host a North Atlantic Treaty Organization missile-defense system, which was designed by the U.S. to contain Iran.

Turkish and U.S. diplomats say they now cannot remember a time when cooperation between Ankara and Washington was closer, after a period of significant strain in 2009-2010.

"When Prime Minister Erdogan came to Washington in 2009, he sounded almost like the ambassador from Iran. Now he sounds quite different...After a period of suspicion, Turkey and the United States have come closer together," said Stephen Kinzer, a visiting professor of international relations at Boston University.

Turkish officials insist relations with Tehran remain strong. Turkey buys around 30% of its oil from Iran and is the second-largest consumer of Iranian gas, after Russia. Official data shows that Turkey's bilateral trade volume with Iraq in 2011 jumped by nearly 50% on the year to \$11 billion, with much of the increase coming in the Shiite-dominated areas around Baghdad and in the South.

In an interview inside Iraqi Kurdistan this month, Mr. Hashemi said that while his political bloc had received advice from Turkey and others, it was no tool for outside powers. "I am not part of the Turkish geopolitical project," said Mr. Hashemi. He criticized Mr. Maliki's "conspiratorial" mind and said that his frequent visits to Turkey last year were mostly private.

Still there is little disguising the building tensions between Ankara and its Shiite neighbors, including Tehran.

In December, Ankara sought an explanation from Tehran after Hussain Ibrahim, chief of the Iranian parliament's national-security committee, told an Iranian newspaper that if Iran were to be attacked, its first retaliatory strike would be against the NATO missile defense radar in eastern Turkey.

Earlier, in October, a key aide to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khomeini told Iran's Mehr news agency that Turkey should radically rethink its policies on Syria, the NATO missile shield and promoting secularism in the Arab world. Otherwise, Ankara would face trouble from its own people and neighbors, he said.

○○○

A decision to strike Iran is 'far off,' Israeli says

JERUSALEM

Apparent effort to soften tough tone comes as Russia criticizes West

BY ISABEL KERSHNER,
ELLEN BARRY
AND ALAN COWELL

Defense Minister Ehud Barak said Wednesday that any Israeli decision on attacking Iran because of its nuclear program was "very far off," apparently seeking to lower the tone of increasingly nervous discourse as powers maneuver in advance of European moves to intensify sanctions against Tehran.

At the same time, the Russian foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, renewed his country's aversion to sanctions and military threats against Tehran, while the Iranian foreign minister, Ali Akbar Salehi, said his country was ready to resume negotiations with the outside powers — Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States — trying to broker a settlement.

Mr. Salehi said during a visit to Turkey on Wednesday that negotiations were under way about the venue and date, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported, and that the talks "will most probably be held in Istanbul."

The previous negotiations, also in Istanbul, broke off a year ago when Iran presented its own set of preconditions, including a lifting of sanctions, that the West considered unacceptable.

Mr. Salehi made similar remarks about a resumption of the talks during a



Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov repeated Russia's aversion to sanctions.

visit to Tehran two weeks ago by the Turkish foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, and some European officials have interpreted his remarks as an effort to

buy time just days before European foreign ministers are to meet next week to discuss possible measures to curb Iran's critical oil exports.

Speaking at an annual news conference in Moscow, Mr. Lavrov took issue with Western policy on Iran, saying a military strike would be a "disaster." He said sanctions now being proposed against Tehran had been couched in terms of nuclear nonproliferation but were "seriously intended to have a smothering effect on the Iranian economy and the Iranian population, probably in the hopes of provoking discontent."

Mr. Barak was speaking in an interview with Israeli Army Radio at a time of high tension following the assassination on Jan. 11 of Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, the deputy director of Natanz uranium enrichment site — an act that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad attributed on Tuesday to "the evil hands of arrogance and Zionist agents." On Tuesday, Mr. Ahmadinejad ordered stricter security to protect Iranian scientists from what some experts have portrayed as a covert war against Iran's nuclear program.

After the assassination, Israel's leaders maintained a customary, cryptic silence while the White House condemned it and vigorously denied any responsibility. At least five Iranian scientists with nuclear connections have been killed since 2007.

Tehran says its uranium enrichment efforts are for peaceful civilian purposes, but that assertion jars increasingly with Western insistence, supported by the International Atomic Energy Agency, an arm of the United Nations, that Iranian scientists have been working toward building nuclear weapons.

Israel has been pressing for more aggressive and immediate U.S.-led sanctions against Iran while the Iranians have threatened to shut the Strait of Hormuz, the maritime conduit for a fifth of the world's oil.

Mr. Barak's remarks also came ahead of a visit to Israel by the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin E. Dempsey. Israeli news media commentators have suggested that General Dempsey was coming in part to warn Israel against going it alone in striking Iran's nuclear facilities.

Mr. Barak denied that suggestion, saying that military chiefs "are concerned with formulating different military options and bringing their views to the political leadership, and don't deal with delivering diplomatic messages."

Still, efforts seem to be under way on both sides to reduce regional anxieties.

Israel and the United States agreed this week to postpone major joint missile-defense exercises that had been scheduled for the spring. Israel's foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, cited "diplomatic and regional reasons, the tensions and instability," as factors in the delay.

In the interview with Army Radio on Wednesday Mr. Barak reaffirmed the

Israeli assessment that Iran had not started building nuclear weapons.

"The Iranians have not ended the oversight exercised by the International Atomic Energy Agency," he said. "They have not done that because they know that that would constitute proof of the military nature of their nuclear program and that would provoke stronger international sanctions or other types of action against their country."

The Islamic Republic News Agency, the official Iranian news outlet, confirmed on Tuesday that a team from the International Atomic Energy Agency would visit Iran for three days starting on Jan. 29.

Israel has kept open the possibility of military action against Iran, saying that a credible threat is necessary to back up the sanctions effort. In a veiled reference to what some experts view as a kind of approaching deadline, Mr. Barak said Iran was "focused on creating a reality in which its nuclear program would be immune from physical attack." He was apparently referring to

Iran's plans to start production at a second major uranium enrichment site, the Fordo plant, near the city of Qum. The new facility is buried deep underground and is considered far more resistant to airstrikes than the enrichment site at Natanz.

For Israel, the prospect of a nuclear armed Iran, which opposes Israel's right to exist, is by far its greatest strategic challenge.

Maj. Gen. Amir Eshel, chief of the Israeli military's planning directorate, said Tuesday that apart from the obvious risk to Israel, a nuclear Iran would create a nuclear arms race in the region and set off a process that could lead to "a global nuclear jungle." He also said that extremist groups in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip would become more aggressive and daring once operating under an Iranian nuclear umbrella and that Israel would be more limited in its strategic options.

On Tuesday, the European Union and United States took new steps to raise the pressure. Denmark, the rotating president of the European Union, proposed that starting on July 1, all member countries impose a full embargo of Iranian oil, setting a timetable for that threatened step for the first time.

In South Korea, a major importer of Iranian oil, a senior U.S. diplomat, Robert J. Einhorn, urged buyers there to reduce their dependence and "unwind their financial dealings with the central bank of Iran."

A new law signed by President Barack Obama, if fully enforced, would penalize any foreign entity that does business with the Iranian central bank, the primary conduit for purchases of Iran's oil, the country's most important export. While the law allows some leeway, it is widely seen as the most punitive step yet taken by the United States against Iran.



23 JANVIER 2012

Plusieurs dizaines de milliers de personnes ont défilé, samedi à Paris, contre le vote, aujourd'hui au Sénat, de la loi réprimant la négation du génocide arménien.

Les Français d'origine turque font bloc



Une manifestante de la communauté turque, samedi après-midi à Paris.

Par **MARC SEMO**

REPÈRES

LA PROPOSITION DE LOI

Déposée par la députée (UMP) Valérie Boyer et adoptée par l'Assemblée le 22 décembre, la proposition de loi votée aujourd'hui au Sénat punit d'un an de prison et d'une amende de 45 000 euros toute négation publique d'un génocide reconnu par la loi. La France reconnaît deux génocides, celui des Juifs et celui des Arméniens, mais ne punit jusqu'ici que la négation du premier. Le texte est soutenu par François Hollande et Nicolas Sarkozy. Si le Sénat le vote conforme, il sera adopté.

«**O**h putain Ramzi, t'es où ?» hurle un jeune en survêt sur son téléphone portable. Le petit groupe s'affaire autour de la banderole : «Faites gaffe les mecs à ne pas la déchirer.» Les drapeaux turcs sont partout ; des grands, dont ils s'enveloppent comme d'une cape ; des petits, agités en même temps que ceux aux couleurs de la France. Entre eux, ils parlent le plus souvent français. Ils sont nés dans l'Hexagone ou y sont arrivés tout gosses. Les jeunes sont les plus nombreux dans le cortège qui défile samedi à Paris, de Denfert au Sénat, pour protester contre la loi sanctionnant la «négation ou la minimisation outrancière» des génocides, dont le génocide arménien, qui doit être votée aujourd'hui par la Chambre haute (lire également page 23).

REPORTAGE

BOOMERANG. «Je vote», clament les panneaux avec une reproduction de la carte d'électeur. «Citoyens français mais avec le drapeau turc dans le cœur, assure Yilmaz Betullah, artisan à Thiers (Puy-de-Dôme). Nous voulons montrer qu'il n'y a pas que les Armé-

niens qui comptent en France et qu'on ne peut pas voter des textes de loi qui stigmatisent tout un peuple.» Sur les pancartes, les mots sont soigneusement pesés : «Ni haine ni vengeance, juste la vérité» ou «Laissons l'histoire aux historiens». Parfois un cri du cœur : «Mon arrière-grand-père n'était pas un assassin.» Il s'agit d'éviter tout débordement nationaliste ou négationniste qui pourrait avoir un effet boomerang.

Cette manifestation très bien encadrée est sans précédent en France comme en Europe. Quelque 50 000 personnes selon les organisateurs et 15 000 selon la police. Au moins 25 000 selon notre estimation, rien qu'en comptant les passagers des 550 cars arrivés de toute la France, de Belgique et d'Allemagne. Les consulats turcs ont mouillé leur chemise. Les associations ont, pour une fois, fait bloc, les islamistes comme leurs ennemis laïcs kémalistes, les groupes ouvriers de gauche comme les ultranationalistes. Seuls les Kurdes et l'extrême gauche ont refusé «la manifestation étatiste». Cette mobilisation marque le surgissement d'une diaspora de 550 000 personnes, souvent peu visible, sinon en Alsace, éparpillée sur le territoire. «Merci Sarkozy, qui nous a unis comme jamais», se réjouit Demir Onger, élu par la coordination des associations, qui assure vouloir «la réconciliation de deux peuples en laissant travailler les historiens». Dans le cortège, des jeunes filles avec le foulard islamique côtoient celles en jean. De vieux prolos moustachus défilent avec des ados en capuche. Des supporters brandissent des écharpes des clubs de foot de Galatasaray ou Besiktas.

«**ACHARNEMENT.**» Pour tous, la nouvelle proposition de loi a eu l'effet d'un électrochoc. Il y avait déjà eu la loi de 2001 reconnaissant le génocide. Puis, en 2006, un premier projet de texte sanctionnant sa négation présenté par les socialistes, puis abandonné. «C'est de l'acharnement», s'indigne Fatih, de Romans (Drôme), qui s'est inscrit dès le 22 décembre sur les listes électorales. «On n'était pas intégré comme les Arméniens. Maintenant, on veut faire entendre notre voix», explique ce jeune maçon. Partout, les associations et les imams ont mené campagne. Avec succès. Par milliers, ils se sont précipités en décembre dans les mairies. Il y aurait aujourd'hui 180 000 électeurs français d'origine turque. «Mais pour qui voter ? Hollande, dans cette affaire, est sur la même ligne que Sarkozy», soupire un entrepreneur.

Le plus important, dans l'immédiat, est de montrer sa force. Une nouvelle manifestation a lieu aujourd'hui devant le Sénat. «Nous sommes des citoyens de seconde zone», s'insurge un représentant de la puissante association islamiste Milligörus. Les laïcs, eux, s'inquiètent pour le modèle républicain français qui avait inspiré Mustafa Kemal. Murat Erpuyan, de l'association Ataturque de Nancy, soupire : «Cette loi a pour effet de pousser encore un peu plus au communautarisme.»

L'embargo européen sur le pétrole iranien obtenu au prix de lourdes tractations

La Grèce, l'Italie et l'Espagne se sont inquiétées de l'impact des sanctions sur leur économie

Bruxelles
Bureau européen

Les ministres européens des affaires étrangères, réunis à Bruxelles, lundi 23 janvier, devaient décider du passage à une phase inédite des sanctions contre le régime iranien. Soucieux d'éviter ce qui est perçu comme une course iranienne à l'arme atomique, les Vingt-Sept entendent, cette fois, viser directement les ressources financières de l'Iran. Les ministres devaient décréter à la fois un arrêt des achats de pétrole iranien, un gel des transactions avec la Banque centrale iranienne, l'interdiction des investissements dans le secteur pétrochimique et la vente d'or, de diamants et de métaux précieux à l'Iran.

Un doute subsistait, lundi matin, quant à la nécessité de geler les avoirs de la banque Tejarat, la principale banque commerciale du pays, utilisée par certains constructeurs automobiles européens, très présents en Iran, et aussi des missions diplomatiques.

La décision la plus spectaculaire des Européens, à savoir l'embargo sur le pétrole, devait concerner les achats et le transport de brut iranien, le financement et les assurances de contrats pétroliers, ainsi que les achats de pétrole iranien par des compagnies européennes à des pays tiers.

Les discussions préparatoires à la réunion de lundi ont été diffi-

les. Les diplomates avaient pour mission de faire des propositions fermes mais qui ne déstabiliseraient pas l'ensemble du marché mondial et tiendraient compte des difficultés de certains Etats membres.

En 2011, l'Italie a couvert 13,3% de sa consommation de pétrole par des importations d'Iran. L'Iran représente 9,6% des besoins en pétrole de l'Espagne. La Grèce a assuré, la même année, 22,6% de sa consommation grâce à l'Iran... Plongée dans les difficultés financières que l'on sait, la Grèce acquiert ce pétrole à crédit et sans garantie, ce qu'aucun autre pays producteur n'accepterait sans doute.

Les sanctions ne débuteraient qu'au 1^{er} juillet pour permettre de trouver d'autres sources d'approvisionnement

A l'issue de rudes discussions, avec Athènes notamment, un compromis a été trouvé. Il restait aux ministres à définir, lundi, la date précise d'entrée en vigueur des sanctions pétrolières. Diverses sources évoquaient le 1^{er} juillet, à l'issue d'un délai de transition permettant à la fois de mettre un terme aux contrats de livraison en cours et de trouver d'autres sources d'approvi-

sionnement. L'Arabie saoudite serait prête à augmenter sa production. Les Européens comptent également sur la Libye, qui en revient à son niveau de production d'avant l'intervention armée de 2011.

Le gel des transactions avec la Banque centrale iranienne comportera, lui aussi, des exceptions, afin de ne pas mettre en péril l'ensemble des relations commerciales avec des entités iraniennes qui ne sont pas visées par les sanctions. L'Iran est, aujourd'hui, un partenaire important de l'Union: en 2010, ce pays a importé des biens européens à hauteur de 11,3 milliards d'euros et exporté vers les Vingt-Sept pour 14,5 milliards d'euros.

Trois Etats - la France, le Royaume-Uni et l'Allemagne - avaient proposé un plan de sanctions dès février 2009, afin d'appuyer les Etats-Unis dans leur tentative de règlement du dossier nucléaire iranien. Près de deux ans plus tard, l'unanimité des Européens a enfin été obtenue. Au fil des différentes décisions, 433 sociétés iraniennes et 133 personnes ont été visées par des sanctions.

Consciente que son plan de sanctions n'atteindra son objectif que s'il est appuyé par d'autres grands clients de l'Iran, en premier lieu la Chine, l'Union européenne (UE) a publié, vendredi 20 janvier, un communiqué appelant à la reprise du dialogue politique avec Téhéran. La haute représentante de l'UE, Catherine Ashton, a indiqué atten-

dre encore la réponse de Téhéran à une lettre qu'elle leur a envoyé le 21 octobre. Une délégation iranienne, en visite en Chine, a affirmé, le même jour, sa volonté de reprendre ses discussions. «*Rhétorique habituelle*», commentait, lundi matin, un diplomate bruxellois.

Le passage à des sanctions visant le cœur de l'économie iranienne résulte pour partie d'une intense «*lobbying*» français - même si on eut préféré, à Paris, que les choses aillent plus vite, et que l'embargo pétrolier entre en œuvre au bout de trois mois, au lieu de six. Cet effort diplomatique s'inscrit dans un contexte lourd de spéculations sur la possibilité, dès cet été, d'une attaque aérienne israélienne contre l'Iran.

Selon Nicolas Sarkozy, qui s'exprimait trois jours avant la réunion européenne, la «*seule solution*» pour «*éviter une intervention militaire*» qui «*déchaînerait la guerre et le chaos au Moyen-Orient*», «*c'est un régime de sanctions beaucoup plus fort*». «*Ceux qui n'en veulent pas, a-t-il ajouté, porteront la responsabilité d'un risque de déchaînement militaire.*»

Lundi, le ministre israélien chargé du renseignement, Dan Meridor, a salué le «*durcissement*» des sanctions européennes, y voyant un pas «*important*» et jugeant que de telles mesures avaient «*une chance de réussir*». ■

JEAN-PIERRE STROOBANTS AVEC NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE (À PARIS)

AFP

Eutelsat suspend la chaîne kurde Roj TV, condamnée pour son soutien au PKK

PARIS, 19 jan 2012 (AFP)

L'OPÉRATEUR satellitaire européen Eutelsat Communications a décidé jeudi de suspendre la présence de la chaîne kurde de télévision Roj TV sur ses satellites, après sa condamnation au Danemark pour "soutien à une organisation terroriste" pour ses liens avec le PKK.

"Aux termes d'un jugement rendu le 10 janvier 2012, le tribunal de Copenhague, saisi par le Ministère public danois, a établi que la chaîne de télévision Roj TV est un organe du Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), tant au regard de leurs liens financiers que structurels et opérationnels", indique Eutelsat dans un communiqué.

"Dans ces conditions, Eutelsat a décidé de suspendre la présence de Roj TV sur ses satellites pour ne pas être en situation de se rendre complice d'une activité terroriste".

Eutelsat a également demandé "aux distributeurs qui diffusent Roj TV à travers des capacités louées sur ses satellites de suspendre la diffusion de cette chaîne".

Le Tribunal municipal de Copenhague a estimé que la chaîne de télévision Roj TV avait "soutenu l'activité de l'organisation" de février 2008 à septembre 2010, et l'a condamnée le 10 janvier pour "soutien à une organisation terroriste" pour ses liens avec le PKK. La chaîne kurde a fait appel du jugement.

Génocides : un texte de loi contesté mais finalement adopté

Les sénateurs, malgré de fortes réserves, ont définitivement approuvé la proposition UMP

Le Parlement a définitivement adopté, lundi 23 janvier, la proposition de loi visant à réprimer la contestation des génocides reconnus par la loi, dont, en premier lieu, le génocide arménien de 1915. Le Sénat a à son tour approuvé – par 126 voix contre 86 – le texte de la députée (UMP) des Bouches-du-Rhône Valérie Boyer qui avait été adopté – à mains levées – le 22 décembre 2011 à l'Assemblée nationale. Sans pour autant que celui-ci ait recueilli un assentiment majoritaire de la part de sénateurs qui ont fortement marqué leurs réserves.

La plupart des groupes représentés au Sénat se sont partagés au moment du vote. Les présidents de groupe de l'UMP et du PS s'étaient engagés en faveur de l'adoption du texte, après la décision de la commission des lois du Sénat, jeudi, de

lui opposer une motion d'irrecevabilité. Leur action a rencontré des résistances. Faute de pouvoir réunir une majorité, ils se sont alors efforcés de convaincre le plus grand nombre des récalcitrants de s'abstenir ou de ne pas prendre part au vote.

Tant à l'UMP qu'au PS, ces consignes ont été suivies à reculons. Seuls 57 membres de l'UMP (sur 132) ont voté pour la proposition de loi, alors que 19 ont voté contre, 10 se sont abstenus et 46 n'ont pas pris part au vote. Côté PS (130 membres), 56 ont voté pour, 26 contre, 9 se sont abstenus et 39 n'ont pas pris part au vote. L'Union centriste et républicaine (31 membres) s'est partagée en 1 pour, 12 contre, 1 abstention et 17 refus de vote. De même que le groupe communiste et républicain (CRC, 21 membres), majoritairement favorable au tex-

te : 11 ont voté pour, mais 4 sénateurs CRC ont malgré tout voté contre et 6 autres n'ont pas pris part au vote. Seuls le Rassemblement démocratique et social européen (RDSE, 16 membres) et le groupe écologiste (10 membres) ont en bloc voté contre.

Climat de tension

Le résultat du scrutin traduit le malaise qui s'est exprimé tout au long des débats. Devant le Palais du Luxembourg, un impressionnant dispositif de sécurité maintenait à distance le rassemblement organisé, d'un côté, par les associations franco-turques et, de l'autre, par les associations franco-arméniennes. « Non à la pénalisation, oui à la liberté d'expression », proclamaient les premières; « le négationnisme n'est pas la liberté d'expression », répondaient les secondes. Tribunes du public et des invités comblés, sous le regard de nombreux médias turcs et arméniens, tous les ingrédients étaient réunis pour entretenir un climat de tension.

À l'inverse de l'Assemblée nationale, où étaient majoritairement présents en séance les partisans de la proposition de loi, la discussion en séance au Sénat a fait entendre de multiples oppositions à ce texte. À l'instar du président (PS) de la commission des lois, Jean-Pierre Sueur, nombreux ont été ceux qui ont émis des réserves sur sa constitutionnalité. D'autres ont mis en garde contre « un risque de concurrence des mémoires » ou se sont éle-

vés contre ce qu'ils ont qualifié de « faute politique ». Fait rare, deux anciens présidents du Sénat, Christian Poncelet et Gérard Larcher, se sont exprimés pour dire qu'ils voteraient contre. Le vote final n'en est pas le reflet. ■

PATRICK ROGER

La Turquie prépare des mesures de rétorsion

« Un acte irresponsable » et une « atteinte à la liberté d'expression ». Le ministre turc des affaires étrangères, Ahmet Davutoğlu, a critiqué « avec véhémence » le vote du Sénat. De son côté, le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, doit annoncer ce mardi, devant les députés de son groupe parlementaire, des mesures de rétorsion. Lundi soir, il a convoqué quelques collaborateurs au siège de l'AKP, le parti au pouvoir, à Ankara, pour élaborer la riposte. La coopération militaire et diplomatique est déjà suspendue depuis le vote du texte par les députés français, en décembre 2011. L'ambassadeur de Turquie à Paris pourrait être rappelé définitivement. Les prochaines mesures pourraient toucher l'économie : les échanges entre les deux pays atteignent près de 12 milliards d'euros en 2011. – (Corresp.)

le Parisien 25 JANVIER 2012



ANKARA (TURQUIE), HIER. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, le Premier ministre turc, a qualifié la loi pénalisant la négation du génocide arménien de « discriminatoire et raciste ». Il attend que Nicolas Sarkozy renonce à la promulguer.

(REUTERS.)

Syrian Kurds form their own council in Arbil

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

Syrian opposition Kurdish parties are preparing to announce the formation of their own "National Kurdish Council" in the northern Iraqi capital of Arbil, the Hürriyet Daily News has learned.

"There will be a meeting of the Syrian Kurdish groups on Jan. 21 in Arbil. The Kurdish parties participating in the meeting will make a call to all the other Syrian Kurdish parties to join them," Kendal Efrini, a Syrian Kurdish opposition member and representative of the Alliance of Syrian Liberals in Europe, told the Hürriyet Daily News in an interview on Wednesday.

Dr. Abdul Hakim Bashar, secretary-general of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria, will lead the National Kurdish Council, which will become the second

national council established by opposition forces after the establishment of the Syrian National Council.

France-based Efrini said he would also attend the meeting. "Right now, there are five or six Kurdish parties joining the National Kurdish Council. We want to broaden this council as much as possible."

A member of the Syrian National Council who wished to remain anonymous said most of the leaders of the Syrian Kurdish parties had been staying in Arbil under the protection of the Kurdistan Regional Government for some time.

"We don't know yet whether they will achieve their goal of uniting the Kurdish parties under one umbrella – we need time to see that," he said.

The Syrian National Council descri-



Riot police stand guard as Syrian Kurds protest in front of the UN office in Arbil to demand the departure of the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime. AFP photo

bed itself as the largest Syrian opposition group – including Islamists, leftists, liberals, Arabs, Christians and Kurds – when it was established in Istanbul on Aug. 29, 2011 under the leadership of Burhan Ghalioun.

There are around 15 different Kurdish parties in Syria, a few of which are represented in the Syrian National Council. ■

What went wrong with Iraq and Syria?

OPINION/MURAT YETKİN

"Arbil is my home as well," Turkish Economy Minister Zafer Çağlayan said in Kurdish yesterday in Arbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq as he was welcomed by KRG President Massoud Barzani, showing the hard-to-believe improvement of relations between Turks and Iraqi Kurds.

A few hours later, news wires reported from Baghdad that the Turkish Embassy was attacked with rockets. Though there were no injuries, the building was damaged. Ankara took it as another act of animosity shown by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

The KRG is also hosting the Syrian Kurdish opposition against the Bashar al-Assad regime in Damascus, similar to Turkey's hosting of Syrian opposition activities.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's relations with both al-Maliki and al-Assad were brotherly not more than a year ago; now they are like arch enemies.

There can be two interpretations for the situation.

The first one is the backfiring of Turkey's "zero problems with neighbors" policy after the Arab Spring. As Turkey decided to side with the rightful demands of the peoples in neighboring countries, it lost the friendship of the autocratic admi-

nistrations and the fall of the one in Syria, for example, was not as easy as the fall of Moammar Gadhafi in Libya.

The second one says two main factors changed the nature of relations with Syria and Iraq. With Syria, it was the Arab Spring. Al-Assad was afraid of a similar fate with Gadhafi and gave up his pseudo-democracy game to take things under control the way he knows. Erdoğan, who had to make a choice in Libya affair in siding with the Western alliance NATO as a member, stood against the line of al-Assad.

With Iraq the game changer was the U.S. troop withdrawal. It was no secret that Iran would try to increase its influence over the Shiite majority in Iraq following the U.S. evacuation, especially when the future of Syria, its main ally in the region started to become uncertain.

As quick as the last American soldier left Iraqi soil, al-Maliki started to intimidate his coalition partners; Sunni Arabs and Kurds. Tariq al-Hashemi, the Sunni Arab deputy of the Kurdish-origin President of Iraq Jalal Talabani, is in a fugitive position in the Kurdish region.

One high ranking official of the Turkish Foreign Ministry explained Ankara's position yesterday as follows: "Turkey has no problems with Iraq and Syria, but has problems with al-Maliki and al-Assad's policies. Our relations with the rest of the region and with many partners are in their best state for years. With North Africa countries, with Lebanon, Jordan and the Gulf, with the U.S. and Britain, with Azerbaijan and Russia (with the exception of the missile shield radar discrepancy) we have no serious problems. And with Iraq and Syria, as soon as their state policies change, our strategic relations will resume from where they were frozen." ●

Rockets hit Turkey's embassy in Iraq amid rising acrimony

By SAHAR ISSA
McClatchy Newspapers

BAGHDAD -- A rocket attack on Turkey's embassy in Baghdad this week has highlighted the rapid deterioration in relations between Turkey and Iraq, a development tied to Turkish criticism of the detention of opposition politicians by the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

No one has claimed responsibility for the Wednesday attack, in which assailants fired three rockets at the embassy. But the timing of the assault, just days after an acrimonious exchange between al-Maliki and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, raised suspicions that al-Maliki sympathizers were responsible.

"The attack against the Turkish Embassy in Baghdad reflects the government's failure to secure foreign embassies," Maysoon al Damaluji, a spokeswoman for Iraq's Iraqiya movement, a secular political bloc that is a frequent critic of al-Maliki's policies, said in a statement Thursday. She demanded that the government step up security to make sure similar attacks are prevented.

"We are concerned lest Iraq become an arena for regional conflicts that would affect Iraq's stability and the safety of its people," she said.

Turkish news accounts said three rockets were fired at the embassy and quoted the Turkish ambassador, Yunis Dimirar, as saying one struck an exterior wall but did little damage. It was not known where the other two rockets fell.

Turkey, a NATO ally of the United States, and Iraq, which



only a month ago saw the last U.S. troops leave after nearly eight years of American occupation, have found themselves on opposite sides of a growing number of issues in recent months.

Turkey has demanded that Iraq crack down on Kurdish rebels who Turkey claims use Iraqi territory to launch attacks inside Turkey. Turkey also is supporting sanctions against Iran, which has drawn increasingly close to Iraq's government, and has called for the ouster of Syria's president, Bashar al Assad, who still enjoys the backing of the al-Maliki government.

But the source of the most recent tension is al-Maliki's accusations that Iraqi Vice President Tariq al Hashemi, Iraq's most senior Sunni Muslim politician and a member of the Iraqiya bloc, orchestrated terrorist attacks by his bodyguards. Al-Maliki is a Shiite Muslim who has often been accused of pressing sectarian claims in his administration. Hashemi is known to be close to Turkey, which is widely

believed to have funneled money to Iraqiya, a secular political alliance that enjoys widespread Sunni support, during the most recent election campaign.

Last week, Turkey's Erdogan used a meeting with the speaker of Iraq's parliament, Osama al Nujafi, to criticize al-Maliki's charges against Hashemi, who currently has taken refuge in Iraq's northern Kurdish region, out of reach of al-Maliki-controlled security forces.

"For us, Iraq is like Syria. Any sort of conflict to erupt from there would affect the entire region. We cannot remain indifferent to the developments," Erdogan said. "Those who seek out or do not obstruct a sectarian war, will never be able to recover from such a plague."

The next day, al-Maliki accused Turkey of interfering in Iraqi affairs. "Turkey is playing a role that may result in catastrophe and civil war in the region, a war that will harm Turkey itself," he said.

On Monday, Iraq's deputy minister of foreign affairs,

Jawad al Doski, summoned the Turkish ambassador to a meeting to convey Baghdad's concern regarding "Turkish officials' statements."

In response, the Iraqi ambassador in Turkey was summoned to the Turkish Foreign Ministry and informed that Turkey had no choice but to be concerned by possibly destabilizing issues on the other side of its border with Iraq.

Turkey recently has taken a more aggressive foreign policy approach throughout the Arab world as Arab Spring revolts have toppled and shaken authoritarian regimes. Last year, Erdogan was the first foreign head of state to visit Libya after the government of Moammar Gadhafi was toppled. He also was greeted by huge crowds in Egypt, where he called for an Egyptian-Turkish partnership.

Such forays are controversial, however, in a region split by Sunni-Shiite suspicions - Turkey's leadership is Sunni - and that once was ruled by the Ottoman Empire, whose collapse after World War I gave rise to the modern Turkish state.

"Turkish officials' recent statements are a blatant illogical interference (in Iraqi internal affairs) that stem from their policy in the region," said Haider al Jorani, a member of al-Maliki's State of Law coalition. "It is an attempt to put Iraq under its control and revive the Ottoman province system."

★★★

(Issa is a McClatchy Newspapers special correspondent.)

Ankara, Arbil likeminded on Iraq's future

ARBIL –Gökhan Kurtaran
Hürriyet Daily News

Turkey supports the unity and stability of Iraq, according to Turkey's Economy Minister Zafer Çağlayan, who expressed disappointment with Iraq's prime minister's recent comments on Turkey's role in the region during a visit to Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) cities yesterday.

"Our visit here to Arbil and Suleymanyah itself is a message," said Çağlayan after his 45-minute meeting with Masoud Barzani, the president of KRG, at his command center in Selahaddin. Later in a forum in Arbil, Çağlayan said, "Arbil mala mine ji," which means "Arbil is my house" in Kurdish, while addressing local businessmen there.

"We are thinking in the same way about Iraq's future" with the northern Iraqi administration, said Çağlayan at a press meeting at Barzani's headquarters nearly 20 km to the north of Arbil.

However, he also said Iraq Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's strongly worded statement Jan. 13 in an interview with private broadcaster al-Hurra was "upsetting." "Turkey is playing a big role that might bring disaster and civil war to the region, and Turkey will suffer because it has different sects and ethnicities," al-



Iraqi Kurd leader Barzani (L) meets Çağlayan who hails Arbil as his home. AA photo

Maliki said.

"We want Iraq to become a united welfare country," Çağlayan said. "Turkey has never intervened in the internal affairs of other countries and will never intervene. A single united Iraq respecting all religions and ethnic roots is our desire."

Çağlayan also met with Nechervan Barzani, the leader of the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party, during a breakfast yesterday, prior to his meeting with Masoud Barzani.

"Both Nechervan Barzani and Masoud Barzani are thinking the way we are," said Çağlayan, signaling that the Ankara-Arbil ties were in a deeper spat. The Turkish minister's trip, however, did not include Baghdad.

Trade swells

"Trade and politics are separate matters," Çağlayan said about last week's call by some members of Iraqi Parliament to cut trade relations with Turkey.

"Syria has tried to cut ties with us; but on the second day, they continued to trade," Çağlayan said, adding that Turkey is dedicated to increase bilateral trade ties with its southern neighbor. "Until now we have received no sign or any notification from the Iraqi government regarding such issues," he said.

"We will continue increasing our bilateral trade with Iraq," Çağlayan said, adding that the total trade volume of both countries hit nearly \$12 billion by the end of last year. He also said nearly 70 percent of trade is done with the northern administration of Iraq.

Turkey's total exports to Iraq rose to \$8.5 billion by the end of last year, ranking Iraq as Turkey's second biggest export destination, Çağlayan said, adding that Turkish businessmen have approximately \$16 billion of direct investment in the country.

\$400 million deal

The central government of Iraq still supports good relations with Turkey, Çağlayan said, adding that the central government approved two important business deals Jan. 17.

Iraq's Electricity Ministry approved the electricity distribution deal for \$235 million to be run by Enka and a hospital project in Baghdad to be built for \$125 million by Dorçe, a Turkish construction company.●

Mission unaccomplished

The question still remains whether Iraq will become an Iranian satellite state.

By YOEL GUZANSKY AND
GALLIA LINDENSTRAUSS

Pulling out of Iraq may have been the lesser evil for the US, but questions now loom regarding the ability of the Iraqi state to function, and the withdrawal does not resonate well among some of America's allies in the region. In their eyes, the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq at this time is tantamount to unfinished busi-

ness, eroding their confidence in the US.

"As we leave... you'll see various elements try to increase their freedom of movement and freedom of action," US top commander in Iraq, Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III, told journalists on the eve of the planned departure of the last American troops. "These are elements that are really focused on creating a Lebanese Hezbollah kind of organization in this

country... if left unchecked, they will eventually turn on the government," Austin added.

Austin's comments represent a clear acknowledgment by a US military commander that the US mission in Iraq comes to an end at a time when Iranian influence in Iraq is perhaps at unprecedented heights, as exemplified by Iraq's Shia leadership's expression of support for the Shi'ite protest in Bahrain, the strengthening

of economic ties with Iran, and the political and perhaps economic support that Iraq is providing Syria's Bashar Assad, Iran's ally.

Iran is already the outside force with the greatest influence in Iraq. The possible fall of the Assad regime and the rise to power of a Sunni-dominated regime is liable to evoke even greater Iranian attempts to increase involvement in Iraq, this time in order to "compensate" for the loss of an ally. In the short term, Iran will try to weaken the central government in Baghdad to make it easier to exert its influ-

ence, and in the long term it will attempt to thwart the development of a competing model: a moderate, secular Shi'ite state with some democratic characteristics.

These are not mere speculations; Iran will probably portray the American withdrawal as an Iranian success and has already begun to feel more confident in increasing its military activity within sovereign Iraqi territory. It also appears more comfortable challenging the Fifth Fleet's ships in the Gulf and in recent months those elements that General Austin mentioned that Iran supports, such as "Hezbollah Brigades," have stepped up attacks on US forces and have even fired Katyusha rockets toward Kuwait.

Babakir Zibari, chief of staff of the Iraqi army, has rightly said

that without the support of the US, the Iraqi army will not be able to confront external security threats before 2020. Indeed, most of the 670,000-strong force is responsible for internal security. In addition, the loyalty of the security forces is largely a function of their tribal and sectarian affiliation.

The State Department, in order to protect US and Western diplomats after the withdrawal, has already signed contracts with private security companies, and the Iraqi government will most likely do so as well. While the use of these companies might provide some security, there are many problems associated with using them, such as their problematic reputation and obscure legal status.

The goal of Iran is to limit American influence in the

region and use Iraq as a platform for greater regional influence. If this is materialized, Iran might soon, as the Jordanians and Saudis fear, knock on their door. A possible counterweight to Iran in this respect might be Turkey. While strongly objecting to the formation of an independent Kurdish state, the ability of Turkey to forge good relations with the Kurdish Regional Government has been one of the surprising developments of recent years.

Turkey's influence in Northern Iraq will by no means diminish now that the US forces have pulled out. On the contrary, as tensions in Iraq heighten, the Kurdish dependence on Turkey will increase. The strong level of cooperation at present between the US and Turkey, as well as growing Turkish-Saudi cooperation,

might also prove a possible deterrent against Iran's ambitions regarding Iraq. However, despite growing alienation between Iran and Turkey over the Syrian issue and the NATO radar system, the sides still cooperate economically and in dealing with Kurdish rebels.

A combination of the use of private security companies, strong US-Turkish and Turkish-Saudi cooperation and the deterrent power of US and perhaps NATO presence in the Gulf can provide Iraq with some security. However, the question still remains whether this will prove enough to prevent Iraq from becoming an Iranian satellite state. □

The writers are associate researchers at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) at Tel Aviv University.

BDP hints at federalism for Turkey

ANKARA

'We will defend the freedom of a Kurdistan which is part of the Turkish Republic,' Peace and Democracy Party co-leader Selahattin Demirtaş says at his party's group meeting. Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) Co-Chair Selahattin Demirtaş vowed yesterday that his party would "defend the freedom of Kurdistan," as he called on all democratic forces in Turkey to unite against "the fascism" of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).

"If there is no justice for the Kurds, the thing they should do is resist. We will not give way to AKP fascism. We will win," Demirtaş said in a speech to his party's parliamentary group.

"We want education in our mother tongue. We will not step back. We will defend the freedom of a Kurdistan which is part of the Turkish Republic," he said.

Demirtaş said the government had yet to explain last month's botched air raid at the Iraqi border, in which 34 civilians perished, and asked why the four-hour footage of the incident which Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan mentioned has not yet been revealed.

He condemned the arrest earlier in the day of Kurdish politicians Tuncer Bakırhan and Fatma Kurtalan, who are now behind bars as part of a sprawling investigation into alleged urban networks of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Demirtaş said court records indicated the only question the prosecutor asked them was why they had received and read emails that contained notes from meetings between jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and his lawyers.



Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) Co-Chair Selahattin Demirtaş speaks during the party's parliamentary group meeting. DAILY NEWS photo, Selahattin SÖNMEZ

"The prime minister, ministers, parliamentary members, governors read the same notes, but if BDP read them they are sent behind bars. This reveals the fascist mentality of the AKP," he said.

He appealed to the Turkish people to understand that Kurdish youths were joining the PKK because they were left without other options. "There's no justice for us. Instead, there are bombs, massacres, arrests and prisons," he said.

"We will be organized in every street and resist. All democratic forces should unite and stand up against this [AKP] fascism," he said. "This is an obligation for everybody who has honor and self-respect, no matter whether Turk or Kurd. Those who win are always those who resist the tyrants." ●

Explosion kills 1, wounds 27 in mostly Kurdish city in Turkey

By Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — An explosion apparently targeting a police car killed one civilian and wounded 27 people, including seven police officers, in a mostly Kurdish city of Turkey on Thursday, an official said.

The private Dogan news agency said police had to use tear gas to disperse an angry crowd that gathered at the scene of the blast in the city of Hakkari.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the explosion, but Kurdish rebels who are fighting for autonomy in the region have used roadside bombings against military and police vehicles there

in the past.

Gov. Muammer Turker told Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency that the explosion occurred on a busy street in the southeastern city as the police vehicle was driving by.

The blast wounded a total of 28 people, including seven policemen, and one of the civilians died at the hospital, Turker said.

TRT, Turkey's state-run television, said the explosion was caused by a roadside bomb targeting police. The pro-Kurdish news agency, Firat, said the explosion was caused by a bomb that formed a large crater on the ground and



shattered the surrounding buildings' windows.

Kurdish rebels, who belong to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, have been branded as terrorists by the U.S. and the European Union. Tens of thousands of people have died during their battle for independence since 1984. ■

Al Assad regime's survival depends on Iran's strength

If Tehran cracks under the pressure of economic sanctions and military threats, Damascus could fall

By Patrick Seale, Special to Gulf News

President Bashar Al Assad of Syria does not seem to be in any immediate danger of collapse or overthrow. In spite of confronting a popular uprising at home and severe pressures from abroad, he has — for the moment at least — weathered the storm. His difficulties, however, are immense. In a speech on 10 January he described the crisis he is facing as 'a battle unprecedented in Syria's modern history.'

Several authoritative sources, both inside and outside Syria, share the view that, having held his enemies at bay since last March, Al Assad stands a good chance of survival for several more months. His longer-term prospects, however, remain uncertain.

As a skilful tactician, he has played for time. His agreement to allow in Arab League monitors has relieved him of some pressure for a month, and possibly two. In dealing with the protesters, he has used carrot as well as stick, such as his recent amnesty for political prisoners, his offer of an immediate dialogue with the opposition, and his renewed promise of a revised Constitution, to be put to an early referendum, followed by multi-party elections in the early summer. Two new parties were granted licences this week.

Al Assad's long-term survival, however will depend, sources say, on whether Syria's close ally, Iran manages to stand firm. Already under crippling western sanctions, Iran faces what looks like an attempt, not just to halt its programme of uranium enrichment —



Image Credit: Ramachandra Babul © Gulf News

which Israel sees as a challenge to its own nuclear weapons monopoly — but to change the Tehran regime altogether. The United States and Israel — supported by a number of European and Arab nations, who have joined in for their own commercial, sectarian or strategic interests — have launched a determined assault on the tripartite alliance of Tehran,

Damascus and Hezbollah. The crime of this trio is to have dared challenge America's military hegemony in the Gulf and Israel's military hegemony in the Levant. The three allies — Iran, Syria and Hezbollah — know that they stand or fall together. The battle is likely to be fierce. Iran is facing a systematic campaign aimed at subverting its nuclear facilities by cyber attack, the murder of its scientists, and the undermining of its economy by a boycott of its oil exports and Central Bank. Israel and its American friends are also sparing no effort to trigger a US attack on Iran — much as they pushed the US into invading and destroying Iraq. If Iran cracks under the pressure of sanctions and military threats, Syria could fall. Hezbollah in turn, stripped of its external patrons, could then face another Israeli attempt to destroy it, as in 2006.

Syrian Kurd Leader: Revolution Won't Succeed Without Minorities

What Syria's largest minority means for the uprising, for the opposition leaders, and the country's future



Abdulhakim Bashar



Protesters wave Syrian and Kurdish flags in the Kurd-majority town of Amouda / AP

BY MICHAEL WEISS

It's hard to know just how many Kurds are in Syria. The last census was taken 50 years ago, though demographers today tend to predict that Kurds number between 3.5 million and 4.6 million, or about 15 to 20 percent of Syria's total population. Anyone with a nodding acquaintance with the struggles and strategies of this nationless people will know that they have been a decisive force in the federalist system of postwar Iraq and an ever-present human rights challenge for Turkey's hopes for European Union accession. If the revolution in Syria is to have any chance at success, the Syrian Kurds will mostly likely play a major role.

Dr. Abdulhakim Bashar is the Secretary-General of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria -- the sister party to Massoud Barzani's Iraqi counterpart -- as well as the Chairman of the Kurdish National Council (KNC), a newly formed umbrella organisation representing ten Syrian-Kurdish parties. Bashar was arrested in 2008 before a Kurdish protest slated to take place outside the Syrian parliament in Damascus. He lives in Syria but gave me an hour or so of his time on a weeklong visit to London, where I met him in my office. We talked about minority rights in Syria, Turkey's role in the Syrian opposition, and the prospect of Western intervention to hasten the end of the Assad regime.

What's your relationship like with the Syrian National Council [the aspiring government-in-exile]?

I've been in contact with [SNC Chairman Burhan] Ghalioun several times, there has been engagement. However, their proposal is still very vague, and doesn't meet our full demands for participation. For example, the SNC says it endorses lifting the "pressure" on the Kurdish people. What does that mean? We said in the KNC that we advocate lifting all the discriminatory policies that have been applied to the Kurdish people such as the Arabization policies in Syria, the Arabized name changes of existing towns and villages and demographic changes. These were all deliberate policies applied by the Ba'ath Party.

The SNC also offers a "democratic" solution without any clear meaning. What does "democratic" mean? It might imply private schooling to learn the Kurdish language or opening satellite stations for the Kurds.

Such as Turkey has implemented.

Yes. However, we demand our cultural freedoms categorically.

Do you want to see Syria adopt the Iraq model, a federalist system based on power sharing, with broad autonomy granted to the predominantly Kurdish region? Kurds are more widely distributed throughout Syria than they are in Iraq, so that might be difficult to achieve.

We demand the right to self-determination in a form that would be decided in a national Kurdish referendum, but also within the integrity and unity of the Syrian land. When Syria was formed, it was formed by the Sykes-Picot agreement, it wasn't our choice. But we want to keep the current borders. With a new social contract between ourselves and all the Syrian components.

Second, if we talk about federalism in the Kurdish areas, from the northeastern part of Syria, up to the border with Iraq until Afrin, near where Aleppo is -- the Kurds form about 75 percent of the population of that region. That land is the Kurdish land.

I've heard Yekiti and Azadi [Syrian Kurdish parties] have pulled out now or are threatening to do.

All Syrian Kurdish groups decided in Irbil in October to freeze any participation of Kurdish groups in the SNC. This applies to all Kurdish parties, from the Damascus Declaration on, and will continue until and unless the SNC listen to our demands. My party, the Kurdish Democratic Party, had an SNC member: we actually froze his membership before the conference in Syria that formed the KNC.

Of course, we cannot stop individual Kurds from participating in the SNC, although I suspect that as time goes on and nothing changes, they too will freeze their membership or quit altogether.

So what are the Kurdish National Council's preconditions for joining the SNC fully?

We have four main demands, and they're not necessarily all going to be fulfilled: First, political decentralization of the government. Syria is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-ethnic country. If it keeps to the same governing style as now -- one central government -- there is a possibility of civil war. Second, a secular state. Third, constitutional recognition of the Kurdish issue, a constitutional assurance that the Kurdish people are on their historic land. And the lifting of all discriminatory policies that have been deliberately applied to the Kurdish people. Fourth, the right of self-determination within Syria's unity and integrity -- that's our condition to remain within Syria.

If the SNC fully recognizes the Kurdish Bill of Rights, we will join the SNC fully. Because we are very concerned that the SNC is so much influenced by Turkey now, they may postpone guaranteeing our rights until after the regime falls. Therefore we ask for a recognition of these rights in order to become a draft for a new constitution.

So you want a written guarantee from the SNC?

We want a guarantee written and published internationally. The important thing to realize is that if we get our full rights, Turkey will be obliged to grant full rights to Turkey's Kurdish population. If the Kurds were to get recognition in the Syrian constitution, Turkey will give similar if not more rights to the Kurds in Turkey. Syria is the key player.

Change in Syria means change in Lebanon, Turkey, and Iran. Iran will be isolated because Iran's connection with Hezbollah would not be so much facilitated as before [by the Assad regime]. The new Syrian government would not be an ally of Iran.

Ghalioun said this in his interview with the Wall Street Journal two months ago, though he's gone back and forth on partnering with Hezbollah recently.

Ghalioun wants to be diplomatic. In fact, I believe, the SNC would completely cut ties with Hezbollah.

Recently, university students [in Syria] have said that Lebanese are enrolled in Syrian universities who aren't of university age. This is from student sources. Students have said that these are Hezbollah members.

The SNC has not been recognized by world governments, apart from Libya's, as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people. If it were, would you be more willing to join?

If the international community recognized the SNC at this stage, that would be a very quick decision. It still represents only one side of the Syrian opposition, it doesn't include Kurds as Kurds. We are united and we have agreements. If we were to join the SNC fully, we'd do so from a unified political standpoint on this issue.

Is the KNC all in for regime change or are you entertaining a possible reconciliation with the Assad regime?

We are part of this revolution, we are not neutral. One of the main points in the KNC statement is that we don't want the present dictatorship and we refuse to accept any future dictatorships. We don't accept an Islamic government or a Muslim Brotherhood-led government. We will refuse that very firmly.

We have also decided not to have any dialog with the regime separately from the Syrian opposition. For example, if the international community decided all the opposition groups had to have a dialog with the regime, we'd support that, in case the current regime asks for negotiations for a transition of power, just like in Yemen. But that's unlikely.

When I've asked SNC members about the poor representation of Kurds as a bloc in the Council, they usually reply by saying something like, "Well, we don't want to give the Kurds their own bloc as we see the SNC as a non-sectarian political entity. Kurds are fairly represented in strictly political groupings that reserved seats in the Council, such as the Damascus Declaration bloc and the Local Coordination Committees bloc." Is that just an excuse for exclusion, in your opinion?

Yes. It's not just about Kurds, however. Arabs, Druze, Ismailis, Alawites, Christians have been ignored by the SNC, which is responsible for these minorities failure to participate as united communities in the revolution. Also, if the SNC says that Local Coordination Committees are very active in the SNC, I'd like to add that the

Committees have very little participation of Alawites and Druze; only the elites of these communities are involved in them.

In my opinion, Syrian Alawites would not accept working in a central government with Sunnis because the regime has succeeded in sowing fear amongst [Alawites]

This is why we ask for political de-centralization in Syria. The regime has succeeded in convincing minorities that any change would mean a new Islamic system coming to power and the rights of these minorities would be lost completely. In order for the SNC to convince minorities to take part in the revolution and hasten the fall of the regime, it must send a clear message to these minorities to participate. Transitioning to democracy in such a country is very difficult; it can't happen in one day. You have to give guarantees and assurances to each minority as these fit their rights and benefits.

You seem to be arguing that the Syrian opposition is doing the regime's propaganda work for it, by not convincing minorities of the multicultural nature of this revolution.

Yes, exactly. Let me give you an example. In Qamishli [a predominantly Kurdish city in Syria], Assyrians have formed a pro-democracy organization, however they can't gather even ten people to demonstrate in the Kurdish region. Why? Because the Church is playing a major role in turning Syrian Christians into shabbiha [pro-regime death squad] thugs for the sake for regime preservation.

The French ambassador to Syria has told me personally that he see loads of Christians every day telling him that their lives would be at risk if this regime changed. This is evidence that the SNC is still not able to be clear with other minorities to show their rights will be guaranteed.

The SNC is mainly focusing on things on the ground -- the number of people killed, how to topple the regime -- but not a political program to address the issue of minorities.

By taking what concrete steps, apart from guaranteeing Kurdish rights as you already discussed?

The SNC should, in my opinion, keep in contact with all the minorities and be positive about their demands within the unity and integrity of Syria. For Christians, the [SNC should emphasize] freedom of religion. It should reassure Alawites, Ismailis and Druze that they are equal in belonging to Islam, they are not outsiders to the faith. There must be a very clear program for each and every ethnic group.

The current path is the one that Islamists are taking in the SNC, not the liberal representatives.

Are there enough liberal representatives in the SNC to alter its approach to the minorities question?

The liberals are not enough to influence the SNC. That's also our responsibility as Kurds. It's the international community's responsibility to pressure the SNC, and the Muslim Brotherhood, to guarantee the rights of minorities. And also -- most important -- for the international community to pressure Turkey not to take one side of the opposition over all others.

The Kurds are Syria's largest minority, larger even than the Alawites. Would it be fair to say that there is no Syrian revolution without their full and wholehearted participation?

We are more organized and recognized as a society within Syria and other Arab countries than other minorities. If we do participate more actively, other minorities will feel more assured and follow suit. The regime has tried to convince the world that the conflict is between them and the Arab Sunnis. We want to prove that wrong. The revolution is not sectarian but it is being threatened by sectarian interests.

Kurds caught in middle as tensions stoked by regional jockeying

The Kurdish Globe

By Bashdar Pusho Ismaeel

With the political crisis in Iraq already at a critical juncture, domestic and regional events this week served to intensify tensions.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki formally suspended a number of ministers from the predominantly Sunni-based al-Iraqiya list after weeks of boycotts. As internal parties continued frantic jockeying to soothe friction and find a way forward, fierce rhetoric from rival factions only further highlighted the prevalent fractured landscape and a strong sense of animosity.

Over the past weeks, with realization of the great perils that the current sectarian stand-off threatens to unearth, regional neighbours, particularly Turkey, have been getting overly anxious.

The reality of Iraq's diverse socio-ethnic mosaic and its fractured foundations is hardly new; the threats and problems that exist today have not developed overnight. They have existed for decades and only became more magnified after 2003.

However, the ever-evolving Middle Eastern struggle for influence and supremacy has left the likes of Turkey on the edge. Turkey realizes that with the highly volatile and sensitive Middle Eastern climate, it can either wait on the side and become consumed by the end products that ensue or actively try and influence the current tides for its ultimate benefit.

Iraq has often been a playground for regional powers, and the current predicament is only a byproduct of this. The current standoff that began with the arrest warrant of Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi and the resulting acrimonious fallout has as much of a regional footing as a local one.

The Arab Spring, which is still

ongoing in Syria, has set a new benchmark in the Middle East and along with it a lot of political, sectarian and strategic wavering.

Add the U.S. withdrawal in Iraq, Turkey's frosty relations with Israel and its continuing struggle with the PKK, a new round of sanctions to punish Iran's growing nuclear clout, Iran's increasing faceoff with the Sunni Arab Gulf states and one can see that the Middle East is a deep, interconnected web of ties and proxy battles.

Turkey has acknowledged and highlighted the dangers of Iraqi fragmentation before any other side due to sensitivities with the preservation of its own borders, but Turkey has become more vociferous in recent weeks amidst what it deems as a Shiite grasp of power aided by an increasingly isolated Iranian regime. Tehran's relations with Ankara have certainly cooled, and Iran has used its immense leverage on Iraq and Syria to show that it still has plenty of strings to pull.

Iraq's continuous solidarity with Syria is a byproduct of Iranian influence and a stark contrast to the Turkish stance on Bashar al-Assad's waning regime.

Tensions between Baghdad and Ankara were deepened when the Turkish Foreign Ministry summoned Iraq's ambassador to Turkey, Abdulemir Kamil Abi-Tabikh, to its headquarters in Ankara to express their anger at al-Maliki's growing hard-line statements and criticism toward Turkey. This was just a day after Baghdad had done the same to show their displeasure at what they saw as Turkish interference.

The attacks on the Turkish embassy in Baghdad are only likely to stoke sentiments further.

The Kurds are not a party to the sectarian battle in Iraq but nevertheless become ubiquitously sucked into the standoff. The Kurds



Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan reviews an honor guard with his Iraqi counterpart al-Maliki during an official welcoming ceremony.

were often looked at by Turkey as an instigator of a future breakup, but Turkey has to soon come to terms that an Iraqi split will not be on the part of the Kurds and it must plan for the eventuality that sooner or later it will need to embrace an independent Kurdistan.

Turkey is already relying heavily on the Kurds to maintain equilibrium and leverage in Iraq. The shift toward sectarianism by Baghdad is evident in the eyes of Ankara, which perceives the dilution of Sunni power in Parliament and controversy around al-Hashemi as testimony to this view.

While Turkey has warned that current political antics risk the breakup of Iraq, ironically al-Maliki has in turn warned that "Turkey is playing a role that might bring disaster and civil war to the region and will suffer because it has different sects and ethnicities."

No doubt the growing prominence of the Kurds in Iraq and ongoing disgruntled noises of millions of Kurds in southeastern Turkey is keeping Turkey restless at night—not to mention that Turkey may end up a passive player in the shape of proceedings in spite of all its efforts as changes unravel around it.

As we have seen with the Arab Spring, it doesn't take much to create a political avalanche that can bring more change in mere weeks

than decades prior.

Turkish warnings over the current state of regional meddling in Iraq may speak true but are certainly contradictory. The same regional influence that they fear that Iraqi blocs will fall under has been raging for over eight years and Turkey has been a key component of this.

Although many had hoped that al-Hashemi would be giving a fair trial with a legal rather than a political underpinning and that the tensions could be cooled by an all-inclusive national conference, the suspension of al-Iraqiya MPs placed further cloud on the prospects of near-term compromise and concord.

Al-Iraqiya leader Ayad Allawi warned this week that Iraq needs a new prime minister or new elections to prevent the country from falling apart. Both these demands may not come anytime soon. Al-Maliki still enjoys a fair amount of support in Baghdad and crucially still has Kurdish backing.

The key task for the Kurdistan leadership is play their cards wisely but also do what is in the interests of Kurdistan and not simply aid political jockeying in Baghdad. The Kurds could well pull the rug out from under the feet of al-Maliki, and after this week's turn of events, Ankara will be siding and pressuring the Kurds closely to

contain al-Maliki.

As the KDP resumes the premiership with the imminent return of Nechirvan Barzani to spearhead the next Kurdistan government, Kurdistan Region finds itself at a crucial but highly delicate juncture. What dice the Kurds roll and what cards they play could echo for many more years. As Kurds realized to their detriment for decades after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, missing historical opportunities can set back a nation many more years.

If their yearly plays to glue Iraq together bear only counterproductive fruit for the Kurdish people, then the serious question must be

asked of the Kurdish leadership. If Iraq continuously deploys policies that are counter to the principles of voluntary union and national harmony, then the Kurds must formally declare their independence.

The situation in Iraq after eight years of fierce pushing, hand-holding and direct support from Washington didn't bring much joy, and it is unlikely that the current situation in Iraq can be magically transformed.

Deep-rooted problems need deep-rooted solutions. The simple reality is that as a majority and with significant backing of Tehran, the Shiites are not about to relinquish power in Baghdad anytime soon.

The Sunnis will continue to feel marginalized unless they can win some form of autonomy or real decision-making posts in Baghdad, which, as witnessed under the State of Law coalition, will not be easily ceded.

As part of the current coalition underpinned by the Erbil Agreement, al-Iraqiya was to be afforded executive decision-making posts that never materialized. Al-Iraqiya discontent was already at the tipping point long before the al-Hashemi debacle.

It is the political environment that often makes a leader, and thus even if al-Maliki was replaced, it is not certain that significant outcomes

can be achieved. Furthermore, new elections will only result in another de-facto national census, with no clear winner due to the factional split and thus the same arduous process of coalition building.

The regional turmoil itself is only just brewing. If Iran carries out its threat to close the strategic Strait of Hormuz, then it places regional governments into a tougher corner. Iraq itself could find itself in a precarious position against its allies, as the closing of the Gulf passage would cripple the Iraqi economy. Meanwhile, Turkey is unlikely to heed al-Maliki's warnings not to interfere when they have so much at stake. ●

Kurdish group to demand autonomy in new charter



Independent deputy Ahmet Türk (L) speaks as Peace and Democracy Party co-leader Gültan Kışanak (2-L) looks on during a news conference in Ankara on Jan 13. Türk will today join a parliamentary commission on the new charter.

ANKARA - *Hürriyet Daily News*
Göksel Bozkurt

Mardin independent deputy Ahmet Türk is scheduled to meet with the Constitution Conciliation Commission today to voice demands of the Democratic Society Congress, including calls for 'democratic autonomy'

The Democratic Society Congress (DTK), an umbrella organization that brings together various Kurdish groups and politicians, has submitted its proposal to Parliament for the new constitution and is expected to renew its demand for democratic autonomy.

DTK co-chairman and Mardin independent deputy Ahmet Türk is scheduled to meet with the Constitution

Conciliation Commission today, confirmed Democratic Society Party (DTP) Diyarbakır deputy Altan Tan to the *Hürriyet Daily News*.

While the DTK had declared its proposals of "democratic autonomy" in the past, this marks the first time the demand was brought to an official commission.

Türk's verbal pitch to Parliament today was sent in writing last week and includes radical demands from the DTK, compiled from meetings with citizens of Kurdish origin, NGOs, opinion leaders, intellectuals, writers and artists.

REGIONAL AUTONOMY

The DTK suggested a regional autonomy in executive, legislative and judicial areas, stating that the Turkish government's overly centrist bureaucratic structure needed to be toned down and large governments in the world were all embracing a more local approach to

governing.

This change is crucial to ensure locals could contribute to the decision-making process and the region's resources were used in line with local needs, said the DTK.

The emphasis on "Turkishness" should be completely removed from the new constitution, further proposed the DTK, saying the charter must not focus on any single race in order to embrace and protect all of the ethnic and cultural groups in Turkey. The definition of constitutional citizenship should not create discrimination between Turks, Kurds or other ethnic identities, said the DTK.

As part of their demand for constitutional equality, the DTK further demanded education and public services in native languages as well as in scientific, religious and artistic activities.

When writing the new constitution, universal norms should be embraced, said the DTK, suggesting that in order to give power to the public's will, the guardianship of the appointed figures in the military, bureaucracy and judiciary over the elected representatives of the public should end.

The National Security Board (MGK) should be shut down, added the DTK in its proposal.

As a final note, the DTK emphasized the election threshold must be removed, as well as changes to the Election Law and the Political Parties Law so that political parties were not limited by ideological or national reasons and a truly democratic society could be achieved.

○○○

LE FIGARO

mardi 24 janvier 2012

L'Iran Les Occidentaux redoutent qu'Israël passe à l'attaque

ADRIEN JAULMES

CORRESPONDANT À JÉRUSALEM

LA CRISE suscitée par le programme atomique iranien entre dans une période critique. L'année 2012 est déjà perçue comme celle de tous les dangers par les diplomates et les analystes. Le premier ministre israélien, Benyamin Nétanyahou, a salué hier l'embargo européen comme « un premier pas dans la bonne direction », mais il a prévenu que « les sanctions seront évaluées à l'aune de leurs résultats ».

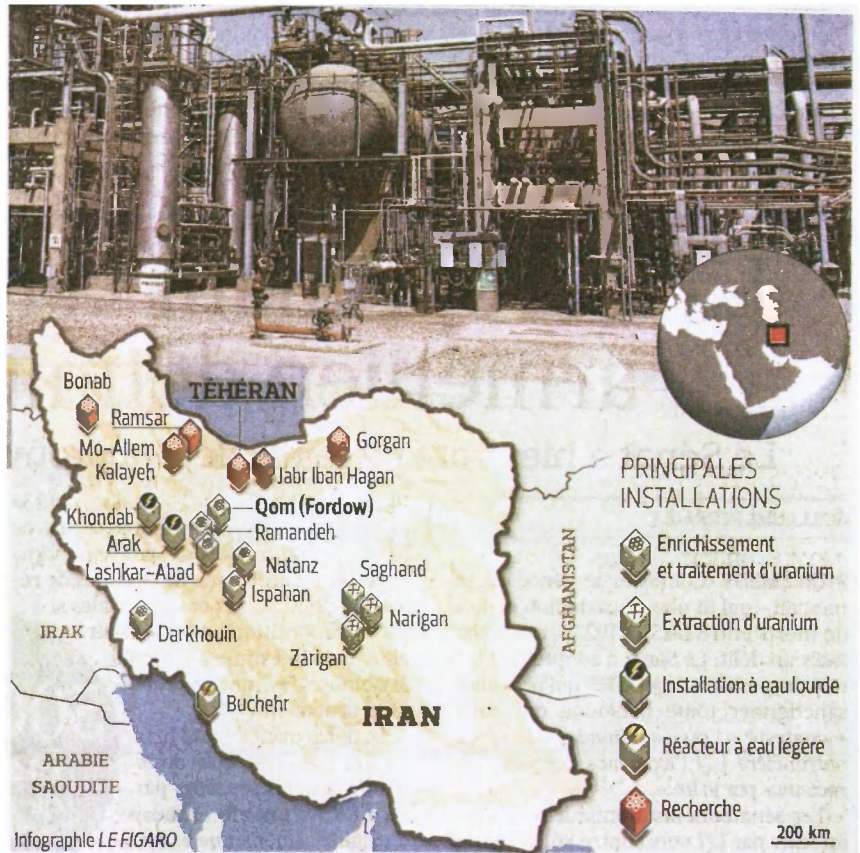
Sur fond d'une guerre secrète qui a vu l'assassinat d'au moins quatre scientifiques nucléaires iraniens, plusieurs explosions sur des sites militaires en Iran et des attaques d'étranges virus informatiques dirigées contre les installations d'enrichissement d'uranium, le programme nucléaire de Téhéran s'est néanmoins poursuivi. Selon la plupart des spécialistes, l'Iran serait aujourd'hui sur le point d'obtenir la capacité de fabriquer à court terme une arme nucléaire, « ligne rouge » dont le franchissement risque de précipiter les événements.

Les Occidentaux, les Américains en particulier, craignent que les Israéliens ne lancent une attaque surprise préventive contre les installations atomiques iraniennes, déclenchant ainsi une crise majeure au Moyen-Orient. Les Israéliens débattent ouvertement d'une telle action, ne doutant plus de l'imminence de la capacité nucléaire iranienne.

« L'Iran dispose actuellement de tous les composants nécessaires pour fabriquer une bombe atomique. Il n'y a pas si longtemps, l'obtention de cette capacité était considérée comme un point de non-retour », a mis en garde ce week-end l'ancien chef du renseignement militaire israélien Amos Yadlin dans une interview au journal israélien Maariv. « Si les Iraniens décident ce soir de développer secrètement la bombe, ils ont tous les moyens et ingrédients nécessaires pour la faire... Pour le moment, ils avancent doucement, pour payer un prix minimum en sanctions et d'un point de vue diplomatique, a prévenu cet ancien pilote de chasse. Ils procèdent par étapes, aucune n'étant suffisamment provocante pour que l'on prenne des mesures dramatiques contre eux. Nous et les Américains comprenons de la même façon leur stratégie. »

Défendre le peuple juif

Cette compréhension diverge en revanche sur la question de l'urgence. « Israël définit sa ligne rouge en termes de capacités à accélérer soudainement le programme (iranien), les Américains la placent beaucoup plus loin... Ils ont une puissance mondiale et disposent de capacités stratégiques que n'a pas Israël », a ajouté Yadlin.



Les Israéliens voient le programme nucléaire iranien non pas comme un problème diplomatique, mais comme une menace existentielle, de nature à justifier tout type d'actions visant à empêcher Téhéran de se doter de la bombe. « Le peuple juif et le gouvernement israélien ont le droit, l'obligation et la capacité de prévenir une nouvelle destruction du peuple juif ou une attaque contre son État », a prévenu Benyamin Nétanyahou à l'approche, vendredi prochain, du 70^e anniversaire de la conférence de Wannsee, où fut planifiée l'extermination des Juifs d'Europe. « La différence entre 1942 et 2012 n'est pas l'absence d'ennemis jurés... La même volonté de détruire le peuple juif et son État existe... Ce qui a changé, c'est notre capacité à nous défendre et notre détermination à le faire. »

Un récent article du Wall Street Journal indiquait que les Américains étaient plus inquiets que jamais de l'éventualité d'une attaque israélienne. Ils auraient déjà commencé à prendre des mesures préventives pour protéger leurs installations au Moyen-Orient contre une possible riposte iranienne. La sécurité de l'ambassade des États-Unis à Bagdad a été renforcée et l'armée américaine aurait déployé des avions et des munitions supplémentaires dans le Golfe.

Selon l'hebdomadaire britannique Sunday Times, les divergences entre les Américains et les Israéliens auraient culminé récemment lors d'une conversation téléphonique entre Obama et Nétanyahou.

Le premier ministre israélien aurait refusé d'exclure une attaque contre l'Iran, ne promettant que de prévenir Washington douze heures avant, soit à la

dernière minute d'un point de vue militaire et diplomatique. L'annulation, ce mois-ci, d'un important exercice militaire conjoint entre les deux pays a été vue comme un autre signe de tensions.

Message de modération

Le chef d'état-major américain, le général Martin Dempsey, s'est rendu la semaine dernière en Israël pour discuter du dossier iranien et faire passer un message de modération aux Israéliens. Il a rencontré pendant sa visite tous les responsables civils et militaires israéliens, du président Pèrés et du premier ministre Nétanyahou au ministre de la Défense, Ehoud Barak, et au chef d'état-major, Benny Gantz. Tout en réaffirmant l'alliance étroite entre les deux pays, le général Dempsey a néanmoins insisté sur la nécessité de « concertations continues » sur le dossier iranien. Autant dire que ces concertations n'ont pas vraiment eu lieu jusqu'ici.

Les précédentes actions israéliennes, contre le réacteur nucléaire irakien d'Osirak en 1981 et contre une usine atomique syrienne en 2007 n'avaient été précédées d'aucune escalade verbale ou mise en garde. ■

L'Elysée tente de réparer les dégâts avec la Turquie

Après le vote de la loi française sur la négation des génocides, la diplomatie reprend le dessus

Après la politique intérieure, la diplomatie. Au lendemain du vote par le Sénat français d'une loi pénalisant la négation des génocides – et donc de celui perpétré par l'empire ottoman contre les Arméniens en 1915 –, l'Elysée était engagé, mardi 24 janvier, dans un travail de réparation des dégâts auprès du pouvoir du premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Dans la matinée, le dirigeant turc, qui entretient des relations de cordiale détestation avec Nicolas Sarkozy, persuadé que ce dernier ne cesse, depuis des années, de brandir la Turquie comme un épouvantail musulman auprès de l'opinion à des fins électoralistes, n'avait pas réagi au vote avec toute l'agressivité que l'on redoutait à Paris. Tout en fustigeant un texte « discriminatoire, raciste, et massacrant la liberté d'expression », M. Erdogan reportait, en effet, à plus tard les mesures de représailles concrètes que prendrait la Turquie, en espérant que la France saurait « corriger l'erreur ».

Agréablement surpris par ce semblant d'éclaircie dans l'orage de la relation bilatérale avec Ankara, les conseillers de l'Elysée ont aussitôt cherché à capitaliser sur cette apparente hésitation turque. Un petit groupe de journalistes était ainsi invité en urgence à pren-

dre connaissance de la lettre adressée par M. Sarkozy à M. Erdogan le 18 janvier, quelques jours avant le vote de la loi litigieuse par le Sénat.

Ce texte, qui avait déjà « fuité » dans les médias turcs, se lit comme une confuse autojustification mêlée d'une certaine contrition, le tout purgé de toutes les remontrances que M. Sarkozy avait pu faire à la Turquie, en octobre 2011, lorsqu'il avait sommé ce pays de « réviser son histoire », après avoir visité l'émouvant musée du génocide à Erevan, en Arménie.

Selon M. Sarkozy, la loi « ne vise nullement un peuple ou un Etat en particulier »

La loi « ne vise nullement un peuple ou un Etat en particulier », souligne cette missive. « Les auteurs du texte y ont veillé car ils savent les souffrances endurées par le peuple turc dans le contexte de la disparition de l'empire ottoman, puis de la première guerre mondiale. »

La lettre de M. Sarkozy ne fait aucune mention explicite du génocide arménien, mais l'évoque par allusion, en parlant de « protéger les mémoires blessées » et d'aider à « refermer les plaies ouvertes il y aura bientôt cent ans ».

Autre élément frappant, le président français se livre à une énumération des pages noires de l'histoire de France : la traite négrière, le rôle de l'Etat dans la déportation des juifs et « les souffrances indicibles et la brutalité aveugle de la colonisation française en Algérie ». Au nom d'un rappel du travail de mémoire accompli côté français, M. Sarkozy semblait ainsi donner prise aux critiques officielles turques, qui, depuis des semaines, renvoyaient la France à son passé colonial.

Nulle intention, donc, soulignait-on mardi à l'Elysée, de stigmatiser la Turquie ! Ce qui n'empêchait pas les conseillers du président d'assurer, parallèlement, que la loi française aurait un effet pédagogique... en Turquie, puisque « le débat au Sénat a été retransmis en direct par les médias turcs ».

L'Elysée assure par ailleurs qu'un boycottage des entreprises françaises en Turquie serait irréaliste. Même si le Medef, apparemment plus inquiet, a annoncé une réunion sur le sujet.

Dans sa lettre au dirigeant turc, M. Sarkozy tentait surtout de replacer le curseur sur les urgences diplomatiques au Proche-Orient, rappelant « la valeur ajoutée qu'apporte la coordination de nos actions dans la gestion des crises ».

La Turquie est un partenaire

indispensable sur les dossiers de l'Iran et de la Syrie. Le ministre français des affaires étrangères, Alain Juppé, qui n'a jamais caché qu'il considérait la loi inopportune, a pour cette raison appelé, dès mardi matin, « nos amis turcs au sang-froid », ajoutant : « Moi, je tends la main, j'espère qu'elle sera saisie un jour. »

Les résultats de l'effort français pour trouver un apaisement semblent incertains. Ils sont suivis avec une pointe de préoccupation, mêlée de lassitude, par certains alliés de la France. Le département d'Etat américain a commenté mardi qu'il souhaitait « voir des bonnes relations entre [la France et la Turquie], qui sont des alliés des Etats-Unis ». La nouvelle péripétie franco-turque s'ajoute à celle vécue au début de la guerre de Libye, lorsque les tensions bilatérales avaient failli paralyser l'OTAN.

La Turquie pourrait considérablement gêner, aujourd'hui, le transport militaire français vers l'Afghanistan, en fermant son espace aérien à l'armée française. Il faudrait alors passer par la longue route du Nord, via la Russie. Un élément supplémentaire de complication, surtout au moment où M. Sarkozy doit se prononcer sur un éventuel retrait anticipé des troupes françaises. ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

Découverte d'ossements de 23 personnes dans le sud-est de la Turquie

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie) 25 janvier 2012 (AFP)

LES AUTORITÉS TURQUES ont découvert les ossements de 23 personnes dans une fosse commune située près d'un ancien bâtiment de la police militaire, à Diyarbakir, principale ville du sud-est de la Turquie, à majorité kurde, a annoncé mercredi l'agence Anatolie.

Les premiers restes humains ont été découverts plus tôt en janvier, lors de fouilles archéologiques à Ickale, dans le centre de Diyarbakir, près des ruines d'un palais datant du 13^e siècle.

Ce emplacement était celui du siège local de la police militaire jusqu'au début des années 2000.

Un musée et un centre culturel doivent être créés à cet endroit, après les fouilles et des travaux de restauration.

Selon les associations de défense des droits de l'Homme, ces ossements appartiennent à des civils kurdes tués par les forces de sécurité pendant les années 1990.

"Des crânes et d'autres ossements humains ont été trouvés ici... Selon ce qui a été constaté, ils ont été empilés dans un endroit exigü... Ils ont semblé-t-il être jetés à cet endroit, sans cérémonie religieuse", a déclaré cette semaine le ministre de l'Agriculture, Mehdi Eker, après une visite du site.

La section de Diyarbakir de l'Association des droits de l'Homme (IHD) et 36 familles dont des parents ont disparu dans les années 1990 ont porté plainte mercredi contre les autorités de l'époque et ont réclamé des tests ADN d'identification.

Plus de 45.000 personnes sont mortes depuis les années 1980 dans le conflit qui oppose les forces de sécurité turques aux rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), principalement dans le sud-est du pays.

Jusqu'à présent, les restes de 190 corps ont été trouvés dans 29 fosses communes de plus de 10 provinces du sud-est de la Turquie, selon l'IHD.

L'association estime qu'au total, plus de 3.000 personnes sont enterrées dans 224 fosses communes, sur toute la région.

SYRIA'S RISING TOLL

The international community needs to make clear to President Assad and his cronies that their time has run out.

The death toll from the brutal 10-month war by President Bashar al-Assad of Syria against his own people is now more than 5,400, according to the United Nations and others. Yet the international community still has not mustered the tough pressure that might force Mr. Assad to stop the killing, or the Syrian Army and business elite to toss him out.

For months, Russia has been blocking the United Nations Security Council from imposing any serious punishments. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is far more interested in selling arms to Syria and thwarting democratic forces and their Western backers.

On Monday, Russia proposed a shamefully weak resolution that put equal blame on the protesters and the Syrian Army for the violence and made no mention of sanctions. The United States and other members are trying to toughen it up, but we are not optimistic.

That means it is up to Arab League ministers who need to recognize that the time for the Syrian dictator to go has long past. With his butchery, Mr. Assad has made clear that there is no compromise or deal to be had — and he has made clear

his contempt for the Arab League's efforts to broker peace.

When they meet this weekend in Cairo, the ministers should agree to pull out their failed monitoring mission and impose the sanctions that they originally approved in November and then suspended, including a freeze on Syrian government assets in Arab countries and a ban on transactions with Syria's central bank. The league should also insist that the Security Council do the same.

The European Union's oil embargo and an American and European ban on business with Syria's main commercial bank, in particular, have hit the economy hard. When the European Union meets on Monday, it is expected to place asset freezes and visa bans on 22 more individuals and eight more companies connected to the government. There is little chance of changing Mr. Assad's mind. But, in time, such pressure could persuade army and business elites to abandon the Assad government.

World leaders must keep speaking out against the slaughter as President Obama did on Tuesday when he met with King Abdullah II of Jordan at the White House. He decried the "terrible brutality" in Syria and pledged to redouble efforts to force Mr. Assad out.

There is no easy solution. But the international community needs to exert whatever diplomatic and economic pressure it can to make clear to Mr. Assad and his cronies that their time has run out.

Syria signals that crackdown will go on

BEIRUT

Monitors from Gulf bloc pull out as government vows to battle 'chaos'

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Syrian foreign minister said Tuesday that "half the universe" was conspiring against his country, as the six nations that form the Gulf Cooperation Council withdrew from a monitoring mission in Syria because the government had failed to stop 10 months of violence.

International pressure is building on Syria, not only from the West but increasingly from Arab countries as well. The United Nations estimates that more than 5,400 people have been killed since the uprising began in March, sparked by the arrest of a group of teenagers who scrawled anti-government graffiti on a wall in the south of the country.

Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem on Tuesday signaled that the crackdown would continue, saying in Damascus that the government would take any steps necessary to defend against chaos. Activ-

ists, meanwhile, reported more violence nationwide Tuesday, with more than 15 people killed and possibly many more.

Syria has claimed that armed gangs acting out a foreign conspiracy are behind the revolt, not protesters seeking change in one of the most authoritarian states in the Middle East.

"It is the duty of the Syrian government to take what it sees as necessary measures to deal with those armed groups that spread chaos," Mr. Moallem said during a televised news conference.

He also said it was clear that some Arab countries had joined the conspiracy against Syria — a clear reference to the Gulf countries' decision to withdraw their monitors and to Sunday's call by the Arab League for Syria to create a national unity government in two months.

The Arab League plan provides for Mr. Assad to give his vice president full powers to cooperate with the proposed government to enable it to carry out its duties during a transitional period.

The Syrian government has rejected the plan as a violation of national sovereignty.

The decision Tuesday by the six oil-rich Gulf nations — Saudi Arabia,

Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates — to pull out their monitors is a blow to an Arab League observer mission that has been mired by controversy, but which for many represented the only hope for an Arab solution to the crisis in Syria, away from outside intervention.

Now, the Gulf Cooperation Council, which had contributed 52 of the estimated 160 observers, has called on the U.N. Security Council to take all "necessary measures" to force Syria to implement the Arab League's peace plan.

The Gulf council has long advocated referring Syria to the Security Council, putting it in conflict with other Arab states. Security Council action could open the door for more economic sanctions and possible military intervention, although Russia, which has veto power, is firmly opposed to punitive measures against Syria, its longtime ally.

"The decision was made after careful and thorough monitoring of events in Syria and the conviction by the G.C.C. that the bloodshed and the killing of innocent people there is continuing," the Gulf council statement said.

Mr. Moallem acknowledged that there was little hope for an Arab solution but tried to portray confidence, saying that Syria had the strong support of powerful allies in Iran as well as Russia.

The permanent representatives of the Arab League's 22 members were to hold an emergency meeting in Cairo on Tuesday night to review the situation following the Gulf council's decision.

Arab-Led Syrian Opposition Courts Erbil

RUDAW

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan – In an attempt to ease Kurdish concerns over Syria's Islamist-led opposition, Burhan Ghalioun, the head of the Syrian National Council (SNC), pledged to guarantee Kurdish rights in post-Assad Syria during a meeting with Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani in Erbil earlier this month, a senior opposition leader told Rudaw.

Abdul-Bast Sayda, a member of the executive committee of the SNC who accompanied Ghalioun to Erbil, said that following the visit to Erbil, "Barzani's attitude has changed toward Syrian National Council." Leaders in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq have aired reservations about the Arab-dominated SNC and Kurdish claims that they have been sidelined in key decisions on

Syria's future.

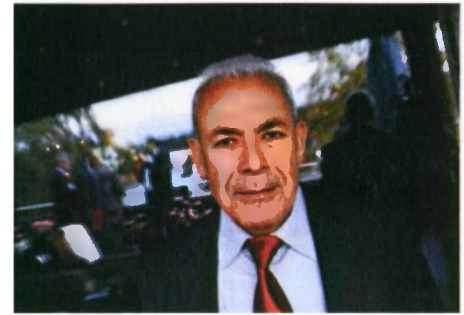
The SNC was established in Istanbul September. Ten Kurdish parties and civil organizations have boycotted the council and formed their own Kurdistan National Council.

However, Sayda, a Kurd, joined the SNC and has tried to bring more Kurds into the group.

"We will respond to this attempt for unification between the Kurdish and Syrian National Council soon," Sayda said. "We have asked both of the councils to meet in Erbil in the near future."

Abdul-Hakim Bashar, the head of the Kurdish National Council in Syria, confirmed to Rudaw that there is an attempt to bring both councils closer.

Bashar, who is also the leader of Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria, said, "We feel like the Syrian National Council doesn't treat us like we are all equal in



The head of the Syrian National Council (SNC) Burhan Ghalioun. Photo AFP.

Syria. Despite this, there is progress and between the two councils."

According to Sayda, Ghalioun wanted to meet with Barzani, who demanded that Kurdish rights be respected in Syria if Assad's regime falls.●

REUTERS

Syria Kurd groups to try to unite against Assad

ARBIL, Iraq - January 19, 2012 - (Reuters) - Zhear Sarkawt and Jon Hemming

SYRIAN KURDISH groups opposed to Bashar al-Assad will try to unite this month to explain their autonomy demands to Arab groups trying to topple the Syrian leader, activists said on Thursday.

While security forces have clashed daily with protesters and insurgents demanding Assad's downfall in mainly Sunni Arab towns, Syrian Kurdish areas have remained relatively calm, despite many Kurds' long-standing opposition to the government.

Syrian Kurdish exile leaders say they do not trust the Arab opposition to heed their demands for self-rule in the mainly Kurdish northeast of the country.

Kurdish groups representing Syria's largest ethnic minority are also divided among themselves, with some factions backed by Iraqi Kurds, and another by Turkish Kurd rebels of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), independent analysts said.

"There will be a national conference of all the Kurdish parties to form one front," said Mahmoud Mohammad Bave Sabir, a leading member of the Democratic Union Kurdish Party of Syria, one of the oldest Kurdish opposition groups.

"The aim of the conference is to press the demands of the Kurds

in Syria and to open a dialogue with the Arab opposition," he told Reuters.

A date for the meeting has not been set, but it will be held this month in Arbil, capital of the semi-autonomous Iraqi region of Kurdistan, the activists said. All the main Syrian Kurdish parties, plus intellectuals and independent organizations, have been invited.

"The Arab opposition does not care about the Kurdish cause," said Sarbast Nabi, a Syrian Kurdish politics professor at Salahaddin University in Arbil. "All they have promised is to deal with us as Syrian citizens."

Kurds say they have been sidelined from the opposition Syrian National Council, an exile group that was set up in Turkey to coordinate a 10-month-old uprising against Assad.

"The Arab opposition is made up of Islamists and Arab nationalists who do not accept Kurdish demands for a democratic, pluralist, secular state where the rights of all minorities are recognized," Nabi said.

Syrian Kurdish groups are also wary of Turkey's influence on Syrian Arab dissidents based in Istanbul, given Ankara's historic hostility to demands for autonomy for its own large Kurdish minority.

In 2004, Syrian Kurds fought deadly clashes with security forces for days after an incident at a football stadium in the main Kurdish city of Qamishli. At the time, they said they received no support from Arabs now leading the opposition.

But student activists say they are still mobilizing support inside Syria in preparation for taking to the streets.

Many thousands of Kurds live in the capital Damascus, as well as in the northeast, and if they swung their weight behind the uprising, it would deal another powerful blow to Assad.○

E.U. agrees to embargo oil imports from Iran

BRUSSELS

Action to be phased in as part of strategy to avoid military action

BY STEPHEN CASTLE AND ALAN COWELL

The European Union escalated pressure on Iran over its nuclear program on Monday by agreeing on a phased ban on oil imports that officials said was needed to help force a shift in policy and reduce the risk of military strikes against Tehran.

While emphasizing their desire for talks, European foreign ministers, meeting in Brussels, sought to intensify an economic squeeze on Iran with measures to cut off the European market, which accounts for about one-fifth of Iranian oil exports.

"This has shown the resolve of the European Union on this issue and of the international community, and it is absolutely the right thing to do," said the British foreign secretary, William Hague.

Still, the push for sanctions by Europe, while significant for the numbers of countries it encompasses, remains opposed by major powers like Russia, and will do nothing to stop the continued flow of oil to Asia, a far larger market for Iran.

Western politicians suspect that Iran is building a nuclear weapons capability, but Tehran insists that its nuclear program is for civilian uses only. Amid the heightened tension, Iran has threatened to retaliate against the intensifying sanctions by blocking the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic corridor for global energy supplies. Two Iranian lawmakers repeated that threat on Monday.

While the measures announced in Brussels do include exemptions for existing contracts until July, and a plan to review the economic impact of the ban on certain ailing E.U. members, officials said such a review would do no more than possibly delay sanctions in certain areas, not imperil the larger plan.

And despite the economic consequences for several E.U. nations, European diplomats said they believed that tougher sanctions were their best hope of reducing the risk of a military strike against Iran, probably by Israel.

Iran is refusing to engage with any sense of intellectual honesty, said Alain Juppé, France's foreign minister.

"To avoid any military solution, which could have irreparable consequences, we have decided to go further down the path of sanctions," he said. "It is a good decision that sends a strong message and which I hope will persuade Iran that it must change its position, change its line and accept the dialogue that we propose."

One can be skeptical about the impact of sanctions," Mr. Juppé added, but they are better than a war.

The Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who has voiced skepticism about Iran's being persuaded by non-military tactics, said the E.U. sanctions were a "step in the right direction."

"True, it is still impossible to know what the result of these sanctions will be," his office said in a statement. "Very strong and quick pressure on Iran is necessary. Sanctions will have to be evaluated on the basis of results."

In a joint statement, Britain's prime minister, David Cameron, the German chancellor, Angela Merkel and the French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, described the measures as "an unprecedented package of sanctions on Iran."

"Iran has so far had no regard for its international obligations and is already exporting and threatening violence around its region," the statement said. "Until Iran comes to the table, we will be united behind strong measures to undermine the regime's ability to fund its nuclear program."

U.S. officials said they welcomed the decision in Brussels.

"The measures agreed to today by the E.U. Foreign Affairs Council are another

strong step in the international effort to dramatically increase the pressure on Iran," said a statement released by Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. "This new, concerted pressure will sharpen the choice for Iran's leaders and increase their cost of defiance of basic international obligations."

But the reaction from Moscow was critical. "In essence, this is an attempt to strangle an entire sector of the Iranian economy," the Russian Foreign Ministry said. "It is clear that this is pressure, diktat, an attempt to punish Iran for intractable behavior. As we have told our European partners before, this is a mistaken policy. Under this kind of pressure, Iran will not agree to any kind of concessions or change in its policies."

In a separate statement, Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov said, "We have continued hope that negotiations will be resumed soon."

Under the embargo deal, E.U. countries agreed not to sign new oil contracts with Iran and to end existing ones by July 1, the ministers said in a statement. The ban will cover imports of crude oil, petroleum products, and petrochemical products. It will also cover the export of key equipment and technology for the sector.

In addition, the assets of the Iranian central bank within the European Union will be frozen, with limited exemptions to permit the continuation of legitimate trade, the statement said.

One exemption was designed to allow the execution of existing oil contracts up until July, said one diplomat who was not authorized to speak publicly.

"Trade in gold, precious metals and diamonds with Iranian public bodies and the central bank will no more be permitted, nor will the delivery of Iranian-denominated bank notes and coinage to the Iranian central bank," the statement said.

However, the accord allows for a review, to be undertaken before May 1, of the economic impact of the sanctions on countries, including Greece, that rely heavily on Iranian oil. The Greeks have sought more time to find the finance and to seek new sources of oil to soften the impact on its debt-crippled economy.

For Italy and Greece, the search is now on for new suppliers. Mr. Juppé said other oil exporters had indicated that they would fill the gap left by the Iranian embargo, and Greece's foreign minister, Stavros Dimas, said he believed that Saudi Arabian production could increase.

Meanwhile, there is a risk that Asian governments will continue to buy from Iran, filling the gap left by Europe. One diplomat said efforts to persuade them not to do so would be increased.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, Iran's top export destinations in 2010 included China, with 20 percent of exports, Japan, with 17 percent, India with 16 percent and South Korea with 9 percent. Europe's biggest importer was Italy, at 10 percent.

Pressure from the United States could be more effective, according to an analysis by Paul Stevens, a senior research fellow at the Energy, Environment and Resource program at the Chatham House research organization in London. "Given the current situation in North Korea, both South Korea (imports from Iran 230,000 barrels a day) and Japan (520,000 barrels a day) are extremely vulnerable to American pressure to join any embargo against Iranian crude," he wrote. "Japan has recently been actively seeking ways to reduce imports from Iran."

Catherine Ashton, foreign policy chief of the European Union, said it was committed to a dual-track strategy and was open to negotiations with Iran.

"Sanctions are not an end in themselves," she told reporters, "the purpose of sanctions is to keep pressure on Iran to come back to the negotiating table."

Alan Cowell reported from London. Michael Schwartz contributed reporting from Moscow, Isabel Kershner from Jerusalem and Brian Knowlton from Washington.

Turks scold France over Armenian genocide bill

PARIS

BY SEBNEM ARSU

A day after the French Senate approved a bill criminalizing the denial of officially recognized genocides, including the Armenian genocide that began in 1915, Turkey heavily criticized the bill on Tuesday but said it would hold off on sanctions against France until all legal avenues to invalidate the bill were exhausted.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the legislation was "evident discrimination, racism and massacre of free speech." The bill calls for up to one year in prison and a fine of up to €45,000, or about \$60,000, for those found guilty of denying officially recognized genocides.

"We are going to impose our sanctions step by step with certainty, without hesitations," Mr. Erdogan said in a speech in Ankara. "However, for now, we are still in the phase of patience as we watch how this process would shape up."

Turkish officials say they expect the French constitutional court to hear likely appeals calling for annulment of the measure so that there would no need for permanent sanctions. Mr. Erdogan said, "We believe that our French friends and the French people would be more sensitive about increasing discrimination."

The office of President Nicolas Sarkozy said Tuesday, "The president of the republic will promulgate the law within the usual timeframe, that is two weeks," Reuters reported.

The bill added to escalating tensions between France and Turkey since bilateral relations took a downturn after Mr. Sarkozy, along with Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, repeatedly expressed opposition to Turkey's full membership to the European Union since his election in 2007.

The Turkish government, in turn, argues that Mr. Sarkozy's stance against its E.U. membership, as well as his support for the bill, is aimed at appealing to the 500,000 ethnic Armenians in France before presidential elections this spring.

After the approval of the bill in late December by the National Assembly, France's lower house, Turkey recalled its ambassador to Paris and suspended political and military cooperation.

Ankara warned that stronger sanctions — including disqualification of French companies from public contracts, cancellation of military, political and cultural functions with French insti-

"Our bilateral relations are at a different level from now on."

tutions, as well as the closing of Turkish air, naval and land ports — could be permanent if the bill became law, NTV television reported at the time.

The Turkish government also threatened to withdraw support for Euronews, a continuous international news network based in France, the Anatolia news agency reported on Monday. Turkey's national radio and television network holds a 15.5 percent stake in Euronews.

Turkey's anger resonated in various echelons of political circles on Tuesday with President Abdullah Gul strongly denouncing the legislation.

"Our bilateral relations are at a different level from now on," Mr. Gul said on NTV.

The opposition Nationalist Movement Party proposed annulment of the Turkish and French friendship parliamentary committee as party officials lashed out at the legislation, calling it unacceptable.

Turkish officials have argued fiercely that the French bill contradicted free speech, a founding principle of French society, emphasizing that reaching conclusions about historical events is the duty of historians, not politicians.

Many critics, however, contend that Turkey's claims of violation of free speech do not stand up because Turkey's penal code criminalizes public affirmation of the Armenian genocide on the premise that it is an insult to Turkish identity; they also note that there are more than 95 journalists in Turkish jails on political charges.

In March, the Nobel literature laureate Orhan Pamuk was fined the equivalent of about \$3,670 for his statement in a Swiss newspaper that "we have killed 30,000 Kurds and one million Armenians."

Armenian lobby groups around the world seek countries' official recognition that Ottoman forces killed about 1.5 million of their kin in a genocide from 1915 to 1923. Parliaments of 19 countries and the European Union have officially recognized the killings as genocide, while Slovenia and Switzerland additionally bring criminal charges against those who deny it.

"If each Parliament reflects its own view of history in a legislation," the Turkish foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, said Monday, "it would be the revival of the era of Inquisition in Europe."

Turkey strongly rejects the genocide claims and has proposed opening all state archives for an international committee of prominent historians to investigate atrocities during World War I, when the Ottoman Empire was falling apart.

Syria rejects proposal that Assad step down

DAMASCUS

BY KAREEM FAHIM

Denouncing a new Arab League peace proposal that calls for Syria's president to hand over power to his deputy, the government emphatically rejected the plan on Monday, calling it a blatant infringement on Syrian sovereignty and evidence of a "conspiratorial scheme."

The rejection, the Syrian Arab News Agency reported, came less than 24 hours after the Arab League unexpectedly floated the proposal, under which President Bashar al-Assad would relinquish power to a deputy and start negotiations with opponents within two weeks.

There had been little expectation of a positive response to the proposal from Mr. Assad. The president has cast the rebellion against his family's four decades in power as a crime wave by terrorists backed by hostile foreign powers, including Qatar and the United States.

Mr. Assad's refusal to acknowledge his political opponents, combined with the failure of the Arab League's observer mission here to end months of violence and the growing prominence of armed militias, have reinforced fears that Syria's political crisis is devolving into a civil war.

"Syria considers these decisions a violation of its national sovereignty, a blatant interference in its internal affairs and a flagrant violation of the objections for which the Arab League was established," the Syrian Arab News Agency statement said about the Arab League proposal.

"Syria condemns this decision, which came in the framework of the conspiratorial schemes hatched against Syria which have been exposed to our people and the Arab Homeland."

The Arab League proposal appeared to have been modeled on the agreement signed in November by President Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen and was formally presented Sunday at the league's headquarters in Cairo.

Like the Yemen pact, the proposal for Syria called for a government of national unity to be formed within two months, followed by presidential and parliamentary elections.

Representatives of the Syrian National Council, an opposition group, welcomed the proposal on Sunday. But the group also signaled the likelihood of failure because of its condition that there would be no negotiations until Mr. Assad stepped down.

Iran, Syria and Iraq: Turkey's Challenging Triangle?

The triangle's cooperation on questions of security is crucial to Turkey. Iran, Iraq and Syria share the volatile Kurdish issue with Turkey and each can play a part in lighting and quenching its fires, reports *Idrees Mohammed*.

Middle East Online

Turkey is facing a difficult period with respect to ties with its triangle of neighbors: Iran, Syria and Iraq. Their current domestic situations and foreign policies are now endangering Turkey's own domestic stability and foreign policy. A polarization now appears to exist in this regard and the triangle of Iran, Syria and Iraq's Shiite population maintain somewhat similar attitudes vis-à-vis Turkey. The major reasons behind this state of affairs are regional power rivalries, conflicting attitudes towards the Arab Spring, and a mutually held stance in relation to the West. Developments currently unfolding within the triangle are now seen by Turkey as a cause of grave concern that will be difficult to overcome.

Prior to the Arab Spring reaching Syria - at which point it then became Turkey's nightmare, an amalgam of Turkish political, economic and security interests in Syria were well protected thanks to the AKP's foreign policy. Furthermore, Turkey was increasingly engaging Syria in international politics and positioning itself as the principle interlocutor between it and the West, thereby distancing Syria from Iran's sphere of influence while increasing its own importance to western countries and the international community.

Ironically, Turkey's excellent relations with Syria also helped it to develop ties with Iran and Iraq. Such developments explain why Turkey initially strained every nerve to shield the Syrian regime. Currently, however, Syria's continuing refusal to accede to Turkish demands has made bilateral relations increasingly tense, to the point where Turkey has lost confidence in the Syrian regime.

Amid this complex environment Turkey has striven to consolidate its regional clout, approaching the United States and coordinating with western and Sunni powerhouses over Syria. During a major tour, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan tried to sell Turkish secularism to the changing countries of the region, encouraging them to benefit from the Turkish model, while at the same time making an extremely controversial geo-strategic decision by agreeing to host the early warning radar of NATO's anti-missile system. Turkey has also liaised closely with influential western and Gulf countries, declaring its support for the anti-Syrian regime protestors and expressing Turkish dismay at the rule of President Bashar al-Assad.

Such attitudes are in clear conflict with Iran's policy. Contrary to Turkish efforts to spread the Turkish experience of secularism, Iran had scrambled, trying to seize developments in the Arab world by likening them to Iran's Islamic Revolution. While Turkey has officially declared that hosting the NATO

system does not target Iran, Iranians believe they are in fact its main objective and that its primary beneficiary is the "Zionist regime." In addition, Iran values Syria's survival as a matter of the utmost importance and is trying to do whatever is necessary to protect it.

Syria is Iran's greatest strategic regional ally, and Iran, together with segments of Iraq's Shiite, with whom it shares religious connections, has made strenuous efforts to protect Syria's regime. Turkey, meanwhile, struggles to find a workable alternative.

This spidery network with its alarming developments and uneven ties to Turkey is dangerous as many Turkish interests - primarily those concerned with security and economic concerns - are located within the triangle. Yet it holds key mechanisms to Turkey's foreseeable future.

The triangle's cooperation on questions of security is crucial to Turkey. Iran, Iraq and Syria share the volatile Kurdish issue with Turkey and each can play a part in lighting and quenching its fires. In the past, both Syria and Iran were reportedly accused of assisting Turkish Kurds in their struggle against the Turkish state. Indeed, Turkey could only capture the PKK leader after Syria withdrew its backing for him. The nature of relations between Turkey and these countries is very important to Turkey's security concerns.

While Iran is still a crucial energy partner for Turkey, both Syria and Iraq are budding markets for Turkish goods and are its gates to the Arab world. Until recently, Turkey and Syria enjoyed good trading relations, Syria being the transit country for Turkish goods. However, as the rift between them widens Turkey plans instead to use Iraq for the exportation of its products to regional markets.

The current crisis in Syria and the turmoil in Iraq loom very large in Turkey. It is deeply concerned that its worsening relations with Syria will result in it losing Syrian cooperation and any crackdown will result in inter-sectarian tension triggering a flood of refugees, including the Kurds, into the demographically mosaic Turkey. In conjunction with that, the status of Syrian Kurds - should they obtain greater rights - would be improved, making Turkish Kurds more jealous and motivating them to increasingly demand rights.

With regard to Iraq, the political instability in Iraq endangers the power-sharing process, deepens mistrust among the political factions and widens ethnic and religious division, prompts inter-sectarian violence and threatens Iraq's territorial integrity. While Turkey has for years defended the territorial integrity of Iraq, the current potential for its reality is frighteningly clear.

Iran wields influence over Iraq, Syria and the nationalist and fundamentalist forces inside Turkey, where, reportedly, it is able to neutralize and mobilize them. In a series of threats Iran has accused Turkey of adopting the Western stance towards it and Syria, and demanded that Turkey shift its policy towards favoring Syria or face difficulties from neighboring and domestic forces.

On the one hand Iraq's attitude towards Syria appears, to be influenced by that of Iran, and Iranian support for Syria buttresses the regime's confidence vis-à-vis Turkey. On the other hand, intelligence has warned that a Quds Force may plan to

attack the US embassy or consulate in Turkey. Iraq's turmoil has become apparent and recently the Turkish embassy in Iraq came under attack. Despite the fact that the intention is not to hold any side accountable for that, the late events took place amid the increasingly chilly atmosphere between Turkey and the triangle.

The developments in Iran, Syria and Iraq, the rise of tension between them and Turkey and the process of fence mending are Turkey's major current challenges. Though Turkey is ready

to do whatever is necessary to resume talks on Iran's nuclear program, the ties between Turkey and Iran remain uneven. Nevertheless, Turkey needs to gain Iranian cooperation over Iraq and Syria to protect its interests and because it cannot afford losing allies. On Iraq, the political factions should be encouraged and pushed for keeping a broad-based government. Syria remains a special case. □□□

Idrees Mohammed , Observer of Turkey's foreign policy.

Rudaw 31 January 2012

Barzani To Nominate Kurdish Vice-President



*Kurdistan
Region
President
Massoud
Barzani (left)
with his former
Vice President
Kosrat Rasul
Ali. Photo
Rudaw.*

The president's office has often been criticized for limiting its staff to KDP and PUK officials and sidelining the opposition. However, Fuad Hussein, chief of staff for the president, said, "There are people from all religions, sects and affiliations in the Kurdistan Region's president's office."

Abubakr Ali, a senior official in the opposition Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), said, "The opposition doesn't talk to the president's office with the same language it uses for the government. It even sometimes makes a distinction between the president and the KDP when it is at odds with the KDP."

Hussein said the president has "Relationships with all opposition leaders and has dialogue and meetings with them."

Yusef Mohammed, an official from Kurdistan's largest opposition party, Change, said the president has been seen as taking the side of the two ruling parties, the KDP and PUK.

He criticized the president for not taking a "neutral role" during the protests that engulfed some cities across the Kurdistan Region last year.

However, he admitted that the president has taken on a more intermediary role in the recent tensions between political parties, saying "This has to be enshrined in the constitution of the Kurdistan Region that he should not favor any political group."

Mohammed said the president should not consider himself part of the government "Otherwise it will become part of the problem." ○

RUDAW

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan -- Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani is expected to nominate Kosrat Rasoul Ali to serve as vice-president again.

Barzani is expected to send the nomination for parliamentary approval in the near future.

In addition to having served as Barzani's vice-president in the past, Ali a deputy to Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) leader Jalal Talabani. The PUK has a strategic power-sharing agreement with Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

Ali's nomination comes following months of speculation and occasional tension between the KDP and PUK over who should fill the vice-presidential post which has been vacant since 2009.

Fazil Mirani, a senior KDP official, told Rudaw, "If the PUK nomi-

nates Ali today, we will approve him tomorrow."

While the Kurdistan Region Government (KRG) is a parliamentary system, many have said with its current power structure it is difficult to determine if the political system in Kurdistan is presidential or parliamentary.

Talib Rashid, head of legal affairs of the Kurdistan Region's presidential office, said it is a parliamentary system "but has also a semi-presidential character too. The powers given to the president have not turned the system into a presidential one."

Barzani wields enormous power as president and often represents the region internationally. Barzani was elected as Kurdistan Region President in 2009 with nearly 70 percent of the vote in the region. He also served as president from 2005 to 2009.

The vice-president is deputy commander-in-chief but does not hold many of the powers of the president including deploying troops.

Kurdish Authorities Confident About Region's Oil Sector

By HEVIDAR AHMED

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan – Over the past several years, the right to manage oil and gas deals has been a major dispute between Baghdad and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region which aspires to become a major global energy source with its massive oil and gas fields.

Because Iraqi officials and political observers believe oil and gas development in Iraqi Kurdistan may in the end prompt a demand for an independent state, Baghdad's reservations about Kurdistan's oil industry has political dimensions. This became clear when ExxonMobil, the world's largest oil company, signed a contract with the Kurdistan Region.

Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani said during a recent visit to Duhok province, "I have not met with any oil companies before, except Exxon Mobil and that is because I know the importance of its investment in the Kurdistan Region. Therefore I support them to come and invest in the fields of gas and oil in Kurdistan Region."

"The Kurdistan Region's contract with Exxon Mobil is a sound contract and doesn't have problems," said Ashû Hawrami, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Minister of Natural Resources.

Hawrami said that the Kurdistan Region has decided to sign more contracts with other international oil and gas companies in the near future.

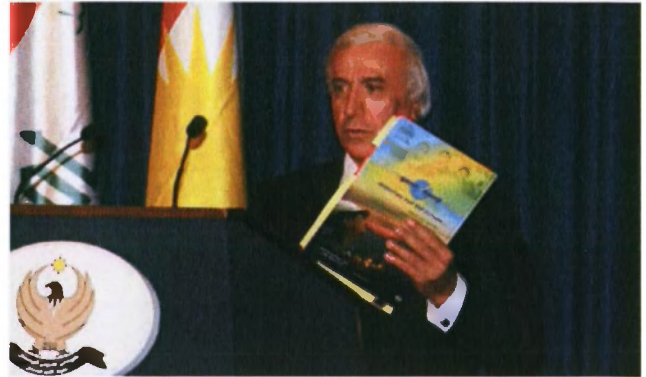
In September 2011, an oil and gas conference was held in Kurdistan where Hawrami announced that "There is a mutual understanding between Baghdad and KRG to draft a new oil and gas law."

Hawrami said he will meet with the Iraqi minister of oil to discuss the new draft law.

Kurdish officials backed an oil and gas law that was drafted in Baghdad 2007, but the Iraqi government is now planning to pass a new law that has put Kurdistan authorities at unease.

"The KRG has sent its concerns and comments regarding this draft to the Iraqi Ministry of Oil, Prime Minister Nuri Maliki and the Iraqi

*Ashti
Hawrami,
Kurdistan
Regional
Government
(KRG)
Minister of
Natural
Resources.
Photo
investorsir-
aq.com*



Councils of Ministers," a senior official at KRG Ministry of Natural Resources said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "The case is now in the hands of the Iraqi Parliament and the central government,"

However, Farhad Atrushi, spokesman for the Kurdistan Alliance in the Iraqi Parliament, believes that due to the current political turmoil in Baghdad, the new oil and gas law may not be passed any time soon.

"The minister of oil cannot make any moves without Shahrستاني, and Shahrستاني cannot make any decisions without Maliki," Atrushi said in reference to Hussein Shahrستاني, the deputy prime minister for energy affairs. "This matter has been turned into a political issue and it is very difficult to solve."

Shahrستاني, Iraq's most influential oil official, has consistently opposed Kurdistan's oil deals with foreign companies and described them as illegal. However, international oil companies continue to seek investment in the relatively stable Kurdistan Region.

"If these international companies weren't 100 percent sure of the security and constitutional aspects of regions they invest in, they would not have come in the first place," Atrushi said. "The Kurdistan Region has its own oil and gas laws, and it is safe from the security aspect. The policies of the KRG and its diplomacy have encouraged many international companies to come to Kurdistan Region and sign contracts with the KRG Ministry of Natural Resources."

The senior official from the ministry of natural resources said oil companies are hoping to invest in Kurdistan because of its investment

law and "the prospect of high levels of oil and gas production in Kurdistan region."

Currently key industry players such as Marathon, HESS, Repsol and ExxonMobil are involved in Kurdistan's oil sector.

KRG's contract with ExxonMobil allows the oil giant to explore six oil fields, the biggest deal of its kind so far in Kurdistan.

According to the Ministry of Natural Resources, there are more than 45 billion barrels of reserve oil in the Kurdistan Region. The KRG has signed 45 contracts with oil companies from 17 different countries.

The Kurdish Parliament passed its own oil and gas law in 2007 which further deepened the disputes with Baghdad. Kurdish authorities argued that the Iraqi constitution entitles them to unilaterally sign contracts with foreign companies while there is no federal oil and gas law, a move that Baghdad maintains is illegal.

In a recent interview, Barzani's Chief of Staff Fuad Hussein told Rudaw, "Some Iraqi officials and some in the US as well tried to have the agreement revoked and pressured ExxonMobil for that reason. Our talks with the State Department and ExxonMobil's officials convinced everyone that the deal was legal and constitutional and that it would be in the interest of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region."○

A Europe-Iran war

discounted as unrealistic scare-mongering or dismissed on

The E.U.'s embargo on Iranian oil imports could very well result in military hostilities.

Mark A. Heller

TEL AVIV This week, the European Union went to war against Iran. There was no formal declaration, of course, nor even any undeclared use of military force. But the E.U. decision to place an embargo on Iranian oil imports, ban new contracts, and freeze Iranian Central Bank assets is effectively an act of war and may very well result in the military hostilities that sanctions are meant to forestall.

Oil exports account for over 50 percent of Iranian government revenue and about 80 percent of its hard currency earnings. And the E.U., as a bloc, is Iran's second-largest customer, taking about a quarter of Iranian exports. Consequently, unless other customers neutralize E.U. actions by stepping up their own purchases from Iran — and indications from China, Japan and South Korea suggest that this is unlikely to be the case — the E.U. decision, coupled with existing American measures, will come close to imposing the “crippling sanctions” that Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton threatened but could not deliver without European cooperation.

If that turns out to be the case, then the Iranian regime, already coping with high inflation and a rapidly depreciating currency, will feel constrained to react. One possibility is that it will capitulate and essentially dismantle its nuclear weapons program. That is obviously the outcome that Europeans and others

hope sanctions (or even the credible threat of sanctions) will bring about.

But it is at least as likely that Iran, feeling trapped, will lash out in a desperate attempt to frighten the Europeans into backing down or at least introduce so much hysteria into the oil market that price spikes will allow it to earn the same revenue from a reduced volume of exports.

One form this might take would be an attempt to close the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has already threatened to do. But that is probably beyond Iran's capacity for very long and would in any case also shut down Iran's own ability to export to whatever markets it manages to retain.

Far less complicated would be sabotage or rocket attacks on refineries, pipelines and other facilities in places like Abqaiq and Ras Tanura in Saudi Arabia. These might be carried out as “false flag” operations by local Shiite insurgents concentrated in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, but nobody would be fooled and the risks of escalation to large-scale conflict with Iran would be significant.

In this scenario, the military confrontation that many Europeans have

It appears that the European Union is experiencing its own “spring” in foreign and defense policy.

sought to avoid will become unavoidable, even if Iranian decision makers do not delude themselves into thinking that they would ultimately prevail.

Before such courses of action are

grounds that they would be self-defeating, it might be worth recalling that Imperial Japan did not attack the United States because it was physically attacked by the United States but rather because it was being economically squeezed (as Iran may well be squeezed now) to the point where it felt that war was preferable to slow-motion strangulation. And it made no difference that many Japanese military leaders, including Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, chief planner of the attack on Pearl Harbor, believed that Japan's ultimate defeat was foreordained.

It is difficult to imagine that the E.U. members who adopted the decision on sanctions are unaware of this possible dynamic. Indeed, the very fact that British and French warships accompanied the U.S. aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln on its passage through the Straits and back into the Gulf — in brazen defiance of Iranian warnings — imply the opposite: that E.U. governments, especially the two with the greatest force projection capabilities, are perfectly cognizant of the possible consequences and are prepared to deal with them.

And that suggests that the European Union, notwithstanding its economic travails, is experiencing its own “spring” in foreign and defense policy and that those who tended in the past to dismiss it as a flaccid talking shop capable of little more than vacuous posturing now need to carry out a fundamental reassessment.

MARKA. HELLER is principal research associate at the Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv University.



January 24, 2012

US designates al-Qaeda Kurdish battalions as a terrorist organization

VOANews.com

The al Qaeda Kurdish Battalions, or AQKB, is a terrorist organization primarily active in the northern Iran-Iraq border areas.

From time to time, the United States identifies certain groups as terrorist organizations. These are mostly active militant groups that do not shrink from committing violent acts against others, including civilian populations, or they are involved in providing support for other terrorist organizations. In all cases, these are people or groups that have committed, or are deemed to pose a significant risk of committing, acts of terrorism.

When such a group is identified, the U.S. Government places that group's name on the Specially Designated Global Terrorist

Entities List. Its assets within U.S. reach are immediately frozen, and the entity is locked out of the global financial network. No U.S. citizen or company may conduct business with a designated individual or group. In this way, the United States disrupts financial support networks for terrorists and terrorist organizations.

The al Qaeda Kurdish Battalions, or AQKB, is a terrorist organization primarily active in the northern Iran-Iraq border areas. According to the U.S. Department of State, it was formed in 2007 from the remnants of other Kurdish terrorist organizations, and has publicly pledged its allegiance to other terrorist groups, including al Qaeda and al Qaeda in Iraq.

The AQKB is comprised of former elements of Ansar al Islam, and other Kurdish

extremist groups loyal to the Islamic State of Iraq, al Qaeda in Iraq's political front. The AQKB sees the leaders of the Kurdistan Regional Government as traitors. The group has claimed responsibility for a number of attacks against Kurdish targets in Iraq.

As a result of a May 2007 attack in Erbil, Iraq, when a vehicle loaded with explosives struck the Kurdish Ministries of the Interior and Security, 19 people died.

In July 2007, AQKB killed seven border guards and one Patriotic Union of Kurdistan security force member in an ambush in Penjwan, Iraq. And in September 2010, two police officers were injured during an unsuccessful AQKB suicide bomb attack targeting security officers in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq.

The al Qaeda Kurdish Battalions extremist group has demonstrated its commitment to violence. This designation is intended to disrupt its ability to carry out its deadly agendas or to support other terrorist groups with which it collaborates.

□□□

LE FIGARO

jeudi 26 janvier 2012

Khaddam : « Assad planifie la partition de la Syrie »

L'ex-vice-président syrien affirme que le régime transfère ses armes sur le littoral, pour créer un État alaouite au nord-ouest

PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR
ISABELLE LASSERE

L'ancien vice-président syrien, Abdel Halim Khaddam, 73 ans, vit à Paris depuis qu'il a fait défection en 2005. En novembre, il a créé le Comité national de soutien à la révolution syrienne (CNSRS), un mouvement qui voudrait rassembler tous les courants de l'opposition. Il réclame depuis plusieurs mois une intervention militaire occidentale en Syrie, pays où il a conservé de nombreux contacts.

LE FIGARO. – Affirmez-vous que le régime de Bachar el-Assad est en train de transférer le matériel militaire de l'armée à l'ouest du pays, au bord de la Méditerranée, en zone alaouite ?
Abdel Halim KHADDAM. – Tout à fait. Bachar et son clan ont d'abord distribué des fusils et des mitraillettes dans les villes et les villages peuplés par leurs compatriotes alaouites. Depuis un mois, ils ont aussi commencé à transférer les armements lourds de l'armée, par la route, vers le littoral, en les dissimulant sur les collines et les hauteurs. 8 % de la population syrienne est alaouite, même si tous les Alaouites ne soutiennent pas Bachar el-Assad. Les zones alaouites partent du sud-ouest de Homs et remontent, via Hama, jusqu'à la ville de Lattaquié, sur le littoral.

De quel type d'armements s'agit-il ?

Les missiles et les armes stratégiques ont déjà intégralement été transférés. Les tanks et l'artillerie, en partie seulement, car le régime a besoin d'en garder pour assurer la répression contre les manifestants dans les villes. Bachar a également prévu d'envoyer ses avions de chasse sur l'aéroport de Lattaquié.

Quel est le but du régime ?

Le président syrien a changé de tactique. Pendant longtemps, il a essayé d'envahir les villes et de bloquer les insurgés. Mais cela n'a pas marché. Il applique donc aujourd'hui un autre plan, qui vise à créer une guerre de religion, une guerre interconfessionnelle. Je sais qu'il y a un mois, il s'est confié à l'un de ses affidés libanais et lui a dit son intention de créer un État alaouite d'où il pourrait mener une guerre fratricide et confessionnelle. Il est désormais prêt à créer sa république personnelle. Il envisage de s'installer à Lattaquié. Je suis sûr qu'il existe suffisamment d'abris souterrains où lui et son clan pourraient se plier.



Pensez-vous que Bachar el-Assad joue la carte de la partition de la Syrie ?

Oui. Il a en vain utilisé la force contre le peuple syrien. Il ne veut pas se rendre et subir le même sort que Kadhafi, même si, aujourd'hui, son discours politique, celui d'un homme aux abois, ressemble à 100 % à celui de l'ancien président libyen. Il ne veut ni fuir ni quitter le territoire. Il a refusé toutes les opportunités qui lui ont été offertes par la Ligue arabe. La force ayant échoué, il ne lui reste donc plus qu'à mettre en place son plan de déstabilisation et de partition de la Syrie, qui entraînerait la destruction du pays.

Pensez-vous que ce plan puisse réussir ?

Non, car la population syrienne va continuer à se battre pour défendre l'unité et l'intégrité territoriale du pays. Je pense que ce projet finira par précipiter sa fin. Mais il est néanmoins très dangereux pour la Syrie. Car pour faire échec à la partition, certains insurgés n'hésiteront pas à faire appel à tous les radicaux du monde islamique. Les terroristes risquent donc d'entrer dans le jeu syrien. Le monde arabe se caractérise par un pluralisme ethnique et religieux. L'instabilité risque donc de se propager à toute la région.

Pourquoi l'armée syrienne libre n'a-t-elle pas essayé de bloquer les transferts des convois militaires à destination des zones alaouites ?

Parce que l'armée libre n'existe pas dans toutes les régions. Et parce que les routes sont contrôlées par l'armée régulière, celle de Bachar. ■

La Syrie sous mandat français en 1926



Quand la France créait l'« État alaouite »

Ce n'est pas la première fois qu'une partition de la Syrie est envisagée.

En 1920, après la Première Guerre mondiale, débute le mandat français sur la Syrie confié par la Société des nations. Le pays est divisé entre quatre entités politiques : l'État de Damas, l'État des Druzes, l'État d'Alep et le Territoire des Alaouites.

Ce dernier a pour capitale Lattaquié. Il est constitué par le djebel alaouite et les plaines périphériques. L'État des Alaouites est rattaché à celui de Syrie en 1936.

À l'indépendance, la fin du confessionnalisme prive définitivement les Alaouites de tout statut d'autonomie. Mais en 1963, des officiers alaouites participent au coup d'État baasiste de 1963 et l'un d'eux, Hafez el-Assad, s'impose quelques années plus tard à la tête de la Syrie. La secte des Alaouites qui représente environ 20 % de la population est considérée comme une branche du chiisme composée à l'origine de montagnards attachés à leur foi. Sous l'Empire ottoman, les sultans ont tenté sans succès de les convertir au sunnisme et le gouvernement turc s'est toujours heurté à la résistance des grandes familles locales.

REUTERS

Un attentat suicide fait 31 morts à Bagdad

BAGDAD - 27 janvier 2012 - (Reuters)

TRENTE ET UNE personnes ont été tuées et une soixantaine d'autres blessées dans un attentat suicide à la voiture piégée, vendredi, près d'un marché d'un quartier chiite de Bagdad.

Cet attentat porte à plus de 400 le nombre de victimes depuis le début, en décembre, de la crise politique opposant le Premier ministre, le chiite Nouri al Maliki, au vice-président sunnite Tarek al Hachemi, qui s'est réfugié au Kurdistan irakien.

Le kamikaze a fait exploser son véhicule -un taxi- au passage d'un cortège funèbre chiite dans le quartier de Zaafaranaia.

"Le kamikaze n'a pas réussi à atteindre le commissariat de Zaafarinaia, alors il s'est fait exploser près de magasins et du marché", a dit un porte-parole des services de sécurité.

Le cortège funèbre portait en terre un agent immobilier chiite tué la veille par des inconnus, a précisé la police.

Une série d'attaques ont visé la majorité chiite, marginalisée, voire persécutée par le régime de Saddam Hussein, depuis que le gouvernement de Nouri al Maliki a délivré un mandat d'arrêt visant Tarek al Hachemi et demandé aux députés de limoger un vice-Premier ministre également sunnite.

Maliki affirme que ses décisions contre des dirigeants sunnites ne sont pas motivées par des considérations politiques ou reli-



Trente et une personnes au moins ont trouvé la mort et une soixantaine d'autres ont été blessées dans un attentat suicide à la voiture piégée, vendredi près d'un marché du quartier chiite de Zaafaranaia, à Bagdad. /Photo prise le 27 janvier 2012/REUTERS/Saad Shalash

gieuses mais découlent de poursuites judiciaires. Les sunnites s'inquiètent, eux, du poids grandissant des chiites dans les institutions de l'Etat à leurs dépens.

La crise, déclenchée au lendemain du départ, le 18 décembre, du dernier soldat américain, risque de faire voler en éclats le fragile accord de partage du pouvoir conclu il y a un an entre chiites, sunnites et Kurdes.○

Observatoire de la Vie Politique Turque (OVIPO).....24 janvier 2012

LES DESSOUS DE LA RÉCONCILIATION TURCO-IRANIENNE

PAR WALID BELBACHIR

Ce mois de janvier est celui de la réconciliation entre la Turquie et l'Iran. Après une fin d'année difficile (votre notre édition du 15 décembre), les relations se réchauffent entre les deux pays. En visite à Téhéran début janvier 2012, Ahmet Davutoğlu a affirmé que les éléments du bouclier anti-missile récemment installés sur le territoire turc sont purement défensifs et ne seront pas utilisés contre un voisin de la Turquie. Le chef de la diplomatie turque a aussi tenu à rassurer Téhéran en déclarant que le sol turc ne pourra pas servir de base à une intervention militaire contre l'Iran. Ankara a enfin offert sa médiation dans le dossier du nucléaire iranien. Les prochaines négociations entre Téhéran et le conseil de sécurité pourraient ainsi se tenir à Istanbul. La chef de la diplomatie européenne, Catherine Ashton, s'est montrée favorable à cette initiative.

Pour Téhéran, quels sont les bénéfices tirés de la réconciliation turco-iranienne ?

Sur le plan diplomatique, l'Iran ne peut se passer de la médiation turque. Le dernier rapport de l'AIEA (8 novembre 2011)



Un navire de la marine iranienne tire un missile Mehrab dans le détroit d'Ormuz, le 1er janvier 2012. AFP/Ebrahim Noroozi

faisant état d'une possible militarisation du programme nucléaire iranien avait marqué l'arrêt des négociations entre Téhéran et la communauté internationale, isolant davantage la République islamique. La brouille entre Téhéran et Ankara notamment au sujet du bouclier anti-missile – un responsable iranien avait déclaré que ces installations militaires sur le territoire turc seraient visées en cas d'attaques sur le sol iranien – pouvait faire perdre à l'Iran le soutien d'un acteur important dans son bras de fer avec une partie de la communauté internationale. Sur le plan stratégique, la mise en œuvre de sanctions contre les exportations d'hydrocarbures iraniens ne laissait rien

présager de bon pour Téhéran. D'autant que l'Arabie Saoudite s'est engagée à augmenter ses exportations de pétrole pour continuer à fournir les pays dépendants des ressources énergétiques iraniennes, comme la Grèce et l'Italie. L'Iran a répondu à ces pressions en brandissant la menace d'une fermeture du détroit d'Ormuz, par lequel transite 30 à 40% du trafic maritime pétrole mondial. Un scénario qui n'aurait pour autre conséquence de provoquer un conflit ouvert qui n'est certainement pas dans l'intérêt de Téhéran. Cette montée des tensions durant le mois de décembre 2011 témoignait d'une perte de contrôle de la situation par l'Iran qui s'engageait vers une voie de plus en plus incertaine et dangereuse, compromettant même sa propre sécurité. La Turquie est ainsi venue au secours du régime iranien en lui apportant un soutien diplomatique fort. L'affirmation de l'amitié turco-iranienne et l'organisation de nouvelles négociations à Istanbul entre Téhéran et le conseil de sécurité offrent un répit essentiel à l'Iran.

En concurrence avec Téhéran pour l'hégémonie régionale, pourquoi la Turquie a-t-elle soutenu son rival en

situation difficile ?

Pour la Turquie, les bénéfices de cette réconciliation avec l'Iran sont nombreux. La diplomatie turque se pose, ici encore, en acteur régional incontournable. La démarche d'Ankara a permis à la Turquie de renouer de bonnes relations avec le voisin iranien (son principal fournisseur énergétique), d'accroître son influence auprès des pays occidentaux, et surtout d'éviter une déstabilisation générale due à l'acculement de l'Iran. C'est là la principale raison de l'action diplomatique turque. Une pressurisation excessive du régime de Téhéran risquerait, comme les tensions dans le détroit d'Ormuz le montrent, de provoquer un embrasement régional avec des conséquences certaines pour les intérêts turcs. Il s'agit donc pour la Turquie d'éviter que l'Iran soit obligée de faire le choix de la confrontation et bouleverse ainsi une situation régionale dans laquelle Ankara tente d'affirmer peu à peu son leadership.

□ □ □

Courrier 24 janvier 2012

TURQUIE-FRANCE • Au bord de la rupture totale

La tension dans les relations franco-turques est montée d'un cran le 23 janvier, après le vote du Sénat français entérinant la loi sur la négation des génocides. Ankara menace de représailles, et la presse turque reflète bien ce mécontentement.

Pierre Vanrie

"**P**auvres Français !" C'est en ces termes que Hasan Celal Güzel, chroniqueur conservateur, fustige la France dans le quotidien Sabah, proche du gouvernement, en réaction à la décision du Sénat français validant la loi pénalisant la négation des génocides, visant en particulier le génocide arménien. "Je n'ai jamais été un ennemi de l'Occident, mais je trouve tout de même que les générations qui nous ont précédés ont accordé plus d'importance que nécessaire à l'Occident et en particulier à la France", poursuit Güzel.

"Les Français croient qu'ils sont les inventeurs des Lumières. Que personne ne s'offusque, mais moi, l'Europe me fait de plus en plus penser à une vieille prostituée pitoyable dont le maquillage est en train de couler. Peu nous importe que cette loi ridicule et d'un autre âge soit adoptée. La nation turque, riche d'une histoire et d'une civilisation plurimillénaires, ne va pas commencer à se soucier de décisions basement politiques prises aujourd'hui par des Français. Ce qui compte, c'est la vérité établie très clairement par de



© AFP/Bulent Kilic

▲ "Satan Sarkozy", titre le quotidien populaire proche de l'opposition, Sözcü, le 24 janvier.

nombreux documents historiques. A la lumière de ceux-ci, il apparaît de façon tout-à-fait évidente qu'à aucun moment de son histoire, notre nation n'a commis le moindre génocide. Dans ces conditions, personne ne nous obligerait à demander pardon".

Dans Vatan, quotidien volontiers critique à l'égard du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, au pouvoir), Okay Gönensin, éditorialiste libéral, dénonce lui aussi cette loi mais pour d'autres raisons : "La classe politique française n'a pas compris qu'en adoptant ce texte, elle ne contribuerait pas à éclairer l'histoire mais qu'elle retarderait au contraire ce pro-

cessus et nourrirait les discours de haine. Alors qu'elle essaie de dépasser ce traumatisme hérité de son histoire, la société turque va, dans ce contexte, connaître une régression. De ce point de vue, on peut dire que la classe politique française a fait du mal à la société turque et qu'en plus, en retardant le processus de rapprochement entre Turcs et Arméniens, elle a aussi fait du mal aux Arméniens".

Dans cet éditorial intitulé "Regardons-nous nous-mêmes", Gönensin estime toutefois que la société turque ne pourra se libérer du discours de haine "qu'en se regardant en face" : "Que l'on qualifie ce qui s'est passé en 1915 'd'événements malheureux liés à la déportation', de 'génocide' ou de 'grande catastrophe', avant d'affronter la classe politique française et le monde entier - que vous ne pourrez d'ailleurs plus faire changer d'avis sur cette question - regardons-nous en face et interrogeons-nous. Car si nous poursuivons sur la même voie [négationniste], la société turque actuelle s'enfoncera encore plus dans un crime dont elle n'est pas responsable et en sortir deviendra d'autant plus difficile".♦

Car bombs kill 13, wound 75 in Iraq capital



Reuters

Baghdad: Four car bombs exploded in mainly Shi'ite Muslim areas of Baghdad on Tuesday, killing at least 13 people and wounding 75, underlining a political crisis that threatens to revive sectarian strife in Iraq.

The first blast hit a group of day labourers gathering for jobs in the poor northeastern Sadr City area of the capital, leaving a chaotic scene of scattered shoes and food, and pools of blood.

The bomb killed at least eight people and wounded 24, police and hospital sources said.

"We were all standing waiting to earn our living and all of a sudden it was like a black storm and I felt myself thrown on the ground," said Ahmad Ali, a 40-year-old labourer whose face and hair were burned by the explosion.

"I fainted for a while then I woke up and hurried to one of the cars to take me to the hospital," said

Ali, lying on a bed in the emergency room at Imam Ali hospital in Sadr City.

The second blast near a traffic roundabout in Sadr City killed two people and wounded 26 others, the sources said.

Near two schools.

Two other car bombs exploded in mainly Shi'ite northwestern areas of Baghdad, killing three people and wounding 25, sources said. One car blew up near two schools in the Shula district, the other on a busy commercial street in Hurriya.

Violence in Iraq has dropped sharply from the height of sectarian killing in 2006-07, but insurgents and militias still carry out daily attacks and assassinations in an attempt to undermine the government.

Iraq has been hit by a series of bombings targeting Shi'ites during the worst political crisis in a year, which threatens to break up a fragile coalition government and has raised fears of renewed sectarian violence after US troops left on December 18.

The government of Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki moved

last month to arrest Sunni Muslim Vice President Tareq Al Hashemi on charges he ran a death squad and then sought to sideline a Sunni deputy prime minister after he branded Maliki a dictator.

Hashemi denied the charges and sought refuge in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region, where he is unlikely to be arrested.

The Sunni-backed Iraqiya political bloc then announced a boycott of parliament and several Iraqiya ministers have stayed away from cabinet meetings in protest. Others have attended, underscoring splits in the alliance.

The turmoil has fuelled fears that Maliki is trying to shore up Shi'ite power and sideline Iraqiya. The political blocs began talks last week to try to organise a national conference to resolve their differences.

A series of bombings in Shi'ite areas of the capital on December 22 killed at least 72 people and wounded 200 others. Scores more were killed in attacks targeting Shi'ite pilgrims this month. □

Eager for new alliances, Assad's opponents look to Iraqi Kurdistan

TODAY'S ZAMAN
ABDULLA HAWEZ*,

Lately, Iraqi Kurdistan has seen a surge in political activity, from the visit of Burhan Ghalioun, chairman of the Syrian National Council (SNC), to Walid Jumblatt, a prominent Lebanese Druze leader, to Samir Geagea, from the Lebanese opposition bloc, to Turkey's Deputy Foreign Minister Feridun Sinirlioğlu.

For some, the stream of political leaders to Kurdistan might be normal, but lately all political leaders who have visited Kurdistan are in one way or another linked to Syria. Those who have visited Kurdistan are anti-Syria Lebanese leaders, from the Syrian opposition or from Turkey, an important player in the Syrian

crisis. According to information I acquired from sources close to Massoud Barzani's ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), in the group's meetings with the above people, Barzani has been discussing Syria

Ghalioun's meeting with Barzani, which took place two weeks ago, was mostly about guarantees from the SNC for Kurds in Syria, which was made in return for an agreement in which the Kurdish National Council, which represents most Kurdish parties in Syria, will join the SNC.

Syrian Kurds have some demands which they tie to membership in the SNC, including the right to study in Kurdish in predominately Kurdish cities and the right to limited regional autonomy.

Ghalioun promised to discuss the conditions with other members of the SNC.

Yet some Kurds still haven't joined the demonstrations -- which may suggest they belong to pro-Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) parties. According to some Kurdish journalists who visited senior PKK leader Murat Karayilan last August, the PKK doesn't want Bashar al-Assad to be toppled. The PKK has historical ties with the Syrian regime, and they used to set up camp in Syrian territory prior to the imprisonment of PKK leader and founder Abdullah Öcalan in 1999.

Lebanese Druze leader Jumblatt, who claims to have a neutral stance regarding Syria, met with Barzani in mid-December. Jumblatt used to be a diehard opponent of Assad. Jumblatt,

who is of Kurdish origin, discussed with Barzani the idea of withdrawing his party from the Lebanese government if need be.

Prominent Lebanese politician Geagea's meeting with Barzani was also motivated by the Syrian crisis. According to unconfirmed information, Barzani, who himself has strong ties with many Lebanese parties, is trying to convince Jumblatt to negotiate with Geagea's opposition party to topple Lebanon's current government, which is dominated by Hezbollah. Turkey has had a harsh stance on the Syrian regime since the start of the uprising and is believed to have asked Barzani, a strong ally of Turkey, to use his ties with Lebanese parties to topple any pro-Assad government in Lebanon.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sinirlioğlu paid a visit to the Iraqi city of Arbil to discuss the development of closer ties with Barzani.

In addition, the Kurdistan Islamic Union

(KIU), which has strong ties with Iran, Turkey and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, is mediating between Iran and the Syrian Brotherhood, because the Syrian Brotherhood knows if Iran continues to support Assad, there will be little hope of toppling the regime without foreign intervention. Again, Turkey, specifically Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, personally asked Selahaddin Bahaddin, head of the KIU, to use the group's own privileged position to open negotiations between Iran and the Syrian Brotherhood. For this, Bahaddin paid a visit to İstanbul to see the leaders of the Syrian Brotherhood and then visited Tehran. Moreover, later, Bahaddin flew to Sudan to see Iran's friends, Sudanese president Omar Hassan al-Bashir and Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal, who both have a good relationship with Iran and an Islamist background. What they discussed is not yet known. Furthermore, a week ago, Bahaddin met with a delegation from the Kurdish National Council, according to a source close to the KIU; Bahaddin is try-

ing to mediate between Syrian Kurds and the Brotherhood as well. The Syrian Kurds are striving to get guarantees from the opposition regarding Kurds amid the growing opportunity of toppling Assad's regime.

Iraqi Kurdistan, with its strategic geopolitical location between Syria, Turkey and Iran, is becoming a vital place for political activity between different actors playing a role in the Syrian crisis. Kurds are trying to keep up good relations with Middle Eastern giants Iran and Turkey. Barzani, who used to have good ties with Assad's regime, seemingly turned toward the opposition with the growing opportunity of the uprising's success in Syria.

☆☆☆

**Abdulla Hawez is a freelance journalist based in Iraqi Kurdistan.*

San Francisco Chronicle JANUARY 28, 2012

Iraq car bomber hits Shiite cortege, killing 33



Barbara Surk, Associated Press

Baghdad —A suicide car bomber struck a Shiite funeral procession Friday, killing 33 people as suspected al Qaeda militants stepped up apparent efforts to provoke a counterattack by Shiite militias on Sunnis that could pave the way toward open sectarian warfare now that U.S. troops have left Iraq.

The powerful blast - the second deadliest attack in Iraq this month - set nearby stores and cars ablaze alongside scattered flesh and mutilated bodies. It shattered windows and damaged walls in the local hospital, wounding a nurse and four patients; Within minutes, the hospital was scrambling to treat scores of others.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the

attack in the predominantly Shiite neighborhood of Zafaraniyah in southwestern Baghdad. But the bombing resembled previous attacks by al Qaeda in Iraq.

Minutes after the explosion, gunmen opened fire at a checkpoint in Zafaraniyah, killing two police officers, according to police officials. More than 200 people have been killed in bombings and shootings since the U.S. military withdrew from Iraq on Dec. 18. Many of the dead have been Shiite pilgrims and Iraqi police and soldiers.

Al Qaeda and other Sunni extremist groups are thought to be exploiting sectarian tensions in the wake of Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's efforts to marginalize the Sunni minority and cement his own grip on power.

Al Maliki's security forces have launched a widespread crackdown against Sunni politicians, detaining hundreds for alleged ties to the deposed Baath Party. Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, a Sunni, fled to the safety of the Kurdish semiautonomous zone after he was charged with running death squads during the height of the war.

"The attacks are a reaction to political developments in Iraq," said Mustafa Alani, a Geneva-based analyst and an Iraq expert with the Gulf Research Center. "The Sunnis feel the Shiites are squeezing them out of the government, and militants see the sectarian tensions in politics as a golden opportunity to reactivate their terror campaign."

"The U.S. soldiers are gone, Sunni politicians are being marginalized and while most Sunnis will not support the militants at the expense of being part of the political process, the attackers know that most Sunnis won't condemn violent acts either," Alani said.

□□□

Barzani Stresses Separation of Politics and Government

By HEVIDAR AHMED

SULAIMANI, Iraqi Kurdistan -- Earlier this month Kurdistan Region's opposition groups decided to boycott the new cabinet of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Opposition leaders argued that the KRG had failed to carry out any reforms, especially following the anti-government demonstrations that broke out for two months in Sulaimani city last year.

However, after a visit by the new Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani to Sulaimani last week, some opposition and ruling party leaders believe Barzani can lead a successful government and the opposition's stance may change.

Dilshad Shahab, member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) political bureau accompanied Barzani on his visit to Sulaimani.

"In our meetings (with the opposition) we emphasized that the relations between the political parties should not become a criteria for relations between the government and the parties," Shahab told Rudaw.

Farid Asasard, a member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) political bureau said that Barzani's visit to Sulaimani was good, but "we still have to see the results,"

In Sulaimani Barzani met with Nawshriwan Mustafa, the leader of the Change Movement (Gorran). Prior to his visit Barzani wrote on his Facebook page, "The political process in Kurdistan needs more dialogue and hand in hand we can reach the strategic national goals. The situation demands all parties and groups speak in a civil language to debate the fateful questions about the future of the Kurdistan Region."

Asasard who is also the head of



Nechirvan Barzani (right) in a press conference with Gorran leader Nawshirwan Mustafa in Sulaimani. Photo Rudaw.

Kurdistan Research Center said, "National dialogue faced disintegration last year and its impact is still palpable."

He added, "But I expect Barzani to reduce the impact of that disintegration. He should work to solve the causes of that disintegration so that he does not face the problems the sixth cabinet did last year."

During his meetings with the leaders of the Gorran Movement Barzani said, "Even if the opposition does not join the government, it can still play its role in the parliament and criticize the government."

Following two months of protests in Sulaimani last year where a dozen people were killed and many more injured as a result of security crackdown on protesters, the region's opposition parties presented the KRG with a set of recommendations for reform.

"Because their recommendations are for reform, we have no reservations whatsoever to meet with the opposition and discuss a work plan for reform," Barzani said.

Gorran spokesperson Shao Saeed said, "We told Barzani that it is important to put the opposition's reform recommendations in the agenda of the government."

Saeed declined to comment on the details of the meeting between his groups and Barzani said, "At the moment we do not pass judgment on the meeting neither positively nor in a negative way. We are waiting to see the work of the next cabinet and only then will we announce our opinion."

Nazim Abdullah, a leader in the Kurdistan Islamic League (Komal) echoed Shahab's statement that politics should be separated from the government, saying, "Barzani speaks of implementing the recommendations of the opposition and that is an important step because in our recommenda-

tions we demand the separation of political parties from the works of the government."

Shahab who attended some of the meetings between Barzani and opposition leaders said that Barzani and Gorran leader Mustafa agreed that putting the Kurdish house in order is imperative at this time.

"I believe if the government implements some of the recommendations of the opposition and there is a common view between the government and the political parties, Kurdistan will step forward," Shahab said.

In his Facebook message Barzani reiterated the importance of the opposition in the Kurdistan Region.

"Everyone has to be sure that we are open to dialogue," he wrote. "It was that same freedom and democracy that allowed for the opposition to emerge and watch the government with critical eyes. The opposition is a normal and healthy phenomenon and it is evidence of the success of the political process and democracy in Kurdistan."

Demonstrations in Sulaimani last year and riots in Duhok province in December where offices of the Kurdistan Islamic Union and massage parlors and liquor stores were torched by angry mobs, drifted Kurdistan's political parties away from each other.

Abdullah, Islamic League's political bureau member said, "Barzani's visit to Sulaimani was a good thing because taking stance against each other from afar isn't healthy. Both the government and the opposition want to serve the people and protect their interests; therefore Barzani's efforts will facilitate the way to implement the demands of the opposition and the people." ○

SYRIE. Les violences de jeudi ont fait 62 morts, dont 43 civils

Soixante-deux personnes, dont 43 civils, ont été tuées jeudi 26 janvier dans les violences en Syrie, où le régime réprime dans le sang depuis dix mois un mouvement de contestation populaire, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH).

A Homs, foyer de la contestation où l'armée a lancé une offensive jeudi, 33 civils dont neuf enfants ont été tués.

Dans la ville rebelle de Hama (centre), où l'armée syrienne avait lancé mardi une vaste offensive, quatre civils sont morts dont une femme de 58 ans, tuée par des tireurs embusqués, a indiqué la même source, précisant qu'une nouvelle offensive était en cours.

"Tirs nourris de mitrailleuse lourde"

"Le quartier de Hamidiyé fait l'objet depuis l'aube d'une campagne militaire féroce, accompagnée de tirs nourris de mitrailleuses lourdes", indique l'OSDH, ajoutant que de fortes explosions y étaient également entendus.

Les Comités locaux de coordination, qui chapeautent la mobilisation sur le terrain, ont indiqué que dans cette ville avaient été découverts "23 corps sans vies, dont la plupart étaient ligotés et portaient des marques de torture et de tirs dans la tête".



Des tanks syriens prennent position à Homs. (photo amateur, transmise à l'AFP)

Dans la province de Deraa, un adolescent a été tué dans la ville de Nawa lorsque les forces de sécurité ont tiré sur une manifestation étudiante, selon l'Observatoire.

Un civil a été tué dans la province d'Idlib (nord-ouest), et quatre autres dans la banlieue de Damas.

En outre, 7 soldats dissidents et 12 militaires et membres des services de sécurité ont péri dans des violences dans l'ensemble de la Syrie, selon la même source.(AFP)□

les Kurdes irakiens appellent leurs homologues syriens à "l'unité"

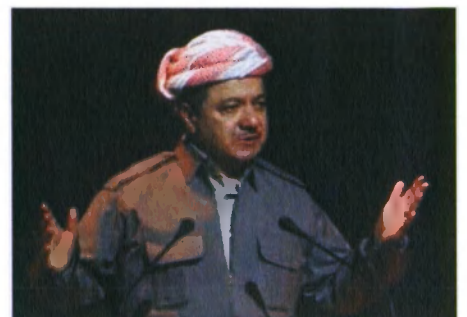
Le dirigeant kurde irakien Massoud Barzani a apporté, samedi, son soutien aux Kurdes de Syrie dans leur combat contre Bachar el-Assad.

Le dirigeant kurde irakien Massoud Barzani a apporté, samedi, son soutien aux Kurdes de Syrie, réunis en conférence à Erbil, tout en insistant sur la nécessité qu'ils demeurent unis face à la crise que traverse leur pays depuis plus de dix mois. "La situation est importante pour nous, car (la Syrie) est un pays voisin, nous avons une longue frontière avec elle et plus de deux millions de Kurdes vivent là-bas", a déclaré Massoud Barzani lors de cette conférence de deux jours dédiée à la situation des Kurdes en Syrie.

Quelque 210 Kurdes syriens venus de 25 pays y participent samedi et dimanche dans la capitale du Kurdistan irakien. Le Kurdistan irakien bénéficie d'un statut d'autonomie

élargie selon la Constitution irakienne adoptée en 2005. "Nous ne voulons pas interférer dans les affaires des Kurdes de Syrie, mais vous aider et soutenir vos décisions. Mais à la condition que vous soyez unis pendant cette période sensible et que vous évitiez des conflits entre vous", a-t-il déclaré aux délégués kurdes.

La communauté kurde de Syrie compte une douzaine de partis politiques concurrents, tous interdits par les autorités de Damas. Elle a participé aux nombreuses manifestations contre le régime de Bachar el-Assad. "L'objectif de la conférence est d'étudier la situation de cette région, de prendre des décisions logiques et d'être prêts à tous les changements qui peuvent arriver en Syrie", a ajouté Massoud Barzani. Pour



Nouri Brimo, Kurde syrien et l'un des organisateurs de la rencontre, le but de la conférence est de "décider de l'avenir de la Syrie", de "construire, avec une nouvelle Constitution, une démocratie syrienne basée sur la laïcité" et de "soutenir la révolution syrienne".(AFP)

Pour les Kurdes de Syrie, "il est urgent que l'opposition s'unisse"

Le président du Conseil national des Kurdes de Syrie Abdul Hakim Bachar est resté quelques jours à Paris où il devait être reçu au ministère des Affaires étrangères. Ce pédiatre de 52 ans, qui vit à Qamichli dans le Kurdistan syrien, souligne l'implication des Kurdes dans la révolution en marche et appelle l'opposition arabe à travailler avec eux.



Abdul Hakim Bachar, président du conseil national kurde de Syrie, à Paris, le 24 janvier (Céline Lussato / NO)

Quel est le but de votre passage à Paris ?

- J'ai été invité à Londres par le ministre des Affaires étrangères britannique en tant que président du Conseil national des Kurdes de Syrie et je passe désormais en France pour rencontrer un conseiller du ministre des Affaires étrangères français. Il est urgent que l'opposition syrienne s'unisse et la France peut appuyer nos demandes d'être intégrés au Conseil national syrien et considérés, avec les autres minorités, à égalité avec l'opposition arabe. J'ai vu le président du CNS Burhan Ghalioun les 15 et 16 janvier dernier au Kurdistan irakien. Je leur ai fait cette proposition et j'attends une réponse. J'espère que nous pourrions ensuite vraiment discuter d'un projet politique pour la Syrie.

Quelle est la situation des Kurdes en Syrie ?

- Sur le terrain, et bien, nous faisons partie de la révolution syrienne. Il y a des manifestations dans toutes les régions kurdes. Les manifestants demandent la chute du régime. Et il est tout à fait dommage que les médias arabes ne montrent pas nos manifestants. C'est une grande erreur de leur part.

Ils sont des dizaines de milliers à descendre dans les rues de nos villes.

Sur le plan politique, nous avons composé le Conseil national kurde de Syrie qui regroupe dix partis, cent membres dont cinquante indépendants. Nous faisons partie de la révolution syrienne,

mais en tant que Kurdes, isolément, nous ne faisons pas de négociation avec le pouvoir. Nous demandons une décentralisation politique car la Syrie est composée de différentes ethnies et religions. Bachar al-Assad a voulu nous monter les uns contre les autres en prétendant que s'il tombe, viendront alors des terroristes islamistes à sa place et d'ailleurs beaucoup l'ont cru. Nous, nous demandons la décentralisation car elle seule peut garantir les droits de toutes les communautés. Une décentralisation dans une Syrie unie.

Les Alaouites, proches d'Assad craignent d'avoir de gros problèmes s'il est destitué. Mais avec la décentralisation, leurs droits aussi pourraient être préservés et si l'opposition nous suivait dans cette démarche, ils seraient rassurés.

Nous demandons également un Etat laïc alors que l'opposition arabe demande un Etat civil. Or, un Etat civil ne garantit pas la laïcité. Des islamistes peuvent se revendiquer d'un Etat civil.

Enfin, nous travaillons pour changer tout le système politique syrien. Nous ne voulons pas que seule la tête parte et que le système reste. Il faut désintégrer le système policier. Nous voulons un pays de droits et des institutions: nous voulons un état parlementaire et démocratique.

Pour les Kurdes, nous demandons :

- la reconnaissance dans la constitution syrienne,

- l'annulation des lois et décrets racistes et discriminatoires à l'encontre

des Kurdes,

- nous demandons le droit à l'autodétermination mais dans l'unité de la Syrie. Pourquoi ? Quand la Syrie a été créée, cette unité a été faite forcée. Nous voulons accepter les frontières actuelles par volonté. Nous sommes le deuxième peuple en Syrie, nous composons entre 15 et 20% de la population et nous voulons être un véritable associé dans le pays. Les arabes doivent arrêter de dire "ça c'est bon ça c'est mauvais pour les kurdes". Ce n'est pas à eux de décider de nos droits. Malheureusement, jusqu'à maintenant les négociations avec l'opposition arabe n'ont pas abouti. Ils disent qu'ils donneront plus après le changement mais cela nous inquiète. Nous pensons que si aujourd'hui ils ne nous donnent rien, ils ne donneront nous rien demain non plus et n'établiront pas non plus la démocratie.

Si les Alaouites, les Druzes, les chrétiens ne sont pas vraiment dans la révolution syrienne c'est parce que l'opposition n'a pas pu les convaincre, n'a pas su les rassurer sur le fait que le changement de régime est dans leur intérêt.

Deux choses vont les rassurer : la décentralisation et une vision politique claire qui montre que les communautés sont associées. Il ne faut pas que l'opposition syrienne distribue les droits mais il faut que tous soient associés, il faut que cette pensée de "nous sommes les dominants et nous vous distribuons des droits" soit déga-gée.

Quelle est la situation humanitaire dans les régions kurdes syrienne ?

- Les Kurdes sont très mal. L'électricité est coupée quatre heures par jour, le mazout devient rare, les voitures attendent plusieurs heures dans les stations services et il est très difficile de faire approvisionner sa maison pour le chauffage. Bien sur les prix ont explosé. Le gaz est rare et les prix au marché noir ont doublé voire triplé dans certains endroits. Le chômage est très élevé et le taux de pauvreté atteint 70 à 80% de la population.

Cette situation va-t-elle selon vous pousser encore plus le peuple kurde dans la révolution ou au contraire l'amener à revenir dans le rang ?

- Quand la pression est forte, on peut imaginer que l'explosion est proche.

Que pensez-vous de la visite des observateurs de la Ligue arabe ?

➔ **Sont-ils venus dans la région kurde ?**

- Ils ne sont pas venus dans la région kurde. Cette visite est pour la forme. 150 observateurs, que vont-ils faire au niveau de la Syrie? Même 500 observateurs envoyés seulement à Homs n'auraient pas suffi. Quand ils allaient dans un quartier, c'était calme, dès qu'ils repartaient les chars revenaient. Et notez que ce sont les services de sécurité du régime qui préparent les visites.

Je ne regrette pas vraiment le fait qu'ils ne soient pas venus dans notre région car cela n'aurait rien changé. Le pouvoir affirme sa détermination, dit qu'il va

rester coûte que coûte. Seule la représentation compte pour eux.

Comment sortir de cette situation qui dure depuis bientôt un an ?

- Il y a beaucoup de scénarios possibles. L'un d'eux est un accord de l'opposition avec la Ligue arabe et la communauté internationale. Mais je pense qu'avant d'arriver à cela il va y avoir beaucoup de morts, car plus le régime est affaibli, plus il aura de victimes.

Je crains que le système ne s'accroche jusqu'au bout à Damas avant de fuir au dernier moment vers la côte, où il y a une majorité alaouite. Là, il risque de

résister longtemps.

Demandez-vous le départ d'Assad ou bien, s'il vous promet la mise en place d'une confédération, accepteriez-vous de négocier avec lui ?

- Nous les Kurdes ne déciderons pas seuls mais avec l'opposition arabe. Nous ne voulons pas jouer ce jeu-là.

□ □ □

L'Orléans
LE JOUR

30 JANVIER 2012

Des Kurdes syriens partagés sur une intervention internationale



ERBIL (Irak), (AFP)

Des représentants de la communauté kurde de Syrie se montrent partagés sur l'opportunité d'une intervention militaire internationale pour provoquer la chute du régime de Bachar al-Assad comme ce fut le cas en Libye contre Mouammar Kadhafi.

Quelque 210 Kurdes syriens venus de 25 pays ont participé samedi et dimanche à une conférence sur la situation dans leur pays, à Erbil, au Kurdistan irakien (nord), une région bénéficiant d'un statut d'autonomie élargie selon la Constitution irakienne.

Le communiqué final de cette conférence dénonce "les violences des forces de sécu-

rité syriennes contre les manifestants et insiste sur l'importance d'une collaboration entre les Kurdes à l'intérieur de la Syrie et ceux de l'extérieur".

Très radical, Jawad al-Mulla, dirigeant du Congrès national kurde, qui s'est prononcé au cours de la réunion pour "un gouvernement (autonome) kurde en Syrie", est totalement en faveur d'une opération militaire étrangère.

"L'intervention internationale est la seule solution car nous avons déjà l'expérience du régime de Saddam Hussein qui ne serait jamais tombé sans une intervention extérieure", a-t-il expliqué à l'AFP en allusion à l'invasion conduite par les Etats-Unis en Irak en 2003 et qui avait abouti à la chute

du dictateur.

"Le (parti) Baas syrien est de la même nature que le Baas irakien et rien ne pourra l'éliminer en dehors d'une telle intervention. C'est la seule solution", affirme-t-il. Les deux pays voisins ont été dirigés par deux branches antagonistes du parti Baas.

Pour Saadeddine al-Mulla, un dirigeant du parti al-Likiti (Démocratie en langue kurde), "il y a déjà des interventions extérieures notamment de l'Iran et de la Turquie et le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU doit donc prendre des décisions en se basant sur le chapitre VII de sa Charte".

Ce chapitre prévoit différentes mesures dont l'intervention militaire en cas de menace contre la paix ou d'acte d'agression.

Aller vers l'ONU est également ce que souhaite Hamad Darwich, secrétaire du Parti progressiste kurde de Syrie, considéré comme l'une des plus anciennes formations kurdes de Syrie.

"Si la Ligue arabe n'arrive pas à imposer ses solutions, le dossier doit être transmis au Conseil de sécurité qui ne peut

pas rester spectateur face à ce qui se passe dans le pays", juge-t-il.

En revanche, le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan en Syrie (PDK) se montre plus circonspect. "C'est trop tôt pour une intervention internationale et je crois qu'il faut chercher une solution nationale avec une pression internationale dans les domaines politique, économique, médiatique et diplomatique", a souligné son dirigeant, Abdel Hakim Bachar.

"Je crois que le premier pas, c'est de trouver une issue nationale et en cas d'échec? il faudra trouver une alternative arabe ou internationale", a-t-il ajouté.

Les Kurdes de Syrie représentent environ 9% de la population du pays et sont installés essentiellement dans le Nord-est et à Damas, où ils forment une importante minorité.

Affirmant faire l'objet d'une politique discriminatoire depuis plusieurs décennies, ils réclament la reconnaissance de leur langue et de leur culture et veulent être traités comme des citoyens à part entière. Ils disent aussi revendiquer des droits politiques et administratifs.

★★★

Arab League suspends its mission in Syria

RANKOUS, SYRIA

Situation too dangerous, bloc says, accusing state of escalating bloodshed

BY KAREEM FAHIM
AND NADA BAKRI

The Arab League has suspended its monitoring mission in Syria, saying that a harsh new government crackdown made it too dangerous to proceed and was resulting in the deaths of innocents across the country.

The head of the Arab League, Nabil al-Araby, said in a statement Saturday that after discussions with foreign ministers, the 22-member body had come to its decision because of "a severe deterioration of the situation and the continued use of violence." He blamed the Syrian government for the bloodshed, saying it had decided "to escalate the military option."

A final decision about the mission is due in the coming days.

The suspension came after days of bloody civil conflict in cities across Syria, leading to criticism of the observers' effectiveness, as they traveled to the edge of neighborhoods racked by violence in recent days, only to be turned back.

Their hesitation outside Rankous on Saturday, a town emptied of people after five days of clashes and government shelling, seemed to encapsulate the shortcomings of a mission accused by government opponents of providing cover to President Bashar al-Assad's crackdown.

Warned by army officers that insurgents could use explosives against them, a driver working with the observers refused to drive their heavily armored Mercedes into town.

Opposition activists in Rankous said they would have welcomed the visit. Despite the criticisms, the observers, with offices in several cities, were often the only outside witnesses to fighting that the United Nations said has killed more than 5,400.

Jaafar Kibeida, one of the Arab League observers, said he feared any restraint the government had shown in their presence would now vanish.

"I guess they will take a firm hand now," he said. "There will be a heavy crackdown."

The opposition Local Coordination Committees said at least 78 people were killed across the country on Saturday, including more than 20 people in the ongoing bloodshed in the central Syrian city of Homs. The group, whose esti-



A Syrian opposition fighter near his position outside of Damascus, where frequent confrontations between armed groups and security forces were reported Friday.

mates could not be confirmed, said that the security forces opened fire on a demonstration in Aleppo, marking a second day of violence in a city that had been relatively calm.

Arab League observers and Syrian officials said at least 26 soldiers had been killed on Friday and Saturday, including many fighting in the Damascus suburbs.

The Syrian military began an offensive Sunday to regain control of suburbs on the eastern edge of the capital, fighting battles with army defectors that sent residents fleeing and killed at least three civilians, The Associated Press reported from Beirut, citing the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Violence elsewhere in the country Sunday killed at least 17 more people, including six soldiers in a roadside bombing south of the capital, The A.P. reported.

The beginnings of the Arab League monitoring mission, more than a month ago, emboldened protesters but ultimately did little to stanch the violence.

On Saturday morning, on what may have been one of their final forays in Syria, Arab League observers traveled to the edge of Rankous, a defiant city near the Lebanese border that has withstood repeated incursions by the army, according to residents.

On the approach to the city, after the observers had gone, four families were seen driving out of town on Saturday, in minivans packed with belongings and

"I guess they will take a firm hand now. There will be a heavy crackdown."

children. They said it was a ghost town, where all but about 60 families out of 23,000 residents had fled.

Men in a town square pointed to the distance, where three tanks were moving in a valley below. They said the army, which surrounded the town, had been shelling for days and all of Friday night.

Some who stayed behind said they did not have the money to move.

Now, the local bakery was open once a week. Cooking gas was smuggled in from nearby towns. Vegetables had disappeared from the stores. The streets were empty except for a small group of army defectors, led by a soft-spoken 33-year-old man who said they had come to defend the protesters and residents.

He used a nom de guerre, Abu Khaled, and said he was a former army lieutenant. His previous posts had included a stint guarding a checkpoint outside the Baba Amer neighborhood in Homs, a focal point of resistance to the government.

There, he said, he saw soldiers level anti-aircraft guns at houses and heard accounts of atrocities, including the killing of a woman and a child by an officer, "to teach the neighborhood a lesson," he said.

He and his men defected together, in December, taking their weapons to Rankous, Abu Khaled's hometown. They said they were there as part of the Free Syrian Army, the loosely organized confederation of militias that is opposing Mr. Assad's forces.

"If all the civilians leave, we will leave," Abu Khaled said. "We will go to other places where people are vulnerable."

About an hour after reporters arrived, shelling and heavy machine gun fire could be heard. The defectors said tanks were ringing the town, and snipers were posted on surrounding hills.

Bullets whistled by a house where they had taken up positions. The shelling got closer. One defector was shot in the leg.

At a checkpoint outside Rankous, army soldiers talked about their own trials, saying they had been on duty, without a break, for seven months. Seven of their colleagues had been killed by the defectors, they said.

"We're facing disobedience," Lt. Raed Ammar said. "We can't stay silent."



Demonstrators near Damascus carried a man killed Friday in fighting with the Syrian security forces. Elsewhere, activists said at least 30 people in Homs had been killed since Thursday.

By nightfall, at a spot on the edge of the town where observers had visited in the morning and seen little, several

tanks had moved onto a hill, tightening a cordon around Rankous.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

JANUARY 28-29, 2012

BAGHDAD

BY TIM ARANGO

In the first sign that Iraqi leaders may yet halt a sectarian political crisis that has raised fears of civil war, the country's Sunni leaders said Sunday that they would end their boycott of Parliament.

The Iraqiya coalition, a largely Sunni-backed group of lawmakers that won the most seats in the 2010 parliamentary elections but was unable to build a governing coalition, will return to Parliament, a spokeswoman said in a brief statement.

The decision does not signal the end of Iraq's political crisis, which erupted days after the withdrawal of the U.S. military last month when Iraqiya announced its boycott to protest what it saw as moves by the Shiite-dominated government to sideline Sunnis from power. Those underlying issues have not been resolved.

But the group's decision eases tensions and paves the way for the political leadership to hold a national meeting to discuss reconciliation among Iraq's three main ethnic factions — Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds.

"As a good-will gesture, Iraqiya announces its return to Parliament meetings to create a healthy atmosphere to help the national conference, and to seek guarantees for the conference to succeed and defuse the political crisis," said the Iraqiya spokeswoman, Maysoon al-Damluji, according to Reuters. Iraqiya said a separate boycott of cabinet

Sunnis in Iraq end their boycott of Parliament

meetings, which has paralyzed the government, is still in place.

The concession came a day after Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. made another round of calls to Iraqiya leaders, urging them to return to Parliament so the leadership could hold a national conference, which the Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani, has been trying to arrange.

Mr. Biden, according to a White House statement released Saturday, spoke to the Iraqiya leader, Ayad Allawi, and the speaker of Parliament, Osama Nujaifi. "The two Iraqi leaders described deliberations underway among all Iraqi political factions and parties in the run-up to a proposed national conference led by President Jalal Talabani," the statement said.

Mr. Biden, according to the statement, "discussed with both leaders the importance of resolving outstanding issues through the political process."

Ms. Damluji said ending the boycott did not end the standoff — which escalated when the government issued an arrest warrant for a Sunni vice president — nor was it a signal that the bloc's demands for a meaningful role in the government had been met. "We'll work through the national conference to achieve the demands of the Iraqi people," she said in an interview.

The crisis flared in December just as U.S. troops were leaving the country after nearly nine years of war and occupation, and represented an embarrass-

ing turn of events for the Obama administration, which emphasized Iraq's democratic progress as it trumpeted the troop withdrawal.

Sunni militants have taken advantage of the political impasse to carry out a campaign of sectarian attacks in recent weeks, killing hundreds of people, mostly Shiites, in what appears to be an effort to incite sectarian war.

Iraqiya walked out of Parliament in mid-December, accusing the Shiite-dominated government, which is led by Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, of arresting some of its members and harassing aides. Sunnis have viewed those arrests, as well as the round-up in October and November of hundreds of former members of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party, as a power grab by Mr. Maliki and an effort to marginalize the Sunnis.

The drama quickly intensified, as the government aired confessions on state television in which men who had been bodyguards for the Sunni vice president, Tariq al-Hashimi, said they had orchestrated bombings and assassinations at Mr. Hashimi's direction.

The government issued an arrest warrant for Mr. Hashimi, who denied running a death squad and said the confessions were coerced. He fled to the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in the north, where he remains beyond the reach of the central government's security forces.

Conference Aims To Unite Fractured Syrian Kurds



The first conference of the Syrian Kurds in Erbil.

RUDAW

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan -- For two days last week, Kurdish political and opposition leaders held a conference in Erbil to press for the right to self-determination if the Syrian regime falls.

"This meeting is a message to the world that the Kurds of Syria are not alone," one participant at the conference told Rudaw.

More than 250 Kurdish representatives and political observers, mostly from Europe, attended the conference titled "The Right to Self-Determination and a Democratic Syria."

Syrian Kurds have been divided over whether to participate in anti-government protests in Syria and over what role they should play in the opposition, which is primarily based outside of the country. Syrian Kurdish leaders have also walked out of several opposition conferences over concerns that Kurdish rights are not being recognized by the Arab- and Islamist-dominated opposition.

Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani and Kurdistan Parliament Speaker Kamal Kirkuki attended the conference in an effort to support the Syrian Kurdish political parties and their struggle for Kurdish rights in Syria.

Barzani pressed the leaders to unify and pledged his support.

"Our support is tied to the unity of your positions," he said in a speech at the event. "It is important to stop the narrow partisan interests for now and

follow the path of Kurdishness until the situation had calmed down."

Kamaram Hajo, a member of the Kurdish National Council in Syria, said the lack of unity was major issue among Kurds from the outset of uprising against Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad's regime.

"We need to help ourselves first by creating unity among us,"

"The Syrian Kurds have come closer together after the Kurdish National Council was founded," he said. "President Barzani is aware of the divisions that have plagued Syria political movements for years. Narrow partisanship has created many obstacles for Kurdish politics."

Hajo believes that Barzani's message was directed at organizations and groups that have not yet joined the KNC.

"We hope the groups that have not joined the KNC will join it soon," Hajo said. "At the same time, all the KNC members must change the logic of their work because only in this way we can see success."

Kamaram Abdo, a leader at Kurdish Democratic Union Party, believes that even if Iraqi Kurdish leaders lend their support, it won't help unless there is unity among Syrian Kurds.

"We need to help ourselves first by creating unity among us," Abdo said.

Saadaddin Mulla, a KNC delegate from Cairo, said the Erbil conference showed that Kurds in other areas stand by Syrian Kurds.

"It was a message to the Arab opposition in Syria, neighboring countries and the world that Syrian Kurds aren't without support," Mulla said. "If

the Syrian Kurds face danger, the Kurds from other countries will come to their aid."

Some Kurdish parties and youth groups did not attend the conference in Erbil, and Hajo called it a serious shortcoming.

"The invitation to this Erbil conference was only sent to those close to the Kurdish National Council," he said. "This is a shortcoming, and the organizers are responsible."

Hajo added, "The Syrian Kurds demand self-determination within a united Syria, but they did not raise the Syrian flag next to the Kurdish flag in the conference hall."

Muhammad Ahmed Salo, a Kurdish student of law in Cairo, told Rudaw that he hoped the Erbil conference would become a milestone for Syria's Kurds to unite.

"I did not come to this conference for the sake of the political parties, but I came for the Kurds so that I can pressure the Kurdish politicians to unite their positions," he said. "I hope our politicians will read the message of President Barzani and unite by distancing themselves from partisanship."○

En Syrie, les combats s'intensifient entre les forces du régime et la contestation

La guerre civile est en train de gagner les faubourgs de Damas. L'armée syrienne a déployé, dimanche 29 janvier, quelque 2 000 militaires, arrivés à l'aube à bord de convois d'autocars et de véhicules de transport de troupes, en plus d'au moins 50 chars dans la banlieue proche de la capitale. Le but de cette opération sans précédent est de reprendre le contrôle de quartiers tombés aux mains des insurgés, à quelques kilomètres seulement du centre de Damas.

Le régime syrien semble avoir lancé, depuis la semaine dernière, une vaste offensive contre les places fortes de la contestation dans la province de Damas-campagne, mais aussi à Hama et à Homs, où *Le Monde* a pu rendre compte du massacre d'une famille, jeudi 26 janvier, dans le quartier de Nasihine. Selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH), les violences ont causé 80 morts dimanche, dont la moitié sont des civils.

Cette offensive sécuritaire vise à endiguer la montée en puissance des milices rebelles, réunies sous l'appellation d'« Armée syrienne libre » (ASL). Composées de civils armés et de déserteurs de l'armée régulière, ces cellules manquent d'à peu près tout, à commencer par une chaîne de commandement. Néanmoins, avec l'accélération des défections et la multiplication des saisies d'armes, les insurgés gagnent en efficacité. Il y a une dizaine de jours, dans la ville de Zabadani, à l'ouest de Damas, des combattants ont tenu tête pendant cinq jours aux soldats venus les déloger.

La présence des observateurs de la Ligue arabe n'est peut-être pas étrangère à la trêve consentie alors par les autorités syriennes, qui a permis à l'ASL de se retirer en bon ordre de Zabadani. Reste un fait indéniable : la fréquence des attaques contre les loyalistes ne cesse de croître, de même que leurs pertes. Dimanche 29 janvier, 16 militaires ont été tués dans deux attaques distinctes : 10 dans l'explosion d'une bombe au passage de leur convoi à Kansafra (nord-ouest) ; 6 autres tués à Sahnaya, près de Damas, dans une embuscade.

Pour Haytham Al-Manna, un responsable du Comité national de coordination pour le change-



Près de Damas, le 27 janvier, un déserteur brandit le drapeau de l'indépendance. AHMED JADALLAH/REUTERS

ment et la démocratie (CNCD), la plateforme d'opposition rivale du Conseil national syrien (CNS), cette militarisation mène à une impasse. « On voit actuellement la réponse militaire à Zabadani, dit-il. La présence d'hommes armés parmi les manifestants, au lieu de les protéger, ne fait qu'accroître le nombre de victimes. Le régime profite du fait que l'attention est tour-

**La fréquence
des attaques
contre les loyalistes
ne cesse de croître,
de même
que leurs pertes**

née sur New York [où une nouvelle résolution sur la Syrie est en cours de négociation à l'ONU] et que les observateurs sont réfugiés dans leur hôtel. Même s'ils ne peuvent pas faire grand-chose, il est urgent qu'ils se redéplacent. Quand ils étaient sur le terrain, il y avait des tirs de snipers, des confrontations isolées, mais pas d'attaques aussi massives. »

La recrudescence de la violence a, en effet, poussé la Ligue arabe à suspendre samedi sa mission d'observation commencée le 26 décem-

bre. Damas a « regretté » cette décision visant à « augmenter les pressions en vue d'une intervention étrangère », alors que des pays européens et arabes ont l'intention de présenter un projet de résolution au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU cette semaine. Le texte reprend le plan de la Ligue arabe, refusé par Damas, prévoyant un transfert du pouvoir du président Assad au profit de son vice-président, Farouk Al-Chareh, la mise en place d'un gouvernement d'union nationale et l'organisation d'élections libres.

Après des mois de blocage dus aux veto de la Russie surtout, et de la Chine, fermement opposées à toute intervention étrangère en Syrie, c'est une tentative de trouver une solution négociée. « Demander le départ de Bachar Al-Assad comme préalable était une erreur, concède un diplomate européen. Sa démission ne peut qu'être l'aboutissement du processus. » La France a été à la pointe de cette stratégie offensive, qui n'a pas donné de résultats : Alain Juppé, qui avait évoqué en novembre des corridors humanitaires, a reconnu qu'il n'avait aucune idée sur les moyens de les mettre en œuvre.

Encouragés par la France, la Turquie et le Qatar, dont l'émir a appe-

lé à l'envoi de troupes arabes en Syrie pour protéger les civils, le Conseil national syrien (CNS), principale coalition de l'opposition, a lui aussi tout misé sur une internationalisation. En vain. Il faut probablement chercher la raison de ce maximalisme dans le défaut de légitimité de l'opposition en exil, qui répercute les demandes des manifestants plus qu'elle ne les dirige. Le président du CNS, Burhan Ghalioun, est parti à New York afin de tenter de convaincre Moscou de ne pas s'opposer au nouveau projet de résolution.

Les diplomates arabes et occidentaux se perdent en conjectures sur les intentions réelles de Moscou. Le chef de la diplomatie russe, Sergueï Lavrov, avait été le premier à évoquer un règlement de la crise syrienne « à la yéménite », c'est-à-dire par une mise sur la touche en douceur du président. C'est ce que proposait le plan de la Ligue arabe. Mais Moscou, qui a condamné la suspension de la mission des observateurs arabes, fait aujourd'hui savoir qu'un appel à des « sanctions » et à un « changement de régime » étaient des lignes rouges. La Russie cherche-t-elle à gagner du temps pour son dernier allié au Proche-Orient ? ■

**CHRISTOPHE AYAD
ET BENJAMIN BARTHE**