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IRBIL: TWIN SUICIDE BOMB ATTACKS CAUSE A HUNDRED DEATHS, INCLUDING SEVERAL KURDISH POLITICAL LEADERS

KURDISTAN, that had, so far, managed to keep clear of the wave of terrorism that is being inflicted on Iraq was hit full force on 1st February. Taking advantage of the traditional ceremonies of exchanging good wishes on the occasion of the Moslem festival of the Sacrifice, two suicide bombers mingled with the

crowd and managed to enter the premises of the two main Kurdish political parties and blow themselves up just as they were shaking hands with Kurdish leaders present to wish them a happy holiday.

One of the bombers, disguised as a mullah, mingled with visitors to the Kurdistan

Democratic Party (KDP) while his colleague went, at the same time, to the premises of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) about ten kilometres away. They had, hidden, under their wide robes, belts stuffed with high explosives mixed with shot to increase the devastating effect. On this day of Moslem festivity and forgiveness, the Kurdish security services, generally very vigilant, had suspended body searches out of politeness for the thousands of visitors come to offer their best wishes, while taking all

precautions against any car bomb attacks. This relaxation of vigilance was exploited by terrorists who had long been lying in wait and several of whose previous attempts had been foiled by the Kurdish police.

The toll of this double attack is very heavy: 105 killed and nearly two hundred injured. Many Kurdish leaders were amongst those killed including: Sami Abdulrahman, Secretary of the KDP Political Committee, Deputy Prime Minister of the Kurdish Regional Government, together with his son; Shawkat Sheikh Yazdin, General Secretary of the Council of Minister in Irbil, member of the KDP Central Committee; Saad Abdullah, Minister of Agriculture, member of the KDP Political Committee; Akram Mantik, Governor of Irbil; Mahdi Khoshnaw, Deputy Governor of Irbil, together with his son; Mahmud Halo, Deputy Minister of Agriculture; Ahmad Rojbayani, Mayor of Irbil; Nariman Abdul-Hamid, Irbil's Chief of Police; Hijran Barzani, KDP political officer; Shakhawan Abbas, Peshmerga Forces and member of the PUK leadership; Mula Muhammad Bahirka, head of the PUK Committee in Irbil; Bahroz Kashka, member of the PUK leadership in Irbil and Khoshrow Shera, member of the PUK leadership in Irbil. Adnan Mufti, member of the PUK leadership and former Deputy Prime Minister of the Suleimaniah Kurdish Regional Government was seriously injured. Six journalists and cameramen of Kurdistan-TV, who were broadcasting the

ceremonies live were also murdered. Their pictures enabled the immediate identification of one of the suicide bombers.

The responsibility for this double attack was claimed by Ansar al-Sunni (partisans of the Prophet's tradition) on 4 February on an Islamist Internet site. Run by an Iraqi Arab whose pseudonym is Abu Abdallah Hassan ben Mahmud, this Sunni terrorist group act as the local branchy of the Al-Qaida network. According to American and Iraqi services, the overall operations of the Al-Qaida jihadists are co-ordinated by the Jordanian al-Zarqawi, considered responsible for the murderous attacks of August 2003 against the Jordanian Embassy and the UNO headquarters in Baghdad and against the Ayatollah al-Hakim in Najaf.

This massacre, taking place on a Moslem sacred religious festival, has provoked a real psychological trauma in the Kurdish population. The Kurdish authorities decreed three days mourning, which was broadly observed throughout Kurdistan. More or less everywhere, Kurdish communities in neighbouring countries, but also in Europe, Central Asia and the United States identified themselves with this national mourning by organising commemorative ceremonies to pay homage to the victims, and silent marches against terrorism. The Iraqi Government Council, for its part, decreed three days mourning throughout Iraq,

where similar attacks have already hit Shiite communities. Several foreign governments sent messages of condolence. As well as Washington, London and Berlin, Paris, through its Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin expressed its feelings and sympathy for the victims.

Even the Kurdish Members of Parliament for the former Party for Democracy (DEP — banned), imprisoned in Turkey form the last 10 years — Leyla Zana, Orhan Dogan, Hatip Dicle, and Selim Sadak, managed, on 11 April to send a message of condolences from the depths of their jail to Massud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, respectively President of the KDP and General Secretary of the PUK.

"We offer our condolences for our brothers who were killed and wishes for a speedy recovery to those who were wounded in this attack. We offer our condolences to our people and condemn with aversion, this felonious attack. We share your pain and that of your people in our heart. Our pain is collective" the former M.P.s write in a letter written in Kurdish.

No one should be unaware that no force, no attack and no provocation can make our people retreat from its goal. We think and hope that the feelings of union and of solidarity of our people, dispersed to the four corners of the world, will be still further strengthened. Our people will overcome the obstacles liable to hinder the path to peace by union, reciprocal solidarity and support and will join the democratic world ... We share

your pain, with feelings of a warm solidarity and once again offer our condolences. With all our feelings, our respects and our friendship ..." the jailed M.P.s concluded.

The M.P.s' message was read in full on the TV news programmes of both the Kurdish satellite TV news programmes, Kurdistan TV and Kurdsat, broadcasting from Iraqi Kurdistan and widely viewed by Kurds in the Near East and Europe. The same networks opened their programmes for several weeks for a wide public debate on the

means of fighting terrorism and consolidating Kurdish democratic institutions.

1 February has become, for the Kurds, the equivalent of 11 September 2001. The tragedy has strengthened Kurdish national consciousness over and above the borders and the political, religious or regional differences. To avoid any such disasters recurring, the Kurdish authorities have taken a series of security measures including an increased lookout for Islamist militia and surveillance of Kurdistan's borders.

Saddam Hussein regime with the tacit support of the two principle Kurdish parties, Jalal Talabani's PUK and Massud Barzani's KDP.

At a conference in Irbil in December, that brought together 135 members from all over Kurdistan, the participants decided to collect signatures to exert pressure on the American and Iraqi authorities.

On 24 February, this organisation had met with two members of the Interim Government Council, Salaheddin Mohammad Bahaeddin, of the Kurdistan Islamic Union and an independent Shiite, Mohammad Bahr al-Ulum. Mr. Bahr al-Ulum declared, on this subject, *"I told them that the referendum should also be extended to the Arabs so that they could give their opinion on the question. But as they insisted that the popular consultation only concerned Kurdistan, I told them to present an official request so that the Government Council could reply"*.

A PETITION THAT COLLECTED 1.7 MILLION SIGNATURES CALLS FOR THE HOLDING OF A REFERENDUM ON SELF-DETERMINATION FOR IRAQI KURDISTAN

AN Iraqi Kurdistan based organisation is conducting a campaign calling for a referendum allowing the population of that region to decide whether it wants to remain in Iraq or not. *"We are a non-political movement that is trying to enable the voice of the people of (Iraqi) Kurdistan to be heard so that it determine its own future"* said Halkaut Abdallah, one of the members of the Movement for a referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan, at a Baghdad Press conference in 25 February. *"We have collected 1.7 million signatures demanding the holding of referendum of self-determination of all persons over the age of 16, of all faiths and of all parts of Iraqi Kurdistan"* he pointed out. According to him, these signatures were collected

between 24 January and 15 February.

The Movement for a Referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan was created after the fall of the

THE GENERAL ELECTIONS IN IRAN: "A HISTORIC FIASCO", IRANIAN KURDISTAN RECORDED THE LOWEST RATE OF PARTICIPATION

THE 20 February General Elections in Iran, which the conservatives, not surprisingly, won recorded an unprecedented level of abstention for this kind of vote, although the Islamic Republic has made participation in the elections a barometer of popular support for the regime.

Only 50.57% of the electors went to the polls to elect some 290 members of parliament, announced the Ministry of the Interior on its Internet site. The polling stations were empty, which is why the regime's authorities delayed closing them for two extra hours. Never have so many electors cold

shouldered the ballots at any general election or even in other major vote (such as presidential elections or referenda) in all the history of the Islamic Republic, which will be celebrating its 25th anniversary in a few weeks time. Independent observers estimated the actual rate of participation at less than a third of those registered.

The conservatives have, officially, won an absolute majority in the Parliament, according to the results of a general election denounced as a "*historic fiasco*" by the reformers. According to the final results announced by the Ministry of the Interior, the conservatives won 27 of the 30 seats in the capital, bringing the number of them elected at the first round to 156. The absolute majority is 146, since there are 290 seats in Parliament. These figures, for which five days of counting were needed, seal the victory of a generation of conservatives that claim to be both pragmatic and devoted to Islam and who, despite their denials, will put the brakes on the political, social and cultural reforms so timidly begun by the "*reformers*", close to President Khatami.

The conservative victory was guaranteed since the Council of Guardians, institutional pillar of the regime's ultra-conservatives, had disqualified the bulk of the leading reformist candidates on the grounds of disloyalty to Islam and the Constitution. Before the elections, the Council of Guardians had this disqualified over 2,400

candidates, including the majority of the sitting members, leaving only 250 reformers out of 4,500 approved candidates. These disqualifications plunged Iran into the most serious political crisis the country has known for decades. The reformist President, Mohammad Khatami, had at first declared that he would oppose the holding of elections if the disqualifications were not cancelled, before giving in completely, while declaring that the poll would not be equitable. Many calls for boycotting the polls were made.

According to the official figures, only 39 reformers were elected in the first round, whereas they had made up three quarters of the members of the outgoing Parliament.

In Teheran, of 30 sitting members, 29 were reformers, the only conservative being the top of the "builders" list, Gholam-Ali Hadad-Adel. The head of the only reformist list allowed, the Coalition for Iran, is no longer in the running. Mehdi Karubi, Speaker of the outgoing Parliament and close to President Khatami and long considered the incarnation of reform, decided to withdraw on 25 February. Arriving in 31st position, he could have stood for the 2nd round. Thus every one of the 30 seats was won by the conservatives.

The voters of Teheran and the Kurds showed the highest rate of abstention, according to the figures published by the Ministry of the Interior on 23

February. In Teheran, of 6.04 registered electors, only 1.7 million went to the polls, i.e. a rate of participation of 28.11%, as against 2.9 million (55.91%) in 2000. Yet the number of electors had increased by 800,000 between the two elections. Various sources dispute the official figures — thus, according to a report on the "Rouydad" web site, the rate of participation in Teheran was only 20%. Mohammed Reza Khatami had topped the poll in the previous elections, scoring 1,794,605 votes personally. Like the majority of the outgoing reformers in the capital, he had been disqualified by the conservatives' control organs.

In Ispahan (central Iran) the third largest city in the country and a reformist bastion, only 32.19% of the electors voted, against 47.45% four years earlier. On the City of Tabriz (Northern Iran), the second largest university town, the winning candidate reached the top of the poll with only 90,000 votes (out of 1,000,000 electors) — that is 6.5% of the electorate. Amongst the majors agglomerations, the Holy City of Mashhad (North-East) the second largest agglomeration in the country had a 47% turnout — but, according to the Ministry of the Interior, of 700,000 ballot papers 100,000 were blank ... The city of Mashhad is of capital importance to the regime both for political and religious reasons and because it houses Razavi's large Quds forces (a militia totally devoted to the conservatives). The Council of Guardians had prevented any of

the reformist candidates from standing — the conservative at the top of the poll was elected with only 28,000 votes, one tenth of the votes.

In Iranian Kurdistan, where all the outgoing Members of Parliament, close to the reformers, had been disqualified, the rate of participation dropped in four years from 70.18% to 32.26%. Outside Kurdistan Province, in towns whose population had a Kurdish majority in the neighbouring provinces, the participation was also weak, as low as 23.65% in the historic city of Mahabad, according to official figures. But the periodical "Iranian Kurdistan" states that the real figure for participation is barely 7%. In Kermanschah, the largest city in Kurdistan, where several tens of thousands of the regime's troops are quartered, the rate of participation was even lower than at Tabriz. The election was also a failure at Sanandaj, Kaniaran, and Diwandara — sources close to the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) report that in the working class quarters of Awiar, Bulwari, Xasrawa, Shalman, Sharif, Ama, Adab, Nemaki, Wakil and Farah in Sanandaj, the rate of participation was virtually naught. In Marwan, out of 132,000 registered electors, only 33,255 votes were cast — but with 5,251 of the ballot papers blank and 10,000 of the votes coming from the armed forces quartered in the town.

According to information from the towns of Piranshahr, Sardasht and the surrounding villages, the rate of participation was barely 10%. In Saqez, Baneh, Bikan and Shno the rate of participation was under 15%. Iranian Kurdistan recorded the lowest rate of participation in the whole of Iran.

Moreover, according to the Ministry of the Interior, the rate of participation exceeded 100% in two constituencies: 100.77% in Poldokhtar (Western Iran) and 101.97% in Mamassani (Southern Fars Province), where it had been 114.15% in 2000. The Ministry gave no explanation ...

The authorities had announced that it had prevented the transport of convoys of electors in Fars Province. Voters can vote in any constituency they like. The only restriction being that if there is a second round the elector must vote in the same constituency. A stamp on their identity card prevents voting twice.

This first round also confirmed the election of 31 independents and 5 representatives of religious minorities, 58 seats remain open for the second round. This round, which should take place at a date still to be determined, will strengthen the conservative dominance. Only 17 reformers remain in the ring. Traditionally the second round has a poor turnout, the conservatives can

rely on a faithful electorate and so will win again.

The conditions under which these elections took place were criticised by the European Union and the United States as "*a setback for democracy*". The American President, G.W. Bush declared on 24 February that the Iranians had been "*deprived of the opportunity of freely choosing their representatives*". The European Union expressed its "*disappointment*" at this poll, considering that the exclusion of the majority of the candidates had made "*a real democratic choice impossible*". "*It is clear to everyone that these elections were distorted from the outset*" declared the British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw at a meeting.

Moreover, a hundred members of Parliament have asked President Khatami, as they are allowed to do, to come and explain to Parliament "*his ambiguous stands*" in defence of the candidates before the elections and on his failure to keep his promises. The Member of Parliament Reza Yusefian insisted that it was not to launch an attack on him.

Furthermore, at least eight people were killed and 38 injured in clashes that took place during the elections in two towns in the South, Firuzabad and Nurabad Mamassani and in Izeh in the South-West.

A TENSE SITUATION IN KIRKUK AND MOSSUL

NEARLY a year after the fall of the Baathist regime, the situation remains tense in the mixed population cities of Mossul and Kirkuk, where Islamists and Arabs loyal to the Baath are provoking violent clashes. Thus an Iraqi civilian was killed on 26 February in an attack by rocket launcher on the premises of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in Kirkuk, the Iraqi police reported. *"The premises of the PUK were targeted at 20.50 hours (5.50 pm GMT) by three rockets and an Iraqi passing nearby was killed"* by one of them stated General Turhane Yussef, the Kirkuk Chief of Police. *"The attackers fired three rockets from a car as they drove past the premises"* added the General. He pointed out that exchanges of gunfire took place in the same quarter after the attack, without specifying the origin of the shots.

This is the second attack against Kirkuk premises of the PUK, one of the two most important parties of Iraqi Kurdistan, in the space of five months.

Kirkuk, in which co-habit Kurds, Arabs and Turkomen, is daily the scene of attacks against the police and Iraqi security forces which work in collaboration with the coalition allies.

On 23 February, a suicide bomb attack (the third since the end of January aimed at the Kurdish community, determined to

preserve its autonomy in Northern Iraq) caused eight deaths, including the bomber, in Kirkuk. The kamikaze had blown up a vehicle loaded with explosives in front of a police station in a Kurdish quarter, killing seven police and injuring at least 52 people. The violence of the explosion seriously damaged the police station and destroyed vehicles parked nearby.

Moreover, on 29 February Turkomen clashed with Kurds in Kirkuk provoking the setting up of a nighttime curfew on the town. The American authorities clamped down a curfew as from 18.00 (6.00 pm) local time and closed several of the main roads to avoid possible disturbances in this city of a million inhabitants. The day before, a woman had been killed and 10 people injured by bullets during a demonstration of joy by the Turkomen at the news that the Iraqi executive had promised to guarantee their rights. On 25 February, in the centre of Baghdad, thousands of Turkomen, mostly from Kirkuk, had demonstrated to demand *"respect for their political rights and against their marginalisation"*.

The Turkomen make up 250,000 of this city's one million population. They make up about 2% of the 25 million overall population of Iraq. They are represented on the Government Council by a woman, Songul Shapuk, and on

the Council of Ministers by the Minister of Reconstruction and Housing, Bayan Baqer Sulagh.

Furthermore, a senior Iraqi Kurdish official reaffirmed, on 18 February, that Kirkuk, forcibly Arabised by the fallen Baathist regime, should be added to the three provinces of Kurdistan. *"Kirkuk is a city that is at the centre of a conflict. But the problem can be resolved by taking a census"* declared Fuad Maassum, a leading member of the PUK in a press conference. *"This census can only be taken after the return of those (Kurds) who were forcibly displaced and the departure of people who were settled in their place"* he added, referring to the Arabs settled in Kirkuk by the Baathist regime to enable them to control this important oil-producing city. *"After this census, Kirkuk will be attached to Kurdistan, of which it is historically part"*.

The claims on Kirkuk by the Kurds in December 2003 unleashed bloody clashes with this multiethnic city's Arabs and Turkomen. The Interim Government Council called on the Kurdish chiefs to be patient and the American administrator, Paul Bremer, postponed examination of the status of Kirkuk till 2005.

For their part, five Kurdish parties that are not represented on the Government Council have appealed to the Kurdish leaders on that body not to abandon their claim to Kirkuk. *"This question must not be postponed till after the elections and the drawing up of the Constitution. Kirkuk must be recovered today"* declared the

general secretary of the Democratic Socialist Party, Mohammad Hajji Mahmud. Leaders of the Kurdish Communist Party, of Jamaa Islamiya, of the Islamic Movement and of the Kurdistan Party of the Proletariat share this view and are demanding that the new Iraqi security forces keep out of their region, virtually autonomous since 1991. *"We do not want these forces, that have served the former dictatorial governments, to run Kurdistan with fire and steel and persecute the Kurdish people"* stated Bahman Ahmad of the Kurdistan Party of the Proletariat. Abdelrahman Abdelrahman of the Islamic Movement went further: *"We reject the idea that our region and its security be in the hands of any central government"*.

According to officials of the city, some 600,000 people, mostly Kurds, were expelled in stages from Kirkuk beginning with the 1975 defeat, when the Shah of Iran abandoned them after the Algiers agreement with Iraq on the border dispute.

Elsewhere, on 23 February, the KDP offices in Mossul, in Northern Iraq, were attacked and two members of that organisation assassinated. *"On Monday night some assailants in a car attacked the KDP offices in the very centre of Mossul. However the peshmergas (Kurdish fighters) fired back and they fled on foot"* reported a KDP official the next day. *"The Kurdish militia found in the abandoned car hand grenades, anti-tank rockets and Kalashnikovs as well as leaflets in which was printed "Death to*

the heathens who cooperate with the Americans" and "How many gods do you worship" added the official.

According to him, these attacks against Kurdish organisations are conducted by islamist groups.

Furthermore, two KDP activists were found murdered on 22 February, a few hours after being kidnapped. According to Police Captain Abdallah Mahmud "the bodies were found in dustbins". Yet further, the next day a KDP official in Mossul was found shot in his car, added the police officer.

On 21 February, two Iraqis and were killed and four others wounded in several attacks in Mossul, including one against the home of the Chief of Police of Ninivah Province. *"Two armed Iraqis, driving a white car, attacked, with automatic*

weapons, the home of Ninivah Province Police Chief General Mohammad Khayri al-Berhawi" according to a police officer, Hikmat Mahmud Mohammad. The police found automatic weapons, rocket launchers and hand grenades in their car.

An Iraqi civilian was killed the next day in the same region, by the explosion of a booby trap placed by the side of a road used by American Army convoys. *"At 10am (7am GMT) a booby trap exploded, killing a passer-by on the spot"* reported Police Lieutenant-Colonel Abdekajal Hazem Khattabi.

Moreover, two of the bodyguards of General Abdelrazzak al-Juburi, a member of the Provincial Council, were wounded on 22 February by shots fired by unknown people driving an Opel car, according to Hikmat Mahmud Mohammad.

WHILE ON A VISIT TO ANKARA, SCHROEDER CONSIDERED THAT TURKEY "WAS ON THE RIGHT ROAD FOR MEMBERSHIP OF THE E.U."

ON 22 February, the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, arrived in Istanbul in a two-day official visit to support the Turkish Government's efforts to meet the criteria for membership of the European Union and to help achieve the re-unification of Cyprus.

On 23 February, the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, praised the progress achieved by Turkey towards joining the European Union, considering that there were "good chances"

that negotiations for membership might begin at the end of 2004, as the Turkish Government hoped. *"Thanks to the reform process, Turkey is on the right road"* for joining the Union, stated r. Schroeder during a Press Conference after his discussions with his Turkish opposite number Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

This is the first official visit of a German Chancellor to Turkey since 1993.

The reforms adopted by Turkey

to align itself with European standards of democracy and Human Rights, the so-called "Copenhagen criteria" "provide good chances" for a recommendation by the European Commission to open negotiations for membership at the end of this year, according to Mr. Schroeder. But he also stressed the necessity for putting the reforms into effective practice, and offered the help of his country in this area. Turkey's integration into Europe is important for strategic and economic reasons, the Chancellor considered.

Turkey has been knocking at Europe's door since 1963, when it signed a first association agreement with the European Economic Community. In December, the E.U. leaders must decide whether the progress achieved by Turkey since 1999 justifies the beginning of negotiations for membership with Turkey, the only candidate for membership that has not begun such negotiations. "Turkey can absolutely count on Germany's support" stressed Mr. Schroeder, whose position on this question is in sharp contrast to that of the Christian Democratic opposition.

A week earlier, the leader of that opposition, the German Conservative Angela Merkel, had proposed, during a visit to Ankara, a "privileged partnership" for Turkey in place of membership — an option immediately rejected by Mr. Erdogan. Clearly satisfied by Mr. Schroeder's support, Mr. Erdogan stressed his government's "determination" to go forward in the carrying out of

reforms, asserting that his country had "to a large extent" fulfilled the political criteria for membership. "We are expecting, in great confidence, a positive decision" on the opening of negotiations for membership, he added.

Regarding Cyprus, Mr. Schroeder welcomed "the positive contribution" of the Erdogan government to a settlement of the division of Cyprus, stressing that the pursuit of these efforts would contribute to the decision of the European leaders in December.

Mr. Schroeder also met President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and the leader of the opposition, Deniz

Baykal (social democratic).

The Chancellor was accompanied by a delegation of 13 bosses of major companies. Germany, which is the European country with the largest community of people of Turkish and Kurdish origin numbering about 2.5 million, 600,000 of whom are Kurds, is also Turkey's main economic partner, with a trade, in 2002, of about 14.2 billion euros. Moreover nearly 3.5 million Germans visit Turkey every year — the largest influx of all foreign tourists.

Mr. Schroeder's agenda of discussions also covered Iraq and the Near East.

THE COALITION IS INCREASINGLY FACED WITH FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN IRAQ

THE U.S. led coalition has admitted it is increasingly faced with foreign fighters in Iraq, where attacks targeting civilians and police reached a record figure in February, even as a second contingent of Japanese soldiers entered Iraq on 27 February.

The Commander of coalition land forces in Iraq, General Ricardo Sanchez, clearly evoked this danger by stating, on 26 February, that the foreign fighters had become a much greater threat than Saddam Hussein's accomplices. "It is today clear that terrorists of (Abu Musssab) Zarqawi's Ansar al-Islam or al-Qaida are the first in carrying out operations against the coalition" he stated. According to him, the attacks

against the coalition carried out by Saddam Hussein's partisans have diminished as against those by islamists and foreign fighters linked to the al-Qaida network.

The coalition has identified a Jordanian, Abu Musssab al-Zarqawi, linked to al-Qaida, as the brains behind the wave of suicide attacks in Iraq since August. General Sanchez accused Abu Musssab al-Zarqawi's supporters of having, since January, committed the attacks on the coalition headquarters in Baghdad, the offices of the principal Kurdish parties in Irbil, the Iskandariyah Police Station (Southern Iraq) and the Army recruitment centre in the capital, causing a total of almost 300 deaths. "How can you explain that more people are

dying? *There are terrorist elements that are attacking Iraqi people. They are targeting defenceless people*" he stressed. The U.S. Army has doubled the reward for the capture of Zarqawi from 5 to 10 million dollars, after having published a document attributed to him in which he lays out his "*strategy for terror in Iraq*". On Tuesday it announced that it had killed one of Zarqawi's lieutenants during a raid in Ramadi, 100 Km West of Baghdad.

At Riyadh, where he had discussions with Saudi leaders, the month's President of the Interim Government Council said that he had received assurances that the Saudis controlled their borders with Iraq and were preventing any attempt at infiltration. During a Press Conference, Mr. Mohsen Abdel Hamid stated that the Saudi leaders had assured him that "*they control the border as best they can (...) and that they disapproved of any infiltration by individuals*" who might wish to take part in actions liable to endanger Iraqi security.

On another level, a second 140-strong contingent of Japanese land forces entered Iraq on 27 February from the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border while an oil pipeline linking two Iraqi refineries in Samara was burning. Samarra is a Sunni town about 100 Km from the Iraqi capital. This second contingent had come to reinforce the 100 Japanese soldiers already settled in Samawa (Southern Iraq) since the beginning of the month for a "*humanitarian and reconstruction*" mission,

according to Tokyo. All in all, some 600 Japanese will be based at Samawa by the end of March in what is the first action by the Japanese Army in any war theatre since 1945.

Moreover, on 25 February, the UN Interim Special Representative in Iraq, Ross Mountain, excluded any immediate return of UN foreign staff to Iraq. Questioned by journalists as to such a return, Mr. Mountain stated that the question depended on "*the development of the security situation*".

On the other hand, the number of Iraqi police killed since the end of the war in Iraq is approaching that toll of American soldiers, which shows the increasing involvement of Iraqis in their country's security, explained American Army authorities on 23 February. According to the latest assessment, 263 American soldiers have died since 1 May 2003 when President Bush announced the end of the fighting. According to Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt, Assistant Director of Operations of the coalition forces in Iraq, the number of Iraqi police killed on duty is approaching and may even have passed this number. However he gave no precise figures. On his arrival in Iraq on 23 February, the US Secretary for Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, declared that he was optimistic about the country's security situation. "*On each of my many visits to Iraq, my impression is that each time I observe improvements. Every week the number of Iraqis taking part in*

the security forces increases" Donald Rumsfeld declared in an interview on Iraqi television. "*In June and July last there were no Iraqi security forces. Today, in February 2004 there are 210,000 Iraqis serving in the security forces. That is a fantastic score*" he added. This is his fourth visit since the "end of the war".

Several dozen attacks have been launched against the multinational division of 9,000 men in Iraq, which includes 2,400 Polish soldiers and is commanded by Poland. To day they have only resulted in 1 death amongst the Poles, an officer killed by automatic weapon fire on 6 November. But on 18 February, seven Iraqis were killed and 86 people injured, including 58 coalition soldiers, in a double suicide attack with booby-trapped vehicles against a Polish Army base South of Baghdad. This was the first attack of this kind against a Polish base in Iraq, declared the Polish General Staff spokesman Colonel Zdzislaw Gnatowski.

Furthermore, in 14 February insurgents launched a spectacular twin assault against Iraqi security forces at Fallujah, in the course of which 27 people were killed and about thirty wounded. At least 23 police and four attackers were killed in simultaneous attacks on a police station and a building of the Iraqi Civil Defence Corps (ICDC — an auxiliary police force). This attack in the rebel town of Falluja, 50 Km West of Baghdad, is the third this week by insurgents against Iraqi security forces. This twin assault

occurred in the same spot where, two days earlier, the head of the American Forces Central Command (Centcom), General John Abizaid had escaped an attack by anti-tank rockets.

On 10 February, a suicide bomb attack in front of a police station in Iskandariya, South of Baghdad, caused 55 deaths. The next day a booby-trapped car exploded before the Baghdad recruitment centre for the new Iraqi Army, causing 47 deaths.

UNO: KOFI ANNAN CONSIDERS THAT IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO ORGANISE ELECTIONS IN IRAQ IN THE PRESENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

PLUNGED into profound uncertainties regarding the exact manner of the transfer of power, the Iraqi leaders are discussing an amended timetable to prepare for general elections.

On 23 February, in a report to the Security Council, Kofi Annan stressed that technical and legal problems on the spot should be settled first, and that it would take at least eight months before the country would be able to organise elections, implying that they could not take place before 2005. Mr. Annan, who had sent a fact finding mission to Iraq between 6 and 13 February led by his Algerian adviser, Lakhdar Brahimi, to examine the feasibility of the general election called for by the Shiites, considered that *"it would be extremely difficult and, perhaps, even dangerous"* to attempt such a poll before the end of June and that the American plan of organising a caucus was not *"a viable option"*.

He also stressed that security in Iraq needed to be *"considerably*

improved in a manner that would guarantee the honesty of the electoral operation and the credibility of the process". *"If the (organisational) work were to begin immediately and the political consensus rapidly reached, it could be possible to hold elections by the end of 2004"* added Mr. Annan, stating that the eight months period was a minimum for an institutional and legal framework to be set up and to find the means and money needed to organise elections. *"None of these conditions exist for the moment in Iraq and there is profound disagreement on these fundamental aspects"* he said.

In a first reaction, the American administrator in Iraq, Paul Bremer, described the UNO document as *"a constructive contribution to our common objectives, which are to transfer a sovereign and democratic Iraq to the Iraqi people"*. *"We share UNO's positions on the importance of direct elections as soon as possible at the same time as we also share its concern at the feasibility of holding direct*

and honest elections in a few months time" he declared in a communiqué on the evening of 23 February.

According to him, the report *"clearly states that sovereignty must be transferred to the Iraqi people on 30 June, and we are going to adhere to that stage"*. *"We hope to see UNO involved (...) in the coming stages, including the establishment of a provisional government for the period following 30 June"* he stressed. A member of the Interim Government Council, Adnan Pashashi, considered, for his part that *"UNO can play a role of primary importance in the preparation of elections and in registering the electors and drawing up an electoral law"*.

In fact, the UNO report completely shattered the principal terms of the agreement signed between the Government Council and the Coalition on 15 November 2003, except for the date of 30 June 2004 for the transfer of power.

The Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, spiritual head of the Iraqi Shiites demanded in a communiqué on 26 February that the UN Security Council pass a resolution setting a date for general elections before the end of the year 2004. Ayatollah Sistani asked for speedy general elections to choose the authority that would receive power from the occupying coalition on 30 June. He added, in his communiqué, that a UNO resolution would *"assure the Iraqi people that this question would not be postponed again"*. *"The Marjaiya (the Shiite religious directorate) wants the*

body that receives power at the end of June to have wider powers to prepare clear and free elections but to run the country without taking any important decisions" stated the Ayatollah.

Ayatollah Sistani met five Shiite members of the Government Council, including Muaffak al-Runai, who stated: *"We all entirely agree with Sir Sistani's communiqué"*. The delegation also included Ahmad Chalabi, leader of the Iraqi National Congress (INC), Abdel Aziz Hakim, leader of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) as well as Ahmad Shayyah al-Barrask and Mohammad Bahr al-Ulum.

For its part, the Iraqi executive announced on 25 February that it would shortly reply to the UNO report on elections and the transfer of power. The Interim Government Council *"has received this report, has decided to submit it for examination by a special committee for a detailed opinion and will reply officially to the UNO General Secretary in writing next week"* declared the current President of the Interim Government Council, Mohammad Bahr al-Ulum. *"There are positive and negative points in the report. What is positive is that it insists on the holding of general elections and on the date of the transfer of power" from the coalition to the Iraqis. "The negative points are the exaggeration of (religious) sectarianism and the fear of the Sunnis and Kurds of Shiite domination of an elected government"* added the Shiite

leader. *"The report should have avoided mentioning these subjects"* in his opinion.

The Coalition had announced the day before that it was ready to delay negotiations with the Iraqis on the status of its forces after the transfer of power. These negotiations were initially planned for the month of March, but the coalition indicated that the Iraqi Government Council preferred to discuss this point

later, even after the 30 June. The UNO report of 23 February noted, in this respect that *"many Iraqis have insisted that only an elected government can sign a bilateral agreement on security with the coalition and that any other form would lack legitimacy"*. However, according to this report no government could be elected before 2005. The Coalition has about 150,000 troops in Iraq, mostly American.

THE FIFTH MEETING OF IRAQ'S NEIGHBOURS FOR CONCERTED DISCUSSIONS

ON 15 February, the governments bordering on Iraq, at the end of their meeting in Kuwait, solemnly called for an end to the occupation of Iraq *"as soon as possible"*, arguing in favour of a vital role for the United Nations in the process of transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqis. A final communiqué, adopted after long discussions, stressed *"the importance of developing the role of UNO"* for it to prepare the ground *"for an end to the occupation (of Iraq) as soon as possible"*.

This 11-point document does not specifically name the United States, the principal occupying power in Iraq since the overthrow of the former Baathist regime in April 2003.

However, the Syrian Foreign Minister, Faruk al-Sareh, backed by his Iranian opposite number, Kamal Kharazi, had called for the final text to mention *"the end*

of American occupation of Iraq" indicated the members of the drafting committee.

The Iraqi Foreign Minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, considered that it was unnecessary to sharpen the tone, mentioning the sovereignty and independence of Iraq being a clear reference to ending the occupation. *"We cannot talk of the immediate withdrawal of the occupation forces before the establishment of a representative authority and a government strong enough to control the situation"* declared the Jordanian Foreign Minister Marwan Moasher.

Moreover, the neighbouring countries *"denounced terrorist actions"* on Iraqi territory and welcomed *"UN resolutions, in particular N° 1511, calling for a precise timetable for the transfer of power to the Iraqis"*.

In a declaration without precedent in the region, Iraq,

Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan, Iran and Turkey furthermore hailed *"the decision of the Iraqi people to try the leaders of the former Iraqi regime, in particular the former president, for crimes against Humanity"*. The communiqué expressed *"support for the efforts"* of the Interim Government Council in Iraq *"to face up to its responsibilities"*. It expressed the hope of the neighbouring countries to see a *"broadly representative Iraqi government"*.

The communiqué attacks the *"crimes of the former regime"* particularly evoking the *"mass graves"*, deplores that *"Kuwaiti prisoners and those of other countries had been killed by the (overthrown) regime"* and demanded that *"the authors (of these crimes) be tried"*.

The document *"condemns the attacks and terrorist actions that target Iraqi civilians and police as well as staff of humanitarian organisation, of UNO and diplomats"* but makes no reference to attacks against American troops or those of the Coalition.

Mr. Zebari announced that his country and several of its neighbours would be forming bilateral security commissions to control the infiltration of *"terrorist"* groups into Iraq. *"We have asked our neighbours to help us control the borders in a more effective manner to prevent terrorist groups from entering Iraq to perpetrate terrorist and criminal attacks"* added Mr. Zebari. These neighbouring countries *"have given a positive reply. The next stage will be the*

formation of bilateral security commissions uniting Iraq, on the one hand, and Syria, Jordan, Turkey and, perhaps, Saudi Arabia on the other" he added.

The next meeting of Iraq's neighbours is due to take place

in Egypt at a date that has yet to be set.

The Kuwait meeting was the fifth of this kind, following on that in Istanbul (January 2003), Riyadh (April 2003), Damascus (November 2003).

BERHAM SALIH VISITS ANKARA WHILE EGYPT AND TURKEY ISSUE WARNINGS TO THE IRAQI KURDS

BERHAN Salih, Prime Minister of the Suleimaniah Regional Government, arrived in Ankara on 9 February for discussions with the Turkish authorities. In the course of his discussion with Osman Koruturk, the Turkish special coordinator for Iraq, B. Salih indicated that an autonomous Kurdish region would not tolerate the presence of the PKK operating on its soil. *"We are ready to work to displace all kinds of elements that constitute a threat to our neighbours"* he declared.

A few weeks earlier, Nechirvan Barzani, Prime Minister of the Irbil Regional Government had called for the withdrawal of Turkish troops stationed in Iraqi Kurdistan. Questioned on the subject, B. Salih declared that there was no question of using force to expel the Turkish troops and that *"friendly discussions can be held with the United States, Great Britain and Turkey and a solution found"*.

Berham Salih also asked for hospital treatment for eight more of the wounded victims of the bomb attacks carried out

simultaneously against the offices of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in Irbil, which had caused over a hundred victims. The week before a first group of seven had been transported to hospital in Ankara for treatment.

Furthermore, Abdullah Gul, Turkish Foreign Minister, declared in Warsaw on 9 February, in discussions with his Polish opposite number, that Turkey would take part in NATO's stabilisation of Iraq. NATO will meet next June in Istanbul to decide the means of its participation in the stabilisation of Iraq.

On the other hand, during a visit to Ankara by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on 11 February, Turkey and Egypt issued a joint warning against any attack on Iraq's territorial unity, thus stressing their fears that increased autonomy might be given to the Iraqi Kurds. *"We are of the opinion that the preservation of the territorial integrity of Iraq is a necessity and that attempts that might lead to the dislocation of Iraq are*

dangerous" declared the Egyptian Head of State, who was speaking to the Press at the end of his discussions with his Turkish opposite number Ahmet Necdet Sezer.

Mr. Moubarak's last visit to Ankara was back in 1998, when he went to try and mediate between Turkey and Syria, at that time on the brink of war because of Syria's support for

the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who saw Mr. Moubarak in the evening, had stated, in February last year, that his country was ready to play the role of mediator between Syria and Israel. Turkey has hoped for years to host an international conference to contribute to a solution to the Near East conflict.

belonging to a "secret organisation" and of wishing to "annex a part of Syrian territory to another State" is due to be announced on 11 April next, stated Mr. Bounni. These seven Kurds had been arrested on 25 June 2003 during a demonstration in Damascus demanding Syrian nationality, on the occasion of World Child Protection Day.

DAMASCUS: TWO KURDISH LEADERS SENTENCED

ON 22 February, a Syrian Emergency Court sentenced two leaders of a Kurdish party to fourteen months imprisonment, but ordered their immediate release as they had already served their sentence in pre-trial detention declared the lawyer and Human Rights activist Anouar Bounni. Marouane Osmane and Hassane Saleh, leaders of the Kurdish Yakiti (Unity — banned) Party were sentenced for having "*tried to annex a part of Syrian territory to another State*", according to Mr. Bounni, who also considered, in his declaration that the verdict "*was an attempt to regild Syria's image*" but nevertheless "*illustrates the determination to continue sentencing people for any political activity*".

Messrs. Osmane and Saleh, arrested in December 2002, had been "*initially sentenced to three years imprisonment, but the State Security Court decided to reduce their sentence to fourteen months and to release them*"

added the lawyer. According to him, Messrs. Osmane and Saleh were defended by eighteen lawyers.

About 150 people, mainly Kurds, gathered outside the Court shouting slogans in Arabic and Kurdish and calling for more "*freedom*". Banners carried by the Kurdish demonstrators called for "*solidarity with the Kurdish prisoners being tried by the State Security Court*" against whose verdicts there is no appeal. Five diplomats accredited to Syria (US, European Union, British, Canadian and Dutch) were in the crowd.

The two Kurdish leaders were arrested a few days after a demonstration before the Syrian Parliament by some 150 Kurds in December 2002. The demonstrators were calling on the authorities to "*review their discriminatory policy*" towards the Kurdish population of Syria.

Furthermore, the verdict on seven other Kurds accused of

The Yakiti Party had, on 8 February, demanded a solution to the Kurdish question, while affirming its "*commitment to the integrity of Syrian territory*". "*The Kurdish Yakiti Party, like all the Kurdish parties in Syria, none of which has any legal existence, demand a democratic solution to the Kurdish cause in the context of the integrity of Syrian soil*" the Secretary of its Central Committee, Abdel Baki al-Youssef, had affirmed in a communiqué. "*The desire to annex a part of Syrian land to a foreign State is an unfounded accusation that (the authorities) habitually use against all Kurdish political activists*" the communiqué stresses.

Kurdish political parties complain of "*segregation*" of the Kurdish population of Syria, estimated at about one and a half million people. They demand that the authorities restore their national identity cards to about 300,000 Kurds in Syria from whom they had been arbitrarily been withdrawn in 1962, in the context of a policy of forcible Arabisation of the Syrian Kurdish territories running along the border with Turkish and Iraqi Kurdistan. The communiqué refers to the detention, for over a year, of the

Party's Lebanese representative, Farhat Abdel Rahmane, "*arrested in December 2002 in Lebanon by the Lebanese Intelligence Services at the request of the Syrian Army Intelligence*" and handed over to them. Farhat is accused by the State Security Court, an Emergency body, of "*belonging to a secret organisation*" and of "*wishing to annex a part of Syrian territory to a foreign State*" adds the communiqué that demanded his release as well as "*all the political prisoners in Syria*".

Furthermore, representatives of Syrian Human Rights organisations have declared that over 130 political prisoners have been released in Syria in the

context of Presidential pardons. Amongst the people released are 84 islamist activists and some members of the Iraqi branch of the Baath party, according to a communiqué published on 30 January by the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Syria. Its President, Aktham Naisse, welcomed these releases, stressing that certain detainees had been released for humanitarian reasons and exhorted the Damascus government to release all political prisoners and "*put the country on the road to serious and effective democratic detente*". According to him, some 2000 political prisoners are detained in Syria, some of them for nearly 20 years.

the world that its nuclear programme is solely for civilian use, to produce electricity. Although Iran has, indeed, ceased to enrich uranium, as it promised during the visit to Teheran of the European "troika" in November, it continues to produce and assemble centrifuges intended for its vast underground enrichment site of Natanaz. Information from a variety of sources indicates that Teheran has benefited from nuclear cooperation with Pakistan, which already possesses atomic weapons.

The project of endowing Iran with a nuclear industry goes back to the reign of the Shah, who invested a billion dollars in the French nuclear waste retreatment plant, Eurodif. Nuclear cooperation with France ended after the establishment of the Islamic Republic and the Iran-Iraq war. Teheran then signed a contract with the Russians for the building of a nuclear power plant, in principle for the generation of electricity. Parallel to this, it launched a secret programme for making nuclear weapons. In fact, in this country that is floating on a sea of oil, the civilian nuclear programme is intended to train the personnel and acquire the equipment necessary for the production of an "*Islamic*" atom bomb.

AS WELL AS ...

• **IRAN IS SEEKING TO EQUIP ITSELF WITH THE BOMB.** Iran has carried out nuclear experiments that it has omitted to reveal, according to an internal report on that country published on 24 February by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The IAEA inspectors discovered traces of polonium, a radioactive element that enables the triggering of a nuclear chain reaction. Yet, the report points out, the Teheran government has not mentioned any research with polonium in its declarations on the subject of its past or present nuclear activities.

The IAEA report points out that

the Agency discovered polonium last September and stresses that the element "*can be used for military purposes (...) specifically as a neutronic detonator in certain types of nuclear weapons*".

On 25 February Iran minimised the importance of the IAEA report, stating that it was based on a "misunderstanding" which would soon be cleared up. Teheran also insinuated that it might resume the enrichment of uranium if it finds that its present suspension of this is insufficient to win the confidence of the international community.

Teheran is striving to convince

• **THE EUROPEAN HUMAN RIGHTS COURT FINDS TURKEY GUILTY OF VIOLATING THE "RIGHT TO LIFE" AND OF "INHUMAN AND DEGRADING TREATMENT"**

ON THE PETITION OF A KURDISH FAMILY.

On 17 February, the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) found Turkey guilty of serious violations of the European Convention on Human Rights and particularly of its clauses guaranteeing the "*right to life*" and forbidding "*inhuman and degrading treatment*" during an operation by the Turkish Army against a Kurdish hamlet. The Court sentenced Turkey to paying a total of 70,480 euros damages to Abdurrazak Ipek, a 61 year old Kurd whose two sons disappeared while being subjected to violent and barbaric treatment from the Army on 18 May 1994 in the hamlet of Çaylarbasi (Dahlezeri in Kurdish) in Diyarbakir province,

The two young men are presumed dead which established, in the Court's view, a breach of Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights ("*the right to life*").

For the judges of the Human Rights Court, the "*distress and anguish*" inflicted on the father by the disappearance of his sons, exacerbated by the destruction of the family home and the contempt displayed by the authorities in the face of his complaints, constitute "*inhuman treatment*", banned by Article 3 of the Convention.

The absence of any written record of the arrest of the two young men and the conditions of that arrest are in breach of Article 5 of the Convention, guaranteeing that "*none may be deprived of their freedom save (...) through due process of law*".

During the operation, the soldiers set fire to the houses in the hamlet, reducing most of them to ashes, including that of Mr. Ipek and his family, thus violating his right to property (Article 1 of protocol N°1 of the Convention).

"No effective recourse" could be exerted or obtained in Turkey against exactions by the Army, in breach of Article 13 of the Convention.

Finally the Strasbourg judges considered that "the Turkish government did not fulfil its obligation (...) to provide the Court with all the necessary facilities to establish the facts" which constitutes a breach of Article 38 of the Convention.

• FRANCE, IN ITS TURN, BANS THE KURDISH SATELLITE NETWORK MEDYA-TV. On 12 February, the Higher Audiovisual Council (CSA) decided to withdraw its licence to broadcast from the Kurdish satellite TV, Medya-tv, thus putting an end to the programmes of this channel, accused of being the successor of MED-TV, banned on 22 March 1990 by Great Britain for "*justifying violence and PKK propaganda*".

Medya-tv, which had started broadcasting on 30 June 1999, had applied to the CSA for a licence to broadcast, but the French Television regulatory body had refused to grant it one. The State Council, to which the channel's lawyers had appealed, handed down its decision on 12 February by confirming the CSA's position and by calling on the ABSAT company to

immediately put an end to all the channel's broadcasts.

The officers of the channel, which is broadcast to 77 countries, criticised this decision, stressing that the silencing of Medya-tv will be used by Mr. Chirac, who is expected in Ankara in a few months time, to negotiate future contracts with the Turkish authorities.

• RECONSTRUCTION IN IRAQ : THE DONORS TO IRAQ FIRMLY COMMIT THEMSELVES TO A BILLION DOLLARS FOR 2004. The donors to Iraq, meeting in Abu Dhabi, announced firm commitments of a billion dollars for that country's reconstruction, on top of the 33 billion at Madrid the year before. At the end of a two-day conference, the donors "confirmed firm commitments of nearly a billion dollars for the year 2004, on top of the commitments undertaken at Madrid last year" declared the Japanese Ambassador to Iraq, Masamitsu Oki, President of a "Committee of Donors" created in Abu Dhabi. These commitments mark the "*operational*" launch of two funds devoted to the reconstruction of Iraq, added the Ambassador, whose country is contributing up to 500 million dollars. In addition to Japan, the United States, Great Britain and the European Commission are amongst the contributors.

At the opening of the conference at Abu Dhabi, on 28 February, the Iraqi Minister of Planning, Mehdi al-Hafez, proposed some 700 projects to the donors,

costing a total of 4 billion dollars with a view to their being financed in the context of the 33 billion promised at the Madrid donors' conference in October 2003.

The Abu Dhabi conference announced the creation of a *Donors Committee* to concretely collect the sums promised, through two reconstruction funds: the Multilateral Fund and the Iraq Development Fund, under the ægis of the United Nations and the World Bank. This Committee consists of 13 members: Australia, Canada, the European Commission, India, Japan, South Korea, Kuwait, Norway, Qatar, Sweden, Great Britain, and the United States, the Japanese Ambassador specified.

The Iraqi Minister of the Interior, Nur Badran, was present at Abu Dhabi to lobby for his department, through contacts with certain delegations taking part in the conference. He indicated that his Ministry needed "billions" of dollars to re-establish the various security services and overcome the insecurity that continues to reign in Iraq, eleven months after the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime.

The absence of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait was particularly noticed at the Abu Dhabi conference. A Kuwaiti official stated that his country had not been invited to this conference. The Emirate, nevertheless, announced on 29 February a contribution of 10 million dollars to the two funds and thus becomes a member of the *Donors Committee*.

• **THE GENERAL SECRETARY OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, ON A VISIT TO TURKEY, CALLS FOR THE EFFECTIVE APPLICATION OF THE REFORMS AND FOR THE RELEASE OF THE IMPRISONED KURDISH EX-M.P.s.**

A delegation from Amnesty International, led by its General Secretary Irene Khan, visited Turkey on 8 February, including Istanbul and Ankara where it met the Prime Minister, Mr. Erdogan, the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Gül, the Minister of the Interior, Abdulkadir Aksu, members of the State Council, the Presidents of the Constitutional Court and the Court of Appeals, the Parliamentary Commission for Human Rights and the Parliamentary Commission for Harmonisation with the European Union. Before returning to London, the members of the delegation went to Diyarbakir on 13 February to meet some women's groups and Human Rights Defence groups with whom they discussed the specific problems of the region.

In the course of her discussions with the Prime Minister, Irene Khan handed him a note in which Amnesty International recognised the progress achieved while stressing the concerns it continued to have regarding the observance of Human Rights in Turkey. In this note, the organisation particularly denounced the case of torture and ill-treatment, for which the authorities responsible for applying the laws were still being accused, as well as the impunity that the latter enjoyed (hence the necessity to settle the

problem of the heritage of violations committed in the past), the restrictions that still weighted on free expression, the criminalisation of non-violent dissident opinion and violence against women.

Irene Khan also asked Recep Tayyip Erdogan for the release of all persons imprisoned for having expressed their opinions in a non-violent manner, including the defenders of Human Rights, Leyla Zana and her colleagues. The Prime Minister, once again, unhesitatingly compared his 3-month incarceration with Leyla Zana's situation (10 years already!) reproaching Amnesty and Europe of applying "double standards". He reproached the latter for not having visited him in prison whereas during the imprisonment of the Mayor of Diyarbakir, Feridun Çelik, five Foreign Ministers came from Europe. He criticised the Human Rights defence organisations of dressing Human Rights "in an ideological l shirt".

Furthermore, on 12 February Amnesty International published a document regarding the "repressive legislation, arbitrary application: Human Rights defenders faced with pressures". According to this document, "despite legal and constitutional reforms that have recently taken place in Turkey, human rights defenders remain, in this country, the targets of acts of harassment and intimidation from agents of the State and continue to come up against a horde of laws and Parliamentary documents that limit their activity". "As fast as the old laws are repealed, the authorities find

new strategies for obstructing the activity of Human Rights defenders" declared Amnesty International.

Amnesty International reiterates its appeals for a fundamental reform of the legislation and practices with the concern to guarantee freedom of expression, of association and of assembly in the country.

• **THE FINANCING OF THE BAKU-TBILISI-CEYHAN OIL PIPELINE HAS BEEN CLINCHED.** The financing of the future Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, which is to transport Caspian oil towards world markets via Turkey, was finally clinched on 3 February, with the signature of an agreement definitive agreement between the international lenders and the Azerbaijani authorities. The lenders, who include International institutions like the European Bank for reconstruction and development (BERD) and public financial agencies, major commercial banks are contributing up to 70% of the construction costs of this project, set at \$ 2.95 billion. The remaining 30 % have already been advanced by the members of the consortium that will own the BTC pipeline.

The BTC, the construction of which began last year, and which is due to come into use in 2005, is designed to carry up to a million barrels of crude oil from Azerbaijan to the Turkish port of Ceyhan, passing through Georgia. About 1,760 Km long, the route of the pipeline was designed to avoid passing either

through Russia, Armenia or Iran, and has been enthusiastically supported by the American authorities.

The owning and operating consortium is led by the British oil group BP, and includes, in particular, the Azerbaijani oil company Socar, the French Total, the Norwegian Statoil, the Italian Eni, the Japanese Itochu, the American Unocal, ConocoPhillips, and Amerada Hess companies. The financing of the project by the international lenders had been delayed because of concern over the ecological consequences of the project, in particular because it passes through the Borjomi Valley in Georgia, which contains a famous mineral water spring.

• **EUROPEAN DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE HAS LED TO THE ARREST OF A SYRIAN, CLOSE TO THE SYRIAN SECRET SERVICES, WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ORGANISING THE ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION OF KURDS ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN.** The Syrian chief of a ring organising illegal immigration in the Mediterranean, and in particular of the wrecking of the *East-Sea* in February 2001 off the French Riviera, with 900 Kurds on board, has been arrested and is now in prison in Damascus, *Le Journal de Dimanche* revealed on 8 February. According to this French Sunday paper, basing itself on a three-year long investigation, Majid (or Abdelmajid) Berki, 30 years of

age, "who claims to be close to the Syrian secret services, was arrested at his home in Damascus, following joint approaches by the French, Italian and German Ambassadors to the Syrian authorities".

The man, suspected of having organised the deliberate wrecking of the Cambodian tramp cargo boat *East-Sea* with 900 Yezidi Syrian Kurds on board near Saint-Raphael in 2001, but also that of the *Sam* off the South of Italy the year before with 400 Kurds the year before and of the *Monica*, flying a Tongan flag of convenience off Sicily with 930 illegal refugees, also Kurdish, had already been arrested in Beirut on 23 April 2003, tried by a Lebanese military court and left free, the paper pointed out.

In November 2003, "diplomatic pressure was then exerted by France, Italy and Germany" and Abdelmajid Berki "was locked up". "With countries that don't want to cooperate in the struggle against illegal immigration, this is the only way to get results" stated officials of the French Ministry of the Interior to *Le Journal de Dimanche*.

Only a small number of the 900 refugees (men, women and children) who were on the *East-Sea* decided to remain in France, where they were granted refugee status. The majority of them went to Germany and the Netherlands where there are substantial Syrian Kurdish communities.

IRAK Tandis que le numéro deux du Pentagone, Paul Wolfowitz, était à Bagdad, un double attentat a fait 56 morts et 200 blessés hier à Arbil

Vague de terreur au Kurdistan irakien

Au moins 56 personnes ont été tuées et 200 blessées dans un double attentat suicide perpétré hier à Arbil, dans le Kurdistan irakien, au premier jour de la fête musulmane de l'Aïd, dans l'une des attaques les plus meurtrières depuis la chute du régime. Ces attaques ont coïncidé avec la troisième visite à Bagdad du secrétaire adjoint à la Défense, Paul Wolfowitz. Hier encore un soldat américain a été tué et 12 autres blessés dans une attaque à la roquette contre une base américaine à Balad, à 75 km au nord de Bagdad.

Bagdad :
de notre envoyé spécial
Arnaud de La Grange

La guerre rampante d'Irak, depuis quelques jours, a pris ses quartiers au nord. Après un sanglant attentat à Mossoul, samedi, contre un poste de police, le Kurdistan a été de nouveau frappé hier par des attaques d'une violence extrême.

A Arbil, les deux grands partis kurdes ont été unis dans l'horreur par deux attentats presque simultanés ayant visé leurs représentations. Les kamikazes, puisqu'il s'agit d'attentats suicides, avaient bien choisi leur jour. Celui de la fête de l'Aïd, qui voit dans tout le

pays les chefs de tribu ou de parti recevoir un flot ininterrompu de visiteurs.

C'était le cas dans les locaux de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK), le parti de Jalal Talabani, quand un homme portant une ceinture d'explosifs s'est mêlé à la foule avant de déclencher sa charge meurtrière. C'était aussi le cas au siège du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK), la formation de Massoud Barzani, quand, cinq minutes plus tard, un autre kamikaze a semé la désolation.

Les deux attaques ont fait au moins 56 morts et des dizaines de blessés. Selon un responsable du PDK, le gouverneur de la province, Akram Mentem, a été tué, ainsi que le nu-

méro trois du parti, Sami Abdel Rahmane. L'UPK aussi a été frappée à la tête puisque Shahwan Abbas, membre de la direction de la formation, a trouvé la mort. Les deux mouvements rivaux se partagent depuis 1991 le contrôle du Kurdistan irakien.

Un porte-parole de l'UPK a immédiatement dénoncé « les partis extrémistes et islamistes d'être derrière cette tragédie ». La semaine dernière, Jalal Talabani avait accusé « al-Qaida, Ansar al-Islam et d'autres combattants venus de l'étranger » d'être responsables des attentats qui ensanglantent Bagdad et les grandes villes d'Irak. Le groupe islamiste Ansar al-Islam (« Les partisans de l'Islam ») est suspecté depuis longtemps par Washington d'entretenir des liens avec la mouvance d'Oussama Ben Laden. D'où l'empressement des forces spéciales américaines à le déloger du petit sanctuaire dont son petit millier de militants bénéficiait dans le nord-est de l'Irak, dès le début de



l'offensive de mars 2003. Ces déclarations vont dans le sens de celles des autorités américaines. En se fondant sur des renseignements, les forces de la coalition avaient mis en garde vendredi contre une vague de violences à l'occasion de la fête de l'Aïd. Le général Mark Kimmitt avait réitéré les soupçons américains sur le rôle croissant des « étrangers » dans la violence.

« Ce qui est étonnant, cette fois-ci, c'est que la violence touche Arbil, au cœur même du Kurdistan, commente un



Les corps des victimes ont été rassemblés dans l'hôpital, afin que les proches puissent les identifier. Hier, à Arbil, chef du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan, deux kamikazes ont fait exploser leurs explosifs dans les locaux du PDK et de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan, où les visiteurs défilaient pour présenter leurs vœux, au premier jour de la fête musulmane de l'Aïd. (Photo AP.)

observateur étranger, auparavant, elle s'exerçait à Kirkouk ou à Mossoul, villes charnières où les tensions entre populations kurdes et les autres communautés, arabes ou turcomanes notamment, sont vives. » La venue prévue des Kurdes de rattacher la ville pétrolière de Kirkouk au Kurdistan dans le cadre d'un futur Etat fédéral a provoqué déjà maintes poussées de fièvre.

Il y a trois semaines, Jalal Talabani et Massoud Barzani ont rencontré plusieurs

membres chiites et sunnites du Conseil de gouvernement transitoire irakien. A cette occasion, les deux chefs kurdes ont accepté de mettre en sourdine leurs revendications. En mettant notamment en suspens la question de la définition des frontières du Kurdistan et leur demande du rattachement de Kirkouk à leurs provinces. Ce futur statut de l'Irak et le calendrier politique qui doit y conduire concentrent aujourd'hui toutes les passions. L'examen de la loi fonamen-

tales qui esquissera les contours du nouvel Irak en attendant l'adoption d'une Constitution fin 2005 doit commencer demain.

Dans tout l'Irak, la violence redouble alors qu'une mission de l'ONU doit étudier la faisabilité d'élections directes à brève échéance. Une demande de la communauté chiite qui réclame un scrutin au suffrage universel, alors que l'accord du 15 novembre entre la coalition et le Conseil de gouvernement transitoire prévoit l'élection in-

directe de cette assemblée provisoire. Les Nations unies ont mis comme condition préalable des garanties de sécurité.

Le bain de sang d'Arbil est aussi intervenu le jour même de la venue à Bagdad du numéro deux du Pentagone, Paul Wolfowitz.

Cet arrière-plan de violence ne devrait pas dépayser le grand lieutenant de Donald Rumsfeld. Lors de son dernier séjour à Bagdad, en octobre dernier, il était sorti sain et sauf d'une attaque à la roquette sur l'hôtel Rachid où il se trouvait.

ANALYSE

La mosaïque du Nord en péril

Thierry Oberlé

Faut-il craindre une guerre civile ? En dépit des propos rassurants des leaders kurdes les risques d'une implosion de l'Irak grandissent au lendemain du double attentat suicide d'Arbil. Bien sûr, le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) de Massoud Barzani et l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) de Jalal Talabani ont de bonnes raisons de respecter les règles du jeu d'une transition politique devant déboucher sur un Irak confédéral. Mais la voie suivie dictée avant tout par le réalisme est semée de sanglantes embûches. Touchés à la tête dans leur capitale institutionnelle, les Kurdes subissent une épreuve proche de celle endurée en août dernier par les chiites lors de l'assassi-

nat de l'ayatollah al-Hakim dans la cour de la mosquée de la ville sainte de Najaf. Les religieux chiites issus d'une communauté majoritaire dans le pays avaient alors réagi serotinement. Convaincus de sortir en position de force d'une joute électorale, ils ont continué à apporter un soutien critique aux stratégies de sortie de crise proposées par les forces de la coalition. Les partis kurdes qui se sont alliés aux mouvements chiites ont la même approche. Mais pas pour les mêmes raisons. Minoritaires, ils savent par expérience qu'il vaut mieux consolider ses alliances américaines que de tenter un cavalier seul sur la route de l'indépendance. Hier, les responsables kurdes ont mis officiellement en cause des groupes venant de l'étranger. Ils visaient al-Qaida en particulier et les « salafistes », ces fondamentalismes inspirés par un islam venu d'Arabie saoudite, en

général. Présent dans les montagnes au croisement de l'Irak et de la Turquie, Ansar al-Islam, le mouvement suspecté d'être à l'origine des tueries, est toutefois un groupe intégriste musulman... kurde. La crispation provoquée par les kamikazes d'Arbil peut également par un effet de souffle poser sur l'équilibre précaire régnant à Kirkouk, la cité pétrolière. Considérée par les Kurdes comme leur véritable capitale, la ville est en proie à des tensions ethniques depuis la chute de l'ancien régime. Les communautés ethniques et religieuses s'observent depuis près de dix mois en chiens de faïence. Kurdes, Arabes, Turkmènes, chrétiens se guettent. Chaque camp semblait jusqu'à présent convaincu de l'intérêt de se conformer au statut quo de l'après-guerre. Sans vraiment y croire. L'attentat d'Arbil a pour principal objectif de miner cette stabilité.

La pression monte sur la coalition pour que des scrutins directs, théoriquement fixés à 2005, soient organisés dès cette année

Washington face au casse-tête des élections

Bagdad :
Georges Malbrunot

Le combat pour la démocratie en Irak, promise par George W. Bush après avoir renversé Saddam Hussein, se joue paradoxalement à fronts renversés. En réclamant des élections au suffrage universel le plus tôt possible, la majorité chiite a pris au piège l'Administration américaine, qui s'y oppose, redoutant de voir lui échapper le processus

de transfert du pouvoir à une autorité irakienne souveraine, le 1^{er} juillet.

La pierre de touche de ce processus est la désignation avant le 31 mai d'une Assemblée nationale transitoire (ANT), qui choisira un gouvernement provisoire. En vertu de l'accord signé le 15 novembre entre le Conseil intérimaire de gouvernement (CIG) et Paul Bremer, l'administrateur civil américain, des élections générales ne se tiendront qu'en 2005, et les membres de l'ANT doivent être sélectionnés

dans chacune des dix-huit provinces par une commission de quinze notables, au terme d'un mécanisme complexe et opaque. Cinq seront choisis par le CIG, cinq autres par l'assemblée régionale et les derniers par les cinq principales municipalités de chacune des régions.

« Une démocratie des élites » contestée par les partis chiites, les seuls à occuper le terrain depuis l'arrivée des Américains dans le pays. « La puissance occupante a de diaboliques plans coloniaux pour façonner la politique irakienne selon ses

propres intérêts », tonne cheikh Abdel Mahdi al-Karbalai, un proche du grand ayatollah Ali Sistani, le porte-parole des opposants chiites au projet américain.

Comme Paul Bremer contrôle le CIG et a approuvé la désignation des gouverneurs à la tête des régions, le processus choisi revient en fait à ce que les Américains aient la haute main sur au moins les deux tiers de la future Assemblée transitoire... « Il est possible d'organiser des élections générales si les Américains sont sérieux, assure Mous-

safer Fahd Jasem, responsable du parti chiite al-Dawaa. *Ils doivent passer devant une réalité incontournable. Les Américains ne sont qu'invités en Irak* », ajoute-t-il, faisant planer la menace de manifestations en cas de refus de leur part.

La faisabilité du scrutin oppose non seulement les chiites à.

la coalition, mais également les premiers aux sunnites et aux Kurdes, les deux autres composantes de la mosaïque irakienne. « *Les conditions de la tenue d'une élection dans des circonstances satisfaisantes ne sont pas réunies*, affirme un porte-parole de la coalition. *L'environnement n'est pas sûr, et faute de recensement, la capacité d'identifier les votants ne peut être assurée.* » Pour répondre à cette dernière objection, les chiites, mais aussi des membres du CIG, ont proposé de se fonder sur les cartes de rationnement alimentaire établies par le précédent régime. « *Elles ne couvrent que 70 % des foyers* », rétorque ce responsable à la coalition.

« *Que faites-vous des 3 ou 4 millions d'Irakiens qui vivent hors du pays ?* » s'interroge également Wael Abdullatif, le gouverneur de Bassora, et membre du CIG. Pour trancher le diffé-

rend, une mission de l'ONU va se rendre bientôt auprès de l'ayatollah Sistani, pour formuler, le cas échéant, une alternative à des élections directes.

En coulisse, de part et d'autre, des idées de compromis sont étudiées. Pour les chiites, la priorité est d'élargir la représentativité du mode de désignation au niveau local des membres de l'Assemblée transitoire. « *Les candidats pourraient venir en disant « j'ai tant de signatures derrière moi », souligne un diplomate, ou alors « j'ai rassemblé tant de cartes de rationnement sur mon nom ».* Selon M. Abdullatif, une autre piste de travail consisterait à « *sélectionner 200 personnalités locales qui ont une légitimité et qui désigneraient 20 personnes, au lieu des 15 prévues. On pourrait aussi envisager de porter le collège électoral à 500 personnalités par gouvernorat* ». Une der-

nière idée, formulée par Adnane Pachachi, membre du CIG, viserait à faire passer ses membres de 25 actuellement à 125. Tout est négociable, répondent les Américains, sauf le 30 juin, date butoir pour remettre le pouvoir aux Irakiens. George W. Bush ne veut pas que l'Irak « pollue » les derniers mois de sa campagne électorale. D'ici là, des ajuste-

ricains, c'est de n'avoir rien fait pour préparer ces élections depuis neuf mois qu'ils sont là, explique un diplomate. *En privé, certains membres de la coalition reconnaissent qu'ils ont peur que des « barbus » non désirés remportent ces élections, et que les vainqueurs soient en fait ceux qui appellent le plus à leur départ.* » Même Ahmed Chalabi, membre du CIG et proche du Pentagone, a durci ses positions, en conseillant récemment aux Américains d'« *essayer de*

« La grande erreur des Américains, c'est de n'avoir rien fait pour préparer ces élections depuis neuf mois qu'ils sont là »

ments sont possibles, afin de conjurer le pire des cauchemars pour les Américains : que le référendum avec la majorité chiite la fasse basculer dans la guérilla.

Jeudi dernier, dans une première volte-face, le général Ricardo Sanchez, le plus haut gradé américain en Irak, affirmait que la sécurité pouvait être assurée en cas d'élections directes à brève échéance. A Washington, plusieurs scénarios de sortie de crise sont donc envisagés : inclure davantage de chefs communautaires dans les assemblées régionales, ouvrir ces « caucus » à quiconque souhaite y participer, ou mettre en place des élections locales étalées dans le temps, afin d'en faciliter l'organisation. Pour le gouverneur de Bassora, des élections sont possibles dès maintenant dans le pays chiite, où le calme règne.

« *La grande erreur des Amé-*

rendre possibles (les élections) et elles le deviendront. »

Les Américains sont-ils prêts à adouber par les urnes le premier pouvoir chiite dans un pays arabe, un pouvoir qui risquerait d'être lié à l'Iran voisin, dominé par des chiites radicaux ? Les chiites irakiens (60 % de la population) redoutent le coup de Jarnac. « *Sistani ne veut pas que le 1^{er} juillet marque le début d'une nouvelle période intérimaire qui repousserait jusqu'à 2005 la souveraineté des Irakiens sur leur pays* », poursuit ce diplomate. Le dirigeant chiite redoute que les Américains profitent de ce délai pour façonner un leadership à leur goût. « *Nous sommes engagés dans une course contre la montre* », reconnaît le porte-parole de la coalition. La prochaine étape est le 28 février, date limite pour la rédaction de la loi fondamentale provisoire. Selon nos informa-

tions, l'Irak s'achemine vers un régime parlementaire, type IV^e République, doté d'une Assemblée toute-puissante, qui pourrait révoquer les ministres et les membres de la présidence, et d'un exécutif faible, derrière lequel les Américains pourraient continuer de tirer les ficelles. Est prévue une présidence collégiale, composée de trois ou quatre membres (un sunnite, un Kurde et un chiite, mais ces derniers exigent deux représentants pour être majoritaires).

Statu quo en ce qui concerne les revendications des Kurdes : l'autonomie des deux provinces du Nord serait maintenue, et la controverse sur la nature des liens avec le pouvoir central ajournée. Même prudence à propos des liens entre l'Etat et la religion. Une formule de compromis aurait été trouvée sur l'islam, religion d'Etat, comme dans la majorité des pays arabes.

Bremer : « Saddam sera jugé publiquement »

Le président irakien déchu Saddam Hussein, capturé par les forces américaines, restera en Irak et sera remis à une cour spéciale créée par le Conseil de gouvernement transitoire irakien, a déclaré l'administrateur civil américain Paul Bremer dans une interview publiée samedi.

« *Saddam est en Irak actuellement, et oui, il sera jugé publiquement par une cour spéciale irakienne quand les préparatifs nécessaires à la mise en place de ce tribunal seront achevés* », a déclaré M. Bremer au quotidien arabe Asharq al-Awsat édité à Londres. Le Conseil de gouvernement, créé par les Américains, « *a commencé à mettre en place cette cour spéciale et nous avons dépensé de l'argent à cet effet. Et Saddam Hussein sera jugé pour génocide et invasion de pays*

voisins », a-t-il dit en allusion notamment à l'invasion irakienne du Koweït en 1990.

« *Saddam sera remis au Conseil de gouvernement après que ce dernier aura achevé la création de cette cour* », a poursuivi M. Bremer dans cet entretien réalisé à Bagdad.

Interrogé pour savoir si Saddam Hussein, capturé par les forces américaines en décembre dans le nord de l'Irak, coopérerait, il a répondu : « *Il ne coopère pas mais il n'est pas non plus un fauteur de troubles.* »

« *Il ne nous a pas donné d'information importante ou utile jusqu'à présent et n'a pas avoué où se trouvaient ses fonds à l'étranger, mais sous sa coupe à coup sûr qu'il a beaucoup d'argent hors d'Irak* », a ajouté le responsable américain. (AFP.)

The Guardian February 2 2004

They came to celebrate. Minutes later, 70 were dead and the region was in turmoil



Left: a Kurdish family waits to hear news of relatives; an injured man lies on a stretcher in hospital (above); offices of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (below) reduced to ruins
Main photograph: Julie Jacobson/AP

Suicide bombs at party offices drag Kurdish area into insurgency

Michael Howard in Irbil

The day began in bright sunshine, a fitting way to start the four-day Muslim holiday, the Eid al-Adha, or the Feast of Sacrifice.

The streets of the regional capital of Iraqi Kurdistan were blissfully traffic free as Kurdish families took advantage of the clear blue skies and crisp winter air to visit friends and relatives.

At the offices of the region's two main political groups, the Kurdistan Democratic party and its rival the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, celebrations were also in full swing.

But the seasonal greetings being exchanged between hundreds of party faithful and other well-wishers were about to be shattered.

Shortly before 11am two men, apparently wearing Kurdish dress, suicide belts wrapped around their waist, slipped past the normally tight security at the party buildings to deliver their own Eid message. In explosions that appeared to be carefully synchronised, they killed at least 70 people and injured more than 200.

They also shook Kurdistan and its war-weary people to the core, and raised fears that the debilitating insurgency that has brought havoc to the rest of the country has found a new battleground.

There had been attacks in the Kurd's northern enclave before, but nothing to compare to yesterday's atrocities, which killed many high-ranking politicians and local leaders.

The attacks marked the first time that bombers have struck with such force at the Kurdish parties in the northern region, an area previously regarded as far more peaceful than most of Iraq.

At the KDP's headquarters near the Kurdish parliament in the city centre, the reception room was crowded at the time of the blast.

Witnesses said people were jostling to shake hands with party leaders who included Sami Abdurrahman, a veteran Kurdish leader who was the deputy prime minister of the Kurdish regional government and one of the Kurds' toughest — and best — negotiators.

Alongside him stood, among others, the minister of agriculture, Saad Abdullah, the governor of Irbil, and the head of the city's police force.

Sheikh Allein, a local tribal leader, said: "It was so busy and everyone was in a good mood. I was a few feet away from Sami. Then a man stepped forward to shake hands and — bang.

"I don't remember much else but I saw immediately that many of our leaders had been ripped apart. I am lucky to be alive."

It was a similar scene across town, at the PUK's regional headquarters, where leaders moved through hundreds of people gathered in the conference room, shaking hands and kissing old friends.

Abdullah Ahmed, 22, was acting as an usher. Speaking from a hospital bed, he recalled: "I saw a man entering the room carrying a flower for one of the leaders. He looked a bit odd and as he stepped forward to one of the officials, I saw him move his hand towards his pocket and



'I saw immediately that many of our leaders had been ripped apart'

'All Kurds are targets, and it must now be time to push for our rights'

one of the bodyguards hurling himself toward the man. Then there was an explosion and I woke up in hospital. I know Kurds have enemies, but how could this happen in Kurdistan?"

Mohammed Rizgar, a war-grizzled PUK peshmerga, ran into the hall after the blast occurred. "I have fought in many

battles but I never saw anything like that. Everything was ruined. There were fingers, legs, bits of face, everywhere."

"The scene is pretty chaotic," Qubad Talabani, son of the PUK leader Jalal Talabani, told CNN. "We are hearing reports of many casualties. There are many, many injured as well. What seems to have happened is some of the walls seem to have collapsed in a building so that many people seem to be trapped under rubble."

"It was a very big day for the parties because of the holiday season and well-wishers going to the party headquarters."

Irbil soon echoed to the sound of sirens as the dead were taken to the morgue, and the injured to the city's hospitals.

News of the death of the deputy prime minister and his colleagues spread across town.

There was pandemonium in the Rizgari general hospital, as porters tried to push trolleys along blood-stained corridors clogged with frantic friends and relatives.

Doctors screamed at nurses for bandages and blood, and then more blood.

Peshmerga fighters guarded the hospital gates to prevent hundreds more distraught relatives from entering, though some of them wanted to give blood to their injured loved ones.

In the intensive care unit, a man lay unconscious, twitching violently and held down by members of his family. He was in charge of electricity for the city; he had severe head injuries and was not expected to last the night.

In the ward next door, men with charred faces and hands, and torsos slashed with shrapnel screeched in agony as their wounds were dressed.

The minister of health, Jamal Abdulhameed, said US forces offered to ferry emergency medical supplies from nearby Mosul. He said Irbil's health system was "stretched to the limit but that they were coping".

He added: "This is a tragic day for

Kurds, who have suffered so much in the past. But we are a tough and resilient people and we won't let either former Baathists or Islamic madmen deprive us of our freedom."

Many of the wounded who were still able to speak talked of their undimmed determination to fight for Kurdish rights in Iraq, called into question by recent geopolitical machinations.

"I have nearly died for Kurdistan under Saddam and I nearly died today," said Sirwan Razek, a KDP peshmerga, as he was visited by Mahmoud Othman, a senior Kurdish politician.

"Make sure that our political parties don't let us down again," he said before drifting into unconsciousness.

The call for unity among the often fratricidal Kurdish parties was a familiar refrain among the wounded.

"These bombers have shown us that all Kurds are targets, and it must now be time to pull together and push for our rights in Baghdad," Dr Othman said.

Idris Ahmed, a member of the PUK who was being treated for serious burns to his face, told Reuters: "We received well-wishers for the Eid al-Adha holiday in our building, whether Arab, Kurd or Turkmen. We will fight terrorism and the terrorists who carried out this explosion."

The PUK and the KDP are on the verge of uniting their divided administrations in the north to form a common front in the face of opposition to a Kurdish federal state.

Dr Othman said the attacks showed that even Kurdistan, which has been largely free from the insecurity of the centre, was "not immune to acts of terrorism".

Last night speculation as to who was responsible for the attack centred on Ansar al-Islam, a Kurdish Islamist group that has been suspected of having connections with al-Qaida.

Who could be to blame for attacks?

Ansar al-Islam

This Islamist group is likely to be a main suspect for investigators looking into yesterday's twin suicide bombings. Until the war last year, this Kurdish group was based in the mountains in the northern Kurdish region of Iraq, where it harboured Arab fighters and was suspected of having links with al-Qaida. Since then there have been several reports that Ansar has begun to regroup, with fighters reported to be crossing back over the border from Iran.

Former regime loyalists

Many of the insurgents fighting against the Americans are thought to come from the elite paramilitary units loyal to Saddam Hussein, including the Special Republican Guard and the Saddam Fedayeen.

These men are well-trained and well-armed, and they have little future in the new Iraq. American officials like to describe them as "dead-enders".

Iraqi nationalists

Many of the insurgents who have talked about their reasons for fighting say that they bear no loyalty to Saddam, but that they fight because of their anger about the American military occupation.

Many of them have seen relatives killed or arrested by the US army. The nationalists are mostly Sunni, and come from the central region north of Baghdad where they rely on their tribes for support.

Foreign fighters and al-Qaida

American officials frequently accuse foreign fighters of involvement in attacks taking place across Iraq. There were many Arab fighters in Saddam's Iraq before the war, but there has yet to be conclusive proof of the existence of any al-Qaida cells in the country.

American generals admit that few of the suspects that they have arrested are foreigners.

Rory McCarthy

Colonel Harry Schute, the senior US officer in the self-rule area, said there had been no warnings of the attack, but that "it has the fingerprints of Ansar al-Islam or al-Qaida, or whatever they have morphed into, all over it".

Attacks increase ethnic tension ahead of handover

Rory McCarthy in Baghdad and agencies

The devastating attacks in Irbil will add to the growing political and security crisis which the coalition provisional authority must resolve before the handover to an Iraqi government, which is due to take power in July.

So far the US army has committed negligible resources to policing the northern Kurdish enclave, which has for the most part been spared the violence that has racked the rest of the country.

In recent weeks the CPA had felt more confident that it had succeeded in curbing the num-

ber of insurgent attacks in and around Baghdad. But although assaults against the US military have become less frequent, insurgents appear to have turned their sights on softer targets, particularly police stations, hotels, restaurants and, occasionally, political party offices.

Paul Bremer, the US administrator in Iraq, said the attacks on the offices of the two main political parties in the region, the Kurdistan Democratic party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, "constituted a cowardly attack on innocent human beings as well as on the very principle of democratic pluralism in Iraq".



Paul Bremer: attacks 'seek to halt path to democracy'

He said the attackers had been "seeking to halt Iraq's progress on the path to sovereignty and democracy".

Within hours of the blasts US military commanders suggested that Ansar al-Islam, an Islamist militant group, or even al-Qaida itself might be behind the bombings.

"It could be Ansar al-Islam, it could be al-Qaida, it could be any number of foreign terrorist groups operating inside Iraq," Brigadier-General Mark Kimmit told a news conference.

Whoever was behind the attacks, analysts say the bombers were seeking to increase ethnic tensions between the Kurd and the

majority Arab population. "I think that they are trying to drive a wedge between the north and the centre," said Jonathan Schanzer, a terrorism expert from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"They will want the Kurds to circle the wagons and make them more suspicious of Arabs. This will certainly add to the fractured landscape of Iraq."

In recent weeks the two Kurdish parties have been pushing hard to secure agreements of significant autonomy for their region, which has enjoyed self-rule for more than a decade since a northern safe

haven was set up with US and British protection after the 1991 Gulf war.

According to Peter Galthraith, a former US diplomat and expert on the Kurds who was in Irbil, the attack could strengthen the hand of Kurdish groups that want to break away from the rest of the country.

"The bombings will strengthen those in the Kurdish movement who want to insulate Kurdistan physically and politically from the rest of Iraq," he told Reuters.

Iraq's insurgents are thought to include several strains, including Islamists, Saddam Hussein loyalists, ordinary

Iraqis angry with the occupation and foreign fighters, although there is little evidence that they have a strong presence on the ground.

Some US military commanders have said recently they believe the insurgency is under control and weakening.

One general last month described the insurgents as no more than a "fractured, sporadic threat" and said Saddam loyalists had been "brought to their knees".

But since then attacks have claimed the lives of several soldiers and dozens of Iraqis. A total of 18 people were killed on Saturday across Iraq, including nine policemen who died

in a suicide bombing at their station in Mosul.

The Kurds have been promised considerable autonomy in the federal structure proposed for the new constitution, but controversy over how much territory they will control has sparked ethnic bloodshed.

● One American soldier was killed and 12 were injured, two of them seriously, in a rocket attack yesterday on an army base in central Iraq, the US military said.

Troops detained 16 people, including four women, for questioning. The death raised to 523 the number of US soldiers killed in the conflict.

Arabes et turcomans s'inquiètent des ambitions kurdes à Kirkouk, où affluent les « déplacés de Saddam »

KIRKOUK

de notre envoyé spécial

Dans le stade pratiquement neuf situé à la périphérie de la ville, aucun match de football n'a eu lieu depuis la guerre. Et pour cause. Shorja, c'est le nom du stade, a été envahi par près de 2 000 Kurdes, qui y ont élu domicile. Les quelque 350 familles se sont installées dans les bureaux, les vestiaires, sous les piliers, à l'abri des tribunes, transformant l'édifice en un vaste capharnaüm d'abris en boue séchée et de parc à moutons, au milieu desquels stagnent les eaux usées.

Chaque famille a tenté de reconstituer son univers. Une existence précaire dans l'attente d'un avenir meilleur pour ces déracinés expulsés par Saddam Hussein et qui sont revenus au pays pour retrouver leurs maisons occupées ou rasées.

Deux kilomètres plus loin, d'autres Kurdes habitent dans des camps de toile que la pluie a transformés en bourbiers géants. Plusieurs centaines de familles venues de différentes villes du Kurdistan attendent les beaux jours et désespèrent de retrouver un jour un toit. Mieux lotis sont ceux qui ont élu domicile dans une ancienne caserne, à un kilomètre de là. Des responsables tiennent une comptabilité précise de cette population d'éternels déplacés, qui continuent d'arriver. Kirkouk est submergée par cet afflux, transformant la quatrième ville d'Irak (un million d'habitants) en un gigantesque refuge.

Cette migration continue depuis la fin de la guerre inquiète la population, tout particulièrement les communautés arabe et turcomane, qui parlent d'invasion délibérée afin de faire de Kirkouk une agglomération à majorité kurde, et qui accusent les partis politiques kur-

des d'organiser la « colonisation » de la cité pétrolière. « Après l'arabisation forcée décidée par l'ancien dictateur, c'est désormais la kurdisation par ceux qui viennent des montagnes », s'inquiète Youssef, un Turcoman. « Après l'avoir pillée en avril, ils tentent d'en prendre le contrôle aujourd'hui », s'insurge un habitant arabe qui a été expulsé de sa maison.

Chaque camp affirme être majoritaire au sein de cette mosaïque de peuples qui avaient vécu en harmonie jusqu'à présent. Au sein du conseil municipal, Kurdes, Turcomans, Arabes et Assyriens sont représentés à égalité. Aujourd'hui, il est bien difficile de savoir quel groupe est majoritaire. Le dernier recensement effectué par les Britanniques en 1957 révélait une nette supériorité de Turcomans (près de 80 %). « Si nous n'étions pas les plus nombreux, il n'y aurait pas eu l'arabisation et maintenant la kurdisation », fait remarquer Saadeddin Ergéc, chef du Conseil national turcoman d'Irak. Certains affirment que les Kurdes sont payés 10 000 dollars pour venir s'installer ici et faire pencher la balance, de la même manière que sous le régime déchu les Arabes étaient payés 10 000 dinars pour le faire.

VISÉE FÉDÉRALISTE

D'innombrables conflits ont surgi entre les expulsés kurdes qui reviennent et les Arabes qui se sont installés dans leurs demeures. Les partis politiques kurdes se sont emparés de bâtiments publics et du siège du parti Baas. Les portraits de leurs dirigeants ont remplacé ceux de Saddam Hussein. Des inscriptions en kurde et des drapeaux ont surgi un peu partout. Les milices du PDK (Parti démocratique kurde) et

de l'UPK (Union patriotique du Kurdistan) se sont solidement implantées, faisant la loi. « Les Kurdes tentent d'acheter à prix d'or les maisons et les commerces. Et de nombreux Arabes saisissent l'occasion pour partir », déplore Wassfi al-Assi, chef de la tribu des Obaïd et du rassemblement arabe.

Tous affirment vivre en bonne intelligence, mais en privé, les ran-

cœurs et les frustrations apparaissent. La tension est montée d'un cran depuis une manifestation du 21 décembre 2003, au cours de laquelle les Kurdes ont réclamé le fédéralisme et le rattachement de Kirkouk au Kurdistan. Dix jours plus tard, Arabes et Turcomans ont décidé de faire front commun et ont défilé dans la rue pour protester contre les visées kurdes. La manifestation pacifique s'est terminée tragiquement. Deux personnes ont été tuées et plusieurs autres blessées par des tirs, déclenchés vraisemblablement par des combat-

tants kurdes. Le 27 janvier, 250 chefs et représentants de tribus ont protesté à leur tour. « Le fédéralisme va allumer l'étincelle de la guerre civile », a déclaré Aggar Jabbas al-Soumaydai.

On n'en est pas encore là mais les inquiétudes sont grandes. Les Turcomans et les Arabes dénoncent le projet de fédéralisme et affirment vouloir s'opposer à l'annexion de Kirkouk au Kurdistan car, comme le dit Wassfi al-Assi : « Le pétrole, c'est pour tout le monde, pour tous les Irakiens. Nous voulons rester irakiens. » « S'ils utilisent les armes, nous nous défendrons jusqu'à la mort. Nous respectons les autres communautés et nous souhaitons qu'elles nous respectent aussi », ajoute Saadeddin Ergéc.

Paul Bremer, l'administrateur américain, a renvoyé à 2005 le statut de Kirkouk, estimant qu'il « doit être décidé par des Irakiens élus ». « Je suis sûr qu'on arrivera à une formule qui allie système fédéral et unité de l'Irak », a-t-il dit, tout en soulignant qu'un système fédéral « ne peut être bâti sur une base ethnique ». Pour Sirwan Kakaï du PDK et membre du Conseil du Kurdistan,

« Kirkouk fait partie historiquement et géographiquement du Kurdistan. Revenir ici est un droit pour les Kurdes ». Il estime à 250 000 le nombre de Kurdes expulsés par l'ancien régime, exhibe une brochure de 168 pages, rassemblant toutes les décisions prises par les Baasistes contre son peuple et fait valoir que justice doit être rendue. Saadeddin Ergéc s'insurge : « Ce n'est pas parce qu'ils ont été tués et torturés que cela leur donne le droit de se comporter en envahisseurs. »

M. B.-R.

Le Monde

3 FEVRIER 2004

Libération

2 FÉVRIER 2004



Une série d'attentats a fait au moins 70 morts ce week-end dont 56 au nord.

Irak : carnage au Kurdistan

Bagdad envoyée spéciale

L'offensive tous azimuts lancée par les forces hostiles à la coalition, à l'occasion de l'Aïd al-Adha, la fête musulmane du sacrifice, a fait plus de 70 morts ce week-end. Un bilan qui ne cessait de monter au fil des heures alors que le secrétaire adjoint américain à la Défense Paul Wolfowitz commençait sa troisième visite à Bagdad. Craignant des attentats, les autorités irakiennes avaient déployé d'exceptionnels renforts de police pour que la fête du sacrifice se déroule sans encombre. Après l'ONU, le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge et les chiites frappés dans leurs lieux saints, ce sont cette fois les Kurdes, dont les principaux partis ont appuyé l'intervention américaine en Irak, qui paient le plus lourd tribut à la violence.

Ceintures d'explosifs. C'est à Erbil, la capitale du Kurdistan irakien, qu'ont eu lieu les attentats les plus meurtriers. Deux kamikazes chargés d'une ceinture d'explosifs



sont entrés dans les locaux des deux principaux partis kurdes, l'UPK (Union patriotique du Kurdistan) de Jalal Talabani et le PDK (Parti démocratique du Kurdistan) de Massoud Barzani, où ils se sont donné la mort au milieu de militants venus présenter leurs vœux à l'occasion de la fête. En fin de soirée, un responsable kurde faisait état d'au moins 56 tués. Un autre évoquait quelque 200 blessés dans les hôpitaux devant lesquels se sont massées des foules de parents inquiets. «*Nous disons aux ennemis du Kurdistan et de l'Irak qu'ils ne porteront pas atteinte à l'unité du peuple irakien et aux revendications des Kurdes en faveur d'un Etat fédéral*», a déclaré

Massoud Barzani dans un communiqué. Selon un responsable du PDK, le gouverneur de la province, Akram Mentem, a été tué ainsi que le numéro trois de cette formation, Sami Abdel Rahmane, et un membre du bureau politique, Saad Abdallah. La mort de Shahwan Abbas, membre de la direction de l'UPK, a de son côté été annoncée par un porte-parole de l'UPK. Ce dernier a accusé «*les partis extrémistes, terroristes, islamistes, d'être derrière cette tragédie*».

Cette accusation semble viser Ansar al-Islam, une petite formation liée à Al-Qaeda, qui s'était installée dans une enclave au nord-est du Kurdistan, avant d'être chassée par les forces américaines au printemps 2003. Mercredi, Jalal Talabani avait accusé Ansar al-Islam et Al-Qaeda d'être à l'origine des attentats commis en Irak et menacé de leur «*couper la main*» s'ils se montraient au Kurdistan. L'implication d'Ansar al-Islam est plausible. S'il est difficile aujourd'hui pour des Arabes d'agir au Kurdistan,

arc-bouté sur sa revendication de faire de l'Irak un Etat fédéral, cela l'est moins pour les combattants de cette formation, qui, eux, sont kurdes. Jusqu'à présent, les islamistes kurdes, qui ont choisi le jihad contre les formations nationalistes qu'ils accusent de collusion avec les Etats-Unis, ●●●

étaient le plus présents dans le Nord-Est, la région contrôlée par Jalal Talabani, où la frontière qui jouxte l'Iran est le plus incontrôlable et où ils bénéficient du soutien de nombreux habitants fatigués de l'autoritarisme du chef kurde.

C'est la première fois que des attentats sont commis dans une foule par des kamikazes ayant revêtu une ceinture d'explosifs. La généralisation de ce type d'acte pourrait semer la panique dans la population, déjà rudement éprouvée par les explosions devenues classiques de voitures bourrées d'explosifs conduites par des commandos-suicides ou les tirs nocturnes de mortier. Les fêtes religieuses sont devenues un moment d'action privilégiée de ces groupes terroristes. Lors de la fête du ramadan, une série d'attentats coordonnés avait fait 35 morts à Bagdad.

Harcèlement. Samedi soir, à Bagdad, une roquette s'est abattue sur un quartier construit à la fin des années 60 pour abriter des réfugiés palestiniens installés en Irak depuis 1948. Quatre Palestiniens et un Irakien ont été tués, quatorze autres personnes blessées. Le tir, selon les habitants du quartier, aurait pu viser un camp américain situé à 300 mètres ou une patrouille américaine. Le harcèlement des troupes américaines reste quotidien. Trois soldats ont trouvé la mort samedi lorsque leur convoi a activé un engin explosif artisanal sur une route proche de Kirkouk. La police irakienne continue elle aussi de compter ses morts. Neuf personnes, dont deux policiers, ont été tuées samedi à Mossoul, dans le nord de l'Irak, dans un attentat à la voiture piégée devant un commissariat de police. Près de 300 policiers irakiens, considérés comme collabora-

teurs de la coalition, ont été tués depuis la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein, un nombre sensiblement égal aux pertes américaines dans la même période. Si l'on ajoute à cette série noi-

re l'assassinat à Kirkouk, samedi, de deux militants du Front turcoman - une petite formation hostile aux revendications kurdes de fédéraliser l'Irak en incluant Kirkouk dans la région autonome kur-

de -, on ne saurait échapper à l'impression que l'Irak se dirige à grands pas vers des affrontements d'envergure, voire une guerre civile. Tout à la fête, de nombreux Bagdadiens ont préféré ignorer les

dangers et conduire leurs enfants dans les parcs d'attractions partiellement ouverts pour l'occasion. ♦

HÉLÈNE DESPIC-POPOVIC

Iran: démissions en masse au Parlement

Ils sont 120 députés à contester ainsi le verrouillage des listes électorales.

Cent vingt députés, soit près de la moitié des parlementaires, ont remis hier leur démission, plongeant l'Iran dans la plus grave crise de son histoire au moment où débutaient les célébrations de son 25^e anniversaire. Symboliquement, les élus ont choisi ce jour - celui du retour de l'ayatollah Khomeiny à Téhéran, où il allait orchestrer la révolution islamique - pour remettre leur lettre de démission à Mehdi Karoubi, le président du Parlement (à majorité réformatrice). Deux figures parlementaires ont aussi lu à la

tribune une déclaration commune: «*Nous ne pouvons pas continuer à siéger dans un Parlement incapable de défendre le droit du peuple et d'empêcher la tenue d'élections où le peuple ne peut pas choisir librement ses représentants.*» Ils ont ensuite accusé les conservateurs de ruiner la république et d'instaurer «*un islam comparable à celui des talibans*». Les deux députés, Mohsen Mirdamadi et Rajabali Mazroufi, font partie des 87 députés empêchés par les organes conservateurs de se représenter aux législatives du 20 février. Ces démissions

doivent être encore approuvées par l'Assemblée. Au total, ce sont quelque 2500 candidats sur 8000 postulants, presque uniquement des réformateurs, qui ont été désavoués par les organes conservateurs pour manquements à l'islam et à la Constitution. Karoubi a rapidement appelé à

une nouvelle intervention du Guide suprême, l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei, pour sortir d'une crise qui, fait sans précédent, jette même le doute sur la tenue des législatives à la date prévue. Les élus démissionnaires ont demandé au gouvernement de ne pas organiser les élections et ont fait savoir qu'ils n'y prendraient pas part. Le Front du 2 Khordad (du 23 mai 1997, date de la première élection de Mohammed Khatami à la présidence), qui fédère 18 partis soutenant son action, a annoncé qu'il boycotterait

aussi le scrutin. Chaque parti membre de ce front doit cependant décider individuellement d'un tel boycottage. Des fissures dans le camp réformateur risquent dès lors d'apparaître. De son côté, Mohammed Reza Khatami, frère du président et chef du principal parti réformateur (le Front de la participation), a mis en garde les conservateurs contre la tentation d'organiser de force les élections, avec le soutien de l'armée: «*Ce sera un coup d'Etat avec pour but d'éradiquer la république.*»

Les conservateurs, qui peuvent compter sur environ 10 à 15 % de l'électorat, ne veulent pas entendre parler d'un report. Le Conseil, qui a procédé aux invalidations des candidatures, et le tout-puissant ministère de la Justice ont fait savoir qu'ils s'y opposeraient. La bataille semble déjà perdue pour les réformateurs. ♦

JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN

2 FÉVRIER 2004



VISIT TO KIRKUK

Wolfowitz Gets an Earful on Ethnic Tensions

By THOM SHANKER

KIRKUK, Iraq, Feb. 2 — Deputy Defense Secretary Paul D. Wolfowitz, on a mission to highlight successes in Iraq, heard firsthand of the ethnic and religious tensions that are vastly complicating American efforts for an orderly turnover of sovereignty to a new government by July 1.

At a session with Kirkuk's town council, Mr. Wolfowitz sat through heartfelt complaints and long lectures from people who contend that Arabs here are mistreated by Kurds; that Shiite Muslims, the long disenfranchised majority group, will settle for nothing less than direct elections; and that local militias with no allegiance to the central government are frightening people.

Undeterred, Mr. Wolfowitz, the intellectual architect of the Bush administration's policy on Iraq, said that "all Iraq was the victim" of Saddam Hussein and that all Iraqis had an equal stake in cooperating to build a new and democratic country.

Maj. Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, commander of the Fourth Infantry Division, which is responsible for northern Iraq, addressed the objections of some groups, especially the Shiites, to a caucus system planned by the United States to select the initial new Iraqi government. He pointed out that those very town council members were selected by a caucus managed by his troops, rather than by direct election.

"As an interim government, it has worked extremely well," General Odierno said.

A member of the town council who identified himself as an Arab and a Sunni Muslim, Ghassan al-Assi, said Kurdish political groups that predominate in parts of northern Iraq are "enforcing their ideas" and had "voided" Arab news organizations and economic opportunity in the region.

Ismail Oboutti, Kirkuk's director of employment, who identified himself as an Arab and Shiite Muslim, said, "Everyone on the street wants direct elections."

On the delicate topic of scheduling elections, Mr. Wolfowitz vowed "maximum participation" but said elections themselves would not settle the concerns expressed here.

Earlier on Monday, he went on patrol in Mosul with troops driving the Army's newest fighting vehicle, called Stryker, a lightly armored, wheeled infantry transport. One Stryker received the ultimate test even as Mr. Wolfowitz was touring Mosul, when it was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade on the other side of the city in an ambush that senior officers said appeared to have nothing to do with his visit. Brig. Gen. Carter Ham, the new commander of occupation forces in northern Iraq, said armor on the vehicle had forced the grenade to detonate 18 inches away from the Stryker's skin, diffusing the blast. None of the troops inside the vehicle were hurt, he said.

The New York Times

FEBRUARY 3, 2004

The New York Times FEBRUARY 2, 2004

56 KURDS KILLED IN SUICIDE BLASTS IN NORTH OF IRAQ

RELATIVE CALM IS BROKEN

2 Rival Northern Parties Lose Some Top Officials in a Holiday Assault

By JEFFREY GETTLEMAN
and EDWARD WONG

ERBIL, Iraq, Feb. 1 — Two suicide bombers killed at least 56 people and wounded at least 200 here on Sunday during Muslim holiday celebrations inside the separate headquarters of Iraq's two leading Kurdish political parties, officials said. The blasts shattered the calm of the north, a part of the country that had been relatively stable under the American occupation.

The bombers killed several top Kurdish leaders and wounded other senior officials in the explosions, which came 10 minutes apart and constituted the worst attack in Iraq since late August, when a car bomb killed more than 80 people outside a Shiite shrine in the southern city of Najaf.

The bombings here came at a time when the two rival Kurdish parties have been trying to unite the divided administrations of the northern region to strengthen their demands to retain autonomy in that area.

The two parties had been using their Erbil headquarters reception areas for the first day of a festival celebrating the end of the hajj, when devout Muslims travel to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. American military officials have said they expected an increase of violence during the four-day holiday, but there was little preparation for the possibility that suicide bombers strapped with explosives would walk virtually unnoticed into celebrations here.

Some officials said the attacks bore the signatures of foreign fighters or Ansar al-Islam, a mostly Kurdish terrorist group that American officials suspect has ties to Al Qaeda. The group was based near the mountainous Iranian border until American forces routed it last year with the help of Kurdish fighters.

At the headquarters of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, a blast blew out every ceiling panel, curled the blades of ceiling fans, peeled off wall-



On top, the damage from an attack yesterday on the offices of a Kurdish political party in Erbil, Iraq. Above, relatives of victims at a hospital.

paper and left charred and bloody remains across the floor.

At the time of the explosion, around 11 a.m., more than 200 people, including children, were packed into the reception hall, according to guards who had been there. They were exchanging greetings, eating chocolates and paying respects to Kurdish leaders.

That was when a lean man in his 20's walked into the reception hall wearing a bulging photographer's vest, said Aziz Ali Achmad, chief of

security for the headquarters.

"He came up, reached for a minister's hand, and then all of a sudden there was a horrible noise and fire everywhere," Mr. Achmad said.

Mr. Achmad said nobody was searched before entering the hall, despite his urging.

"I kept telling the sheiks, 'Please let us search people,' and they said, 'No, we will not bother them, not today,'" Mr. Achmad said.

A witness provided a similar account of an explosion at the headquarters of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

It was unclear to what degree the attacks were a result of rising ethnic and religious tensions in Iraq. Except in the hotly contested oil-rich city of Kirkuk, the Kurds have generally not been involved in sectarian violence, and the Kurdish region has been considered one of the safest

The two main Kurdish parties have been trying to unite to press for autonomy.

parts of Iraq. Relatively free of assassinations, roadside explosions and suicide bombings, the region is one where American soldiers can be seen occasionally walking around unarmed and eating in restaurants.

L. Paul Bremer III, the top American administrator in Iraq, said in a statement that the bombings "constituted a cowardly attack on human beings as well as on the very principle of democratic pluralism in Iraq."

The Kurdish region has existed as a virtually independent state since 1991, when the American and British governments declared it a no-flight zone and protected Kurds from Saddam Hussein's forces. The Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan each govern half the region.

"Certainly this was an attack against the stability and security in the Kurdish region," said Bakhtiyar Amin, a spokesman for Mahmoud Othman, an independent Kurdish member of the Iraqi Governing Council, who was on his way to one of the buildings at the time of the attacks. "They are forces of darkness and they want to bring Iraq back to an age of tyranny."

Mr. Amin predicted that the attacks on Sunday would draw the two main Kurdish parties — which went to war against each other in the mid-1990's — closer together and strengthen their resolve for autonomy. Party leaders say they want a unified regional government that will retain much of the independence the Kurds have enjoyed, though the parties are willing to cede matters of monetary, foreign and national defense policy to a central Iraqi government.

"These attacks could be better prevented by unity, by joining forces," Mr. Amin said. "I hope this will expedite the process."

The two parties have been in talks since the summer to unite their regional administrations. Those talks have accelerated in the past couple of months, and Kurdish leaders say they expect to reach an agreement well before the Bush administration transfers sovereignty to an Iraqi government, which is supposed to happen on June 30.

Mr. Amin said the parties had agreed in principle several weeks ago that the prime minister of a united region would come from the Kurdistan Democratic Party and his deputy from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, while the top two officers of the parliament would come from the two parties in reverse order. The ministries of the rival administrations would be combined, he said.

Several Governing Council officials say autonomy for the Kurds,



A bomber shattered a ritual feast at the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan office in Erbil, Iraq. Another bomber hit a rival party's feast. Hamid Noor-Eldin/Reuters

who make up a fifth of Iraq's population, is one of the most sensitive issues confronting them as they try to complete an interim constitution by Feb. 28. The committee writing the document opened debate over a first draft on Saturday. That draft calls for a three-person joint presidency shared by one Shiite Arab, one Sunni Arab and one Kurd.

Some Kurdish officials insist that the two Kurdish parties should be able to keep their militias, called pesh merga, in some form, a demand that has become a delicate issue with the Governing Council because American officials are trying to disband militias. The attack on Sunday could bolster the Kurds' argument that they need to retain the pesh merga — which means "those who face death" — for security.

On Sunday night, pesh merga essentially shut down Erbil, a city of around one million people. Sentries established roadblocks at all major intersections and searched cars.

At the headquarters of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, a guard's description of the morning attack mirrored the accounts of the bombing in the reception hall of the Kurdistan Democratic Party.

"A man walked up to Shakhawan Abbas," a member of the patriotic union's leadership council, "and while he was shaking his hand, he exploded himself," said the guard, who gave his name as Mahmoud.

The guard said investigators were checking a videotape taken right before the bombing to identify the bomber. Many people here blamed

Ansar al-Islam. They also cited as suspects insurgents from the restive Sunni Arab areas to the south. American military officials have said there is "a rat line" of insurgents flowing north.

As a cold drizzle fell Sunday night, crowds huddled around the gates of Erbil's hospitals. "My son, my son," one man moaned as he collapsed against a friend outside Erbil Emergency Hospital.

Achmad Umer, a farmer in traditional baggy Kurdish dress, with pants pulled up high, waited nearby to hear about his cousin.

"They tried to erase our leaders," Mr. Umer said. "And they took many innocents along the way."

Among the leaders killed were Sami Abdul Rahman, the deputy head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, and Saad Abdullah, a high-ranking official in the same party.

Kurdish officials declared a state of emergency and appealed for donations of blood.

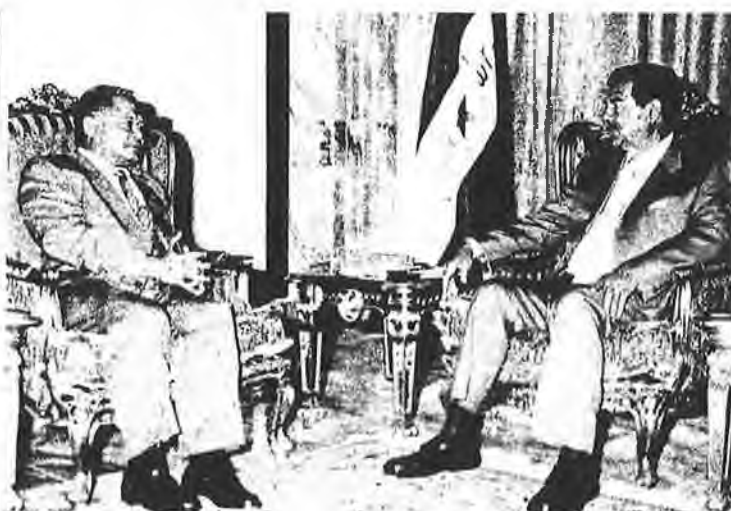
The Erbil bombings overshadowed violence elsewhere in Iraq on Sunday. In the southwest, at least 20 looters were killed when they accidentally set off a munitions bunker guarded by Polish soldiers, Polish military officials said, according to The Associated Press. The looters were apparently trying to steal rockets, artillery shells and other weapons stored by Mr. Hussein's army. Near Balad, in central Iraq, one American soldier was killed and 12 others were wounded in a rocket attack on a support base.

**France
Soir**

28 janvier 2004

IRAK ■ Saddam Hussein aurait profité du plan Pétrole contre nourriture de l'ONU, mis en place après la guerre du Golfe, pour arroser ses « amis »

La liste des profiteurs de l'embargo



Saddam Hussein et le ministre indonésien de l'Energie, Purnomo Yusgiantoro, qui figure sur la liste.

Cela représente plus de quatre jeux de cartes. Après la « liste des 55 » personnalités de l'ancien régime les plus recherchées par les autorités américaines, voici une nouvelle liste, publiée par le quotidien irakien *Al-Mahda*, celle des « 262 » ministres, entreprises, partis et organisations du monde entier ayant bénéficié, en 1999, de la générosité de Saddam Hussein contre des « services rendus ». Cette liste proviendrait du ministère irakien du Pétrole.

Cette « internationale des corrompus de l'ancien raïs » aurait reçu de la part de l'ancien dictateur, des « coupons » à valoir sur le pétrole irakien. « Des millions de barils ont ainsi été offerts à des individus qui n'ont rien à voir avec les activités pétrolières » dénonce ainsi le quotidien. *France Soir* est en mesure aujourd'hui de publier la liste des personnalités mises en cause (*lire ci-contre*), parmi lesquelles on trouve 10 Français, dont l'ancien ministre Charles Pasqua, l'homme d'affaires Patrick Maugein, un proche de Jacques Chirac, ainsi qu'un mystérieux Monsieur X.

L'ancien raïs promet de multiples révélations

Bombe politique ou énorme manipulation ? De part le monde, les « heureux nommés » dénoncent tous une supercherie, une arme de désinformation massive. Il est étonnant en tout cas de no-

262 supposés bénéficiaires

Sur la liste « noire » des bénéficiaires figurent des personnalités, des sociétés et des organismes issus de cinquante et un pays, ce qui correspond à une corruption planétaire d'une ampleur encore jamais constatée. Les cadeaux sont exprimés en millions de barils.

SYRIE : Awad Amoura (plus de 18 millions de barils – 18mb), Bachar Nouri (plus de 12 mb), Ghassan Challah (11 mb), Mohammed Ammar Naoufal (3,5 mb), Tamam Chehab (1 mb), Hamida Naanaa (plus de 9 mb), Firas Mustapha Tlass (6 mb), Salim Al-Toun (3,5 mb), Lotfi Fawzi (2,5 mb), Lid pour les réalisations (3,5 mb), Ghassan Zaccaria (6 mb), Mohammed Maamoun Sabii (4 mb), Hassan Kayyal (2 mb), Anwar Al Aqad (2 mb). **OMAN** : Groupe Chanfari (5 mb). **CHYPRE** : Mohammed Al Houni (plus de 17 mb), Naphta Petroleum (13,2 mb), Continental (3 mb). **TURQUIE** : Zeinelabidine Ardani (plus de 27 mb), Lotfi Dougane (plus de 11 mb), Mohammed Aslan (13 mb), Takfun (15,5 mb), KCK Entreprise (1,5 mb), Delta Petroleum (4 mb), SITA (2 mb), OZIA (2 mb), SAMIR (2 mb), Muhtashem (2 mb), Mukdar Sajzine (2 mb). **VIETNAM** : Finapco (1,2 mb), Darlink Med (3 mb), Fina Food (6 mb), OSC (2 tonnes). **SOUDAN** : Smaso (8 mb), Entreprise de production de pétrole (2 tonnes), Oil Plus (2 tonnes). **YEMEN** : Abdelkarim Al-Aryani (7,8 mb), Toufik Abdelrahman (1,5 mb), Chafer Abdelhak (plus de 7 mb). **BENGLADESH** : Moulana Abdelmannan (43,2 mb). **INDE** : Bilham Think (5,5 mb), Le Parti du Congrès (4 mb). **PAKISTAN** : Oil & Gas Group (10 tonnes), Abou Abdelrahmane (11,5 tonnes), Monsieur Azaz (1 tonne). **MALAISIE** : Fayek Ahmed Chérif (12,5 mb), BITMAL (4 mb), Trad Beer (4 mb), Mastek (Fayek Ahmed Chérif) (57 mb), Hawala (7 mb). **INDONÉSIE** : La fille du président Suharto (2 mb), Hawa Atlantic (2 mb), Makram Hakim (3 mb), Mégawati (8 mb), Mohammed Amine Raves (4 mb), Natona Oil (2 mb). **EMIRATS ARABES UNIS** : Val Petroleum (1,8 mb), Ahmed Maneh Said Al Outaiba (11 mb), Iwan Oil (4 mb), Sultan Bin Zayed Al Nahyan (7,5 mb), Al Hoda (22,9 mb), Issa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan (5 mb), Millennium (2 tonnes), Bonny Fioul (1 tonne). **MAROC** : Abdallah Salaoui (7,2 mb), Nadel Hachemi (5,7 mb), Mohammed Basri (4,5 mb). **ALGÉRIE** : Abdelmagid Attar (6 mb), Abdelkader Bin Moussa (6 mb). **TUNISIE** : Makades Petroleum (6,7 mb), Vernaco (3,7 mb), Maidor (4 mb). **ITALIE** : Roberto Frimigoni (24,5 mb), Selvatori Nikotra (20 mb), Monsieur Felloni (6,5 mb), Père Benjamin (4,5 mb), West Petrol (2 tonnes), Hetrelk (2 tonnes), ABS (1 tonne), Association pétrolière italienne (1 tonne). **ESPAGNE** : Bassem Kakich (17,5 mb), Javier Robert (9,8 mb), Ali Bailoute (8,8 mb). **YUGOSLAVIE** : Parti socialiste (22 mb), Parti de gauche (9,5 mb), Parti italien (???) (16 mb), Parti de Kocstonica (6 mb). **BIÉLORUSSIE** : Parti libéral (6 mb), Parti communiste biélorusse (7 tonnes), Entrep. Bielminal (14,2 mb), Entrep. Bielfarm (4 mb), Directeur du cabinet de la présidence (6 mb), Entrep. Lada (2 mb). **ROUMANIE** : Ylef Adrelneq (1 mb), Parti du Travail roumain (5,5 mb). **GRANDE BRETAGNE** : George Galloway / Fawwaz Zreikate (19 mb), Moudjahidin du peuple (36,5 mb). **CANADA** : Arthur Mel Holland (9,6 mb). **ÉTATS-UNIS** : Chaker Khafaji (7 mb), Samir Vest. (10,5 mb). **TCHAD** : Ministre des Affaires étrangères (3 mb). **THAÏLANDE** : Exportateur du riz Gaïborn (9,5 mb). **PANAMA** : Monsieur Sifane (11,5

ter que la liste, sur laquelle figurent de nombreuses comités internationales (le fils de l'ancien président Nasser, l'actuelle Premier ministre indonésienne Megawati Sukarno, des ambassadeurs, ...), ne comporte que deux Américains, alors que les États-Unis sont impliqués de part le monde dans une grande partie des affaires pétrolières...

Quoi qu'il en soit, ce document apparaît comme le premier des scandales, attendus, concernant les nombreux « présents » accordés tout au long de son règne par Saddam Hussein. L'ancien raïs aurait d'ailleurs promis, à l'occasion de son futur procès, de multiples révélations. Après la Première guerre du Golfe, l'ONU avait soumis l'Irak à un terrible embargo, notamment sur le pétrole. Le dictateur aurait alors chargé son fils Oudai d'organiser

le commerce clandestin des matières premières, parallèlement au programme « Pétrole contre Nourriture » mis en place par les Nations-Unies. Ces coupons lui auraient ainsi permis d'« acheter » des personnalités d'influence – qui touchaient environ 10 cents de dollar par baril – pour favoriser une levée de l'embargo.

Si ces informations étaient confirmées, elles provoqueraient certainement une terrible onde de choc, en apportant le discrédit sur de nombreuses autorités coupables d'avoir pactisé avec l'ennemi public international. Pire encore, elles démontreraient que de nombreux individus se sont outrageusement enrichis, alors que dans cette même période l'embargo sur l'Irak a causé, selon l'ONU, la mort d'au moins un demi-million d'enfants irakiens...

Thomas de Rochechouart

France : 9 noms et... Monsieur X

- Adax (3 / 8 mb)
- Traficora (Patrick Mougine) (25 mb).
- Lire Patrick Mougine*
- Michel Grima (1 / 17 mb)
- Association d'amitié franco-arabe (15,1 mb)
- Monsieur X (47,2 mb)
- Charles Pasqua (12 mb)

- Elias Ferzli (14,6 mb)
- A Lotus (Claude Caspar) (4 mb), *traduction supposée de Claude Kaspereit.*
- Bernard Mirame (3 mb)
- Lire Bernard Merimée*
- Bernard Miramé (8 mb)
- Di Suza (11 mb) *Proche de Mougine*

mb). **HONGRIE** : Parti de l'intérêt hongrois (4,7 mb). **AFRIQUE DU SUD** : Envium Management (Sandi Majali) (9 mb), Tokyo Sixweel (4 mb), Montica (4 mb), Omni Adil (4 mb). **PHILIPPINES** : Consortium des producteurs philippins (3 mb). **PAYS-BAS** : Say Polt (3 mb), Chiner : Monsieur Juan (39,1 mb), Noresco (17,5 mb), Zyng Rong (13 mb), Byourg (13,5 mb), Thouth Holken (1 mb). **JORDANIE** : Leith Chbailate (15,5 mb), Fakhri Kaouar (6 mb), Grands Ressources (2 mb), Al-Rachid International (Ahmed Al Bachir) (9 mb), Fawwaz Zreikate (6 mb), Salem Naass (6 mb), Ziyad Ragheb (7 mb), Machhour I Hadissa (4 mb), Chaker Bin Zaid (6,5 mb), Mohammed Saleh Hourani (4 mb), Toujane Al Faycal (3 mb), Ministère de l'Energie (5 mb), Ziyad Yaghmour (2 mb), Wamid Hussein (1 mb). **PALESTINE** : Aboous Abbas (11,5 mb), Abdallah Hourani (8 mb), Wafa Toufik Sayegh (3,5 mb), OLP (4 mb), FPLP (5 mb), Département politique de l'OLP (5 mb). **EGYPTE** : Incom (Mohammed Chattate) (14 mb), Abdelazim Manaf (6 mb), Khaled Gamal Abdel Nasser (16,5 mb), Imad Jelda (14 mb), Mohammed Salah (7 mb), Mohammed Helmi (4,5 mb), Entreprises arabes unies (6 mb), Entreprise Nil-Euphrate (3 mb), Mahmoud Majdi Maaraoui (7 mb), Entreprise Alhami Bachandi (2 mb), Entreprise Moutaka al Daouli (2 mb). **LIBAN** : BP Energy (2 mb), Fadi Almeh (2 mb), Haitham Sidani (2 mb), Planet Petroleum (1 mb), Georges Tarkhanian (7 mb), le fils du président Lahoud (4,5 mb), Ali Tohmé (1 mb), Entr. Al Hilal (Adnan Janabi) (1 mb), Entr. internationale pour le commerce et l'investissement (3 mb), Faycal Dernaika (3 mb), FJM Oil (1 mb), Najah Wakim (3 mb), Oussama Maarouf (3 mb), Zouhair Al Khatib (3,5 mb). **BAHREIN** : Entr. Kazem Darrazi (2 mb), Entr. Ali Al Mouslem (3 mb), Entr. Concret pour constructions (2 mb). **ARABIE SAOUDITE** : Ent. Naja (3 mb), ASSIS Ent. (2 mb). **QATAR** : Hamas Ali Al Thani (14 mb), Dalimi Group (4 mb), Gulf Petroleum (2 mb), Petrolina Oil (2 mb), Entr. d'entretien des puits pétroliers (2 mb). **LIBYE** : Choukri Ghanem (1 mb). **BRESIL** : Fouad Sarhane (10 mb), Mouvement du 8 octobre (Chaviez) (4,5 mb). **IRLANDE** : Riad Taher (11 mb), Afro Eastern (2 mb). **NIGERIA** : Haisson (7,2 mb), Entr. ZAZ (7,5 mb), Entr. IEG (ambassadeur du Nigeria) (1 mb), Campaq (4 mb). **KENYA** : Mohammed Othman Said (10,5 mb). **BULGARIE** : Parti socialiste bulgare (12 mb), Arak Pol (2 mb). **AUTRICHE** : Hunz Kolger (3 mb), Association arabo-autrichienne (1 mb). **SUISSE** : Media (2 mb), Delta Service (2 mb), Iblom (1 mb), Sepool (2 mb), Klinko (12 mb), Lakia (2 mb), Alkon (23 mb), Toros (8 mb), Petrogas (5 mb), Finar (21 mb), Napkes (3 mb). **SLOVAQUIE** : Parti communiste slovaque (4 mb). **UKRAINE** : Parti démocrate social (8,5 mb), Parti communiste ukrainien (6 mb), Energy Ressources (2 mb), Naphito Gas (8 mb), Vasmach Imbox (2 mb), Hu (Sokolov) (5 mb), Orchatski (4,5 mb), Fider Ali Torkonvki (1 mb), Trans Esco (1 mb), Maison Ukrainienne (10 mb), FTD (2 mb), Parti socialiste ukrainien (2 mb). **RUSSIE** : Les documents concernant la Russie font ressortir des dons de l'ordre de 1,336 milliard de barils. Cette précision concerne seulement les dons à l'Etat de Russie. Quant aux particuliers, organisations et partis : la liste s'établit comme suit : Entr. Zarabachkand (176,5 mb), Russ Napht Embaituations d'urgences (57 mb), Entr. M-chino-import (83,5 mb), Alpha Eco (ministère des Affaires étrangères) (128,8 mb), Petromin (Ministère des Affaires étrangères) (30,1 mb), Slav Naphte (Gottisrev - 25,5 mb), Zan Gas (49,1 mb), Russ Napht (35,5 mb), Kazine Invest (8,5 mb), Kalm Napht-Gas (7,5 mb), Gasprom (26 mb), Tat Napht (Tatarstan) (64,5 mb), Bach Napht (12 mb), Louk Oil (64 mb), Sergot Napht (-Gas (4 mb), Siberia Napht-Gas (1 mb), Naphta Moscou (25,1 mb), Onaco (22,2 mb), Sidanco (21,2 mb), Sibnapht (8,1 mb), Trans Napht (9 mb), Yokos (2 mb), Entreprises du parti libéral démocrate (Jirinovski) (79,8 mb), Entreprises du parti de la paix et de l'unité (34 mb), Comité russe de solidarité avec l'Irak (6,5 mb), Association russe de solidarité avec l'Irak (12,5 mb), Russ Napht-Gas export (12,5 mb), Oral Invest (8,5 mb), Académie moscovite des sciences (3,5 mb), Raoumine (fils de l'ancien ambassadeur à Bagdad - 19,7 mb), Université Gopken (3,5 mb), Group Northwest (2 mb), Gas Prom (Monsieur Hassan - 3 mb dont 1 million livré), Nicolas Rijkov (13 mb), Story Napht & Gas (6 mb), Akht Napht (4,5 mb), Administration tchéchène (2 mb), Adel Hilaoui (A.N. M aviation) (5 mb), Khrouzelt (5 mb), Trans Naphta (3 mb), Directeur du cabinet présidentiel (5 mb), Eglise orthodoxe de Russie (5 mb), Parti nationaliste russe (2 mb).

Iraqis form an intelligence service and plan to include ex-agents

By Edward Wong

BAGHDAD: The Iraqi authorities, with the help of U.S. intelligence agencies, are creating an intelligence service here that will focus on rooting out guerrilla fighters, especially those from outside the country, according to Iraqi and U.S. officials.

The service will employ some former agents of Saddam Hussein's security apparatus and will probably receive financing from the U.S. government, the officials said. Many of the agents will work in the border towns of Iraq to identify foreign fighters who have slipped into the country and will monitor their activities, said Ibrahim al-Janabi, a senior member of the Iraqi Governing Council's security committee.

The service will employ 500 to 2,000 people, he said, and is expected to be formed well before the Bush administration transfers sovereignty to an Iraqi government on June 30.

The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency is taking the lead in helping build the new service, U.S. officials said Friday. The CIA has close ties to the Iraqi National Accord, an opposition group founded by former Baath Party members who worked from London and Jordan to try to overthrow Saddam's government.

The head of the group, Iyad Alawi, heads the Governing Council's security committee and met in December with the director of central intelligence,

George Tenet, at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, to discuss the new intelligence service, officials said. Janabi, also a senior official in the group, is a leading candidate to head the new service.

The formation of an intelligence service is a very delicate matter in Iraq because of the deadly history of Saddam's secret police force, the Mukhabarat, the main instrument of domestic repression. The agency dissolved after the removal of Saddam in April, and many senior officials fled to neighboring countries.

"Under the Saddam regime, the entire structure of Iraq was built on security," Janabi said as he sat in his office in a building once used to train Baath Party officials. "The mentality of the people revolved around this security."

The new service's purported focus on foreign fighters could help allay public fears of a return to those days.

Janabi said that less than 5 percent of the workers in the new agency would be recruited from the ranks of the Mukhabarat and other security forces that operated under Saddam. They will be checked to weed out those guilty of human rights crimes, he said.

The creation of the service comes at a time when U.S. and Iraqi officials are trying to determine the significance of the role played by foreign fighters in the insurgency. Their numbers might not be large, but some officials say the most devastating attacks — the suicide car

bombings — appear to be the work of non-Iraqis.

Some Iraqi officials, including Ahmad Chalabi, a Governing Council member with strong backing from the Pentagon, say they oppose the new effort out of fear that it might empower dangerous members of the old security forces.

Chalabi's party, the Iraqi National Congress, has long competed bitterly with the Iraqi National Accord for backing from the U.S. government, which helps explain the clash between the two over the new service.

Another point of contention is that the Iraqi National Congress condemns the participation of former high-ranking Baath Party members in any aspect of public life, and especially in the new security forces. Chalabi is heading a committee on the Governing Council in charge of purging senior Baathists from the government.

Organizers of the intelligence service "are recruiting former Mukhabarat officers in other countries, people who went into exile after the war and who are now coming back," said Entifadh Qanbar, a spokesman for Chalabi who sits in on meetings of the Governing Council's security committee. "We should vet them before they're recruited."

The New York Times

Douglas Jehl contributed reporting from Washington for this article.

For UN election team, Iraq an unusual mission But it has a reputation to back it up

By Warren Hoge

UNITED NATIONS, New York: On one side of the electoral expert Carina Perelli's 30th-floor office in the United Nations building is the enduring view of the soaring towers of Midtown Manhattan. On the other is a bulletin board jumble of chicken-scratch diagrams of the hastily constructed election process being proposed for Iraq.

In the coming days, Perelli and members of the Electoral Assistance Division that she leads will be traveling to Baghdad to judge if that process or some refined form of it can bring lasting structure to the chaotic politics of Iraq.

It is a highly untypical mission for the division, which usually insists on months of surveys of local conditions and brings a rigor to the task that has gained the United Nations a reputation

as the most credible and trusted outside judge of elections.

That reputation caused the Bush administration to discard its long-standing reluctance to involve the United Nations in Iraq and to ask in mid-January for an emergency mission by UN experts to try to rescue what is a stalemated plan for political transition.

In an interview, Perelli said she could not discuss the specifics of the coming trip, but others at the UN said they felt the United States and its coalition partners had little understanding of the political dynamics of Iraq and had miscalculated in promising its caucus-based vote that will transfer authority to the Iraqis by June 30.

A senior UN official who has recently met with top Bush administration officials said he had told them their belief in the power of quick elections to

bring stability to countries with no history of democracy was "simplistic."

"We know from our experience that these things have to be gradual. It is naïve to think otherwise," he said, speaking not for attribution.

The mission that Perelli is leading will have the narrow focus of determining if direct elections can be organized before that date, and, if not, what adjustments need to be made to the current complex plan for caucuses that has

**Electoral assistance
has become an
increasingly important
function of the UN.**

drawn strong objections from various Iraqi leaders. Those leaders have told the occupation forces that they would only be willing to accept a transition plan that had UN approval.

Electoral assistance has become an increasingly important function of the UN because it is key to the peacekeeping and peace-building mission that oc-

cupies more of the organization's time. Perelli, 46, a sociologist and political scientist from Uruguay, has been head of the unit since 1998 and comes from a background of political activism from growing up under military rule. "I tend to be distrustful of large organizations, and if anything, my stint at the UN has made me even more distrustful of large organizations," she said.

The UN normally provides three

kinds of electoral assistance — technical and logistic assistance, including registration, use of computer technology, training of polling officers, storage of ballot papers, and support for administrators; the observation and monitoring of elections; and the organization and hands-on conduct of elections.

The electoral division has a roster of 1,100 people with field expertise from around the world it can call on, and

over the last two years, it has provided formal assistance to 53 countries. Recent operations have taken the division to East Timor, Liberia, the Central African Republic, Haiti, Afghanistan, the Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone. "Find a hot spot and we are probably there," Perelli said.

The New York Times

U.S. military presence in Baghdad to shrink

Army to hand bulk of security to Iraqis

By Thom Shanker

BAGHDAD: American commanders have ordered a sharp reduction in their military presence in Baghdad, as they increasingly turn over to local forces the most visible role of policing the capital while American troops pull back to a ring of bases at the edge of the city, senior military officers announced Sunday.

After reaching a peak of almost 60 operating sites within Baghdad, the American military already has cut its posts in the capital to 26 and will drop to eight by mid-April, officers said. Six of those bases will be in the Baghdad outskirts, and two will be in the high-security "green zone" that is home to the American-led occupation authority inside the city.

Brigadier General Martin Dempsey, commander of the 1st Armored Division, which has responsibility for security in Baghdad, said the new Iraqi police force and civil defense corps were "capable of handling the threat" inside the city.

The American military is working to "cede the city security problem to them," he said, noting that the American military footprint includes sandbags, concrete barriers and concertina wire, which cause serious disruptions and frustration for Baghdad residents, as well as creating targets for insurgents.

Dempsey's comments came during a visit by Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy defense secretary, who returned on an inspection tour to Baghdad three months after a trip during which his hotel was rocketed by insurgents in an attack that killed one army officer and wounded more than a dozen people.

Security remained a priority for Wolfowitz's visit. No announcement was made in advance of his arrival, and Black Hawk helicopters ferrying his delegation around the capital flew zig-zag routes just above rooftop level to minimize the opportunity for any adversary fire on the aircraft.

Dempsey said insurgent forces in the capital had been wounded by a series of American-led offensives. "I don't think they are as organized as they were a

month ago," he said.

As the 1st Armored Division prepares to hand over the American military mission in Baghdad to fresh forces of the 1st Cavalry Division, rotating into Iraq from Fort Hood, Texas, the U.S. forces will remain poised to assist Iraqi police and civil defense troops. They also are taking steps to reassure the population that the troop rotation does not represent a withdrawal of the American military — or of American political interests — from Iraq.

"We will move from leading the security effort to supporting it," said Brigadier General Mark Hertling, assistant commander of the 1st Armored Division. "There is a point of diminishing consent for them wanting us to be here. They want their security forces taking care of them — at least most of them do."

A senior Pentagon official said one impetus for removing significant numbers of American forces from the city center was to withdraw as much as possible from buildings, posts and offices associated with the fallen government of Saddam Hussein, and eliminate the American military's association with

those sites when possible. But a number of palaces at the edge of the city still will be used by the coalition military, and the occupation political authority continues to use a Saddam-era palace in the city center as its headquarters.

A senior military officer said that about 8,000 Iraqi police now patrol Baghdad, a city of about 5.5 million; security analysts say the city needs 19,000 patrolling officers. About 1,000 new police officers are being trained each month, the military officer said.

A senior official with the coalition authority in Baghdad said that recent bombings of Iraqi police stations had not driven new recruits away from police training.

Military intelligence now indicates that 250 to 300 "hard-core" insurgents operate in the city, loosely organized into about 14 cells.

The American military and Iraqi security forces are now battling a spate of kidnappings by insurgents who hope to compel the victims' families to carry out attacks against American troops and Iraqi police, or to pay money that will then be used for attacks, a senior military officer said.

A senior coalition official expressed concerns that some of the bombings of civilian targets across Iraq were planned by foreign terrorists, perhaps with ties to Al Qaeda. He said the attacks might be part of an effort to set off a wave of sectarian violence and undermine efforts to stabilize the nation.

The New York Times



Itsuo Inouye/The Associated Press

Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz spoke with Iraqi women Sunday in Baghdad.

Double attentat-suicide au Kurdistan irakien, dimanche, jour de fête de l'Aïd el-Adha

A Erbil, dans le nord du pays, deux kamikazes ont fait exploser les locaux des deux principaux partis kurdes, faisant plus de 50 morts et 200 blessés, selon le dernier bilan provisoire

BAGDAD

de notre envoyé spécial

En dépit des mesures de sécurité supplémentaires, annoncées par les autorités américaines, en raison de la fête de l'Aïd el-Adha (la fête du sacrifice) qui a commencé dimanche 1^{er} février, le week-end a été particulièrement sanglant. Près d'une centaine de personnes ont péri dans divers attentats samedi et dimanche. Le plus dévastateur a eu lieu, dimanche matin à Erbil, bastion du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK). Au siège de cette formation comme dans les locaux de l'autre grande formation kurde, l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK), les responsables recevaient les invités venus présenter leurs vœux. Pour l'occasion, il avait été décidé de ne procéder à aucune fouille corporelle.

Deux kamikazes en ont profité pour se glisser parmi les convives.

Les soupçons se sont immédiatement portés sur le mouvement Ansar al-Islam

Ils ont fait exploser leur charge pratiquement en même temps, provoquant un véritable carnage. Selon un témoignage rapporté par l'AFP, un homme s'est approché du ministre des affaires gouvernementales, Shawkat Sheikh Yezdin, et lui a serré la main en lui souhaitant « bonne fête ». Puis ce fut la déflagration. A ses côtés se trouvait Sami Abdel Rahmane, numéro trois du PDK. C'est lui qui aurait décidé de lever les mesures de sécurité pour la fête. Tous deux sont morts dans l'explosion, ainsi que le gouverneur de la province, Akram Mantak, son adjoint, Mahdi Khochnaw, le « ministre » de l'agriculture du Kurdistan, Saad Abdallah, et le chef de la police,

selon des listes publiées par les deux partis kurdes.

Du côté de l'UPK, deux membres du bureau politique, Shihwan Abbas et Khosro Shera, ont également péri. Au siège de ce parti, les victimes seraient moins nombreuses, car le kamikaze aurait été repéré et un garde se serait jeté sur lui. Les chefs des deux partis ne se trouvaient pas à Erbil.

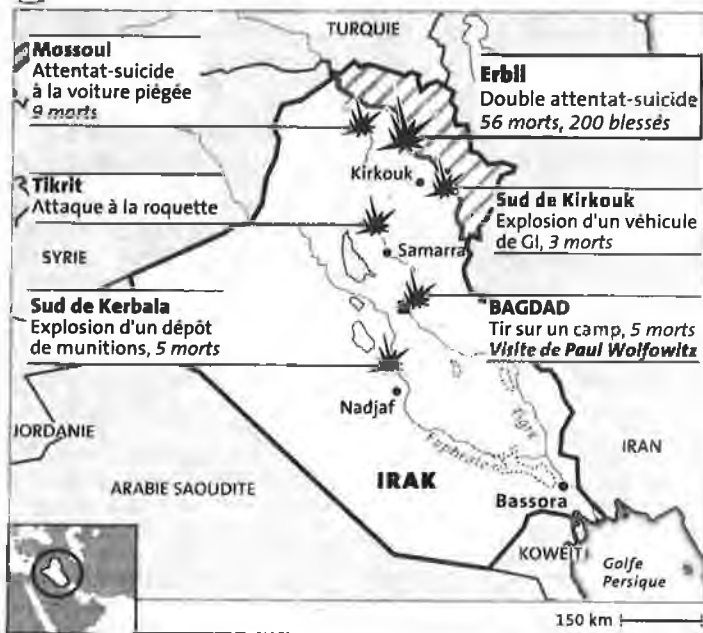
Cinquante-six personnes ont été tuées et 200 autres blessées dans ce double attentat-suicide selon l'armée américaine, mais le bilan pourrait être beaucoup plus lourd, car, dans la confusion, certaines victimes auraient été emportées dans les familles, les hôpitaux étant totalement débordés et la morgue saturée. C'est la première fois que le Kurdistan est touché par une action de cette envergure. Il s'agit en fait du plus important attentat commis depuis celui qui, le 29 août 2003, a coûté la vie à Mohammed Baker Al-Hakim et à une centaine de fidèles chiites, dans la ville sainte de Nadjaf.

Les soupçons se sont immédiatement portés parmi les responsables kurdes sur le mouvement radical islamique Ansar al-Islam, basé à l'est du Kurdistan. Cette organisation a été pratiquement démantelée par les troupes américaines alliées, pour l'occasion, aux forces kurdes. Le général Mark Kimmitt n'a pas écarté cette hypothèse mais il a également laissé entendre que « cela pourrait être Al-Qaida, ou n'importe quel groupe de terroristes étrangers opérant ou tentant d'opérer en Irak ». Il y a quelques jours, le général John Abizaid, chef du commandement central des forces américaines en Irak, avait rappelé que l'arrestation au début du mois d'Hassan Gül est une preuve que ce réseau opère en Irak. La piste Ansar al-Islam semble cependant privilégiée.

Jusqu'à présent, le Kurdistan était largement épargné par les actions terroristes. La cohabitation entre les Américains et les forces kurdes a toujours été sereine. Les GI ont été accueillis à bras

LE WEEK-END LE PLUS MEURTRIER DEPUIS CINQ MOIS

Zone autonome kurde



ouverts dans l'espoir que cette collaboration serait payée de retour par un appui à la revendication kurde d'un Etat fédéral en Irak et du rattachement de la ville de Kirkouk au Kurdistan. « Nous disons aux ennemis du Kurdistan et de l'Irak qu'ils ne porteront pas atteinte à l'unité du peuple irakien et aux revendications des Kurdes en faveur d'un Etat fédéral », a rappelé, dimanche, Massoud Barzani, le chef du PDK.

La veille, un autre attentat, à la voiture piégée cette fois, avait été perpétré à Mossoul, contre un commissariat de police. Neuf Irakiens ont été tués, dont deux policiers, et quarante-cinq autres ont été blessés. Le véhicule a réussi à franchir les barrières malgré les tirs des policiers et le kamikaze a actionné sa charge pratiquement devant le local de police.

Au moins cinq personnes ont, par ailleurs, été tuées par une explosion dans un dépôt de munitions, dans lequel elles s'étaient introduites pour le piller dans la

nuît de samedi à dimanche, au sud de la ville de Kerbala. Trois autres Irakiens ont été tués et 35 capturés au cours d'une opération de l'armée américaine à Baiji, à 200 km au nord de Bagdad. Samedi, quatre Palestiniens sont morts ainsi qu'un Irakien lors d'un tir de roquette sur leur camp à Bagdad qui jouxte un camp militaire américain. Trois GI ont également péri lors de l'explosion de leur véhicule, sur une route au sud de Kirkouk.

Cette série, non exhaustive, d'actes de violence et leur cortège de victimes ont coïncidé avec une visite inopinée à Bagdad, la troisième depuis la fin de la guerre, de Paul Wolfowitz, le secrétaire adjoint américain à la défense. Aucune indication n'a été fournie sur ce séjour qui coïncide avec le début des rotations de l'armée américaine. D'ici au moins de juin, les troupes seront relevées et ramenées de 130 000 à 105 000 hommes.

Michel Bôle-Richard

TIME

FEBRUARY 2, 2004

DEALING WITH THE CLERIC

By demanding elections in Iraq, Grand Ayatullah Ali Sistani is gaining popularity and vexing the U.S.

By ROMESH RATNESAR

THE MOST POWERFUL MAN IN IRAQ doesn't go out much. As an estimated 100,000 of his followers poured into the streets of Baghdad last week to demand direct elections in Iraq, Grand Ayatullah Ali Sistani stayed out of sight, holed up in the same nondescript white-walled compound on an alley off the Street of the Messenger in Najaf where he was kept under house arrest during the rule of Saddam Hussein. A crowd of followers seeking his counsel gathered outside. Some were allowed to enter; others were told by the guards to submit their questions in writing and come back another day.

ETHNIC IRAQ

Iraq is an amalgam of competing and often overlapping ethnic groups. Shi'ites, 60% of the population, are predominant in the south.



Behind the scenes, the place was buzzing. Aides and emissaries shuffled through the heavy wooden doors leading into Sistani's office, trying to determine whether the reclusive cleric, 75—the religious figure most revered by Iraq's Shi'ite Muslim majority—will bend in his opposition to the U.S. plan to hand over power by June 30 to a transitional Iraqi government chosen by an as-yet-undefined caucus system. Sistani says he will urge his followers to reject any new government unless it is directly elected. To those who met with him last week, Sistani seemed good-humored but serious, engaging his guests while betraying nothing. "He has in mind a strategy to serve the Iraqi people," says Basher Ali Jalil, a religious student who often visits Sistani's home. "But he will not reveal it right now."

The Bush Administration's drive to turn over sovereignty and reduce the U.S. troop presence in Iraq in time for the climax of the presidential campaign may hang in the balance. The U.S. plan, unveiled in November, calls for regional caucuses to appoint representatives to an interim legislature. Sistani aides say he suspects this method would allow the Americans and to a lesser degree the Governing Council—the U.S.-appointed group of transitional Iraqi leaders—to engineer the results to their liking.

In an effort to mollify Sistani, the U.S. last week persuaded U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to dispatch a team to Iraq to explore the feasibility of holding elections by June 30. Aides to Sistani told TIME that he would be willing to accept a delay in the planned July handover of power if it meant that elections could be held.

Publicly, Washington continues to stick to the June 30 deadline and insists that elections cannot be organized by then, given the absence of voter rolls, or held safely, in light of the continuing insurgency. But in private, Administration and Iraqi officials say the U.S. may ultimately be forced to bow to Sistani's wishes. "Sistani is the only one in this country who can mobilize millions," says a prominent Iraqi leader. "The Americans shouldn't tempt fate by disregarding that."

Still, U.S. officials are worried that an election as early as five months from now would give Iraq's Shi'ites, who make up 60% of the population but were repressed by Saddam's Sunni-dominated regime, a tremendous edge. With Saddam's Baathist structures gone, the Sunnis are disorganized and demoralized. Shi'ite religious institutions, by contrast, are strong. Among some in Washington, that raises the specter

TEAR SUWAYANA—CORBIS FOR TIME



INSPIRATION
Sistani's followers demand the vote during a march last week in Baghdad

of a replay of the 1979 Iranian revolution, in which fundamentalist Shi'ite clerics took charge of the government, which proved hostile to the U.S.

Sistani's background, however, suggests he prefers a different course. Born in Iran to a family of clerics, Sistani started memorizing the Koran at age 5, according to his official biography. In the early 1950s, he moved to the Iraqi city of Najaf, the site

of one of the holiest shrines in Shi'ism. He later became a student of Grand Ayatullah Abul Khoei, who would turn out to be Iraq's leading cleric. As Saddam ruthlessly suppressed clerical activism, Khoei advocated "quietism," the belief that the clergy should mainly serve spiritual and social needs, and not focus on matters of state. Sistani quickly distinguished himself as a brilliant theologian, adept at applying religious doctrine to

the dilemmas of modern life. (His website, sistani.org, offers advice on the propriety of, among other things, interest-bearing loans and masturbation.)

When Khoei died in 1992, Sistani succeeded him as the most prominent member of the *hawza*, the network of seminaries and mosques that dominates life in the city and generates huge sums in alms and tithes. Two years later, Saddam placed Sistani under house arrest. In response, Sistani established a base in Qum, in western Iran, and forged relationships with the ruling clergy in Tehran. But Sistani, like many other Shi'ite luminaries, disagrees with the Iranian practice of *velayat-e faqih*, or rule of the clergy. Aides say he has always discouraged clerics from holding political positions.

Sistani's aides say his decision to speak out against the U.S. caucus plan was motivated not by political ambition but by his



“He feels obliged to give opinions on politics because of the lack of voices speaking out.”

—SHEIK DHAFFER AL-QAISEY,
Sistani ally in Baghdad

TERI HUWYANA—CORBIS FOR TIME

perception that the Governing Council was not defending the rights of Iraqis and by a desire to protect the interests of Iraqi Shi'ites. In an interview with *TIME* in Qum, Grand Ayatullah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who has spent 15 years under house arrest for criticizing Iran's ruling mullahs for abuse of office, said that Sistani is acting for the good of Iraq. "If there should be a stable government, it is best that it is a government elected by the people," Montazeri said.

Sistani's challenge to the U.S. has made him, says an adviser to the Administration, "the most respected man in the country." His popularity is magnified by his reputation for moral probity. Designated a *marja-e taqlid*, or a source of emulation, the highest position in Shi'ite Islam, Sistani shuns material comforts. He meets with visitors in a simple, spare room, carpeted, with cushions around

the walls. "He wears inexpensive clothes so that he can sit side by side with the poorest man who comes to see him," says Jalil, the religious student. "When people ask a question, he smiles at them to make them feel comfortable. I don't think anyone who came before him or anyone who will come after will be as kind."

Sistani does have detractors among Shi'ites who argue that as an Iranian, he does not represent Iraqis. Some characterize his quietist approach as cowardly. Chief among Sistani's rivals is outspoken cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, who has built a following among poor, urban Shi'ites by call-

ing on them to resist the U.S. occupation.

Because he has refused to meet with journalists and U.S. officials, the Bush Administration has had a hard time figuring out Sistani's game plan. But many Administration officials are hopeful his role will be positive. Washington is already grateful that the ayatullah, while refusing to endorse the occupation, urged his followers to cooperate with the Americans early on. Says a senior U.S. intelligence official: "Sistani can prove to be one of the bigger forces for stability." A U.S. State Department official, on the other hand, says: "I am skeptical that anyone really understands what Sistani's about." The world may be about to find out. —

Reported by Brian Bennett and Hassan Fattah/Baghdad, Massimo Calabresi/Washington, Scott MacLeod/Cairo, Nahid Siamdoust/Qum, Philip Smucker/Karbala, Phil Zabriskie/Najaf



THE KURDS

A New Sarajevo in The Making?

Sheik Hassan Assi could see that the burly Kurdish guerrilla leader was in no mood to bargain. The Kurd, he recalls, backed him against a wall and shook his forefinger, saying, "Shame on you, Sheik, for building a house on Kurdish land. You knew we would be back one day, even if it took us 100 years!" For Assi, an Arab, it was not just a house but a dream home, a resplendent country estate on the outskirts of Kirkuk, on which he had spent his life's fortune. The Kurd, Mohammed Abdullah, had moved into the house after the fall of Kirkuk in April, his original home nearby having been destroyed by Saddam Hussein's regime in the mid-1980s. "I told him it is sacrilegious to take someone's home," Assi says of the recent encounter as he stands outside his family's downsized new abode in

downtown Kirkuk. "Then I offered that I should live in my house and he could build a new one alongside it. He refused."

Confrontations like these between Kurds and Arabs are threatening to make Kirkuk, Iraq's fifth largest city, the world's new Sarajevo, a site of ethnic cleansing and slaughter. Though Assi's encounter with Abdullah ended without bloodshed, at least two gun battles in the city have together left more than a dozen people dead. The trouble is rooted in Saddam's policy of moving fellow Arabs into the Kirkuk area to squeeze out the frequently rebellious native Kurds. The main objective was to secure Baghdad's control over Kirkuk's oil, which represents 6.4% of the world's known reserves. Now displaced Kurds are returning, sometimes routing the Arab

settlers. Meanwhile, Kurdish political leaders are vowing to include the Kirkuk region, by force if necessary, in the area that they intend to continue governing autonomously in the new Iraq. Today the region's population of 1.5 million is composed of almost equal proportions of Kurds, Arabs and Turkomans.

Though the Kurds were a key partner of the U.S. in ousting Saddam, American authorities oppose their efforts to run local Arabs out of town. "The people involved in Saddam's schemes—mostly Arabs—came here following economic incentives, and many of them moved into new homes they built themselves," says Colonel William C. Mayville Jr., the U.S. commander of coalition forces in Kirkuk. Says Britain's Emma Sky, director of the Coalition Provisional Authority in the

DOWNSIZED Evicted from his dream house, Assi sits with relatives in his new abode

city: "We are not here to ethnically cleanse any group. People should be able to choose where they live. These people were the pawns of Saddam's policy, not its architects." That said, coalition forces have not yet agreed to put the disheartened Sheik Hassan Assi—or others like him—back in his dream home.

Locals, in the meantime, are taking matters into their own hands. New Kurdish neighborhoods have sprung up in army barracks, government offices, Saddam's old intelligence headquarters, a youth center and beside Kirkuk's soccer stadium. A U.S. military officer says ethnic militias on all sides are adding to their already substantial arms caches. Local Turkomans, fearing domination by Kurds, have formed a new alliance with Kirkuk's Arabs. Aliya Chakmakchi, a Turkoman who works as a secretary for the U.S. Army in Kirkuk, voices a widespread fear: "If the U.S. leaves here, everyone will just murder each other."

—By Philip Smucker/Kirkuk

Suicide blasts in Iraq that claimed 67 lives have increased resolve to demand autonomy

The Guardian February 3 2004

Kurd rivals unite as they mourn bomb victims



Rory McCarthy
in Irbil

There was little doubt where the bomber stood. Blood stained the thin grey carpet to one side of the meeting hall in the Kurdistan Democratic party office and the blast had carved out small chunks of plaster from the wall nearby in an arc from the floor to the ceiling.

It was here on Sunday morning that the party's officials had lined up to greet the hundreds of guests arriving to celebrate the festival of sacrifice, Eid ul-Adha.

As staff began to clear the chunks of rubble and polystyrene from the floor yesterday, others slowly dug a handful of small, shiny ball bearings from the craters in the wall. The metal balls had been stuffed into the explosives the bomber wore round his chest.

Two men walked through the room spraying canister after canister of air freshener, but the sickly sweet fragrance did little to mask the smell of death.

The explosion here on Sunday morning and another identical suicide blast minutes later at a party hosted by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan on the other side of Irbil together claimed 67 lives, American officials said yesterday. At least 267 others were injured, many critically.

As workers began to clear the scenes of the two explosions, hundreds of people gathered at mosques across the Kurdish town of Irbil to mourn the victims of one of the worst acts of violence in Iraq since the war.

Many Kurds said the bombings would only intensify their long-held demands for autonomy within the new Iraq.

Ahmad Ali, the chief of the guards at the KDP office, held in his hand ball bearings wrapped in white paper. "There were thousands of guests and there was no way I could recognise any of them," he said.

One of the senior party officials had told

him to stop searching the guests on account of the religious holiday. "We didn't like to upset the people. They were our guests. We should respect them," he said. "We were worried about a car bomb, but we never thought there would be a man carrying the bomb."

After the blast Mr Ali said he saw the bomber's head lying in a corner. "His skin was a little dark. He had no moustache, just a small beard."

Kurdish television said the two bombers were dressed as Islamic clerics, an account that will only add to suspicions among many here that the bombings were the work of Islamist radicals such as Ansar al-Islam, a Kurdish militant group based in northern Iraq until the war.

'We were worried about a car bomb, but we never thought there would be a man carrying a bomb'
Ahmad Ali

'There have been a lot of enemies of the Kurds, but they have survived'
Karwan Jalal

On the stage at the back of the meeting hall yesterday was a shallow pool of blood and a table on which there were still two trays of sweets, the offerings prepared for Sunday's guests.

"The man who did this represents terror," said Jasim Mustafa Kadhar, 23, a guard who was standing at the entrance door of the hall when the bomb exploded. "He got in only because it was Eid and security was relaxed. Now no one in Irbil is celebrating for Eid."

Next door to the party office is the region's parliament building, a symbol of the autonomy the Kurds have already won after a decade free from the grip of Saddam Hussein. A few miles further on at the Al-Sawaf mosque yesterday the mourners spoke about how Sunday's bombings made their case for greater independence only more powerful.

At the side of the crowd stood Fathal Ahmed, 45, a technician in the Kurdish ministry of industry. He wore a dark suit and tie and was there to mourn the death of his brother, a KDP member who had been standing close to the bomber in the meeting hall on Sunday.

No conscience

"This was done by people with no conscience, people who have sold their souls to the devil," he said. Like nearly all Iraqis, and particularly the Kurds, he spoke of his relief at the fall of Saddam Hussein. But he also spoke of the cost of the violence that has ravaged this country since the war. "Everyone wanted to see Saddam out of their country, even executed," he said. "He made a tragedy in our country that has never happened anywhere else



A Kurd at the grave of his son, who died in one of the blasts at Irbil
Photograph: Namir Noor-Eldin/Reuters

in the world. But we didn't want to see it happen with these results."

In the crowd in front of the yellow brick mosque were officials and followers from both the Kurdish parties.

For more than two decades the KDP and PUK have been rivals at the same time as they pressed for greater Kurdish autonomy. But both sides were supporters of America's war in Iraq and the two parties hold strong positions on the Iraqi governing council. In recent weeks their two longtime leaders, Masood Barzani and Jalal Talibani, have begun a rapprochement that many expect will accelerate in the light of the bombings. The two sides are preparing to unite the two rival governments they run in the north.

"This will make our political efforts so strong," said Mr Ahmed. "As you see both the parties are here today at the mosque, standing together. I feel the parties will become so close after this. Despite what has happened I feel so optimistic about the future."

In Baghdad the governing council declared three days of nationwide mourn-

ing. In the weeks that follow the council is likely to hear even more forceful demands from the Kurds for guarantees over their autonomy. But there is also considerable pressure on the two leaders from many in the Kurdish community for much

more than just autonomy inside Iraq. Many want the Kurds to take control of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, an hour's drive south of Irbil, and others speak openly of their dream of a state of Kurdistan.

Chain of tragedies

"This was another in the continual chain of tragedies we have been suffering for such a long time," said Mohammad Saleh, a lawyer who stood in the crowd at the mosque.

"Now we must be insistent for our rights. We want federalism but of course our aim is more than that. We should be united with Kurds from other countries, just as Arabs talk of their Arab homeland."

"Look at our history," said his friend, Karwan Jalal, a teacher. "There have been a lot of enemies of the Kurds but they have survived and remained in their place

and even in spite of Saddam's mass graves we are still here."

As the crowds filed from the mosque at the end of the afternoon, others gathered at sunset outside the gates of hospitals waiting for news of injured relatives and talking of the motives behind the blasts.

"The Kurds are trying to get their federalism and there are many who are against that," said Salim Mohammad, who stood outside the emergency hospital, opposite the devastated KDP office.

He stood in a crowd of Peshmerga, the Kurdish militia, waiting for news of a senior KDP official whose legs were badly broken in the blast. "We want peace, we wanted a united Iraq and we want federalism for the Kurds. Now you will see how strongly we will demand this."

Salim Lone The influence of a Shia cleric might just make Washington see sense on the UN and elections

Bush and the ayatollah

Even as one recoils at the carnage caused by the suicide bombings at the offices of Kurdish political parties, it becomes ever more impossible to understand how the US can justify occupation policies that have singularly failed to quell the insurgency and the spectre of civil war, and have not won over even a tiny minority of Iraqis to support continued US control.

The latest strikes will also complicate Kofi Annan's decision on whether to field the UN's world-class electoral team in Iraq, even though there is widespread agreement on the need for UN involvement in the process leading to the end of the occupation.

In the darkness, however, there is a glimmer of hope. The Bush administration's resistance to acknowledging any of the disasters of its Iraq policy seems finally to have been broken by the refusal of Ali al-Sistani, the powerful Shia grand ayatollah, to back down from his insistence that only elected bodies can preside over the restoration of his country's sovereignty.

The US decision to retreat from plans to appoint Iraqi delegates who would choose a new government — and at the

same time, after a year's steadfast refusal, to seek a UN role in the country's political evolution — offers the first hint that America has recognised its need for the voice and expertise of others to fashion a successful exit strategy.

Sistani's effortless overshadowing of the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council is the latest indication of the flaws in a political strategy built around this unelected council running the country under occupation. It has still not been able to play an effective leadership role, or even establish itself as a champion of Iraqis' freedoms.

The council does not even seem to have a finger on the country's political pulse; it unanimously agreed to the coalition's plan to forgo elections for the new government and, on Sistani's first objection, continued to insist that elections would delay the return of sovereignty by at least a year. With such a sorry record, one can only assume that the US insistence on handing power to another unelected body anticipated a continuing behind-the-scenes role for the coalition. But the result would be an even more ungovernable Iraq.

From the beginning, elections were a key issue in Iraq, the US preferring to



bypass them while the Shias, in particular, saw them as a way to end their centuries-old marginalisation under the Ottomans, the British and Saddam Hussein. Indeed, Sistani issued a fatwa early in the occupation asserting that the constitution would have to be written by an elected body, scuppering coalition plans for a US-appointed group to draft it. Indeed, one of the few tense moments in the relationship between Paul Bremer and Sergio Vieira de Mello, Annan's representative in Iraq, who died in the bombing of the UN headquarters, concerned this issue.

That this electoral crisis evolved into a confrontation with Sistani is another example of the isolation of Paul Bremer's team. Having made bitter enemies of the Sunnis early in the occupation and more recently through Israeli-style tactics in their civilian areas, it was reckless to challenge Sistani, whose implicit support for the occupation has been instrumental in restraining an open Shia revolt. But this support was explicitly predicated on speedy elections. Astonishingly, this powerful cleric's concern was ignored. So he has now added an even tougher demand: that any decision on asking coalition forces to stay after the handover can be taken only by an elected body. Sistani is in effect incrementally challenging the whole range of occupation policies, riddled as they have been with blunders of breathtaking magnitude.

Principle and pragmatic concerns aside, Sistani is under tremendous pressure from the rank and file as well as prominent clerics who can no longer abide the burdens of the occupation. Nine months of US rule and insurgency have subjected most Iraqis to a life of unprecedented insecurity, financial hardship and social deprivation. In addition, few Iraqis — and few Arabs and Muslims worldwide — will take the June 30 handover to mean the end of occupation, since coalition troops will be "given wide latitude to provide for the safety and security of the Iraqi people", according to the November 15 document signed by the coalition and the governing council.

And so the UN enters the picture, with President Bush anxious to be inoculated itself against Iraqi turmoil as his re-election campaign looms. One of the great policy failures of the US has been to comprehensively sideline the UN. The November 15 agreement on mechanisms for creating a new government on June 30 did not even mention the UN. But this is one of those reversals that the world and Iraqis can celebrate. The UN has a huge reservoir of knowledge about Iraq, free elections, constitutions and human rights — in other words, in trying to reconcile bitterly torn societies.

The US should no longer try to exercise the complete control it so unfathomably seeks in a country it hardly understands. The political capital the US won with Saddam's capture — and with the startling renunciation of WMD by Libya and agreements on Iraqi debt forgiveness — should make it easier for the US to let go and trust others to play a dominant role. The only way to undercut the insurgency is through a political, not military, solution, and to negotiate a complete political and military handover to a UN mission with a strong Arab and Muslim component. This mission would negotiate directly with insurgents, many of whom will be ready to lay down their arms if they are assured of participation in the new

democratic arrangements. But the UN offers no panaceas. There was lots of anger toward the UN when I served there last summer. no widespread anger

over the bombing of its headquarters in August, and last week the young Shia cleric Moktada al-Sadr accused the UN of serving American interests.

The Iraqi occupation was always going to be much more than just about Iraq. It has opened bitter wounds globally, not only between the US and the world's Muslims. For many of the latter, Iraq has become the new touchstone of Muslim pain and anger, replacing Palestinian occupation as the principal emblem of western hostility towards Islam.

Amazingly, the US continues to rile Muslim passions by threatening other countries such as Iran and Syria. Those in the west who oppose such positions must raise their voices, since it is too easy for Muslims to believe the west is a monolithic force out to destroy Islam.

Much work needs to be done to avert an even greater disaster in Iraq. It is possible that the kernel of the solution will emerge from the process started by Sistani and responded to by the Bush administration, which has had the sense to finally engage with the UN. A lot is riding on the UN electoral team's mission to Iraq, not least of which is the organisation's standing in the Muslim world; the UN must quickly move to shed its pro-US image if it is to provide the neutrality and legitimacy for which the entire world relies upon it.

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Le Monde

4 FÉVRIER 2004

Les partis kurdes irakiens accélèrent leur rapprochement

BAGDAD

de notre envoyé spécial

Le bilan du double attentat-suicide qui a visé, dimanche 1^{er} février, à Erbil, les locaux des deux principaux partis kurdes irakiens, le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) et l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK), s'est alourdi dans la journée de lundi : 67 personnes ont péri et 250 autres ont été blessées, certaines grièvement, au cours du plus sanglant acte de terrorisme commis dans cette région, autonome depuis 1992.

Pour la première fois depuis la fin de la guerre, le Kurdistan, jusqu'à présent épargné, s'est révélé lui aussi vulnérable, ce qui a bouleversé la population, d'autant plus que plusieurs dirigeants des deux organisations ont péri dans le car-

nage. Trois jours de deuil officiel ont été déclarés.

La stupéfaction a frappé les habitants d'Erbil, mais également ceux des autres grandes villes, qui se croyaient à l'abri d'un terrorisme qui sévit d'ordinaire dans le centre du pays et dans la capitale, Bagdad.

Ce double attentat-suicide n'a toujours pas été revendiqué. Les dirigeants kurdes ont répété leur conviction qu'il serait l'œuvre du mouvement radical islamiste Ansar al-Islam (Partisans de l'islam) et d'Al-Qaïda. Ansar al-Islam contrôlait une petite enclave à proximité de la frontière iranienne, avant d'être pratiquement anéanti par les forces américaines. Cette organisation avait des liens avec la mouvance d'Oussama Ben Laden.

Pour les Kurdes, il ne fait pas de doute que les kamikazes sont venus de l'étranger, ou ont été armés et guidés par les pays voisins. « La Turquie et les pays voisins ont un intérêt dans ce qui s'est passé, car ces pays n'aiment pas ce que les Kurdes font en Irak pour établir la démocratie et surtout obtenir le fédéralisme », fait remarquer un membre du PDK cité par l'AFP. « Les Etats voisins ne veulent pas la réussite de l'expérience kurde en Irak, car elle leur porterait atteinte. Mais nous triompherons car personne ne peut nous empêcher d'obtenir nos droits », assure Zaïm Ali, membre du bureau politique du PDK.

AMBITIONS RÉAFFIRMÉES

Face à cette tragédie, les dirigeants kurdes ont resoudé les rangs et réaffirmé avec fermeté leurs ambitions politiques. Dans des lettres échangées entre le chef du PDK, Massoud Barzani, et celui de l'UPK, Jalal Talabani, et publiées dans leurs journaux respectifs, les anciens rivaux affirment, pour le premier que « les terroristes ne réussiront pas à arrêter la marche du peuple du Kurdistan et de l'Irak », se déclarant « déterminé à établir un système fédéral, démocratique et parlementaire », alors que le second souligne que les attaques « ne diminueront pas [sa] volonté

d'aller de l'avant et de bâtir un Irak fédéral et uni ».

Après s'être combattus pendant des années, le PDK et l'UPK ont désormais un destin commun. MM. Barzani et Talabani siègent côte à côte au Conseil intérimaire de gouvernement (CIG) à Bagdad et soutiennent la création d'un Etat fédéral en Irak. Ce projet de fédéralisme inquiète d'autres communautés irakiennes, notamment les Chiites, mais aussi les pays voisins, singulièrement la Turquie, qui se méfient du goût prononcé pour l'autonomie que manifestent depuis plus de dix ans les Kurdes irakiens.

Afin de réunir leurs forces en prévision de l'échéance capitale qui s'annonce, le PDK et l'UPK ont décidé, le 12 janvier, d'unifier leurs administrations. Un mécanisme aurait déjà été mis au point et il ne resterait qu'à régler des questions de détail. Un gouvernement unifié devrait être constitué ainsi qu'un Parlement unique. Créé en 1992, ce dernier n'avait pas résisté aux rivalités entre les deux formations. Aujourd'hui, face aux menaces qui se précisent et afin d'être mieux armés, l'UPK et le PDK vont sans doute accélérer leur rapprochement.

Michel Bôle-Richard

A Hole in the Heart of Kurdistan

By Peter W. Galbraith

On Saturday, the day before he died, Sami Abdul Rahman and I sat in the living room of my elegant government guest house here and discussed American negotiating techniques. We had become friends when we fled together from his hometown, Dihok, as the 1991 Kurdish uprising collapsed. Sami became deputy prime minister of the Kurdish regional government and, since last year, one of its negotiators in discussions on Iraq's interim constitution. As such, he was fully familiar with one American technique: papering over differences with nice-sounding language. As he took his leave, he said he would be looking hard at a new American proposal to see if cosmetic changes in language masked a loss of actual authority for his government.

Sami Abdul Rahman was one of six senior Kurdish government officials who, along with at least 60 others, was killed here on Sunday in suicide bombings at the offices of the two principal Kurdish parties. I visited one of the bomb sites on Monday, and even with the bodies removed, the scale of the destruction was evident in the mangled furniture, collapsed walls, scorch marks and pools of bright blood. The Kurdish leaders are a tightknit group, many related by blood, or marriage, who have worked together for decades and across generations. Seeing so many die so suddenly and so horribly has left them in shock.

With 2 bombs the peace is gone. So is my friend Sami.

Politically, however, the Kurds are probably better able to weather the losses than other Iraqi victims of similar attacks. During the 12 years in which some four million Kurds have administered northern Iraq as a de facto independent state, they have developed institutions that provide for continuity. At Erbil's main mosque today, leaders from both major parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, stood for hours as the people of the city streamed in to offer prayers for the dead. No one was discussing the political fallout of the attacks, but there is sure to be some.

Public pressure will increase on both parties to end the division of the region between the Kurdistan Democratic Party government here in the north and the Patriotic Union government in Sulaimaniya to the south. Indeed, the parties have already agreed on the terms for a unified government.

Until Sunday, the Kurdish lands had been largely free of the terrorism and chaos that has plagued the rest of the country. In April, they protested American demands to dismantle the controls on the border separating them from the rest of newly freed Iraq. They argued that it would let terrorists in. When the Americans relented months later as chaos grew in the south, many

Kurds felt it was too late. The bombings on Sunday will reinforce widely shared doubts about a closer association with Baghdad.

L. Paul Bremer, the American administrator of Iraq, is pressing the Kurds to give up some of the powers they now exercise. The Kurds want to retain control over oil in their region, continue to have exclusive taxation powers and keep the new Iraqi Army out. The Americans, prodded by Turkey, see these demands as setting the stage for secession. For the Kurds, however, the issue is not sovereignty but security.

The Kurds see control of oil and taxation as further insurance against future Baghdad regimes treating them as those of Iraq's first 80 years did. And they are also skeptical of Mr. Bremer's request that they rely on a unified Iraqi Army and a reformed internal security organization — the two institutions responsible for decades of repression, culminating in Saddam Hussein's genocidal assaults of the 1980's. The Kurds would rather maintain their own military, called the peshmerga, and want a clause in the transitional constitution requiring regional approval for any entry of Iraqi armed forces into Kurdish areas.

The Sunday bombings deprived the Kurds of one of their shrewdest negotiators, Mr. Abdul Rahman. And it will probably harden their diplomatic positions as the Kurdish public comes increasingly to feel it must rely on its own institutions — the peshmerga, the local police and security services — to protect it against a danger that most see as coming from the south. □

Peter W. Galbraith is a former United States Ambassador to Croatia.

COMMENTAIRE

L'Amérique est en Irak pour longtemps

Charles Lambroschini

Depuis la capture de Saddam Hussein, la guerre a changé de direction. L'attentat suicide au Kurdistan irakien dimanche, dont le bilan s'élève désormais à 65 morts, en est la dernière démonstration : pour la résistance sunnite, ce n'est plus l'occupant américain qui est la cible prioritaire mais la concurrence locale, les chiïtes et les Kurdes.

Incapables de gagner puisqu'ils rassemblent seulement 20 % de la population, les sunnites ont choisi une stratégie de rupture. L'escalade de la violence a pour objectif d'arracher aux autres composantes de la mosaïque irakienne un statut de minoritaire qui, de nouveau, diviserait pour régner, et sinon, de faire éclater le pays en trois entités indépendantes. Les Kurdes, qui, grâce à la protection de l'aviation américaine, jouissent depuis longtemps de l'autonomie, rêvent bien sûr d'avoir leur propre Etat. Et les coups portés par la résis-

tance sunnite les y encouragent. Mais leur départ serait aussi inacceptable pour Bagdad que pour les pays voisins. Le gouvernement central ne se résignera pas à abandonner le pétrole de Kirkouk dont les Kurdes réclament le contrôle. La Turquie et l'Iran ne veulent pas risquer la sécession de leurs propres minorités kurdes. Tout dépend donc de la patience des chiïtes, qui, forts de leur majorité démographique, sont

bien décidés cette fois à prendre le pouvoir. Il leur faut résister aux provocations des sunnites pour ne pas plonger le pays dans la guerre civile et en même temps convaincre Bush qu'une république islamique ne représente pas forcément l'antinomie de la démocratie. A ce rythme, les GI ne sont pas près de rentrer à la maison : comme leurs camarades toujours déployés en Corée du Sud cinquante ans après

l'armistice de Pan Mun Jom, et pour la même raison. Leur présence est le seul moyen de préserver l'intégrité territoriale du pays. Mais, pour rester, les Américains doivent s'assurer deux garanties. D'abord que le calme revienne : aux États-Unis, l'opinion n'acceptera pas éternellement que chaque jour un soldat soit tué. Ce qui suppose que l'ONU et d'autres contingents militaires prennent le relais. Ensuite que le

gouvernement irakien, en charge à partir de juin, soit effectivement légitime. Si les Américains prennent peur comme Chadli Bendjedid, le président algérien qui, en 1991, annula les élections par crainte d'une victoire islamiste, ils risqueraient de tomber dans une équation à la vietnamienne. Quand, ils prirent la suite des Français en Indochine, ils furent en effet acculés à une situation vite ingérable : soutenant un pré-

sident fantoche, Ngo Dinh Diem, et bataillant contre les bouddhistes qui auraient dû être leurs meilleurs soutiens face au communisme. On en revient à ce paradoxe. Maintenant que les Américains sont débarrassés de Saddam, c'est leur allié chiite qui se fait encombrant.

NORTHERN IRAQ

Bombings 'an attack on Kurdistan stability'

By James Drummond in Arbil

Sabbah Muhammed Amin, a Peshmerga fighter, was with a friend in the compound of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in the northern Iraqi city of Arbil on Sunday morning when a suicide bomber killed several dozen people.

The bomber stood in line in the building's main hall alongside well-wishers to greet local PUK leaders in front of a stage. When he got to the centre of the line he blew himself up, Mr Amin said yesterday.

"There were guards outside the building but they were not searching anyone. It was the Eid," Mr Amin said, referring to the four-day feast of Eid al-Adha.

Another bomber killed himself across Arbil, seat of the Kurdish parliament, in the headquarters of the PUK's rival Kurdistan Democratic party. It was a calculated attempt to destabilise one of the calmer areas of

post-war Iraq.

Azad Jindyany, PUK spokesman, denied stories that the perpetrator was dressed as a Muslim cleric. Rumours always abound after such traumatic events, he said.

Mr Jindyany said the attacks bore the hallmarks of an al-Qaeda operation. "Firstly because of the nature of the operation and secondly because Ayman al-Zawahiri [the Egyptian seen as al-Qaeda's second in command] specifically threatened those who co-operate with the Americans... we are allies of the allies."

If there is a Kurdish reaction to the attacks, most observers believe that it is more likely to manifest itself in the mixed towns of Kirkuk, which the Kurds claim as part of historic Kurdistan, and in Mosul, further west.

Both cities are a medley of minorities - Kurds, Arabs, Turkish speaking Turks and Assyrian Christians. Kirkuk in particular

has been tense, as the Kurds say it was the target of a concerted programme of Arab settlement encouraged by the previous Ba'athist regime.

"This was an attack on the stability of Kurdistan," said Bakhtiyar Amin, adviser to Mahmood Othman, a Kurdish member of the Governing Council. "It will make Kurds more resolved in fighting back."

He also said it would strengthen Kurds' determination not to compromise on their demand for a federal Kurdistan with its own parliament and ministers.

The US will be hoping that Sunday's blasts do not derail delicate negotiations between members of Iraq's interim governing council, in which the Kurdish parties are strongly represented.

The 25-member council has until the end of this month to formulate a basic law which should, according to an agreement reached in November, establish a fed-

eral Iraq. The question is how much autonomy will be given to the Kurds.

Privately, Kurdish leaders admit that their people would greatly prefer autonomy or independence and a withdrawal from even a loosely federal Iraq.

But Mr Jindyany insisted yesterday that the Kurdish leadership remained committed to a united Iraq.

"There is anger of course and there is a strong feeling that we must strengthen the fight against terrorism."

"But we are determined to continue struggling for a new Iraq... this is not the first time that the PUK has been targeted," he said.

Yesterday Iraqi political leaders appealed for restraint and sought to forestall the possibility of revenge attacks by insisting that the perpetrators were not Arab Iraqis.

"When [the Shia cleric] Mohammed Bakr al-Hakim was murdered, many assumed Shias would respond with an anti-Sunni response."

"Instead they understood that it was an assault on all Iraqis and I believe Kurds will do the same," said Feisal al-Istrabadi, legal adviser to Adnan Pachachi, a senior member of the Governing Council.

Additional reporting by Nicolas Pelham in Baghdad

Iran's Islamic Republic is 25 - and at a watershed

President's project of revitalisation has suffered a blow but it is unclear if reformists have a strategy, reports Gareth Smyth

When Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini flew home from exile in Paris on February 1 1979, so many millions of people lined the streets of Tehran that the 78-year-old cleric abandoned his station wagon for a helicopter.

By contrast, the 25th anniversary of the key event in the establishment of Iran's Islamic Republic was a low-key affair on Sunday with few public displays of enthusiasm.

Dignitaries gathered to inaugurate Tehran's new international airport, where President Mohammad Khatami gave an address predicting it would help foster international co-operation.

The ceremony gave no hint of any crisis in the Islamic Republic, despite the resignation notices handed in on Sunday by 134 out of 290 parliamentary deputies.

Mosharekate (Participation Front), the largest reformist party, with around 120 parliamentary seats, yesterday said it would boycott the parliamentary elections due on February 20, but stopped short of calling on Iranians to abstain.

"We have no hope there is any possibility of free and fair elections - all legal opportunities have been killed," said Mohammad Reza Khatami, the party's secretary-general and

brother of the president.

Since the Guardian Council, an unelected constitutional watchdog, three weeks ago barred 3,600 mainly reformist candidates, including 80 deputies, from this month's election, President Khatami has argued the matter could be resolved through discussions with the council and Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader.

Last Friday's announcement from the council that 2,450 candidates remained barred was a heavy blow to the president's whole project of revitalising the Islamic Republic through greater pluralism.

On Saturday, President Khatami took to his bed with severe back pain, rising only for the opening of the Imam Khomeini airport.

He missed the cabinet meeting which agreed late on Sunday "not to hold elections that are not competitive, fair and free" and apparently endorsed a call from Abdolvahed Mousavi-Lari, the reformist interior

minister, to postpone the poll.

While the Guardian Council must agree to any delay, the reformist-controlled interior ministry and the governors of Iran's 28 provinces are responsible for the practical conduct of the election and could refuse to carry out their duties.

With some reformers still hoping that the supreme leader may intervene in the crisis, they are giving no clear sense of how far they are prepared to go, or of whether they have a common strategy.

There is still little public interest in a political crisis that has been brewing for three weeks, despite a sit-in protest by deputies.

"The sit-in came far too late, and the reformers have not raised effective short-term demands among the people," said Javadi Hesar, a Mosharekate member banned from the election.

But while there has been no repeat of the demonstra-



Can the republic founded by Ayatollah Khomeini be reformed?

tions that four years ago followed the closure of several reformist newspapers, there is a quiet sense that the Islamic Republic is at a watershed. "Maybe it's better to have conservatives in both the parliament and the

government," said an Iranian civil servant. "At least then, people will know who's running the country and can see if this system can ever work."

Some conservatives worry that such a short-term victory may breed long-term problems for the system's legitimacy.

While conservative strategists made no secret of their original desire for a low turnout in the elections, at least one has criticised the Guardian Council's actions.

"The council's inflexibility has unified the reformist camp," wrote Amir Mohebian in Resalat newspaper. "It is not helpful to remove all control from the hands of Mr Khatami."

The deeper fear of pragmatic conservatives may be that brushing aside reformists may ultimately swell the ranks of those who, like many student leaders, argue that the Islamic Republic created by Ayatollah Khomeini 25 years ago cannot be reformed.

La crise institutionnelle s'accélère en Iran

A MOINS de vingt jours des élections législatives, prévues le 20 février, la crise institutionnelle en Iran a connu un nouveau rebondissement, dimanche 1^{er} février, avec la démission de près de la moitié des 290 parlementaires. Cent vingt-quatre députés « réformateurs » ont, en effet, confirmé leur démission à Mehdi Karubi, le président du Parlement.

La majorité d'entre eux avaient prévenu, une dizaine de jours plus tôt, qu'ils renonceraient à leur mandat si le Conseil des gardiens de la Constitution ne faisait pas amende suffisamment honorable en rétablissant dans leurs droits des centaines de candidats « réformateurs » arbitrairement interdits, selon eux, de concourir. Criant au risque de « coup d'Etat » obscurantiste de la part de leurs adversaires « conservateurs », de « simulacre » d'élections libres et démocratiques et de mort de la République, ils ont annoncé qu'ils ne participeraient pas au scrutin et qu'ils inviteraient leurs partisans et sympathisants à en faire autant. Les gouverneurs des provinces, qui avaient eux aussi menacé de démissionner pour les mêmes raisons, risquaient pour leur part de traduire leurs paroles en actes. Le ministre de l'intérieur, Abdolvahed Mousavi-Lari, a une nouvelle fois demandé le report du scrutin. M. Karubi a réclamé une interven-

tion de l'autorité suprême de la République islamique, l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

S'abritant derrière l'Etat de droit dont se revendique la mouvance « réformatrice » depuis l'accession de Mohammad Khatami à la présidence, il y a sept ans, les « conservateurs » brandissent la Constitution pour justifier le maintien de la date du scrutin. Ils font valoir que, sur les 8 000 postulants à la candidature, ils en ont, en définitive, retenu, après repêchage, un total de 2 500 et qu'il reste en moyenne 19 candidats pour chaque circonscription. Ils oublient toutefois de mentionner que, s'il est vrai qu'ils ont éliminé quelques postulants « conservateurs » pour faire bonne mesure, ce sont des « réformateurs » qui ont, en grande majorité, fait les frais de la sélection.

PROFIL BAS

Si la dramatisation de la crise et l'accroissement du fossé qui sépare les « réformateurs » des « conservateurs » sont incontestables, une inconnue demeure. Il s'agit de la position du président Mohammad Khatami, autour duquel s'est agrégée la mouvance « réformatrice » et qui garde un profil remarquablement bas dans cette affaire. M. Khatami est certes intervenu auprès du Guide pour que le Conseil des gardiens de la Constitution révisé sa

copie initiale. Il a obtenu gain de cause, même si le résultat définitif est visiblement loin d'être satisfaisant. Mais, dès le 21 janvier, dans une intervention devant le forum économique de Davos, il assurait que le scrutin aurait lieu normalement et dans les conditions optimales d'une consultation libre et démocratique. Depuis, il n'a pas apporté de soutien public aux protestations et démissions de ses « amis », se bornant à déclarer, samedi, qu'il espérait « voir plus de libertés et davantage d'indépendance pour lesquels les Iraniens ont fait tant de sacrifices ». Il a même fait rectifier par ses collaborateurs une déclaration publiée par l'agence officielle Irna, et dans laquelle il parlait d'« impasse » politique, affirmant qu'il n'a jamais prononcé ce mot.

Or, comme le fait valoir Farhad Khosrokhavar, spécialiste de l'Iran et directeur d'études à l'Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS), M. Khatami détient la clef de l'évolution de la crise dans un sens ou dans un autre. Sa démission éventuelle donnerait aux protestations de ses « amis » le poids qui leur manque, les réduisant, à l'heure actuelle, à une sorte de baroud d'honneur d'un courant qui n'a pas les moyens pratiques, ni même institutionnels de parvenir à ses fins. Or, souligne M. Khosrokhavar, une constante sous-tend l'atti-

tude de M. Khatami depuis son accession au pouvoir : son souci d'éviter tout conflit majeur.

Conscient de cette « faiblesse », le Guide et les « conservateurs » ont remarquablement manœuvré, de manière progressive, au fil des ans, réduisant au silence par la répression et/ou par l'emprisonnement les trois principaux piliers de la « base » khatamiste : les étudiants, les intellectuels islamistes et les femmes ; trois catégories par ailleurs déçues des piètres performances du président et des « réformateurs », comme le montre leur quasi-indifférence vis-à-vis de la crise actuelle. Certes, la principale formation estudiantine a demandé l'autorisation d'organiser, mercredi 4 février, une manifestation de soutien aux « réformateurs », mais n'est-il pas déjà trop tard, s'interroge M. Khosrokhavar.

Mouna Naim

Le Monde

3 FEVRIER 2004

THE STRUGGLE FOR IRAQ: The Shaken Kurds, the Battle History, and the Wolfowitz Tour

ATROCITY'S AFTERMATH

Grief and Anger Overwhelm The Kurds of Northern Iraq

By JEFFREY GETTLEMAN
and EDWARD WONG

ERBIL, Iraq, Feb. 2 — Thousands of mourners flooded the streets here on Monday for the scores of people killed in two suicide bombings the day before. Kurdish and other Iraqi officials said the attacks would complicate the political struggles over the future of Iraq and the Kurdish region in the north.

The bombings, which killed several top Kurdish officials, will resonate during the debates on the two most contentious political issues in Iraq: the drive for Kurdish autonomy and the process for handing over sovereignty to a new Iraqi government by June 30.

The attacks came just as Kurdish leaders were embroiled in negotiations over how much independence

the Kurdish region would be allowed and how the two leading Kurdish parties, whose offices were bombed during holiday receptions, would share power. The deaths of key officials could change the balance of political viewpoints in each party.

The attacks scarred a part of the country that had been relatively unscathed by violence during the American occupation, underscoring the argument that Iraq might be too unstable to hold direct elections, officials and experts said.

On Monday in this northern city, two lines of men, hundreds of grim faces long, stood in front of the grand mosque holding pictures of their slain leaders. Mourners filed between them, saluting the photographs. Then they stepped into the mosque to pray. Thousands of people waited in the streets behind them.

If this region were a state, this would have been a state funeral.

American officials said at least 67 people had been killed and 247

wounded in the nearly simultaneous bombings at the two political parties'

offices, where well-wishers had gone to mark a Muslim holiday. The dead included the deputy prime minister of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the mayor of Erbil, a military commander and a police chief.

The loss of some of those leaders could bring a shift in political attitudes with wide-reaching consequences for the future of Iraq, experts said.

Within each of the two main parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, there is tension between factions that advocate a radical break from Iraq and ones that take a more moderate stance.

The highest-ranking Kurdish official killed, Sami Abdul Rahman, deputy prime minister of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, was a "reasonable pragmatist" who was willing to back off of demands for control of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk and any immediate push for independence, said Joost R. Hiltermann, a Middle East expert with the International Crisis Group, a conflict prevention organization.

"He was well ahead of most of the Kurdish people who were talking about independence and about Kirkuk," Mr. Hiltermann said.

Jeffrey Gettleman reported from Erbil for this article and Edward Wong from Baghdad.



Lynsey Addario/Corbis, for The New York Times

Relatives of victims of the suicide bombings in Erbil saluting mourners at a mass funeral yesterday.

Another senior official killed was Akrem Mantik, the mayor of Erbil, known for an especially good rapport with Americans. His absence could mean less leverage for the Coalition Provisional Authority.

If the voices within the parties change, so can the shape of the new Iraq as the transfer of sovereignty planned for June 30 approaches. American officials and Iraqi Governing Council members have been engaged in delicate negotiations with Kurdish leaders over the definition of federalism.

The northern Kurdish region has existed as a virtually independent state since 1991, when the American and British governments declared the area a no-flight zone. Each of the two main parties controls half the region, and insist on keeping their broad governing powers under a projected united administration.

The attacks also showed how fragile the security situation is in Iraq at

a time when some political groups are clamoring for swift elections. Others say such elections should be postponed until the country is more secure and reliable voter rolls are set up.

"The situation has deteriorated if even the Kurdish places aren't safe anymore," Mr. Hiltermann said.

It is not clear who was behind the attacks on Sunday, each of which

was carried out by a man walking into a crowded reception hall and detonating explosives strapped to his body. But many security officials blame Ansar al-Islam, a terrorist group that was driven out of the eastern part of the Iraqi Kurdish region last spring.

According to an Iraqi security agent, as many as 200 members of Ansar al-Islam have congregated in Erbil, where they receive support from guerrilla cells in other parts of the country.

An occupation official said the group, which follows an extremist Islamic ideology similar to the Taliban's in Afghanistan, was still operating in northern Iraq, though it had been weakened. Asked about the bombing, many Kurds here instinctively blamed "the Islamists."

This morning, one after another, pickup trucks loaded with wooden coffins rumbled into Erbil's main cemetery.

At the Erbil Emergency Hospital, shirtless men lay on narrow mattresses. Many had bad burns and shiny burn salve on their faces.

"Their attitude is amazing," said Mario Ninno, an Italian nurse and the medical coordinator for the hospital. "Their leaders come in here to say they are sorry, and the people say: 'No, we are your troops. As long



Agence France-Presse—Getty Images

An American soldier at a memorial ceremony in Tikrit for three fellow soldiers killed last week.

as you are alive, don't feel sorry.'"

Investigators were still picking through the wreckage on Monday, putting money, jewelry and pens in one bag and pieces of flesh in others.

"Look at this," Ako Koyee, an office worker for the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, said as he bent down in the rubble of party headquarters. "Children's teeth."

Iran's reform movement

Nearly seven years ago, Mohammad Khatami won an upset presidential election over the candidate favored by conservative mullahs, electrifying an Iranian population fed up with almost two decades of clerical dictatorship. Now, as hard-line clerics maneuver to exclude Khatami's reform allies from running in this month's parliamentary election, millions of his disillusioned supporters watch passively from the sidelines.

Iran desperately needs the kinds of reforms that Khatami and his parliamentary allies have repeatedly promised: a freer press, a more independent judiciary, more power for elected officials and less for unelected clerics. But Iranians have wondered for some time now whether their reform politicians are tough and resourceful enough to deliver. Khatami, who refuses to confront the conservative clerical leaders, has never found an alternative formula for overcoming their resistance to serious reforms.

Four years ago, reformers won control of Parliament, only to see

their legislative initiatives neutralized. The mullahs have used their control of the police and the courts to jail outspoken reformers and shut down critical newspapers. An unelected, clerically dominated body, the Guardian Council, has regularly vetoed reform legislation. The council also has the power to prohibit candidates from running. In January, it excluded hundreds of reformers — including 87 incumbents — from the parliamentary election, guaranteeing that regardless of how Iranians vote, the conservatives will regain a parliamentary majority.

Rather than accept such a travesty, the reformers are at last putting up a fight. More than 100 members of Parliament have resigned, and the main reformist party is boycotting the election. As many as 28 provincial

governors are threatening to resign as well. Their refusal to accept a sham election is praiseworthy, but their show of resolve may be too late. Unless their actions arouse so much popular indignation that Iran's supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Ali

Khamenei, is forced to intervene, they may be only hastening the end of the reform era. One way or another, the conservatives seem poised to consolidate their hold.

On some international issues, that may not make much difference. The conservatives support more access for international inspectors of Iranian nuclear sites and have shown themselves open to some forms of pragmatic cooperation with the United States over Afghanistan and Iraq.

Inside Iran, however, crushing the reform movement would be felt acutely. The mullahs have failed to prepare their country for the modern world. A quarter-century after its Islamic revolution, Iran remains utterly stagnant. Its economy, supported by one of the world's largest oil reserves, is mired in corruption and mismanagement, and is failing to generate jobs and prosperity. The young are keenly frustrated. By shutting off the last safety valve within the political system, the conservatives are sowing the seeds of more radical forms of discontent.

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Herald Tribune



Reuters

Rescuers in Konya, Turkey, searching Tuesday for signs of life in the rubble of the building. Thirty people had been rescued.

16 dead in Turkey building collapse

Dozens more believed trapped; faulty construction is blamed

From news reports

KONYA, Turkey: Rescue workers used drills and their hands Tuesday to dig through the concrete slabs and powdery rubble of an 11-story apartment building that collapsed in central Turkey, killing at least 16 people and trapping dozens of others in the shattered debris.

Thirty people had been rescued, but between 40 and 100 others were believed buried in the debris, a day after the building went down with a thundering crash. Rescue teams were expected to work round the clock for a second night Tuesday.

Top officials said shoddy construction was to blame for the disaster, and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan called for stricter laws against contractors who ignore building codes.

"This is entirely a technical failure," Erdogan said, referring to the collapsed building. "As long as the sanctions for these type of things aren't heavy, citizens will pay the price with their life. Nobody has that right. We won't allow it."

President Ahmet Necdet Sezer sent a message of condolence to the families of those who died, saying that "human life is so important, it must not be sacrificed to irresponsibility and contempt

for the rules."

In May, a dormitory in eastern Turkey collapsed during a magnitude 6.4 earthquake, killing 84 students. Critics blamed shoddy construction for the collapse.

Poor construction was also considered the cause of many of the 17,000 deaths in an earthquake in 1999.

On Monday, the floors of the apartment building collapsed on top of each other, reducing the 11-story building to a heap of concrete slabs, twisted metal and powder about the size of a two-story building.

The chances of finding other survivors grew dimmer as the hours progressed.

Rescue workers said the death toll was likely to rise sharply once they stopped searching and began clearing the rubble.

The search for survivors was sometimes frantic, with bulldozers moving away debris cleared by rescue teams working with drills and their bare hands.

But the heavy machinery stopped working when rescuers on several occasions ordered silence to listen for possible survivors.

Onlookers cheered Tuesday when a middle-aged woman, who appeared to be conscious, was pulled from the

wreckage.

A rescue worker, Ilhan Ozgur, said that the teams had been trying to reach living rooms, where families celebrating the Muslim holiday of Id al-Adha would have gathered. People traditionally visit friends and family during the holiday.

Ahmet Turkoglu, 56, was celebrating the Id with his family on the eighth floor when the building fell.

"Everything collapsed in a few seconds," said Turkoglu, who was rescued Monday.

"My grandchildren were still holding their balloons in the debris," he added, saying he had been trapped under a heavy piece of metal and had been unable to help his family.

His grandchildren were reportedly later rescued.

"We heard a gigantic crash," said Yeter Oguz, owner of a pastry shop near the collapsed building.

"There was so much dust in the air that it took us 10 minutes to figure out which building collapsed."

The building had more than 140 residents in 37 apartments, officials said, but it was unclear how many people were in the building at the time of the collapse. Officials said at least 18 residents were not in the building when it fell.

(AP, AFP)

Iran reform party to boycott elections, turning up heat on hard-liners

From news reports

TEHRAN: Iran's largest pro-reform party announced Monday that it would boycott the Feb. 20 parliamentary elections, saying it no longer had hope for a free and fair vote. An emergency cabinet meeting backed calls for a postponement of the balloting.

Unless hard-liners in charge of the elections bend to the pressure to reinstate thousands of disqualified candidates quickly, they may be forced into the extraordinary position of requiring military help to hold the vote.

In prior elections, senior military officials appointed by hard-liners supported them, while the bulk of military personnel voted for the reform camp.

The developments Monday leave Iran at a crossroads: rule by the hard-liners or a path toward greater democracy. Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, may risk losing legitimacy altogether unless he supports reformists' calls for a democratic vote.

Mohammad Reza Khatami, the pro-reform party leader and younger brother of Iran's reformist president, Mohammad Khatami, said his Islamic Iran

Participation Front would not field any candidates. "With an overwhelming majority of the votes, our party decided not to participate in the Feb. 20 elections," he told a news conference after an emergency meeting Monday.

"We have no hope for the possibility of free and fair elections. All legal opportunities have been killed," Khatami said. He won the biggest number of votes in the 2000 legislative elections.

Nearly all the Front's candidates have been barred from running in the election — some of them sitting lawmakers, including Khatami, who is also a deputy speaker of Parliament.

Without the Front's participation, hard-line candidates likely would easily retake control of Parliament. Reformists had won the Parliament in 2000 for the first time since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and used it as a platform to press for social and political reforms.

Khatami also called on his brother's government to "resolutely resist and not give in to any hard-line orders."

"If the government strongly insists on its position, nobody in Iran will be able to hold elections," said the party leader, who also is brother of the president.

Earlier Monday, a spokesman for the government said that cabinet ministers backed calls to postpone the parliamentary vote and vowed during an emergency meeting not to hold a sham election. "The cabinet also agreed not to hold elections that are not competitive, fair and free," said the spokesman, Abdollah Ramezanzadeh.

Iran's powerful, hard-line Guardian Council, whose 12 members are appointed by Khamenei, decides when an election is held.

However, the Khatami government's position strengthens the hand of reformists demanding a boycott over mass disqualifications of liberal candidates.

President Khatami, who has been confined to his home because of severe back pain, did not attend the meeting. Instead, the cabinet meeting was chaired by First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref, Ramezanzadeh said.

The decision was made after Interior Minister Abdolvahed Mousavi Lari reported that conditions for free elections did not exist. Five ministers who were assigned last week to reach a compromise with the Guardian Council over disqualifications told the cabinet their

efforts had failed, Ramezanzadeh said.

Reformists accuse the council of disqualifying liberals to fix the election in favor of conservatives. The council denies political motives, arguing the disqualified did not meet legal criteria to stand for election. But more than 80 of the disqualified were sitting lawmakers who'd been vetted in the past.

The furor began in early January when the Guardian Council disqualified more than 3,600 of the 8,200 people who filed papers to run in the polls. After protests, and an opinion from Khamenei, the council restored 1,160 low-profile candidates to the list Friday but barred over 2,400 reformist party leaders and prominent politicians.

As tension rose, the official news agency IRNA reported that two assailants ransacked the offices of a reformist Iranian member of Parliament over the weekend, threatening to kill him unless he withdrew from the elections.

Armed with knives, they broke into the offices of Akbar Alami in northwestern Tabriz late Sunday, ruining everything in sight and scrawling death threats on the walls, IRNA quoted an office employee as saying. (AP, AFP)



Hasan Serbakhshian/The Associated Press

Mohammad Reza Khatami, left, head of Iran's largest reform party, and Mohsen Mirdamadi, who resigned from Parliament, at a meeting Monday of the party.

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune

February 3, 2004

In Baghdad, idled hands yearn for work

By Neela Banerjee
and John H. Cushman Jr.

BAGHDAD: Even on a Friday morning, when most businesses are shut and most people are preparing for weekly prayer services, men looking for jobs paced the sidewalk of al-Tayran Square in the center of Baghdad, at an intersection packed with the buses that ferried them in from outlying slums.

Leaning on their sledgehammers and shovels, hoping against the odds that somebody visiting the hardware stores in nearby alleyways would offer a day's work for a few dollars, they talked about the twin problems that still weigh heavily on Iraq 10 months after the fall of Saddam Hussein: unemployment and insecurity.

Some let their voices fill with anger as they sat on iron benches sipping tea brewed over charcoal fires.

"I haven't been working at all for the last two weeks," complained Hassan Kadhim, 27, who lives in Sadr City, the big Shiite ghetto on the city's outskirts. "If I stay like this for another week, my family will starve, and if someone comes with \$50 and asks me to toss a grenade at the Americans I'll do it with pleasure."

Others, like Mustafa al-Basri, 33, a sewer cleaner who came from the southern city of Basra to look for work in the capital, spoke in more measured tones. "The terrorists and the bombers will not stop if you provide jobs," he said. "Those people are working hard to destabilize Iraq. But providing jobs could solve other security problems, like stealing, looting and carjacking."

The economy here, like the guerrilla war that is holding it back, cannot be measured as much as sensed. But on one question, bankers and borrowers, soldiers and Iraqi politicians, day laborers and urbane professionals all agree: Economic recovery and security are inextricably linked.

In a recent poll of Iraqis in six cities, fully 98 percent said that creating more jobs would be "very effective" in improving security. But the investment that

could produce new jobs will not materialize in the current violence and chaos.

Right now the economy defies easy measurement. Like other Iraqi cities, Baghdad is a place where gunfire crackles in thief-infested shopping districts at night and where a luxury hotel lies in ruins after a recent bombing. Upscale markets are piled high with imported consumer goods, and back streets with used junk for sale. Small building projects are just starting to appear among the bomb-gutted wreckage of towering government ministries.

Despite the confusion, many economists remain optimistic about Iraq's prospects. At the Coalition Provisional

Authority that governs Iraq, a senior American adviser on economic policy said that he was "quite confident that there is a consumer-led expansion under way, bolstered by business spending on reconstruction and construction."

The Economist Intelligence Unit, the forecasting branch of The Economist magazine, predicted that real growth in gross domestic product this year would be 25 percent, fueled by American spending on reconstruction, the recovery of the oil industry and increased trade.

"Despite all the hindrances, as an economist, I cannot help but believe that the economy will crash through the security concerns," said Adnan al-Janabi, the head of the consulting firm Mebex, which helped the World Bank develop its assessment for the Madrid donors' conference last autumn.

But in a week of interviews with leaders and ordinary Iraqis at all levels of its jumbled economy, optimism was usually tempered by security concerns, which are of vital importance in politics, too.

Mowafaq Mahmood, chief executive of the Bank of Baghdad, said that investors would not put their own money

at risk, nor would bankers lend freely, until the risks of violence subsided. Mahmood said that his bank's lending was "much less" this year than last.

Both Mahmood and Janabi said that when it came to creating jobs, the coalition authority's policies were putting too little emphasis on basic, labor-intensive construction projects, like building homes. These sort of investments would generate many more jobs, they said, than investment in capital-intensive projects such as rebuilding the power grid or the oil industry.

Oil and electricity are high priorities, oil for the billions of dollars it can earn for the government, electricity because of the public outcry for reliable power. Both are needed for long term economic growth. But neither industry offers huge

numbers of jobs right away. The coalition economic adviser estimates that unemployment is between 22 percent and 30 percent.

Construction traditionally has provided employment for 30 percent of Iraq's work force, Janabi said. The biggest blow to the economy last year was the end of a construction boom that began in 2000, when the old regime gave 300,000 plots of land to cronies and army officers for building houses.

"What creates employment par excellence is construction," Janabi said. "Thirty percent of every dollar spent on construction goes to labor." An oil expert, he warned against relying on Iraq's oil wealth to create jobs. He said that spending \$5 billion in the oil sector

'What creates employment par excellence is construction.'



Sabiha Rezad in her rations store in Baghdad. Rezad has five daughters and earns \$15 a month. Official statistics are scarce, but Iraqi unemployment may be as high as 30 percent.

would create no more than 10,000 jobs.

Nasreen Siddek Berwari, the head of the Public Works Ministry, said recently that the ministry had created more than 70,000 construction-related jobs last year, many of them temporary, while the coalition economic adviser said internal estimates suggested that the coalition's projects have already generated "hundreds of thousands" of new jobs.

While some parts of the economy have revived, most of the prosperity is limited to government employees and merchants selling consumer goods to the relatively well-off.

On a recent wet afternoon in Aziziya, Nashaat Abdullah and several friends were moving his refrigerator-sized safe into his new jewelry store. Business is up 10-fold compared with before the

war, Abdullah said, because state employees, many of them women, have much more money now.

But for every Iraqi with new money, others live in a flea-market economy, said Naama Moussa and his friends, who drive around Baghdad every day shouting offers down streets and alleys to buy second-hand furniture. One large house they scouted was empty save for a few pairs of shoes the owners hoped to pawn, said Yusef Salah, a driver. Moussa said his customers "are the middle class, who can't afford new things."

The affluent areas of Baghdad seem to be getting more affluent. The shopping street in al-Mansour gleams like a display case for the consumer economy. A visitor there would have no problem finding equipment for a home gym, or a

512-megabyte memory chip that plugs into a computer for extra, portable storage for less than \$100. Iraqis, especially professionals with good government salaries, are buying cars, televisions, clothing and appliances. By some estimates, Iraqi has imported a million cars since May 1.

But in a country still shaking off decades of Baathist socialism, the talk of capital formation and private investment that is bandied about by American economists and the ministers of the fledgling government sound as foreign to people as the slang of the soldiers on patrol against guerrillas recruited from the ranks of the unemployed.

The New York Times

Irbil suicide bombers caught on camera

Michael Howard in Irbil

The Kurdish authorities were studying video footage yesterday believed to show the final seconds before the double suicide bombing on Sunday which devastated the Irbil headquarters of the two main Kurdish political parties in Iraq.

The tapes were made by local television cameramen, one of whom was killed as he filmed.

Colonel Harry Schute, the senior US officer in region under Kurdish rule, said they were "in the custody of the Kurdish police service and being closely scrutinised".

He said the death toll from the two explosions had risen to 101. More than 260 were injured. The Kurdish deputy

prime minister, Sami Abdulrahman, was among the dead. No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks.

A spokesman for the Kurdistan Democratic party, who has seen the video footage from the attack on its headquarters, said it showed what appeared to be the suicide bomber stepping out from the crowd of well-wishers to shake hands with a Kurdish minister, Shawqat Sheikh Yazdin.

The spokesman said the man was in his mid-twenties and of medium height.

He had "black, slightly curly hair" and wore jeans, a black jacket, and yellow Nike trainers.

"As he approaches he can be seen moving his right hand across his body to his left

wrist. His fingers disappear into the sleeve of his jacket as if to adjust a watch.

"We believe it is possible that he could have actually been triggering the bomb that was wrapped around his body." The tape then goes blank.

Shawqat Sheikh Yazdin, minister for parliamentary affairs, took the full force of the explosion.

The video from Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's premises is thought to show only the back of the bomber's head as he joins a line of people waiting to shake hands with senior officials seated in the front row of the party's packed auditorium.

A man in his 20s or 30s shakes hands with one of the local party chiefs, then moves

towards another, Shakhwan Abbas, and holds out his hand. Then the tape goes blank.

The attacks have shocked a part of the country that has been relatively free of the violence afflicting the Sunni triangle since the fall of Saddam Hussein.

Moreover, they happened at a crucial point in the Kurds' negotiations with the US authorities and the Iraqi governing council in Baghdad on the demand for federal status.

Some of the leading Kurdish negotiators were killed.

● US authorities are planning to seal the underground bunker where Saddam Hussein was captured in December. It will probably be covered with concrete, a military spokeswoman said.

Bush team grapples with unity on Iraq

Remarks by Powell left some irked

By Richard W. Stevenson

WASHINGTON: The White House and Secretary of State Colin Powell are scrambling to present a united front about the war in Iraq after Powell said he was not sure if he would have recommended an invasion had he known that Saddam Hussein did not have stockpiles of banned weapons.

After telling The Washington Post in an interview Monday that the absence of weapons stockpiles "changes the political calculus" about whether to go to war, Powell said Tuesday, in comments coordinated with the White House, "The bottom line is this: The

president made the right decision."

Powell's comments to The Post clearly irritated some White House officials, who have complained before that Powell sometimes strays from the official line on national security issues. Repeating a line that Powell had used to describe himself during a dispute with the White House on another topic three years ago, an administration official said on Tuesday that the secretary was "a little forward on his skis again."

Powell's comments focused attention again on the long-standing foreign policy conflicts within the Bush administration that have often pitted Powell against Vice President Dick Cheney and

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Powell's statements highlighted the contrast between his sometimes measured support for the war and the more full-throated justifications offered by Cheney and Rumsfeld.

Powell and the State Department staff have clashed repeatedly with Rumsfeld and his team at the Pentagon over Iraq and other issues. And Powell is known to be deeply resentful over the large role that Cheney and the vice president's influential staff play in foreign policy, and to feel that he has been undercut and marginalized on major issues.

Powell has told associates that he has never before seen a vice president with so large a voice and so powerful a staff, and that it has created enormous problems for an administration that has never been able to speak with one voice on foreign policy.

The administration has struggled for the last week to deal with the conclusions made public by the former chief weapons inspector in Iraq, David Kay, that Saddam did not have any large

caches of chemical or biological weapons at the start of the war. Unlike Powell, Bush has carefully avoided making any public statements suggesting that he views the prewar intelligence he relied on as flawed or that his case for war has in any way been undermined or complicated.

Cheney and Rumsfeld have been equally unwavering in defending the war as justified.

Bush signed off last weekend on the creation of a quasi-independent commission, whose membership will be announced in the next few days, to study whether and how the intelligence sys-

tem broke down and how it should be organized to deal with the threats from terrorism and weapons proliferation.

Powell, in his interview with *The Post*, was supportive of the decision to go to war, and his public comments on Tuesday were more pointedly in sync with the White House's official line. But he appeared to acknowledge in the interview, more openly than any other senior administration official so far, that the failure to find any weapons not only looked bad but weakened Bush's argument that Iraq was a direct and urgent threat.

Asked if he would have recommen-

ded the invasion had he known what Kay would conclude after the war, Powell replied, "I don't know because it was the stockpiles that presented the final little piece that made it more of a real and present danger and threat to the region and the world."

Pressed on whether the lack of stockpiles removed that real and present danger, Powell said, "The absence of a stockpile changes the political calculus. It changes the answer you get with the little formula I laid out. But the fact of the matter is we went into this with the understanding that there was a stockpile and there were weapons."

The New York Times

Rumsfeld says Iraqi arms may yet be found

By Eric Schmitt

WASHINGTON: Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld staunchly defended the Bush administration's prewar intelligence on Iraq's illegal weapons on Wednesday, and he said it was too soon to tell whether there were illicit stockpiles.

Rumsfeld held out the possibility that a U.S.-led team still searching for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq eventually might find them despite last month's conclusion by the group's departing leader, David Kay, that no stockpiles of such arms existed in Iraq when it was invaded last March.

In back-to-back testimony before committees of the Senate and House, Rumsfeld dismissed Kay's assertions as one of many "theories" that inspectors must now pursue.

Rumsfeld was the first of President George W. Bush's top national security aides to testify to Congress since Kay made his assertions and the president signaled his intent to create an independent commission to examine the apparent intelligence failure.

Rumsfeld's position stands in sharp contrast to comments this week by Secretary of State Colin Powell, who told *The Washington Post* that he was not sure if he would have recommended an invasion if he had known Saddam Hussein did not have stockpiles of weapons.

Rumsfeld told lawmakers that the war was justified regardless of the doubts about the presence of those arms.

"I'm convinced that the president of the United States did the right thing in

Iraq. Let there be no doubt," Rumsfeld told the Senate Armed Services Committee. "The world is a safer place today

and the Iraqi people far better off for that action."

The secretary summed up his basic stance on the Iraq intelligence in his opening statement to the panel, headed by Senator John Warner, Republican of Virginia.

"As Dr. Kay has testified, what we have learned thus far has not proven Saddam Hussein had what intelligence indicated and what we believed he had," Rumsfeld said.

Senator Edward Kennedy, the Massachusetts Democrat who has been among the severest critics of the Iraq campaign, was not convinced.

"The debacle cannot all be blamed on the intelligence community," Kennedy told Rumsfeld. "Key policy makers made crystal-clear the results they wanted from the intelligence community."

Rumsfeld told Kennedy that his assertions were baseless. "You've twice or thrice mentioned manipulation," Rumsfeld said. "I haven't heard of it, I haven't seen any of it, except in the comments you've made."

Rumsfeld also heard criticism from lawmakers about Bush's refusal to include a \$50 billion to \$55 billion appropriation request for the Iraq campaign in his proposed Pentagon budget of more than \$401 billion.



Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on Wednesday offered senators "alternative views" on the hunt for banned weapons in Iraq.

"That money should have been part of the budget before us, not left to a supplemental and therefore not part of the projected budget deficit," said Senator Carl Levin, Democrat of Michigan.

Rumsfeld also heard sharp words from a Republican, Senator John McCain of Arizona, who denounced an arrangement under which the air force agreed to lease some tanker planes from Boeing, rather than buy them outright.

Critics of the multibillion-dollar deal have said it made no economic sense. The criticism intensified after it was disclosed that a Pentagon official who negotiated the deal with Boeing later took a high-level job with the aircraft maker. (The revelation led to the firing of that person and the Boeing official who helped to bring her to the company.)

"Does it bother you?" McCain asked Rumsfeld repeatedly, referring at one point to "this incestuous relationship" between Boeing and the air force. "Does it bother you?"

"We are looking into it," Rumsfeld replied. "If we find any wrongdoing, I can assure you that we will take appropriate action, as we have in the past."

The New York Times

David Stout of *The New York Times* also contributed to this report.

February 5, 2004

Herald Tribune

IRAK *L'attentat de dimanche, qui a fait plus de 100 morts à Arbil, met au jour les tensions qui s'accumulent au nord du pays*

Les Kurdes veulent remporter la bataille de l'après-guerre

LE FIGARO JEUDI 5 FÉVRIER 2004



Les funérailles, hier à Arbil, de deux membres de L'Union patriotique du Kurdistan. Les militants kurdes pointent du doigt le groupe islamiste Ansar al-Islam, responsable selon eux de l'attaque meurtrière de dimanche. (Photo Karim Sahib/AFP)

Après avoir été reçu par George W. Bush à la Maison-Blanche, le secrétaire général des Nations unies, Kofi Annan, a réaffirmé hier à Washington son intention d'envoyer une mission en Irak pour étudier la possibilité d'y tenir des élections générales avant le 30 juin. Le président américain a souligné de son côté que « nous avons beaucoup de travail à faire dans certains domaines et, évidemment, une forte attention se porte sur l'Irak ».

Arbil, Kirkouk :
de notre envoyé spécial
Arnaud de La Grange

Arbil porte trois couleurs. Le drapeau kurde, la bannière américaine, et l'étendard noir du deuil. Sur toutes les poitrines des pechmergas, sur toutes les portes, les petits bouts d'étoffe noirs saluent la mémoire des morts de dimanche. Plus de 100 personnes ont péri lors des deux attaques suicides qui ont frappé le siège des deux grands partis kurdes. Le bâtiment du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK), le parti de Massoud



Barzani, offre un sinistre spectacle. La salle de réunion n'est plus que désolation. Dehors, une grande peinture du chef de la li-

gnée Barzani – miraculeusement intacte, vous diront les combattants kurdes – éclaire des débris de fauteuils baignant dans le sang. Le ballet des dignitaires venus se recueillir sur les lieux du drame est ininterrompu. Partout, dans la ville, les mêmes scènes. Les chefs kurdes

« Cette attaque est dirigée contre la voie vers le fédéralisme et la démocratie choisie par les Kurdes »

courent les mosquées, les résidences des familles des victimes. Des délégations venues de tout le Kurdistan, d'Iran même, se pressent. Dans les rues, les milliers d'hommes en armes, pechmergas, policiers, membres des forces spéciales kurdes, sont

d'une nervosité contagieuse.

Jusqu'à présent, Arbil avait été presque totalement épargnée par les violences touchant le reste de l'Irak. Les villes voisines de Kirkouk et de Mossoul, cités tampons entre les montagnes kurdes et les plaines arabes, concentraient les tensions du nord de pays. D'où la certitude, ici, que l'horreur est venue de l'extérieur. « Nous avons récupéré les têtes des deux kamikazes, confié avec des airs terribles un responsable des services de renseignement kurdes, et on voit bien que ce ne sont pas des Kurdes, pas même des gens de la région. » Il ne veut pas en dire plus. Avant de lâcher : « En fait, ces visages ont le type arabe. »

A Arbil, tout le monde est persuadé que le mauvais bras qui a ensanglanté la fête de l'Aïd est celui de l'islam radical. « Ce sont des islamistes, certainement venus de l'extérieur », affirme un

militant du PDK. L'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) de Jalal Talabani est plus précise : ses militants pointent du doigt le groupe islamiste Ansar al-Islam (les partisans de l'islam). La semaine dernière, Jalal Talabani avait accusé « *al-Qaida, Ansar al-Islam et d'autres combattants venus de l'étranger* » d'être les auteurs de la plupart des attentats en Irak.

Le groupe islamiste kurde est suspecté depuis longtemps par Washington d'entretenir des liens avec l'organisation d'Oussama Ben Laden. Dès leurs premiers bivouacs dans les montagnes kurdes, au printemps dernier, les forces spéciales américaines se sont attaquées au petit fief territorial d'Ansar al-Islam, près de la frontière iranienne. Même avant cette offensive, la puissance de feu du groupe, fort de quelques centaines de combattants, a toujours été réduite. « *Islamistes ou non, de l'intérieur ou de l'extérieur, je n'en sais rien, commente Ferhad Pirbal, un univer-*

sitaire d'Arbil, mais une chose est sûre, c'est que cette attaque est dirigée contre la voie vers le fédéralisme et la démocratie choisie par les Kurdes ». La déflagration d'Arbil, c'est aussi cela : la révélation au grand jour de la tension qui s'accumule depuis quelques semaines au nord

du pays. Les leaders kurdes demandent le fédéralisme. Là n'est pas le problème majeur, puisqu'à Bagdad, le Conseil de gouvernement irakien s'est lui aussi prononcé en faveur du fédéralisme. « *Nous restons cependant méfiants car les partis arabes et même les Américains sont encore ambigus sur la question* », avoue un responsable kurde. Si cette question n'est pas encore trop explosive, une autre a déjà mis le feu aux poudres : celle de la définition géographique du Kurdistan. Les Kurdes demandent le rattachement de la ville pétrolière de Kirkouk à la région.

A Kirkouk, le venin fait son œuvre. Il y a trois semaines, une manifestation de populations turcomanes et arabes protestant contre les visées kurdes sur la ville s'est terminée dans le sang. Sept personnes ont été tuées.

Pour calmer le jeu, les chefs kurdes ont accepté de mettre en sourdine leurs revendications. L'administrateur américain Paul Bremer a renvoyé prudemment à 2005 la question. En attendant, sur le terrain, tous les acteurs poussent leurs pions. Perchée sur une petite colline, la forteresse ottomane veille tant

bien que mal sur la ville de Kirkouk. Son vieux gardien, Sabah Sainel, se désole. Il montre les graffitis qui couvrent les murs entre deux colonnades en marbre. « *Cette forteresse atteste de la turcomanité de la ville* », dit une inscription. « *Kirkouk est le cœur du Kurdistan* », dit une autre...

Les Turcomans, minorité turcophone d'Irak, redoutent de faire les frais de la nouvelle donne. « *Nous ne sommes pas contre le fédéralisme, mais, s'il est basé sur les nationalités, il faut que nous ayons aussi notre Etat, à côté de celui des Kurdes, des Arabes sunnites et des Arabes chiïtes* », explique Ali Mehdi Saik, un responsable du Front turcoman irakien. Il y a trois jours, un de leurs chefs a été assassiné. « *Nous avons eu 30 martyrs en neuf mois, assure-t-il, Les Kurdes ont fait entrer des milliers de pechmergas dans la ville, ils ont pris le contrôle de 23 des 25 postes de conseillers municipaux et ils font venir des milliers de soi-disant réfugiés pour infléchir la balance démographique.* »

Les populations arabes de la ville dénoncent elles aussi la « kurdisation » de Kirkouk. Pour Agar Jabar al-Soumaydai, représentant des groupes arabes au conseil du gouvernorat, les revendications kurdes vont « *allumer l'étincelle de la guerre civile à Kirkouk* ». Le chef sunnite de la puissante tribu arabe des al-Obeid a lui aussi déclaré que les siens étaient prêts au « *sacri-*

fice ». Les esprits sont d'autant plus chauds que Turcomans et Arabes soupçonnent les Kurdes de poursuivre toujours leur quête d'indépendance derrière leur demande « *diplomatique* » de fédéralisme. « *C'est vrai que c'est l'aspiration de la quasi-totalité des populations kurdes, dit Ferhad Pirbal, mais le mo-*

ment n'est pas opportun pour le demander... » Ces gesticulations laissent froids les chefs kurdes qui ont pour le moment la force des armes et la bénédiction des troupes américaines. Pour eux, les Turcomans sont instrumentalisés par la Turquie. Et les Arabes parlent plus qu'ils ne devraient, nombre d'entre eux étant ici par la grâce de la politique d'arabisation de la région menée par Saddam Hussein. Toutes choses qui ne sont pas totalement fausses mais qui ne peuvent masquer un fait : aujourd'hui, Kirkouk est pluri-ethnique, et la rente du pétrole devra certainement être partagée... Sur les murs des bureaux d'Arbil, les cartes du Kurdistan englobent allégrement Kirkouk. « *La ville est géographiquement, ethniquement et culturellement kurde* », martèle Mahmoud Mohammad, haut dirigeant du PDK et ministre de la Culture kurde, il n'est pas question de lâcher notre terre ». Après tant de batailles perdues et de promesses effilochées, les chefs kurdes sont bien décidés aujourd'hui à gagner l'après-guerre.

De mystérieux terroristes

Qui était réellement visé à Arbil ? Les Kurdes ont payé le prix du sang, sans que l'on puisse encore dire pour quelles raisons. Leur équilibre politique et la confusion de la scène irakienne ouvrent toutes les hypothèses. « *Les attentats suicides ont jusqu'à présent visé tous les alliés des Américains en Irak : les chiïtes, les nouvelles forces de police, les organisations qui travaillent avec eux, commente un observateur étranger, seuls les Kurdes n'avaient pas vraiment été touchés. Là est peut-être l'explication.* » Certains auraient voulu frapper les Etats-Unis par le biais de leurs plus sûrs alliés dans le pays. Mais au Kurdistan, des responsables n'hésitent pas à voir dans l'apocalypse de dimanche la main de la Turquie, de l'Iran ou de la Syrie. Des pays qui n'aiment guère voir leurs propres Kurdes observer l'émancipation de leurs voisins irakiens. A.L.G.

Malaise au sein du Congrès du PPE

L'adhésion de la Turquie déchire la droite européenne

Bruxelles :
de notre correspondante
Alexandrine Bouilhet

Le premier ministre turc ne figurera pas sur la photo de famille des chefs de la droite euro-

péenne, réunis en congrès à Bruxelles. Invité « spécial » du Parti populaire européen (PPE), Recep Tayyip Erdogan, le président du parti islamiste Justice et Développement (AKP), devait participer à la grand-messe organisée par les formations de droite du Parlement européen,

en prévision des élections de printemps. Treize premiers ministres européens y sont attendus, notamment Jean-Pierre Raffarin, Jose Maria Aznar et Silvio Berlusconi, ainsi que les chefs de l'opposition allemande. La présence à leurs côtés du dirigeant turc, convié en tant que personnalité « proche » du PPE, a suscité un tel malaise dans les rangs des conservateurs allemands qu'Ankara a préféré annuler la venue de Recep Tayyip Erdogan. En accord avec le PPE, le premier ministre turc a cédé sa place à son ministre des Affaires étrangères, Abdullah Gul, figure moins « voyante » du gou-

vernement.

Cette décision de dernière minute illustre les divisions qui régissent au sein de la droite européenne à l'égard de la candidature de la Turquie. Si les parlementaires italiens, espagnols, britanniques, portugais ou grecs appuient sans états d'âme l'entrée de la Turquie en Europe, cette perspective effraie toujours les conservateurs allemands et certains de leurs collègues français, notamment à l'UDF. Le sujet est tellement controversé au sein du groupe conservateur qu'il ne figure nulle part dans le manifeste électoral du PPE, qui doit être ap-

prouvé aujourd'hui par le congrès. « Il ne faut pas que la Turquie devienne le sujet principal de la campagne européenne », insiste Angela Merkel, présidente du Parti chrétien démocrate allemand (CDU-CSU). Côté français, la question turque est également considérée comme un chiffon rouge électoral. « Les chefs d'Etat et de gouvernement ont

fait des promesses inconsidérées au gouvernement depuis des années. Ils se retrouvent aujourd'hui au pied du mur, mais franchement c'est invendable à l'opinion française », soupire un député français. « Si on commence à parler de l'entrée de la Turquie, tout en reprenant les négociations sur la Constitution, on risque un « non » au référendum et ce sera la catastrophe ! »

Malgré les précautions prises jusqu'ici dans les capitales et les états-majors de partis, le débat sur la candidature de la Turquie sera difficile à éviter cette année, alors que le Conseil européen est appelé à se prononcer à l'automne sur l'ouverture des négociations avec Ankara. A en croire le chef de la CSU, Edmund Stoiber, la perspective d'adhésion de la Turquie sera le sujet

de préoccupation « numéro un » de ses électeurs, une fois passé l'élargissement aux dix pays d'Europe centrale, le 1^{er} mai. « C'est le dossier le plus chaud et le plus important de l'année européenne », avoue un commissaire européen. Le dossier est si brûlant que le PPE, principal parti européen, et probable vainqueur des élections, n'ose pas le prendre en main.

Irak : un groupe islamiste revendique le double attentat d'Erbil

BAGDAD. Le double attentat-suicide commis, dimanche 1^{er} février à Erbil, au Kurdistan irakien, qui a fait 105 morts, selon un nouveau bilan, a été revendiqué, mercredi 4 février, par un groupe islamiste, Ansar al-Sunna (Partisans des préceptes du Prophète). « Deux de nos frères martyrs ont attaqué les deux repaires de Satan à Erbil. Notre joie

de l'Aïd al-Adha (Aïd el-Kébir) s'est accrue par celle de l'attaque contre les agents des juifs et des chrétiens », a indiqué cette formation sur un site Internet. Se présentant comme une alliance de plusieurs groupuscules islamistes « djihadistes », ce groupe avait déjà publié, sur Internet, plusieurs communiqués revendiquant des attaques en Irak. Le 20 septembre 2003, il avait annoncé son alliance avec plusieurs groupuscules, parmi lesquels Ansar al-Islam, le groupuscule kurde présumé lié au réseau terroriste Al-Qaida. — (AFP.)

La grande ville portuaire du sud irakien est sous l'influence grandissante de l'Iran, dont la frontière est située à seulement quelques kilomètres

Téhéran pousse ses pions à Bassora



L'ayatollah Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, chef de l'Assemblée suprême de la révolution islamique en Irak (Asrii), est revenu en octobre dernier à Bassora, après 23 ans d'exil en Iran. La branche armée de l'Asrii, officiellement démantelée, continuerait à être financée par Téhéran. (Photo C. Alan/Gamma.)

Le grand ayatollah Ali Sistani, a échappé hier à une tentative d'assassinat dans la ville sainte de Nadjaf. Un soldat américain a été tué et un autre blessé hier dans une attaque au mortier près de Bagdad. Les deux soldats ont été touchés lors d'une attaque au mortier près de l'aéroport international de Bagdad, l'une des principales bases américaines dans le pays. L'ambassadeur américain à l'Otan, Nicholas Burns, a déclaré hier qu'il existait une « très forte volonté politique » parmi les pays membres de l'Otan de participer davantage à la stabilisation de l'Irak, même s'ils ont jugé qu'il est encore trop tôt pour engager des discussions formelles à ce sujet.

Bassora : Georges Malbrunot

Sous les lampadaires de l'avenue Istiqlal (indépendance), au centre ville, les portraits de l'ayatollah Khomeiny se dressent comme autant de pieds de nez à l'histoire. « Vous devez confondre avec l'ayatollah Sistani » (le chef de file de la majorité chiite d'Irak, NDLR) !, réagit, embarrassé, le gouverneur, Wael Abdullatif.

Bassora, un million et demi d'habitants, fut pourtant la ville irakienne qui souffrit le plus des bombardements de l'aviation de Téhéran, pendant la guerre qui opposa les deux voisins entre 1980 et 1988.

A dix-huit kilomètres de la frontière iranienne, la grande cité portuaire du sud de l'Irak est passée sous l'influence des propagandistes zélés du régime persan, neuf mois seulement après la chute de Saddam Hussein, qui y écrasa dans le sang les rébellions successives de la majorité chiite de la population. « *Les partis islamistes soutenus par l'Iran avancent sur nous comme un rouleau compresseur*, déplore Ali al-Mahdi, responsable du Parti communiste. *C'est un État dans l'État qui se met en place.* » Les signaux d'une islamisation rampante sont nombreux dans celle qu'on appelait la Venise du Sud, une cité jadis ouverte sur l'extérieur, où les riches koweïtiens et saoudiens venaient s'encanailler dans les casinos, un verre de whisky à la main. Principal agent d'influence iranien dans le sud : l'Asrii, l'Assemblée suprême de la révolution islamique en Irak, la plus structurée des formations chiites, que le régime iranien abrita et finança entre 1982 et 2003.

A Bassora, le mouvement dispose d'une radio et d'une télévision, et ses œuvres sociales distribuent de la nourriture aux plus pauvres. « *Ainsi, je leur suis doublement loyal* », reconnaît Fouad, un jeune homme favorable à la pénétration iranienne, « *en tant que chiite*

d'abord, et ensuite parce qu'on me nourrit ». Moins visible, mais tout aussi importante, l'influence de la branche armée de l'Asrii, la Force Badr, équipée par Téhéran et qui continueraient de recevoir des subsides de l'Iran. Composée de 15 000 hommes, elle a été officiellement démantelée, sur ordre de Paul Bremer, l'administrateur civil américain, hostile à la survivance des milices confessionnelles dans l'Irak post-Saddam. Sur ses décombres est née l'« organisation » Badr, dont les membres seraient attelés à la reconstruction du pays. Une visite sur la route qui remonte sur Bagdad, entre Bassorah et Amara, non loin de la frontière iranienne, permet de constater qu'il en est autrement.

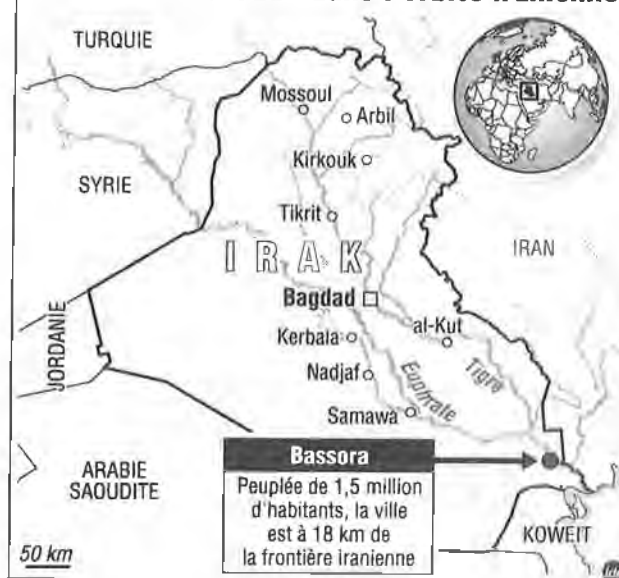
En civil, la barbe finement taillée à l'iranienne, des miliciens Badr tiennent des barages aux côtés de policiers ira-

kiens. D'autres encadrent avec fermeté les manifestations de l'Asrii. D'autres encore ont infiltré la police, et protégeraient certains bâtiments officiels à Bassorah. « *L'Asrii pratique un double jeu, explique un analyste chiite. Elle coopère avec le pouvoir qui s'est mis en place sous autorité américaine, mais en secret, ses hommes stockent des armes en prévision du transfert du pouvoir aux Irakiens le 1^{er} juillet prochain.* » La Force Badr est présente dans l'unité antiterroriste composée de miliciens kurdes et chiites, qui luttent contre la résistance dans les zones sunnites. Des

opérations ultrasensibles qui expliquent pourquoi ses membres ont exigé d'agir le visage masqué par une cagoule. La branche armée de l'Asrii dispose également d'une unité spécialisée dans la liquidation d'anciens proches du régime de Saddam, qui fut très active à Bassorah, et ses hommes se livreraient à certains excès (des rackets notamment), pour surmonter, sans doute, des problèmes financiers. Chacun est convaincu que le régime iranien a dépêché ses propres agents en Irak. « *J'ai reçu récemment un des hauts responsables du Hezb al-Dawaa* » (un autre parti chiite dont une branche extérieure fut longtemps téléguidée par les renseignements de Téhéran, NDLR). *Il était accompagné d'un Iranien en turban qui connaissait tout de moi* », déclare encore stupéfait un ancien diplomate de Saddam que les formations chiites aimeraient débaucher. « *Elles ne se cachent même pas* »,

ajoute-t-il. Lorsque Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, le patron de l'Asrii, est allé à Moscou en décembre en tant que président du Conseil intérimaire de gouver-

La "Venise du Sud" dans l'orbite iranienne



nement, il volait à bord d'un appareil iranien. Et durant son mandat, l'ancien protégé de Téhéran a réclamé le paiement par son pays des dommages de guerre endurés par l'Iran. Un renvoi d'ascenseur en quelque sorte.

A Bassora, la vie quotidienne subit également l'influence iranienne. La vente et la consommation d'alcool dans les lieux publics sont désormais interdites. Neuf marchands – dont sept chrétiens – ont été exécutés ces derniers mois. Dans la rue ou à l'université, les pressions pour porter le voile ont redoublé. « *Les gens ont de la sympathie envers l'Iran. C'est le seul pays musulman dirigé par des chiites, on regarde dans cette direction, c'est normal* », ajoute Fouad qui se sent d'abord chiite. D'autres en revanche expriment des sentiments différents, faisant passer leur arabité en premier lieu. Les chiites irakiens avaient

d'ailleurs combattu aux côtés de Saddam face à l'Iran, et les dirigeants de l'Asrii qui avaient fait le choix inverse voient aujourd'hui leur crédibilité en pâtir. Cette islamisation rampante est « *le contrecoup de l'oppression de Saddam, poursuit Ali al-Mahdi. La religion est devenue un refuge pour beaucoup d'Irakiens* ».

A Bassora, la puissance occupante anglaise est contrainte d'en tenir compte. Des réunions quotidiennes sont organisées entre les dirigeants de l'Asrii et les Britanniques, qui se reposent sur les plus forts pour assurer le calme. La coopération rencontre parfois ses limites. Mi-décembre, les Anglais ont ainsi limogé un haut responsable du ministère de l'Éducation, cheikh Ahmed Malaki, un radical islamiste qui avait fui la répression de Saddam en 1999 pour se réfugier au séminaire chiite de Qom en Iran. Pour Téhéran, avancer ses pions est d'autant plus facile que la frontière avec le sud de l'Irak est poreuse, et de part et d'autre, les origines de ses habitants sont mélangées.

Tentative d'assassinat contre l'ayatollah Sistani

Le plus influent dignitaire chiite d'Irak, le grand ayatollah Ali Sistani, 73 ans, est, selon son entourage, sorti indemne hier d'une tentative d'assassinat dans la ville sainte de Nadjaf. Un homme aurait tenté de pénétrer dans son bureau « *afin de perpétrer un acte criminel visant sayyed Sistani, mais ses gardes ont fait échouer cette tentative* », a indiqué un proche du dignitaire sans donner plus de précisions sur les circonstances de l'attaque ni sur l'armement de l'agresseur. L'ayatollah Sistani s'est imposé depuis la chute du régime comme la principale figure politique en Irak. Opposé fermement à toute résistance armée contre les troupes d'occupation, il est en revanche resté intraitable sur deux points : les étrangers n'ont pas à intervenir dans la Constitution de l'Irak et les élections doivent se faire au suffrage universel.

'Kurdish Sept. 11' boosts resolve

By Dan Murphy

Christian Science Monitor February 5, 2004

ARBIL, IRAQ Kurdistan's two main political parties, rivals who had fought long and bloody civil wars for local dominance in the 1990s, were on the cusp of setting old animosities aside when terror returned to Arbil.

So it was a bitter irony that twin suicide attacks on Sunday morning - which Kurdish officials say they believe was organized by the Al Qaeda-linked Ansar al-Islam - targeted both parties at a time when they are moving at full speed towards closer cooperation. Indeed, officials at the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) believe the two things are linked.

"We have so many enemies that don't want us to be united - they want to keep us weak and divided," says Kakamin Mular, the Arbil party boss for the KDP. "But this only strengthens our will to work together. We see that we can't afford to be divided." Other Kurdish leaders say they believe the attacks, which killed about 100 and injured more than 130, may have been in revenge for what they say was help provided to the US in the capture of suspected Al Qaeda member Hasan Ghul. The Pakistani national was captured in northern Iraq last week.

The PUK - driven out of Arbil by a KDP offensive in 1996 with the help of Saddam Hussein - opened party offices here three months ago, and both sides say they're close to uniting the administration of their region.

The two parties have ruled Kurdistan's two main cities as separate fiefdoms since the mid-1990s, with the KDP controlling the city of Arbil and the PUK in charge of Sulaymaniyah, both parties' militias being prominent on the streets. The two towns have rival interior ministries, health ministries, and even cultural unions that claim to speak for all Kurds.

The attack puts Iraq's Kurdish problem back in the news as the US, the United Nations, and Iraqi leaders enter delicate negotiations over the shape of a transitional government that the Bush administration wants to install by the end of June.

The Kurds are pressing for a transitional constitution that would enshrine their de facto autonomous status in the north and give them a much bigger share from Iraq's oil revenue. These moves are viewed with suspicion by Iraq's dominant ethnic-Arabs as a first step towards Kurdish independence, and tension has been rising between both sides.

"We've lived free for 12 years - we have had a free press and we can show that democratic institutions can thrive," says Sasan Iwni, a KDP official. "There are people in Iraq who don't want this to spread."

Rather than the mixed feelings toward the US that prevail in the rest of Iraq - frequently a mixture of gratitude for the removal of Mr. Hussein and anger at the ongoing occupation - most Kurds are unabashedly pro-American.

Zamri Malek named his chicken restaurant "Washington" after the US invasion began last spring. "I did it to thank America for setting us free," he says.

Arbil, a city of 600,000 that's home to about a fifth of Kurdistan's people, is a city in shock. Militia from the KDP seem to man every other street corner. They flag down and search every car that has nonlocal plates. An aide to a KDP official calls the attacks "the Kurdish Sept. 11," and predicts big changes in the weeks ahead. "Just as things changed in America, we are going to become a lot more aggressive in going after the terrorists in our midst."

Kurds are understandably wary of Iraq at large. They have waged rebellions against the central government since the 1920s, and were treated with particular brutality by Hussein's regime, which famously used nerve gas on unarmed families in the town of Halabja, an atrocity that killed 5,000 in 1988.

Tens of thousands more died in the "Al Anfal," or spoils, campaign against Kurdish villages in the late 1980s that was spearheaded by Ali Hassan al-Majid, Hussein's cousin. "We lived through Al Anfal, but still you can't really describe the horror of this latest attack," says Mr. Iwni.

Mr. Iwni was about 10 feet away when the bomb exploded, and was talking with a colleague about their optimism over the KDP and PUK finally putting their old animosities aside. "There are still some differences between the two sides, but we're working very hard to get together," says Mr. Mular, a former general in the Peshmerga guerrillas who had fought Hussein's regime for decades. "The important thing is all Kurds are entirely in agreement for pushing for real federal autonomy with the Governing Council."

Mujar says the two most important officials lost from the KDP were Arbil Governor Akram Mintik and Deputy Prime Minister Sami Abdul Rahman. Mr. Rahman was one of the parties' leading intellectuals, a guerrilla with perfect English who had transformed himself into a suave diplomat.

Mujar says both men played key roles in negotiations with the PUK. "We're an old party and there are people who can take their place, but this is still a very heavy blow." Others aren't certain about how easy it will be to recover. The home of Mehdi Hoshnaw, the Arbil deputy governor who some here described as Kurdistan's leading poet, is filled with mourning women, the men paying their respects at a mosque.

Mr. Hoshnaw was killed along with his 28-year-old son Zardesh, a surgeon. "He was a poet of Kurdistan, of our loss and special suffering," says Tollah Hoshnaw, his youngest son, who slept through the party meeting. "This is a land stained with martyrs' blood, and now his has been added to it."

Kurdistan, the term for a region that has no precise legal status, now remains in a sort of limbo, neither entirely a part of Iraq nor separate from it. The question of whether Kurdistan will continue legally to exist in an independent Iraq remains an open question. Kurdish leaders insist that general promises of a federal system means that they'll have an ethnic homeland of their own, but politicians for the ethnically Arab parties in the south say redrawing Iraq's political map along ethnic lines could lead to conflict. They'd like the country's 18 ethnically mixed local governments to persist.

"I don't know exactly who did this, but it's no mistake that it happened when we were so close to finally getting our rights after so many generations of struggle," says Sian Nakashbandi, a civil engineer. "We begin to wonder if we'll ever live in peace," she says.

* * * * *

Un groupe proche d'Ansar al-Islam revendique l'attentat d'Erbil sur internet



DUBAI, 4 fév (AFP) - 19h49 - Un groupe irakien proche du groupe fondamentaliste Ansar al-Islam, présumé lié au réseau terroriste Al-Qaïda, a revendiqué mercredi sur un site internet le double attentat perpétré dimanche contre des locaux des deux principaux partis kurdes à Erbil, dans le nord de l'Irak.

Le groupe Ansar al-Sunna (les partisans des préceptes du Prophète), déjà auteur de plusieurs communiqués dans le passé, affirme dans un message reproduit sur le site (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/globalislamicmedia/message/314>) que "deux de nos frères martyrs ont attaqué les deux repaires de Satan à Erbil".

"Notre joie de l'Aïd Al-Adha (la fête du Sacrifice) s'est accrue par celle de l'attaque contre les agents des juifs et des chrétiens", ajoute Ansar al-Sunna, proche du groupe fondamentaliste Ansar al-Islam (les partisans de l'islam) qui aurait entretenu des liens avec le réseau terroriste Al-Qaïda avant d'être écrasé par les forces américaines fin mars, alors qu'il contrôlait une petite enclave dans le nord-est kurde de l'Irak.

Cent cinq personnes ont été tuées dimanche dans le double attentat suicide perpétré contre les sièges à Erbil des deux principaux partis kurdes, le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) et l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK), selon un nouveau bilan fourni par la télévision kurde.

Deux kamikazes ont fait exploser quasi simultanément leurs charges, contenues dans des ceintures, au milieu des nombreux visiteurs venus présenter leurs vœux dans les locaux des deux partis pour la fête musulmane d'Al-Adha, à l'occasion de laquelle les fouilles corporelles avaient été suspendues, selon des témoins.

"Les sunnites en Irak et partout sur la terre ont compris que les Croisés ne sont entrés dans les provinces de Kirkouk et Ninive qu'avec l'aide de l'UPK et du PDK, dirigés respectivement par leurs agents Jalal Talabani et Massoud Barzani", ajoute le communiqué, daté du 4 février et portant la signature de "Abou Abdallah Al-Hassan ben Massoud, émir de l'armée d'Ansar al-Sunna".

"Ces deux agents ont préparé la voie à l'armée américaine pour occuper ces deux provinces malgré la chute du régime baassiste athée (...) avant de remettre ces deux provinces aux Croisés. C'est pourquoi nous avons guetté l'occasion de nous venger de ces deux tyrans dont les mains sont souillées par le sang des musulmans (...) et qui coopèrent avec les Croisés pour frapper nos frères moudjahidine du groupe Ansar Al-Islam, leurs femmes et leurs enfants", poursuit le communiqué.

"Nous avons donc frappé leurs principaux sièges", ajoute le texte intitulé "les deux conquêtes d'Erbil", une appellation qui rappelle celle utilisée par le chef d'Al-Qaïda, Oussama ben Laden, désignant les attentats du 11 septembre 2001 à New York et Washington.

"Nous conseillons aux musulmans de s'éloigner des endroits fréquentés par ces sales types. Nous avons des frères (moudjahidine), dont Dieu seul connaît le nombre, qui ont fait don de leur âme à Dieu", avertit le groupe qui a publié par le passé une douzaine de communiqués sur son site internet dont l'adresse change constamment.

IRAK Selon le chef des services de renseignement américains George Tenet, l'ex-raïs avait l'intention de reconstituer son programme nucléaire

Arsenal de Saddam : la CIA défend son bilan

Washington :
de notre correspondant
Philippe Gélie

Avant que la polémique sur l'absence d'armes de destruction massive en Irak ne mette le feu à sa campagne électorale, George W. Bush dépêche au front son pompier en chef. George Tenet, le directeur de l'Agence centrale de renseignement américaine (CIA), a pris la parole en public hier, pour la première fois depuis mai 2003, afin de défendre le travail de ses espions et, par contre-

coup, légitimer la décision du président d'entrer en guerre. Devant les étudiants de l'université de Georgetown, dont il est sorti diplômé en 1976, George Tenet a reconnu à l'opinion américaine « le droit de savoir » et promis que, « lorsque la vérité apparaîtra, nous la présenterons telle qu'elle est ». Il a plaidé pour plus « de temps et de patience », affirmant : « Nous ne sommes encore loin d'avoir achevé notre travail. » David Kay, l'ancien chef des inspecteurs américains en Irak, estimait avoir rempli 85 % de sa mission au moment d'affirmer la semaine dernière : « Nous nous sommes tous trompés. » Pour le chef de la CIA, au contraire, « lorsque tous les faits auront été rassemblés, on verra que nous n'avions ni tout à fait raison, ni tout à fait tort ».

La ligne de défense suivie par l'Ad-

ministration Bush est résumée dans la formule prononcée la veille par Donald Rumsfeld, le secrétaire à la Défense, lors d'auditions au Congrès : « Ce que nous avons appris jusqu'ici n'a pas démontré que Saddam Hussein possédait ce que nous pensions et ce que le renseignement lui imputait (comme armes interdites), mais le contraire n'a pas été démontré non plus. » George Bush lui-même a in-

sisté hier dans un discours en Caroline du Sud : « Nous n'avons pas encore découvert les stocks d'armements que nous pensions trouver » en Irak, mais, a-t-il ajouté, « sachant ce que je savais alors et ce que je sais aujourd'hui, l'Amérique a pris la bonne décision. »

Le débat sur la nature des informations recueillies et leur traitement par les services de renseignement tente d'occulter celui, beaucoup plus sensible, portant sur l'utilisation politique et stratégique qui en a été faite. Noyant son auditoire sous les explications techniques, façon de montrer qu'il faut être un spécialiste pour ex-

primer une opinion, M. Tenet a tout de même admis avoir « manqué de sources humaines directes » et « sans doute surestimé la menace nucléaire » représentée par l'Irak. Mais il a tranché : « Dans l'ensemble nous étions dans le vrai. »

Il a surtout cherché à balayer les soupçons d'une CIA sous influence politique, entretenus par une série inhabituelle de visites du vice-président, Dick Cheney, au siège de Langley

avant le rapport crucial des services américains d'octobre 2002. « Personne ne nous a indiqué quoi dire ou comment le dire », a assuré le chef espion. Entre les lignes, on pouvait tou-

tefois discerner quelques pare-feux : « Nous avons dressé pour nos responsables politiques un tableau objectif d'un dictateur brutal qui poursuivait ses efforts pour nous tromper et élaborer des programmes susceptibles de nous surprendre à tout moment et de menacer nos intérêts. »

Aux yeux de la CIA, la menace était bien réelle. Mais, précise George Tenet, ses analystes « n'ont jamais dit qu'il y avait une menace imminente. » George Bush a déclenché la guerre en alléguant « une menace grandissante ». Les experts n'ont pas fini de débattre de ces qualificatifs. A la clé, il y va non seulement

de la crédibilité de la communauté du renseignement dans la première puissance mondiale, mais surtout de la validité de la doctrine de « l'action préventive », au cœur de la politique étrangère du président Bush. Or, sur le fond, le directeur de la CIA n'a levé aucune des interrogations qui viennent de contraindre la Maison-Blanche à créer une commission d'enquête indépendante. Sa composition devrait être annoncée aujourd'hui par le président Bush. La commission du renseignement du Sénat s'apprête également à publier un rapport de 300 pages très critique sur le travail des espions.

INACCURATE INTELLIGENCE

CIA director admits faults over Iraqi arms

By Edward Alden in Washington

George Tenet, director of the US Central Intelligence Agency, acknowledged yesterday that the agency might have overestimated Iraq's chemical, biological and nuclear weapons capabilities, and blamed inaccurate human intelligence for some of the flaws.

But he insisted political pressures had in no way tainted the CIA's pre-war conclusions on Iraq. "No one told us what to say or how to say it," he said in a speech at Georgetown univer-

sity in Washington. The extraordinary, hour-long presentation mixed a robust defence of the integrity of US intelligence with a frank assessment of where the CIA might have been misled in reaching its conclusions on Iraq.

In particular, he acknowledged that human sources the agency had relied on to conclude that Saddam Hussein was boosting his weapons programmes now appeared to have been inaccurate.

Mr Tenet's frank admissions may help to shield the CIA from embarrassing new revelations, during a series of

investigations into its pre-Iraq performance. It could also protect President George W. Bush from charges that the White House influenced the agency to build its case for war.

Mr Bush is set to announce the formation of a commission to scrutinise all aspects of US intelligence on states seeking mass destruction weapons. And the Senate intelligence committee will reveal next month its findings on the soundness of the Iraq intelligence.

Mr Tenet's speech contained several revelations. He said for the first time

that the CIA's October 2002 conclusions - which formed the basis of the Bush administration's case for war - had been heavily influenced by two human sources with access to Mr Hussein's top officials. These sources claimed Iraq was developing a nuclear bomb and stockpiling chemical weapons to load on to missiles.

Mr Tenet said these sources had been "characterised by our foreign partners as established and reliable", but he did not reveal the identity of the foreign partners. "Did this information make

any difference in my thinking? You bet it did," he said.

But he acknowledged such claims now appeared exaggerated - and said the CIA itself had never succeeded in penetrating Mr Hussein's inner circle.

Mr Tenet said the CIA was largely right in its conclusion that Iraq was developing prohibited long-range missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles, though he said "the jury is still out" on whether the UAVs were intended to deliver biological weapons.

He acknowledged considerable short-

comings in the findings on nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

On nuclear weapons the key October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate had concluded Iraq was reconstituting its nuclear weapons programme. But Mr Tenet said it appeared only that "Iraq intended to reconstitute a nuclear programme at some point".

He also backed away from the CIA's conclusion that Iraq possessed mobile biological weapons facilities, a claim the agency continued to defend after the war.

Saddam oil bribe claims probed in US

By Thomas Catán in London

US authorities are investigating claims that hundreds of people received oil contracts from Saddam Hussein when US sanctions were in force in return for supporting his regime.

The US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control

and Immigrations and Customs Enforcement are examining whether any oil contracts violated international sanctions.

Iraq's Governing Council (IGC) has also launched an investigation since a local newspaper listed 270 people from more than 40 countries alleged to have received oil contracts, including foreign politicians, officials, companies and activists.

Senior UN officials will shortly discuss a response to related charges of corruption in connection with the oil-for-food programme, which the UN administered for Iraq during Mr Hussein's rule.

In a letter this week to the UN, obtained by the FT, IGC adviser Claude Hanks-Drielsma detailed "serious transgressions" in the oil-for-food programme. He said the original list of oil contracts

"demonstrates beyond any doubt that Saddam Hussein bought political and other support under the aegis of the UN". Kofi Annan, UN secretary-general, has said the programme was satisfactorily audited many times.

According to Mr Hanks-Drielsma, at least 10 per cent was added to the value of all invoices under the UN-run programme. He calculated that the scheme would have provided Mr Hussein's regime with more than \$4bn.

"Everybody knew this was going on but it was not going on under our noses because it was not part of the procedures we were involved in," said a UN official. "Certainly a lot of people and companies got involved in illicit transactions, but these were not part of the oil-for-food programme."

Mr Hanks-Drielsma said he was "absolutely certain" the document was legitimate. "I know how it was compiled and I'm totally satisfied that it's genuine." He said the list was compiled on IGC orders mainly from existing oil ministry records.

Mr Hanks-Drielsma has long known Mr Chalabi, head of the Iraqi National Congress (INC) and chairman of the IGC finance committee, which is investigating the allegations. Mr Chalabi began pursuing the charges against the UN at least eight months ago, according to a person who spoke to him last summer.

"There are many indications there's a huge amount of corruption as regards this programme," said Entifadh Qanbar, a spokesman for Mr Chalabi.

Washington presse le G7 de faire preuve de générosité vis-à-vis de Bagdad

BOCA RATON (Floride)
de notre envoyée spéciale

Ils ne parleront pas de la dette irakienne, du moins officiellement. Les ministres des finances et les banquiers centraux du G7 (les sept pays les plus industrialisés) ainsi que les représentants russes accueilleront, samedi 7 février, à l'initiative du Trésor américain, leurs homologues irakiens à Boca Raton (Floride), en marge de leur première réunion de l'année. Les « Sept » plus la Russie détiennent les trois quarts de la facture impayée par Bagdad au « Club de Paris » : une trentaine de milliards de dollars sur 40 milliards.

Ensemble, a affirmé le sous-secrétaire américain au Trésor, John Taylor, ils vont examiner la situation économique du pays, l'introduction de la nouvelle monnaie, la politique monétaire. Mais la dette apparaîtra en filigrane dans les discussions. C'est en effet de son poids que dépend la capacité de l'Irak à redresser son économie. Et ce poids dépendra en tout premier lieu des efforts que seront prêts à faire les pays créanciers.

La résolution de la question de la dette irakienne figure en tête de

l'agenda de la présidence américaine du G7. Dans un premier temps, Washington a tenté de passer en force en plaçant pour son élimination totale. Au lendemain de la guerre, le numéro deux du Pentagone, Paul Wolfowitz, avait ainsi suggéré que la France, la Russie et l'Allemagne, trois pays opposés à une action préventive hors du cadre de l'ONU, renoncent à réclamer un seul dollar à Bagdad.

Mais la diplomatie l'a emporté. En chargeant l'ancien secrétaire d'Etat de son père, James Baker, d'une mission auprès des chefs d'Etat européens, asiatiques et moyen-orientaux, George Bush a

réussi à enclencher un processus qui devrait déboucher avant l'élection présidentielle américaine de novembre. Déjà, la communauté internationale a accepté un moratoire sur les paiements jusqu'à la fin 2004. Au cours de sa tournée, M. Baker a obtenu l'assurance que les pays créanciers du Club de Paris feront un effort « substantiel » lorsque le sujet viendra à l'ordre du jour.

Selon certains des membres du Club, le calcul de l'administration Bush est simple. Plus le dossier sera

traité rapidement, plus les hypothèses sur lesquelles seront basés les calculs seront favorables au nouveau pouvoir irakien. « Dans un an et demi, il est probable que la production de pétrole et la balance des paiements du pays seront meilleures et ne justifieront plus un traitement similaire aux pays pauvres très endettés », dit l'un d'eux.

Le calendrier est cependant soumis à un certain nombre de conditions techniques ou de principe. Le premier obstacle est l'évaluation de l'ensemble de la dette irakienne. Le Fonds monétaire international, à qui cette mission a été confiée, n'a donné qu'un chiffre approximatif de 120 milliards de dollars au total. Deuxième écueil : les pays créanciers ne sont pas d'accord sur le calendrier. Paris, Berlin et Moscou, par exemple, affirment qu'ils ne bougeront pas avant que la transition démocratique ait eu lieu à Bagdad et qu'un gouvernement légitime soit en place. Les Américains, eux, veulent accélérer le mouvement.

Par ailleurs, le Club de Paris ne peut agir sans qu'un accord préalable soit signé avec le FMI. Ce dernier a annoncé, fin janvier, qu'il

pourrait fournir une assistance financière au titre des aides aux pays en situation post-conflit. Cette assistance, d'un total de 850 millions de dollars, pourrait être versée en plusieurs tranches, dont la première dès le second semestre. Le directeur général du FMI, Horst Köhler, est présent à Boca Raton.

Selon une étude conjointe de l'ONU et de la Banque mondiale, les besoins pour la reconstruction de l'Irak dans une quinzaine de

domaines incluant l'éducation, l'énergie, les transports, les administrations se chiffrent à environ 36 milliards de dollars d'ici à 2007, auxquels il faut ajouter près de 20 milliards de dollars pour le secteur pétrolier et la sécurité, actuellement à la charge de la coalition américano-britannique. La conférence des donateurs de Madrid, en octobre 2003, a permis de collecter 33 milliards. A Boca Raton, les Américains vont insister auprès de leurs partenaires pour qu'ils fassent preuve de plus de générosité lors d'une nouvelle conférence des donateurs qui doit se tenir à Abou Dhabi, fin février.

Babette Stern

Le Monde 7 FÉVRIER 2004

Elles sont médecin,
masseuse
de hammam
ou ministre,
ex-baasiste
ou de retour d'exil.
Irakiennes,
elles racontent
leur nouvelle vie,
l'insécurité et
la menace du retour
de la charia sous
un régime chiite

FEMMES DE BAGDAD



I

CI, la guerre est calme. Vapeur, chaleur, bruits des voix et de l'eau éclaboussant les corps tranquilles : c'est le monde à l'envers, celui des femmes, qui ont presque

totalement déserté les rues de Bagdad - exception faite des mendiants et, dans les quartiers chiites, des marchandes de fruits et légumes. Le hammam du quartier Mansour, à l'ouest de la capitale, a rouvert ses portes à la mi-décembre, un lundi. Deux jours, exactement, après l'arrestation de Saddam Hussein par les GI américains. Le lundi est le jour des femmes.

Trois matrones assises devant les vasques en ciment s'aspergent méthodiquement avec des gamelles en plastique, jacassant à tout va. Plus loin, une mère lave sa fille, une gosse de huit ou neuf ans dont les couettes brunes s'égayent de chouchous roses. A cette heure matinale, Asmahan, la masseuse, est encore en pleine forme.

Gymnaste de formation, elle travaille au hammam le lundi et donne des cours d'aérobic le reste de la semaine. Asmahan a vingt ans. Son patron a trouvé le filon : le hammam, au rez-de-chaussée, et la salle de sports, à l'étage, attirent de plus en plus de monde. « Les femmes sont tellement ten-

dues ! ça se sent dans leur corps, explique Asmahan. Les vieilles sont épuisées, comme si elles avaient été frappées par une maladie. Les jeunes, qui rayonnaient, ont le visage éteint. » Fermé durant des mois, le hammam reçoit surtout des femmes du quartier. Celles qui habitent loin ne viennent plus.

Amal Souaidan, 46 ans, médecin nutritionniste, fait partie des rares Irakiennes qui continuent à conduire leur voiture. Dans le salon cosu où elle accueille ses hôtes, un Coran, posé sur un présentoir, voisine avec une reproduction d'un tableau de Renoir.

Croyante, pratiquante, mais favorable à la séparation de la religion et de la politique, Amal Souaidan refuse, en revanche, de dire si elle est sunnite ou chiite : « Cela n'a aucune importance. On est musulmans et c'est tout ! », s'énervait-elle poliment. Issue d'une famille plutôt prospère, mariée à un médecin et mère de trois enfants, Amal Souaidan a dirigé en 1998 une étude sur les conséquences physiques de l'embargo sur la population féminine de Bagdad. Sur les quelque 4 600 filles et femmes que son équipe avait alors auscultées, pesées et mesurées, il est apparu que 16 % des plus jeunes, âgées de 10 à 14 ans, souffraient de « malnutrition sévère » et 41 % de « malnutrition chronique » - avec des répercussions sur leur taille notamment, « nettement en dessous de la moyenne ». La gent masculine a

été moins touchée : à la table familiale, père et fils restent les mieux servis.

Aujourd'hui, l'embargo est levé, « les gens disposent du minimum », mais les problèmes ne sont « pas résolus pour autant », estime la nutritionniste. « Les marchands de fruits et légumes, comme les bouchers, sachant que les salaires des fonctionnaires ont considérablement augmenté, ont fait grimper les prix de manière astronomique », explique-t-elle.

Sous le règne de Saddam Hussein, Amal Souaidan n'a jamais parlé politique. « Même seule dans ma chambre, je n'aurais pas osé exprimer quelque opinion que ce soit », lâche-t-elle, le sourire amer. A présent, les temps ont changé. Elle aussi. Le

Conseil des dignitaires d'Irak, créé en septembre, ne l'a pas séduite seulement parce que son époux, Jassen Al-Azzani, en est l'un des membres fondateurs, mais parce qu'elle y croit. Ce rassemblement de « l'élite » irakienne a pour but de « faire participer » cette dernière (universitaires, avocats, médecins, notables religieux, etc.) « à toutes les manifestations politiques importantes », afin de barrer la route « aux extrémismes » et de contribuer à « l'unité de l'Irak », plaide-t-elle avec fougue.

La passion militante, d'autres, comme Hanaa Edward, en ont fait l'expérience il y a longtemps. Mais elles l'ont payé au prix fort. Contrairement à Amal Souaidan, qui

renaît, Hanna Edward est une survivante. Agée de 58 ans, cette chrétienne de Bassora a été, dès la fin des années 1960, une fervente activiste de la Ligue de la femme irakienne (liée au Parti communiste). Fervente et chanceuse : sa plongée dans la clandestinité puis son exil à l'étranger lui ont permis d'échapper au pire. Sa meilleure amie, Aïda Yassin, est l'une de celles qu'elle a vu disparaître parmi les premières. Secrétaire de la Ligue de la femme irakienne, elle a été kidnappée en pleine rue, un jour de 1979. « Elle avait 35 ans. On ne l'a jamais revue », murmure Hanna Edward. Même chose pour Layla Youssef, 50 ans, pour Rajaa Majeed, 25 ans, arrêtée avec sa sœur. Ou pour Shadha Barat, pharmacienne, militante de la Ligue elle aussi. Arrêtée à son domicile avec son père et sa sœur, elle a été exécutée en 1983. « Son père et sa sœur ont été relâchés, après avoir été torturés, ajoute Hanna Edward. La sœur de Shadha est venue me rendre visite récemment. C'est une femme cassée, terrorisée. Alors que vingt ans ont passé. »

Revenue à Bassora puis à Bagdad, après plus de vingt-cinq années d'éclipse, Hanaa Edward consacre désormais son temps à l'association humanitaire Al-Amal. Juriste de formation, cette militante professionnelle peste contre les Irakiens d'aujourd'hui, les Irakiennes surtout. « *qui peuvent passer trois heures à vous raconter les hauts faits d'un guerrier arabe d'il y a dix siècles ou l'histoire de la femme du Prophète* », mais qui sont « *incapables de parler de l'histoire de l'Irak et ignorent aussi bien le mouvement des femmes des années 1970 qu'elles méconnaissent les droits que leur donne la loi* ».

« J'espère que la montée de l'islamisme ne sera que passagère et que la vague va retomber »

IMAN AL-SHUK, PEINTRE

C'est une exilée d'une autre espèce qui accepte, un samedi de la fin décembre, de nous recevoir dans son vaste bureau du ministère de la culture, où elle occupe le rang de vice-ministre. Maysoon Al-Damluji, 42 ans, a quitté l'Irak en 1981 pour Londres, où elle a fini ses études d'architecte. « Je suis revenue à Bagdad le 3 mai, explique la jeune femme aux traits énergiques, dont le téléphone portable sonne toutes les cinq minutes. En débarquant à Bagdad, je ne désirais pas militer spécialement pour les femmes. Je voulais faire de la politique », admet sans ambages madame la vice-ministre, qui représente aussi le Groupe irakien indépendant des femmes, créé à son retour d'exil. Un exil plutôt confortable, elle ne le nie pas, et très modérément militant. Membre du Club arabe de Londres, Maysoon Al-Damluji assure avoir « *participé de temps en temps* » à certaines réunions de féministes irakiennes et avoir été à l'initiative de manifestations culturelles – « *de poésie et de théâtre* » notamment.

Ce n'est pourtant pas le nom de Maysoon Al-Damluji, mais celui de sa collègue Nasreen Barawi, ministre des travaux publics au sein du gouvernement provisoire, qui a été cité, à la mi-janvier, dans la presse irakienne et étrangère. Plusieurs cen-

taines de femmes, Nasreen Barawi en tête, ont en effet manifesté dans les rues de Bagdad, pour protester contre un projet de code de la famille particulièrement rétrograde, que l'administration américaine semble prête à négocier avec le clergé chiite, mené par l'ayatollah Al-Sistani – lui-même polygame et favorable à la charia. Lancée le 20 janvier à l'initiative de l'Organisation

pour la liberté des femmes en Irak, une pétition, internationale (PetitionOnline.com/OWFI/petition.html) dénonce ce projet « *liberticide, misogyne et antimoderne* ». Selon les pétitionnaires irakiennes, le port du voile et la « *ségrégation sexuelle dans les lieux publics* » seraient ainsi rendus obligatoires, tandis que la polygamie deviendrait la norme, de même que la lapidation des femmes présumées adultères ou l'interdiction pour la population féminine de se déplacer librement.

De famille chiite, Iman Al-Shuk, peintre et sculptrice, n'a jamais porté le hidjab – contrairement à ses sœurs. C'est tête nue, le visage légèrement maquillé, que la jeune femme reçoit ses hôtes, en leur offrant une

décoction de *noumi bass'ra*, ces citrons séchés et fumés, spécialité de la région de Bassora. Mariée au peintre et galeriste Qasim Alsabti, Iman Al-Shuk a commencé très tôt à peindre et à dessiner.

Son père, un commerçant de Kerbala, aimait lui-même faire des tableaux en amateur. Il ne dédaignait pas non plus de boire du vin. Sa mère, originaire de Nadjaf, était en revanche une personne « *très pieuse* ». Goût du vin excepté, Iman Al-Shuk, 40 ans, tiendrait plutôt de son père. « *J'espère que*

la montée de l'islamisme ne sera que passagère et que la vague va retomber », dit-elle.

Crise économique et violences obligent, la jeune femme s'occupe elle-même de la maison et des enfants, deux garçons et une fille. « *Avant la guerre [l'entrée des GI dans Bagdad, en avril], j'avais une femme de ménage et je pouvais peindre, sans me soucier de rien, jusqu'au retour des enfants de l'école, regrette-t-elle. Aujourd'hui, les prix ont triplé. On n'a plus les moyens de s'offrir une femme de ménage. Et même si on pouvait, elle aurait trop peur de venir, à cause des attentats et de l'insécurité.* » Privé de téléphone, comme l'immense majorité des Bagdadis, le couple Alsabti-Al-Shuk (en Irak, les femmes mariées gardent leur nom de jeune fille) est adepte du « système D ». Il jongle, s'entête, survit. Plutôt moins mal que d'autres. Iman Al-Shuk vend ses tableaux « *entre 150 et 200 dollars* » pièce. A l'époque de Saddam, les peintres, hommes ou femmes, avaient « *la vie plutôt facile* », souligne Iman Al-Shuk, rappelant que les artistes avaient même « *droit à un salaire, s'ils le souhaitaient* ». L'idée de se déguiser, à présent que la page est tournée, en martyre du régime baasiste ne l'effleure pas. Iman Al-Shuk est un oiseau rare. « *Les seuls cadavres que j'aie vus dans ma vie, c'était à la télévision* », dit-elle.

CONTRAIREMENT à Amal Souaidan, Iman Al-Shuk a « *peur de sortir seule* ». A cause des explosions de mines, bien sûr. A cause des militaires américains, aussi, « *qui tirent sur tout ce qui bouge* ». A cause, surtout, de la montée de la criminalité – dont femmes et enfants sont les premières victimes. « *On a un ami photographe dont le fils de 15 ans a été enlevé sur le chemin de l'école. Les kidnappeurs ont demandé 15 000 dollars, raconte la jeune femme. Notre ami a vendu sa voiture, tout ce qu'il avait. Il a expliqué aux rançonneurs qu'il ne pouvait pas donner plus de 5 000 dollars. Mais les types se sont entêtés. Ils veulent toujours 15 000 dollars. Cela s'est passé il y a quinze jours, et notre ami n'a toujours pas revu son fils.* » Le risque des enlèvements, nombreux, semble-t-il, durant les premiers mois qui ont suivi la chute du régime, reste la hantise des Bagdadis. Et pas seulement des Bagdadis aisés. Une étude remarquable, réalisée dans la capitale irakienne entre le 27 mai et le 20 juin 2003 par l'association américaine Human Rights Watch, analyse les cas de plusieurs femmes et jeunes filles kidnappées et violées par des gangs et montre à quel point le « *climat de peur* » qui règne depuis lors a vidé les rues de Bagdad, mais aussi les bureaux, les ateliers, et même certaines écoles, de leur population féminine. Lutter contre les crimes commis à l'encontre des femmes demeure très difficile, « *non seulement parce que le viol est un sujet tabou, mais aussi, insiste Hania Mufti, responsable du bureau irakien d'Human Rights Watch, parce que, aux yeux de la police, des juges et, plus largement, de la société, le viol d'une femme n'est pas un vrai crime, c'est un acte qui relève de la vie privée* ».

Plantée derrière ses montagnes d'oranges, Khadija, vendeuse au marché Aldakhil, dans le quartier populaire de Sadr City – l'un des fiefs chiites des faubourgs de Bagdad – s'esclaffe : « *Chez nous, les hommes se battent pour un rien. C'est pour ça que je préfère me déplacer seule, sans mes frères : avant, quand ils m'accompagnaient, il y avait toujours des bagarres.* » Ici, ce sont les femmes, toutes voilées de noir, qui règnent sur les étals. Fawzia, qui ne sait pas vraiment son âge – « *entre 45 et 50 ans ?* » –, n'a pas l'air effrayé non plus. Des histoires de voyous, elle en connaît, bien sûr.

Elle cite l'exemple d'un de ses cousins, tué récemment à coups de pistolet, alors qu'il rentrait à la maison « *avec 4 millions de dinars* » sur lui. Le mari de Fawzia s'approche et finit l'histoire pour elle : « *Ceux qui ont fait le coup, on les connaît, lance-t-il. Ils étaient cinq, et vous pouvez nous faire confiance !, on va les tuer tous, un à un, on n'a pas besoin de la police* », promet-il en riant. Fawzia aussi veut bien poser pour la photo. Issue d'une famille pauvre, elle n'est pas allée à l'école. « *Mon père ne voulait pas* », explique-t-elle simplement. Ses quatre filles à elle, en revanche, vont en classe – « *et j'aimerais bien qu'elles aillent le plus loin possible* », dit-elle, avec un air de défi.

Au hammam du quartier Mansour, Asma-han a fini sa journée. Il est 15 heures. Elle est épuisée : « *Depuis qu'on a rouvert, il y a de plus en plus de monde. Et je suis seule pour faire les massages...* » Mais ce n'est pas des masseuses supplémentaires que son patron embauche : guerre aidant, six gardiens ont été recrutés pour veiller sur les lieux.

Catherine Simon

Bush: «Je suis un Président de guerre»

Face aux attaques des démocrates, le président américain a justifié le conflit en Irak.

New York de notre correspondant

George W. Bush contre-attaque. Mis à mal par la polémique sur les apparentes défaillances des services de renseignements américains en Irak, sous le feu incessant des démocrates en cette année électorale, le Président a choisi, hier, l'émission *Meet the Press* sur NBC pour justifier l'intervention contre Bagdad

«Saddam Hussein était dangereux. Il avait, au minimum, la capacité de fabriquer des armes de destruction massive.»

George W. Bush

et défendre son bilan. Interrogé par le journaliste Tim Russert, qui lui a demandé si «la guerre [valait] bien la vie de 530 Américains», Bush a marqué une pause. «Il est essentiel que j'explique clairement [mes motifs] aux parents de ceux qui sont tombés [...] Saddam Hussein était dangereux. Il avait, au minimum, la capacité de fabriquer des armes de destruction massive». Plus tard, Bush a parlé d'une «guerre de nécessité», estimant qu'il n'avait pas le choix et que Saddam était une «menace». «Je suis un Président de guerre», a-t-il encore lancé, se présentant comme le protecteur de l'Amérique. Avant de conclure, très incisif, qu'il ne prévoyait «pas de perdre» l'élection présidentielle de novembre.

Offensive. En plus de trois ans de mandat, c'est la première fois que George W. Bush décide d'intervenir dans l'un des fameux talk-shows politiques

du dimanche. Durant une heure de discussion, enregistrée, samedi, dans le bureau Oval, le Président a choisi le ton de l'offensive. Revenant sur son annonce, vendredi, de la création d'une commission d'enquête chargée de déterminer si la CIA avait fait des erreurs en estimant que l'Irak possédait des armes de destruction massive (ADM), il a affirmé qu'il était «important que l'enquête prenne son temps». Critiqué pour avoir annoncé que les experts ne rendraient pas leurs travaux

avant mars 2005, soit bien après le scrutin présidentiel, Bush a poursuivi: «Oui, bien sûr, on va m'accuser d'essayer d'échapper à mes responsabilités [...] Mais les Américains auront largement le temps d'évaluer si j'ai pris ou non la bonne décision en renversant Saddam Hussein. Et j'attends avec impatience ce débat.» Bush, qui a par ailleurs renouvelé sa confiance au directeur de la CIA, George Tenet, a précisé qu'il ne savait pas quand Oussama ben Laden serait capturé. Tout en défendant sa politique économique et ses baisses d'impôt.

L'intervention sur le petit écran n'est bien sûr pas due au hasard. Ces derniers jours, la Maison Blanche laissait filtrer que «le Président [avait] envie de s'exprimer publiquement».

Doutes. Depuis le témoignage, il y a deux semaines, de David Kay, le chef démissionnaire

du groupe d'inspection à Bagdad, qui a affirmé que les services américains s'étaient «trompés» sur les ADM, l'Irak s'est encore invité au cœur de la campagne pour la présidentielle. De nombreux sondages ont montré que les Américains avaient de plus en plus de doutes sur la façon dont

l'administration avait géré le dossier irakien. Et samedi, deux nouveaux sondages publiés par *Time* et *Newsweek* se sont révélés très négatifs pour le Président. Selon *Newsweek*, la cote de popularité de Bush a chuté à 48%. Surtout, à l'évocation d'un scrutin, aujourd'hui, entre le Président et le candidat démocrate John Kerry, les personnes interrogées accordent l'avantage au sénateur du Massachusetts (50% des voix contre 45%). *Time*, de son côté, donne Bush gagnant, mais par une marge infime (50% contre 48%). Autant d'enquêtes d'opinion qui commencent à inquiéter les

républicains, alors que John Kerry s'installe chaque semaine un peu plus dans la peau du futur adversaire démocrate. «Jours comptés». Une nouvelle fois ce week-end, le sénateur a dominé tous les autres candidats pour remporter le caucus du Michigan et la primaire de l'Etat de Washington. Kerry, qui devrait également sortir vainqueur d'une primaire dans le Maine, hier, n'a pas attendu longtemps avant de lancer ses attaques les plus incisives. «Tout cela ne signifie qu'une seule chose:

les jours de Bush à la Maison Blanche sont comptés», a-t-il assuré, avant de dénoncer violemment «un agenda extrémiste qui ne profite qu'aux riches». Choissant de ne pas répondre, George W. Bush s'est, lui, contenté de déclarer à *Meet the Press* que Kerry n'était «pas encore le candidat nommé». Pressé de dire pourquoi il avait l'image d'un Président qui divise l'Amérique, Bush a déclaré ne pas savoir. «Mais je ne vais pas changer ma façon de gouverner.» Et d'assurer encore qu'il avait «une vision pour ce pays et pour mener ce monde vers plus de paix et de liberté». ◆

FABRICE ROUSSELOT

9 FÉVRIER 2004



L'Otan en route vers l'Irak... sous condition

L'Alliance est prête à s'engager si un gouvernement irakien légitime le lui demande.

A petits pas, l'Otan prend le chemin de l'Irak. «Si un gouvernement irakien légitime demande notre aide et si nous avons le soutien de l'ONU, l'Otan ne doit pas renoncer à ses responsabilités» pour jouer un rôle dans ce pays, a déclaré, samedi, le secrétaire général de l'Alliance atlantique, Jaap De Hoop Scheffer. L'engagement des structures militaires de l'Otan en Irak a fait l'objet de nombreuses discussions, ce

week-end à Munich (Allemagne), où de nombreux ministres de la Défense participaient à la *Wehrkunde*, la conférence internationale sur la sécurité.

«Scepticisme profond». «Les Etats-Unis estiment que l'Otan peut et devrait jouer un rôle plus important en Irak», avait lancé, dès vendredi, le secrétaire à la Défense Donald Rumsfeld. Malgré son «scepticisme profond» et

le refus d'engager des troupes, le ministre allemand des Affaires étrangères, Joschka Fischer, a averti que son pays «ne va pas bloquer un consensus au sein de l'Otan». Autre opposant à la guerre, la France reste réservée. «Il n'est pas question que l'Otan effectue une mission sous le commandement d'un pays de

l'Alliance», a affirmé la ministre de la Défense, Michèle Alliot-Marie, en l'occurrence

les Etats-Unis. «*Nous n'avons eu aucune discussion sur un consensus émergent*» autour de cette affaire, a-t-elle ajouté. Mais rien ne presse. Un gouvernement légitime ne verra pas le jour en Irak avant le 1^{er} juillet 2004. La France et l'Allemagne, qui ont déjà proposé de participer à la formation de la police et de l'armée irakiennes, pourraient alors laisser l'Otan s'impliquer aux côtés des Améri-

cains.

Capacités modestes. En Irak, l'Otan devrait surtout être sollicitée pour fournir des capacités de commandement. Si Américains et Britanniques se débrouillent tout seuls dans leur secteur, il n'en va pas de même de la division confiée à la Pologne et à l'Espagne, deux pays à capacités militaires modestes. D'où le besoin d'un état-major capable de commander une coalition comprenant Nicaraguayens, Ukrainiens, Lettons ou Mongols.

Les Etats-Unis souhaitent aussi une implication plus importante de l'Otan en Afghanistan, où elle est déjà chargée de l'Isaf, la force d'assistance à la sécurité à Kaboul. Sollicités, les Européens traînent les pieds, faute de troupes en nombre suffisant. Décision essentiellement symbolique, l'état-major de l'Eurocorps pourrait prendre le commandement de l'Isaf dans les prochains mois. ♦

JEAN-DOMINIQUE MERCHET

Defending the Iraq campaign

President George W. Bush and his top national security officials spent the week in an increasingly desperate attempt to defend themselves from the damaging conclusion by David Kay, the president's former chief weapons inspector, that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction on the eve of the American-led invasion. None of them succeeded. The strained remarks by Secretary of State Colin Powell, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and George Tenet, the director of central intelligence, fell far short of vindicating the way Bush rushed the United States into war without international support. So did President Bush's own attempt to mount a defense of the war in a speech in South Carolina on Thursday.

The saddest spectacle was Powell, who had argued the case for using force against Iraq before the United Nations, based largely on intelligence that now appears to have been wrong. In an interview with The Washington Post on Monday, Powell said he was not sure that he would have recommended an invasion had he known that Iraq did not have stockpiles of banned weapons. The next day, in remarks coordinated with the White House, he quickly retreated and said, "The president made the right decision." We have seen Powell do this before. He does not make himself look better by dropping hints about his true feelings and then scurrying back to the loyal soldier's position when scolded by the White House.

Rumsfeld, whose department was one of the most hawkish proponents of the invasion, took refuge in the hope that banned weapons might yet be found in Iraq, a large nation with many potential hiding places. Rumsfeld told Congress that it was "possible, but not likely" that Iraq had not had weapons of mass destruction at the start of the

war. He suggested that weapons might have been shipped to another country, destroyed just before the invasion or buried somewhere in Iraq. Those possibilities have largely been discounted by Kay. They are precisely the kind of unfounded speculation that got us into this intelligence mess. About all Rumsfeld conceded was misspeaking when he said before the war that "we know" where Iraq's banned weapons were stored. He needs to admit that we don't know that there ever were any weapons.

In the most ballyhooed presentation of all, Tenet made a spirited but ultimately inadequate defense of the pre-war intelligence estimates in a hurriedly arranged appearance at Georgetown University on Thursday. He argued that intelligence is almost

never completely right or wrong. Tenet said his provisional assessment was that the consensus intelligence report before the war had mostly been right about Iraq's missile programs but might have overestimated Iraq's progress on nuclear weapons. He acknowledged that nothing had been found to support the intelligence agencies' predictions about biological and chemical weapons, but argued for more time to look. In other words, the intelligence may well turn out to have been mostly wrong.

The thrust of Tenet's defense was that intelligence analysts had been justified in drawing dire conclusions about Iraq because of Saddam Hussein's history of using chemical weapons, his repeated lying, the inability to confirm that Iraq had destroyed previously known stockpiles of chemical and biological agents, and a stream of reports from human agents, satellite photos and communications intercepts, all suggesting that Iraq might have been hiding banned weapons. That defense will not wash. It may ex-

plain the worst-case mind-set of many analysts, but can hardly justify the egregious overestimates of Iraqi capabilities.

Tenet's speech seemed mostly intended to ward off attacks on the intelligence community, including a reportedly critical brief now being prepared in Congress. He noted that the analysts had never said Iraq posed an imminent threat, had judged that Iraq was several years away from making a nuclear weapon and had always spelled out their areas of disagreement. Those sounded like warning shots against scapegoating the intelligence community for exaggerations made by higher-ups who were pushing for war.

No doubt there will be plenty of blame to go around when all the investigations are completed. It is hard to imagine that anyone's bottom line would be a continued administration of the nation's intelligence agencies by George Tenet.

Finally, Bush acknowledged Thursday that "we have not yet found the stockpiles of weapons that we thought were there," but he insisted that "America did the right thing in Iraq" because Hussein had used weapons of mass destruction in the past and had been intent on making more. "We cannot wait to confront the threats of the world," he said, pledging to "protect and defend this country by taking the fight to the enemy." After everything the public has learned in the last week, it's unnerving to hear the president continue to defend the idea of pre-emptive strikes based on unverified suppositions.

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RACING THE CLOCK IN IRAQ

Our intel about what the postwar scene would look like was wrong, too. Now Paul Bremer, America's modern-day MacArthur, has only five more months to make it all work.

BY MICHAEL HIRSH

WHAT'S NEXT?" IT'S JERRY BREMER'S mantra, his passion. Dreamy visions for Iraq's future, once so much part of the war rhetoric in Washington, only irk him at this late stage. "Schedule, schedule, schedule—that's what I want," Bremer raps out. "I want benchmarks for the number of days. I need a chart of what tasks are falling behind." There are so many tasks. He's training Iraq's new police, civil-defense force and Army. He's creating village councils, an anticorruption agency and inspector-general offices. Hospitals, schools and sewage lines. In all, an astonishing 17,500 projects so far.

A bomb nearby rattles the doors to his dusty office; Bremer doesn't flinch. What's next? Farms—a wheat shortfall looms. Power—Iraq's diesel inventory, which he checks every morning, is low. Bremer's just returned from the United Nations, where he humbly ate the Bush administration's crow and asked Secretary-General Kofi Annan's help to quell Shiite demands for direct elections. Next he must meet the Kurds; they want autonomy in the north, and he's pushing for a deal. What's next? "You've got a few minutes for lunch, sir,"

says an adjutant, delivering a Styrofoam plate from the Army mess to his desk. Bremer gulps down the glutinous chicken and rice, staring into the blue light of his computer screen. He doesn't seem to pay attention to the food; all he's aware of consuming these days is time. He has so little of it. He's obsessed with compressing the time left to him, grinding it down until every minute is directed toward his goal: to build something lasting in Iraq.

And so it goes, 16 to 18 hours a day. Bremer's ultrasecure command post in Sad-

dam's old imperial-palace complex at the heart of Baghdad is a beehive of true believers: military officers, civilian aides, defense contractors and CIA officials who stream in and out of his small office. The 3,000 staffers in his Coalition Provisional Authority get to swim in Saddam's pool, but otherwise live a spartan existence; many sleep in a large dorm, with double-decker beds, men and women mixed together, housed in Saddam's cavernous "Decision Room." That's the place where the dictator once informed officers if they would live or die. The question is, will





America's efforts to remake Iraq live on—or die off once Bremer leaves? To find out, NEWSWEEK recently gained access to Bremer's inner sanctum, spending a week sitting in on his meetings, flying with him to Mosul as he oversaw a graduation class of Iraq's new Civil Defense Corps.

Presently a new team enters the office of Iraq's civil administrator, his democracy task force, the project closest to his heart. Bremer notes he's giving the teaching teams some \$450 million, nearly five times what they were budgeted; he talks about bringing in

INTO THE FRAY Bremer spends his 18-hour days under heavier protection than the president—even to go to the bathroom

local U.S. battalion and brigade commanders. "You've got basically nothing in this area!" he says, scanning a printout. He asks if there is "an escape clause" in the contract being given to the U.S. company that's doing the democracy promotion because "it very well may be that the U.N. takes over." The Iraqi electricity minister pops in, and Bremer, with his usual genteel good humor, ad-

monishes him for making wild predictions about megawatt increases in the country's still-flickering power supply (even now, Baghdad blacks out several times a day). Though he's careful not to flaunt it, Bremer controls everything down to Iraqi ministers' travel plans. "We're both going to get run out of town if you keep doing that," Bremer says. "What do we care?" the minister jokes, "we're both going to lose our jobs anyway."

That is true. On June 30 Bremer will hand over sovereignty to a new Iraqi government, and he doesn't even know yet how it's going to

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be chosen. But for the moment the 62-year-old, a onetime marathoner and triathlete who looks a good 10 years younger, is effectively America's viceroy here, with vast powers of the kind last wielded by Douglas MacArthur in Japan. And the success or failure of George W. Bush's faltering adventure in Iraq—and America's future stature in the Arab world—hangs very much on what he does in the interim. Bremer can move \$100 million around on a whim (anything more, and he has to check with Congress). "It's like being a president, a governor, a CEO and a general all wrapped in one," says his top aide Dan Senor. And as the months have passed, the insurgency has raged and the Bush administration's hopeful vision for Iraq has dimmed, Bremer has shown less and less patience for the "spider's cage" of bickering bureaucrats in Washington who want to noodle every contract. He simply doesn't have the time for it. "I can't have someone back in Washington telling me not to build a hospital in Basra but to do an irrigation project in Mosul," Bremer tells an aide. "You want to do that, you've got to get out here. We've got a flak jacket with your name on it."

Resolutely on his side, he knows, is President Bush's national-security adviser and alter ego, Condoleezza Rice, with whom he confers nearly every day on the red secure phone in his office. (He talks with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld less, about three times a week.) "He's doing a heroic job," Rice told *NEWSWEEK*, adding that her own role is to break through bottlenecks for him. It was Bremer who, with the White House's backing, demanded the \$18.6 billion for Iraq's reconstruction (the rest of the \$87 billion was for the military). Why? Because after a few months on the ground Bremer realized it was time to dispense with the pretense in Washington that this wasn't nation-building from the ground up. The official rhetoric is that the Iraqi people are choosing their own course to democracy. In fact, America is trying to create a brand-new Iraq.

As a result, Bremer may have the toughest job in the world right now. Consider: the fabled MacArthur, the "American Caesar," took seven years to remake Japan. John McCloy, the High Commissioner who reconstituted post-Hitler Germany, took three years, coming on top of four years of military rule. Bremer has just five months to go. And

whereas Japan was already unified, Bremer is trying to build a new Iraq by abruptly reversing the divide-and-rule course that Saddam brutally pursued for 35 years. He must meld together fractious Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds in a backward economy with a jobless rate still at 30 to 40 percent (about half what it was after the war, by Bremer's latest estimate), and in a region of the world where bordering nations, like Iran and Syria, are constantly interfering. Henry Kissinger, who's made diplomatic history himself, says the task his onetime protégé is engaged in (Bremer was his chief of staff and managed

his own in the West Wing. Bremer is ringed by concentric circles of blast walls, razor wire and chicanes (zigzagging concrete blocks to slow vehicles) in a four-square-mile area called the Green Zone that is crawling with troops and armored vehicles. Still, so grave is the risk of infiltration by insurgents and terrorists (disguised as one of the many Iraqi workers at the CPA) that even inside that protective bubble, Bremer must be accompanied by four fierce-looking bodyguards armed with Bushmaster rifles when he needs to use the restroom 20 feet from his office. It's not the kind of thing that MacArthur had to worry about.

None of this was expected when Bush launched his war, saying Americans would be welcomed as liberators. Perhaps the best measure of the failure so far of the administration's grand neocon vision is that while Americans are now spending hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars on Iraq, they'll find no gratitude here. Few Iraqis can admit, even to their family or friends, that they are working for a U.S. company, much less the CPA. The reason: they would be shunned or killed. Despite Saddam's capture on Dec. 13, the insurgency persists. It is now inseparable from the occupation itself, fueled by deep resentment of Americans and their foreign and Iraqi collaborators. Just last Friday there were 35 attacks, nearly as many as occurred daily in the worst month before the capture. For Iraqis hungry for the vision Bush promised, after

ter nearly 11 months of chaos, it's all too slow, too violent, too brutal at the hands of U.S. soldiers who can detain them arbitrarily, and often do. To correct that, Bremer is engaged in what he says is the fastest police-training program in history (85,000 new trainees in a year). But meanwhile the daily killings, humiliations and power outages have created a sense among Iraqis that the Americans have bungled things.

Yet Bremer and his sleep-starved team believe the vision of a new, stable ally in the Mideast is not only achievable, but still likely. Bremer's hope is that the June 30 handover and the withdrawal of U.S. troops to bases outside the cities will blunt the insurgency; someday perhaps, he says, Iraqis will come to remember their liberation more fondly. Now he has a more immediate concern: the one thing that *hasn't* happened in postwar Iraq, except in isolat-



WHEN HE MEETS WITH IRAQI JOURNALISTS, HE IS MOBBED BY REPORTERS WHO SEEM AQUIVER WITH ADULATION

his firm, Kissinger Associates) "is unprecedented." Bremer's job is "much harder" than MacArthur's, says Kissinger. "I can't think of many situations in which there were so many moving parts. And so many conflicting pressures that had to be resolved in so little time ... Secondly, in Japan there was no challenge to legitimacy of the occupation. It was basically accepted."

The lack of a sense of legitimacy—both in Iraq and the international community—is Bremer's most fundamental problem at the moment. First, it means his life is in constant danger as an occupier. Bremer's safety is more closely guarded than that of his boss back in Washington, George W. Bush. The president, at least, can go to the bathroom on

ed cases—ethnic and sectarian fighting.

Bremer is urgently dealing with a growing Shiite rebellion over the issue of whether the new transitional assembly set to accept sovereignty will be elected or chosen by caucuses of elites, his plan. Suddenly he desperately needs the approval of Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani of Najaf, the Shiite cleric who commands much more prestige than the administrator. Sistani, knowing the Shiites represent a majority, wants national elections. The Sunni minority doesn't, and it is fomenting the Iraqi insurgency. The Kurds, meanwhile, want to wait on elections until they can "normalize"—return Kurds to areas that Saddam cleaned out. Bremer's task is to give Sistani something that sounds like elections while allaying Sunni and Kurd fears of disenfranchisement. Bremer hopes that a U.N. team now here will affirm the U.S. view that elections are impossible before handover, because of the lack of voter registration, census data and so on, allowing Sistani a face-saving way out. And he says that contrary to reports Sistani refuses to deal with him, the two have "been communicating since May." But NEWSWEEK has learned that Sistani is planning a new obstacle: a committee of his own that will dissect the United Nations' findings, possibly causing more delays.

Most of today's headaches predate Bremer's arrival in mid-May. Poor planning and Rumsfeld's insistence on cutting, by about half, the 400,000-man invasion force the brass wanted for Iraq resulted in rampant looting and unsecured caches of weapons, now used by insurgents. But Bremer has made some misjudgments. He has relied too much on slow-moving American contractors. Bremer has also been obsessed with the model of postwar Germany; he carries around a timeline labeled MILESTONES: IRAQ AND GERMANY, and insisted on pursuing that approach—a new constitution guaranteeing rights first, elections second, and only then sovereignty. But he failed to gauge rising Shiite demands for national elections and the rage the occupation would engender. When the Shiites stymied his attempts to draft a constitution, he had to publicly retreat on Nov. 15, announcing that sovereignty would be granted first. "Both Germany and Japan were defeated nations," Bremer says now. "In a psycho-

logical way, the people understood they'd gone into total war and been defeated ... The difference here is, what was defeated was a regime, and the Iraqi people have quite understandably a distaste for the occupation."

And yet there remains a paradox in Iraqi attitudes that Bremer still hopes to exploit in orchestrating a happy transition to Iraqi control under a U.S. defense umbrella (essentially the outcome in postwar Japan and Germany). For many Iraqis, the deepest fear now is civil war. Most can't live with the occupation, but few can imagine living without it, or at least a strong U.S. military pres-

the main issue.) If he succeeds, then the much-fabled virtuous cycle of Arab reform so touted by the hawks could get underway, and Bremer could well end up as Bush's second-term secretary of State. Rice, asked about that prospect, laughed and responded, "Jerry can do just about anything." The president is deeply fond of Bremer, administration sources say, and Colin Powell plans to leave. TO JERRY, THE RIGHT MAN FOR A BIG JOB, reads Bush's scrawled inscription on the photo of the two of them, which sits atop a shelf in Bremer's plainly furnished office. Is Bremer the right man? "If anyone can pull it off," says Kissinger, "he can."

Most Iraqis living today have known only two leaders: Saddam Hussein, an unlettered mass murderer from Tikrit who misspent his nation's great wealth, and L. Paul Bremer III, a patrician diplomat from Connecticut who today yearns to do a "Rip Van Winkle" and sleep for three months at his weekend retreat in Vermont. The only thing the two leaders have had in common is near-absolute power, and a certain remoteness from the public eye. So when Iraqis actually meet Bremer, the man who effectively replaced Saddam, their culture shock is palpable. Saddam probably never said to a Kurdish leader, as Bremer did last week, "Let me take your coat."

Though he's sometimes accused of arrogance in policy circles, especially at the United Nations, Bremer seems to have an antibody to personal hubris. Where Saddam erected giant portraits of himself and had feasts set for him at every palace every day, Bremer often stands in line in his mess, and hates publicity. Last week, when he ventured out to meet Iraqi journalists—something he regularly does to win public support (while largely ignoring the U.S. media encamped here)—Bremer was mobbed by the reporters, who seemed almost aquiver with adulation. Seeking souvenir photos, several of them fought for a position next to him, arguing over whose camera would be used. (Although these same journalists would not dare praise him once out of the Green Zone.) Later the Iraqis said they were amazed by his humility. "Iraqis like you, Mr. Bremer," one local reporter gushed. "The ones that aren't trying to kill me," Bremer shot back, grinning.

It does seem odd that anyone would want to kill this genial, good-humored man. A de-



POWER PLAY: Ayatollah Sistani insists that the transitional government be elected directly, which would favor the Shiites

BREMER RECOGNIZES THAT HE IS ALREADY ENTERING A KIND OF LAME-DUCK PERIOD, AS SISTANI HAS MADE CLEAR

ence. The key will be to make it less in-your-face, even as permanent-looking bases in Iraq are being erected. "Prior to the regime's fall, my feeling was that civil war would be a very remote possibility," Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani told NEWSWEEK in an interview last week. "Now I think it will take very little to start one. If Coalition forces leave, we could be only 24 hours away."

For Bremer and for America, the stakes could not be higher. If he fails and Iraq begins coming apart after he leaves, America will face a terror-generating black hole in the Mideast for decades to come. Other nations like Saudi Arabia and Egypt are likely to be destabilized. (And Bush could possibly lose in November, in a race in which Iraq could be

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vout Roman Catholic (his nickname, Jerry, comes from his patron saint, Jerome), Bremer has framed on his desk, right next to his computer, a Latin inscription that is his life's guiding principle. *NON SUM DIGNUS*: "I am not worthy." It's what a Catholic says at mass before receiving the host. "What is significant about it is that every Catholic says it, even the pope," he says. Raised in New Canaan, Conn., the son of a wealthy international businessman, Bremer studied history at Yale and later, like the president, went to Harvard Business School. Unsure about entering business or government, he heeded his father's invocation of noblesse oblige. He argued "you ought to give something back in public service," Bremer says, adding almost apologetically, "It sounds trite these days..." Bremer joined the State Department, fell into Kissinger's orbit, and then it was 23 years and a couple of ambassadorships before "I came to my senses," he says, and went into business. Since then he's kept mostly a low profile, but in 2000 Bremer coauthored a now widely cited report that predicted terrorist attacks on America, earning him his stripes as a post-9/11 hawk.

Bremer doesn't seem to care about the political storms back in Washington. Asked if he's a neocon like his old friend Paul Wolfowitz, he notes he's a lifelong Republican and says with a smile, "I'm a con-con." Bremer, his aides say, simply doesn't read most of the raging Beltway commentary on Iraq. Questioned about what the commentariat widely considers his biggest mistake, the demobilization of the Army, Bremer insists that the media have erred in reporting that he did not hand out stipends. "The two most popular things I've done since I've been here are the de-Baathification decree—which stands head and shoulders above everything else—and the disbanding of the Army." Perhaps some of the vast number of gun-toting ex-soldiers set adrift did join the insurgency. But he insists the move also reassured disaffected Shiites and Kurds that they will never again suffer from Saddam's Baathists. The Iraqis' belief that "the new Iraqi Army is designed not to interfere in internal affairs" might even help to avert civil war, he says.

To his credit, Bremer has evolved. He has a

"legalistic mind-set," says one Iraqi Governing Council member, who, while frustrated at Bremer's stubbornness, admires him. As recently as a month ago Bremer was still insisting on caucuses, rigidly hewing to the Nov. 15 agreement. But "in the Arab world the agreement is *not* the agreement. We keep changing as we go along," says the Council member. "Welcome to Iraq." Now he's willing to finesse the issue, broadening the caucus idea in favor of something that might be more like a local referendum or a partial election. The book

flanking Sistani's power bid. Hence his intense push to hold town-hall meetings and local caucuses, even though officially his caucus idea is suspended pending the United Nations' finding on whether elections are feasible. Now Bremer must fight a rear-guard action as well: jittery suggestions back in Washington that America skip selection of a new transitional assembly altogether and simply hand off to the IGC. But that would almost certainly not be accepted as a legitimate government—the Bremer-appointed

IGC is widely seen as a collection of U.S. stooges. Still, Bush is so intent on that date (coming as it does before the GOP convention) that Bremer cannot dismiss the idea of a handover to the Governing Council.

Meanwhile Bremer is nurturing Iraqi civil society with an accumulation of small steps: he's forming professional and trade associations in major cities, on the theory that this way doctors will identify themselves as doctors and not as Kurds or Shiites. Soon to be announced is that Iraq will field seven teams in the 2004 Olympics. The restoration of symbols of a return to the community of nations—a national soccer team, the Iraqi symphony, new Iraqi Fulbright scholars—is a big Bremer theme, his way of trying to fend off the sense of societal doom many Iraqis feel as they flirt with civil

war. Last week another Bremer pet project, a new Commission of Public Integrity to battle endemic corruption, was handed off to Governing Council member Adnan Pachachi to announce.

Bremer is never short of new ideas. Surely one of the strangest conversations to take place in an Army Black Hawk helicopter occurred last week between Bremer and the outgoing commander of the 101st Airborne in the north, Maj. Gen. David Petraeus, who is rotating out this week. Bremer launched into his latest passion: Iraqi Court TV. He's already nationalizing Petraeus's "Mosul's Most Wanted" TV show to get locals to call in with tips on insurgents. Even U.S. TV host John Walsh is helping. "If we have that, we might as well follow it with Court TV," said Bremer, only half-joking. "Maybe we can have a perp walk." No idea seems too small or too silly to the man who holds Iraq's future in his hands but must soon yield it up to an unready nation. Not when he has so little time left. ■



RUNNING OUT OF TIME: Despite seemingly intractable problems, Bremer and his team still believe Iraq can be saved

BREMER YEARNS TO DO A 'RIP VAN WINKLE' AND SLEEP FOR THREE MONTHS AT HIS WEEKEND RETREAT

that sits closest to his desk is the Qur'an. He studies Arabic in every spare moment, flipping through flashcards on transport planes, quoting the Prophet Muhammad reverently in speeches with the proper invocation, "Peace be upon him." Ultimately he recognizes that he is already entering a kind of lame-duck period, as Sistani has made clear. "Bremer wants to glue the Iraqis together, but his glue is not very strong right now," notes IGC member Mahmoud Othman.

Bremer thinks he can still make things stick together by the time he departs. His overriding goal is to leave behind so many new institutions by June 30 that the forces of integration overtake the chaos. He's trying to create facts on the ground that will engender a powerful demand for sovereignty, out-

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He was the most dangerous man alive, sitting atop a massive stockpile of deadly weapons. The only way to end the gathering threat was to take Saddam out—and fast. Only there wasn't any WMD. The fateful fictions that led to war.

CAREFUL: Former WMD hunt chief Kay

WHAT WENT WRONG

BY JOHN BARRY AND MARK HOSENBALL

SADDAM HUSSEIN WAS HOLED UP IN HIS palace putting the final touches on his latest novel. His first, "Zabibah and the King," had been published in 2000 to reviews that only a dictator could get. Everyone seemed to adore the story of a righteous Iraqi king who dies, but only after restoring the honor of the beautiful Zabibah. The woman had been raped—and here's where the tricky historical allusion comes in—on Jan. 17, the day that American troops launched their 1991 offensive to drive Iraq out of Kuwait. The Iraqi National Theater was planning

FROM LEFT: ROBERTO SCHMIDT—AFP—GETTY IMAGES, MARK WILSON—GETTY IMAGES



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to turn the novel into a hit musical, the country's biggest-ever stage production. So the despot now had his own big act to follow. His second masterpiece, called "Al-Qala-ah Al-Hasinah," or "The Fortified Castle," also concerned a fierce battle between good and evil—"without boring details," Iraqi television had reported.

No writer likes to be disturbed. But so much was going on at the time: the United Nations was demanding greater access to Saddam's palaces, George W. Bush had declared Iraq part of an "Axis of Evil," the United States was pushing for war. Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, who routinely consulted Saddam about U.N. demands, found that his boss was often distracted by his latest literary effort. When the subject did turn to weapons, the dictator seemed dangerously out of touch. As early as 2000, Saddam became convinced there was a loophole in United Nations resolutions—that long-range missiles were proscribed only if they were loaded with weapons of mass destruction. All of Saddam's top aides knew better, but they were terrified of contradicting the dictator. The illegal missile program went ahead.

Saddam's rich fantasy life extended to another weapons program. David Kay, head of the Iraq Survey Group tasked with finding Iraq's WMD after the war, told NEWSWEEK that Saddam was obsessed with building a system that could shoot down U.S. stealth aircraft. He "kept handing out money," says Kay, to scientists and military officers who claimed to be developing new techniques for spotting stealth planes. Many of the schemes were Potemkin projects that existed largely in the imaginations of the officials promoting them. Saddam would give away new cars to the inventor with the most ingenious idea; the more elaborate the invention, the fancier the car. Scientists and officials involved in wacky programs shared payoffs or tacitly blackmailed one another to ensure their programs weren't exposed as empty shells.

Saddam's real masterwork—the edifice of fear that had ensured his power for decades—was decaying beneath him. An air of decadence and decline had spread among the elite, and small to middling officials were trying to take what they could for themselves. But nobody could tell the dictator, because virtually everyone was implicated.

It seems that nobody told President Bush or his senior advisers, either. Saddam was more than just evil, according to their intelligence, he was also a master of control and deception. He had fooled U.N. inspectors for a decade. Now he had resumed produc-

TRUTH, CONSEQUENCES AND THE ROAD TO WAR

The administration's chief *casus belli* was that Iraq's WMD programs posed an urgent danger. Weapons inspectors have scoured the country. Saddam Hussein has been caught. Still, no WMD have been found. The gap between perception and reality:

POST-GULF WAR



INTEL: When the coalition leaves Saddam in power after the gulf war, hawks are convinced he has enough anthrax left to kill millions.

REALITY: After the war, inspectors destroyed most weapons and nuclear facilities. It's doubtful there was a large-scale production program in the '80s.



DECEMBER, CLINTON'S STAND

INTEL: U.S. and British reports detail weapons hidden in Iraq. Military strikes follow when Saddam refuses to allow inspectors into 'presidential sites.'

REALITY: Saddam pens his first romance novel (later adapted as a musical) about a king whose maiden is raped and killed on Jan. 17—the day the gulf war began.



POWER PLAY: Cheney, O'Neill and Bush at the White House in 2001

SEPTEMBER, A CASE FOR WAR

INTEL: Bush II advocates using force in Iraq to the U.N.: 'Right now Iraq is expanding and improving facilities that were used for the production of biological weapons.'



REALITY: Four days later the Iraqi government meets with U.N. officials and agrees to allow the unconditional return of inspectors.

JANUARY,
TO BE CONTINUED

INTEL: Cheney claims trailers found in Iraq were 'conclusive evidence' that Saddam 'did in fact have programs for weapons of mass destruction.'

REALITY: Chief inspector David Kay resigns. Says trailers were intended to produce hydrogen or fuel, not bioweapons. WMD? 'I don't think they existed.'



FEBRUARY,
POWELL AT U.N.

INTEL: Colin Powell makes his case at the U.N. The secretary of State asserts that Iraq has biological and chemical stockpiles and is 'determined to make more.'

REALITY: Tales of 'mobile germ factories' and chem munitions from the Iran-Iraq War aren't convincing. France, China and Russia advocate continued inspections.



JANUARY,
STATE OF THE UNION

INTEL: Bush on WMD: 'The British govt. has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa.'

REALITY: The intel is found to be faulty in July. The CIA takes the fall. Director George Tenet apologizes: 'Those 16 words should never have been included.'



-MEREDITH SADIN

tion of chemical and biological weapons, and he was also trying to purchase parts for a nuclear-weapons program. Defectors were telling of labs hidden under Saddam's palaces. The 2002 National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq, which represented Washington's best available analysis, concluded that "Iraq has continued its weapons of mass destruction [WMD] programs in defiance of UN resolutions and restrictions," that it had "invested more heavily in biological weapons" and that "most analysts" believed that it was "reconstituting its nuclear weapons program." Even the French and Germans believed that Saddam had WMD.

"It turns out we were all wrong, probably, in my judgment," Kay stammered before the Senate Armed Services Committee last week. "And that is most disturbing." With perhaps 85 percent of the Survey Group's work done, Kay said it was likely that no WMD would be uncovered. His team did find evidence that Iraq was working to develop the poison ricin, and he warned of "unresolved ambiguity" about other Iraqi programs. Too much evidence had been destroyed and looted in the early days of the war, he said. But in Kay's mind, the absence of evidence should not obscure a larger fact: Iraq was a monumental intelligence failure.

How did it happen? The United States spends more to run spy satellites and supersecret listening devices than the gross domestic products of many countries, yet it didn't have a clue as to what was really going on inside a sanctions-racked dictatorship it was about to attack? A new Senate Intelligence Committee report, lambasting the CIA for major "errors in judgment," suggests that America's mastery of high-tech gadgetry is part of the problem, and Kay thinks much the same. The United States has become so dependent on what it can detect from a distance that it no longer does the dirty, painstakingly slow business of gathering human intelligence well. But that is only part of the story.

Kay himself believes that in order to get the full picture, an independent panel needs to investigate. He was very careful not to blame the administration—there were no accusations of "sexing up" the intelligence. On the contrary, he absolved policymakers of any misjudgments, and said he still supported the war. (Britain's Tony Blair got a similar reprieve last week, when the much-anticipated Hutton report found him innocent of making a 2002 WMD assessment "more exciting.") But intelligence is never gathered or assessed in a political vacuum, and leading Democrats

DECEMBER-MARCH 2003,
INSPECTIONS IN IRAQ

INTEL: Rumsfeld knows 'where they are.' Claims Saddam moves weapons every 12 to 24 hours, hiding them in residential neighborhoods.

REALITY: Weapons inspectors arrive in Iraq for the first time in four years and conduct more than 900 inspections at more than 500 sites. Nothing is found.



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will be sure to demand that any investigation extend to the White House.

The clamor for heads to roll has already begun. Democratic hopeful John Kerry last week called for CIA Director George Tenet to be fired, and he was seconded by Sen. Bob Graham, who chaired the Senate Intelligence Committee in the run-up to the Iraq war. "If you're in the Navy and you're the captain of a ship that runs aground, you're responsible," Graham told *NEWSWEEK*. "I believe in the principle of accountability."

But the White House is, for now anyway, loath to scapegoat Tenet, a loyal soldier if ever there was one. (The CIA itself says its assessments were done with "professionalism and integrity," and believes WMD may still be found.) Nor did top officials immediately embrace the call for an independent commission. But with Bush insisting that he wanted "to know the facts," the seeming contradiction appeared untenable: *NEWSWEEK* learned late last week that the White House was moving toward endorsing the idea of a "presidential blue-ribbon panel" of elder statesmen and WMD experts. Officials had begun putting out feelers to possible chairs. Such an inquiry will have to examine, at least, whether direct or indirect pressure was placed on American spies to produce particular results. It will also have to examine the reluctance of spymasters to admit what they didn't know, and when they didn't know it.

Some proponents of the war now argue that analysts were relying on outdated information. Saddam did have a hidden weapons program, this argument goes, but must have gotten rid of it after U.N. inspectors were recalled in 1998. But this doesn't quite fit the facts. *NEWSWEEK* has learned of two separate American government panels whose members concluded, back in 1998, that reports of Saddam's secret programs were based on suspicions, not hard data.

THE FIRST PANEL WAS AN independent group of a half-dozen members, most of them distinguished scientists, called the Arms Control & Non-Proliferation Advisory Board. One of ACNAB's pursuits was to examine what was known about Iraq's weapons programs. Panel members got access to CIA materials, and were able to quiz the analysts. What they found, according to three members reached by *NEWSWEEK*, was that the CIA's intel on Iraqi WMD was largely speculative. "There were suspicions, hints, but nothing hard," says one member. "The agency analysts' basic argument was: 'Saddam must be hiding something, or why would he be putting his people through all this?'" The absence of hard evidence was so

striking, in fact, that panel members recall discussing "the Wizard of Oz theory: that the whole Iraq WMD program was smoke-and-mirrors, and Saddam was just a little guy behind a curtain."

Donald Rumsfeld himself led the second such investigation of Iraq's weapons program that year. The brief of his congressionally appointed commission was to assess the potential ballistic-missile threat to the United States from hostile powers. What is not generally known about Rumsfeld's commission is that it also reviewed current intelligence about the WMD various countries might be able to pack in their warheads. "The commission's findings on Iraq's WMD didn't materially differ from what ACNAB had concluded," says a panel member familiar with both reports. Rumsfeld spokesman Larry DiRita says, "The commission based its conclusions regarding WMD on the prevailing [intelligence] assessments."

APRIL 27
PAY DIRT?

INTEL: U.S. investigators prepare to search a facility near Baiji. Missiles and drums of chemicals at the site raise hopes that at last they have found a chemical-arms depot.

REALITY: False alarm. Nine months later the hunt is 85 percent complete, according to Kay. There's still no evidence of outlawed armaments in any significant quantity.

Still, powerful suspicions persisted. These centered mainly on vast stockpiles of Iraqi chemical and biological weapons that were unaccounted for. Saddam had tons of anthrax, VX nerve agents and other deadly materials before the gulf war, and his regime would never produce documents showing they had been destroyed. Given Iraq's long history of deception, it seemed clear Saddam must have been hiding something. But this inference was questionable. Most of the alleged stocks of anthrax and VX were perishable, and would have degraded to uselessness. And in 1995, the most senior defector to emerge from Iraq—Hussein Kamel, who had been in charge of WMD—told debriefers that Iraq had destroyed "all weapons and agents." The phantom stockpiles nonetheless served a useful purpose to those who wanted to keep Saddam in a box. As long as Iraq was incapable of refuting the existence of the VX and anthrax, it was easy to argue that sanctions should remain in place.

But if Saddam didn't have weapons of mass destruction, why didn't he come clean? After all, he could have given U.N.

ERIC CAMPOS—AP/WIDEWORLD



inspectors free rein; he could have allowed them to interview all of his scientists in private—even outside the country—and let them rummage through his palaces. Faced with war, wasn't that the sensible option?

Getting inside Saddam's head isn't easy—the man is famous for miscalculating on a catastrophic scale—but the most likely explanation is the most simple: transparency is the enemy of all dictators. Saddam ensured his continued rule by keeping his many enemies—foreign and domestic—off balance. None could be allowed to know all his secrets, because in Iraq, what you didn't know, you feared. So Saddam wanted to

EMPTY-HANDED:

Claims the Pentagon knew of specific WMD sites proved unfounded



open his regime enough to ensure sanctions were lifted, but not so much that he stood naked before the world.

This wasn't mere paranoia. The CIA had tried to orchestrate a coup in 1996, and the U.N. inspection teams were infiltrated by U.S. and British agents. When President Bill Clinton attacked Iraq in Desert Fox two years later, several bombs hit very specific "leadership targets," including the offices of Saddam and his chief of staff. In recent years some of Saddam's closest relatives had turned against him, including Hussein Kamel, who defected with another son-in-law and revealed many of Iraq's

WMD secrets. (The two defectors inexplicably returned to Iraq, and Saddam immediately had them murdered.) Fear was Saddam's most effective ally. So the dictator often hinted that he had WMD, even as he was trying to persuade the world he was clean.

Once U.N. inspectors left Iraq, Saddam's malevolent history and intentions took on even greater significance, because the CIA was suddenly cut off from a critical source of information. (Kay calls the data produced by UNSCOM inspectors the CIA's "crack cocaine.") In February 2000, Tenet told Congress that the United States had no direct evidence that Iraq had reconstituted its WMD programs, "although given its past behavior this type of activity must be regarded as likely." Iraq had begun to rebuild parts of its chemical infrastructure "for industrial and commercial use," he said, and had also "attempted to purchase numerous dual use items."

Thin gruel. So how did the agency make the leap from suspect intentions to bold claims of existing WMD programs two years later? The impact of September 11 on policymakers and analysts is undeniable. At the first meeting of Rumsfeld's Defense Policy Board after 9/11, there was consensus that the United States should take out two regimes: Afghanistan and Iraq. It was deemed necessary to show American power, and Saddam was the perfect target. It's not clear how fast this view took hold within the White House, or when exactly the intelligence community digested it. What is

clear is that to fight a pre-emptive war, you need evidence of a significant threat; suspect intentions alone are not sufficient.

At about this time, Iraqi defectors started to play a bigger role in the revelation of Saddam's resurgence. The media played a part here, too. Ahmad Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress funneled defectors to the press, which reported claims of clandestine weapons programs. These claims, often disputed by CIA analysts, nevertheless got picked up by the Pentagon's intel shop, which passed them on to the White House. And the CIA was already under fire. It had failed to connect clues that could have foiled

the biggest attack ever on the mainland United States. So officials like Alan Foley, the CIA officer who had the Iraq WMD portfolio inside the agency, knew they couldn't afford to underestimate another threat.

In comments to *NEWSWEEK*, Foley denied reports that he had been bullied by anyone in the White House: "I don't think I was pressured at all," he said. That may well be true, yet people who dealt with Foley during the run-up to war say they were struck by the lack of substance behind his assessments.

PRIOR TO THE INVASION, THE White House convened a series of working groups, and Foley was on the one that dealt with the threat posed to U.S. forces by Iraq's alleged WMD stocks.

More than one member of the high-level group grouched that it was extremely hard to get Foley to reveal exactly what the agency had on Iraq's WMD. U.N. chief inspector Hans Blix had the same problem. All he could get from the CIA was a list of sites that were already well known—from the United Nations' own inspection teams. At Central Command, this lack of hard information produced real problems. The Pentagon needed to know where Saddam's WMD stockpiles were, and what exactly was inside them, so it could plan to destroy them. After intense pressure, the CIA finally produced what one top administration official touted as "the crown jewels"—satellite photos of buildings. But the CIA admitted that it didn't know what was inside the buildings. "I'm coming to the conclusion that the agency really knew very little, but didn't feel it could admit that to anyone," says an insider deeply involved in one of the internal probes into the mess.

A CIA analyst frames it differently: "We said nothing that we knew to be untrue. But we did extrapolate." But to what extent, and why? That's where the question of political pressure comes in. Senior officials may not have bullied analysts, but they certainly made their expectations well known. They made a sport out of dissing U.N. assessments (which turned out to be the most reliable of all), and the Pentagon even set up its own secret war-planning bureau called the Office of Special Plans. "It was a more-nuanced form of pressure," says Greg Thielmann, a former top official in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

Most skepticism about U.S. claims now centers on the astonishingly assertive 2002 National Intelligence Estimate. The report itself was cobbled together in three weeks—and thudded on congressional desks just 10 days before the crucial vote authorizing Bush to use force against Iraq. Very few

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NIEs ever see public print, but key portions of this one did, and certainly influenced public debate. More disturbingly, perhaps, the declassified version was stripped of important caveats and footnotes.

Remember the aluminum tubes presented as evidence of an Iraqi nuclear program? It's now clear that the real experts in the United States' own nuclear-weapons program, at the Energy Department, fiercely challenged the CIA's assessment that the tubes were designed to build centrifuges. Remember the Iraqi drone aircraft that Colin Powell told the United Nations could be used to deliver bioweapons agents? When previously classified chunks of the NIE were released in July 2003, it was revealed that experts in Air Force intelligence regarded the idea of mini-UAVs' dispensing bioagents as nonsense. Remember the mobile bioweapons labs, which Vice President Dick Cheney cited yet again just two weeks ago as evidence of Saddam's WMD program? It seems they were made to generate hydrogen for weather balloons. Kay has called a CIA report endorsing the bioweapons theory "premature and embarrassing." (The CIA still stands by the report.)

President Bush declared last week that he welcomed a debate with Democrats over the war. "I'm absolutely convinced it was the right thing to do," Bush said during a visit to New Hampshire two days after the Democratic primary. "And I look forward to explaining it clearly to the American people." Yet the fact that the president feels the need to re-explain the war—nine months after he declared an end to major hostilities—is an acknowledgment that he has a potential problem. A senior administration official acknowledged as much, saying that Bush must demonstrate—particularly to military families—that he "is as sure today as he was before the war that this was the right decision ... He doesn't have any doubt."

Inevitably, some doubts are emerging on the battlefield. In a recent letter home, a reservist with the 124th Infantry Regiment of the Florida National Guard told friends and family that violent days had become strangely ordinary. In the past week he and his buddies had faced RPG and mortar attacks, "even a car bomb in the area." But that was unexceptional: "It has been just another set of days going by. Most of us don't know what day it is anymore, the concept of a 'work-week' and a 'weekend' are as foreign to us as the Moon." The soldier then proudly told how his unit had uncovered "a large weapons cache" in the town of Ar Ramadi, adding parenthetically "(still no WMD, sorry)." Irony turned to cynicism: "On the subject of WMD, we once did a raid on a place where we heard they may have been storing 'mustard gas,' [and] being the patriots that we are

and always out to prove our Commander in Chief's allegations, we geared up in our chemical suits and stormed the place. It turned out to be a restaurant ... but they did have mustard, and some guy there had gas."

Dark humor—at the expense of commanders, even the commander in chief—has always been as much a part of war as blisters and bad food. But still, there's a new danger here. American politicians told soldiers they had to fight—to die, if necessary—

for a particular reason. That reason was a threat to the American homeland. Now the best piece of evidence about that threat may have been an illusion. The message is muddled, at a time when the country is being asked to gird itself for a long, expensive and bloody occupation. If the cynicism grows, and seeps back home, the whole Iraq enterprise could be undermined.

The Bush administration will focus on other justifications for the war. Many of them

are reasonable: Saddam was an evil tyrant, and the world is better off without him; it was necessary to show other rogue nations that from now on, ambiguity about WMD is no longer acceptable; countries that aren't transparent about their programs and intentions need to know they will suffer, regardless of what those programs are, or were. The Bush team will point to Libya's new openness about its WMD, and recent cooperation by Iran and Pakistan, to bolster its case.

But if for no other reason than to restore American credibility, an unbiased review of the Iraq intelligence process may be vital. Yes, regime change was a Clinton policy aim, but it was the Bush team that came to office vowing to be "forward leaning." After the attacks on September 11, Bush himself outlined a new doctrine of pre-emption, a resolve to strike first—and ask questions later—"when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives." But now the cloud over American intelligence makes pre-emption all but untenable. Who will believe the next American official who goes to the United Nations wagging a vial of fake anthrax, arguing that North Korea or Iran or some other "rogue state" needs to be taken out before it attacks first? More worrisome still, the next dire warning may well be right.

With MICHAEL ISIKOFF and TAMARA LIPPER in Washington, ROD NORDLAND in Baghdad, CHRISTOPHER DICKEY in Paris and CHRISTIAN CARYL in New York

Iraq and the Kurds

The urge to stay apart may grow

ARBIL AND BAGHDAD

Two devastating suicide bombs are making more Kurds think of separation

IT WAS not the sacrifice for which Kurds had queued. Two men wearing explosive vests blew up themselves and scores more during Islam's major sacrificial festival to commemorate Abraham's slaughter of a sheep instead of his son. It may have been the bloodiest day in Iraq since Saddam Hussein was toppled. The Kurds say that the bombs, at the two main Kurdish party offices in Arbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, killed more than 100 of them.

In contrast to the barbed-wire and concrete barriers behind which the Americans live in Baghdad, their Kurdish allies are strikingly lax back home. Road blocks had been tightened after a tip-off that a car bomb was heading their way, so the perpetrators came on foot instead, queuing to shake hands with Kurdish officials. Among their victims was Sami Abdel Rahman, a Kurdish deputy prime minister who had played a big part in negotiations for an Iraqi constitution and was one of the Kurds' most ardent advocates of the idea that Iraq should stay united. One of his sons died with him.

Who did it? The ambitious Kurds have many enemies. Most Iraqi Kurds blame Ansar al-Islam, an Afghan-trained group of Kurdish Islamists, which the Americans say has links to al-Qaeda, or Yemenis abetted by local Ansaris. A week earlier, Kurds near Arbil nabbed Hasan Ghul, a Pakistani thought to be high up in al-Qaeda, and gave warning of imminent attacks. The day before that, a London-based jihadi group, the Islamic Observer Centre, said that a branch of Ansar al-Islam had attacked a police station in Mosul, on the edge of Kurdistan, killing 17 people. And the Americans said they had found a disused factory in northern Iraq where "exploding garments" were made. Unlike Palestinian suicide-bombers, who wear bomb-laden belts, the Kurds' killers had shaped their explosives into a vest.

Blaming fellow Kurds, albeit Islamists, at least helped assuage a desire for revenge against the Kurds' old Arab rivals to the south, against whom they have waged an intermittent 80-year war for self-rule. Still, the fact that violence is spilling into their formerly safe haven is dampening Kurdish enthusiasm for America's project in Iraq.

After 12 years of de facto independence, Kurds are champing for a referendum to determine their own future over Kurdish-controlled land that Baghdad wants to integrate back into Iraq. The separatist calls are rising as the February deadline ap-

proaches for America's consul in Iraq, Paul Bremer, to issue a "basic law" to determine the structure and government of a united Iraq when the United States is due to hand over sovereignty in July.

Kurds say the bombings will stiffen their resolve. So far the Americans have

placated the two Kurdish leaders, whose parties have yet to unite fully, with an offer of loosely-defined federalism, which they interpret as including their own parliament and ministries. But they also want a say in government in Baghdad. In the basic-law draft being circulated, they want a share of an interim three-man Iraqi presidency comprising a Shia Arab, a Sunni Arab and a Sunni Kurd. That worries Shias, who fear the Sunnis would dominate.

For their part, many Kurds, who pride themselves on a liberal attitude to wom-

en's clothes, are loth to have Islamic law applied on their turf. They also flinch at the prospect of a single Iraqi army, which could base Arab troops back in Kurdistan after an absence of 12 years. Though Iraqi militias are banned, Mr Bremer made an exception for the two Kurdish warlords, Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, and let them keep their own private armies, intelligence service and prisons. But, under the basic law's draft, the government in Baghdad would be responsible for defence as well as oil and foreign policy.

The Arbil bombs have hardened the views of Baghdadis who claim that the Kurds need help protecting their borders with Iran, which jihadis seem to cross with ease. But without the moderating voice of Mr Rahman, who had argued for an ethnically-mixed Iraqi army, the Kurds' *persh-merga* guerrillas will demand more strongly that they be allowed to defend their fellow Kurds themselves.

Some in Baghdad are tempted to call the Kurds' bluff and let them go their own way. "What measures and methods are we going to use to make Kurds part of a country they don't want to belong to?" asks a lawyer helping to draft the basic law. That might make Kurds pause. Many doubt that an independent but landlocked Kurdistan could survive. Even if they controlled the disputed oil-rich area around Kirkuk, their foes could block the flow of oil—which is why maps in party headquarters show a Kurdish state arching all the way from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. ■

February 10, 2004

Herald Tribune

Iraqi parties refuse to disband militias

U.S. fears incitement of sectarian strife

By Edward Wong

BAGHDAD: Several of the biggest political parties in Iraq say they are determined to keep their well-armed militias despite American opposition to the idea.

They contend that the militias remain necessary in light of the lack of security throughout the country.

Having had scant success so far in persuading the militias to disband, occupation officials are searching for a new policy that will help disarm the groups, whose members total in the tens of thousands, a senior military official said.

But less than five months remain until the scheduled transfer of sovereignty to an Iraqi government, leaving the Bush administration little time to deal with what many officials here consider an incendiary problem.

In the rugged north, Kurdish militiamen called the pesh merga patrol the roads. In the south, members of the Badr Organization, a militia run by a prominent Shiite political party, work with the police to secure the cities, the group's leader said.

Iraq's instability — and fog-shrouded political future — leave the parties with no incentive to disband the militias, specialists say. "It's all a matter of confidence in the future," said Joost Hiltermann, an Iraq expert at the International Crisis Group, a conflict prevention organization. "You're not going to give up your weapons if you think you're going to fight again in the future."

Militia leaders say the groups can help stabilize the country, something they argue that American troops have been unable to do.

Several politicians say they may push to have the Iraqi Governing Council enshrine the existence of the militias in an interim constitution due on Feb. 28, with the justification that the armed groups can serve as emergency forces. Some suggest that American officials should transfer oversight of security entirely to Iraqi forces, including the militias.

"The issue is just like cleaning the city," said Hassan al-Amari, the leader of the Badr Organization, estimated to have at least 10,000 members. "You can't keep the city clean without the help of the people themselves."

All along, the Americans have worried that private armies could inflame a nation already divided along ethnic and religious lines. The major militias are attached to parties dominated by Kurds or Shiite Arabs, who make up a majority of the population but were long excluded from real power. The other main group, the Sunni Arabs, do not have

political parties with militias and fear retribution for their years in power.

"People don't like the militias," said Samir Shakir Mahmoud Sumaidy, a Governing Council member and a Sunni Arab. "They think they are going to destroy what we are building here."

There are three groups the American military considers to be active militias. First, there is the pesh merga, whose 50,000 soldiers are split between the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. Next is the Badr Organization, a unit of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, a powerful Shiite party.

Then there is the Mahdi Army, formed by Muqtada al-Sadr, a virulently anti-American cleric who is Shiite.

The senior military official estimated the number of the Mahdi Army in the "high hundreds to thousands" and said its antioccupation stand "concerns us greatly." But a representative of Sadr said the Mahdi Army helped the police in Sadr City, a Baghdad slum, and guarded institutions like mosques.

"The Americans have failed to

provide security, not only in Sadr City but in all of Iraq," said the representative, Sheik Amir al-Husseini. "Sadr City has taken it upon itself to provide peace and security to the people."

The Mahdi Army's main rival is the Badr Organization, formerly the Badr Brigade. Leaders changed the name after the group's Iranian-trained mem-

bers entered Iraq following the American invasion. They now call it a "humanitarian" or a "political" group, though they also boast that its members help the police secure the streets of large cities, sometimes with AK-47s, sometimes through intelligence gathering.

Many Shiite Arabs, led by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, are demanding direct elections before the scheduled transfer of sovereignty on June 30. Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, leader of the Shiite party overseeing the Badr Organization, said the group could help provide security at polling stations if given "special permission" by the Americans. But many people find the idea of using party militias at polling sites disturbing.

Kurdish leaders say they want to retain broad autonomous powers in the north, including the use of the pesh merga. Militias can be kept as reserve forces, said Barham Salih, prime minister of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

Amari, the head of the Badr Organization, said his Shiite party had not asked the Governing Council to legally approve the militias, but would do so if the Kurds and others pushed for that right.

The New York Times



Fighters of the Mahdi Army, an anti-American Shiite militia whose membership is estimated in the "high hundreds to thousands," standing guard at a Baghdad mosque.

Memo urges Qaeda to wage war in Iraq

By Dexter Filkins

BAGHDAD: U.S. officials here have obtained a detailed proposal that they conclude was written by an operative in Iraq to senior leaders of Al Qaeda, asking for help to wage a "sectarian war" in Iraq in the next months.

The Americans say they believe that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian who has long been under U.S. scrutiny for suspected ties to Al Qaeda, wrote the undated 17-page document. Zarqawi is also believed to be operating in Iraq.

The document was made available on Sunday to The New York Times, with an accompanying translation made by the U.S. military. A reporter was allowed to see the Arabic and English versions and to write down large parts of the translation.

The memo says extremists are failing to enlist support inside the country, and have been unable to scare the Americans into leaving, and even laments Iraq's lack of mountains in which to take refuge.

Yet an attack on Iraq's Shiite majority could rescue the movement, according to the document. The aim, the document contends, is to prompt a counter-attack against the Arab Sunni minority. Such a "sectarian war" would rally the Sunni Arabs to the religious extremists, the document argues. The document says that a war against the Shiites must start soon — at "zero hour" — before the Americans hand over sovereignty to the Iraqis. That is scheduled for the end of June.

The U.S. officials in Baghdad said that they were confident the memo was credible and that they had independently corroborated Zarqawi's authorship. If it is authentic, it offers an inside account of the insurgency and its frustrations, and bears out a number of U.S. assumptions about religious extremists. The document would also constitute the strongest evidence to date of con-

tacts between extremists in Iraq and Al Qaeda. But it does not speak to the debate about whether there was a Qaeda presence in Iraq during the Saddam Hussein era, nor is there any mention of a collaboration with Saddam loyalists. Yet other interpretations may be possible, including that it was written by some other insurgent, but one who exaggerated his involvement.

Still, a senior U.S. intelligence official in Washington said, "I know of no reason to believe the letter is bogus in any way." He said the letter was seized in a raid on a known Qaeda safe house in Baghdad,

and did not pass through Iraqi groups that U.S. intelligence officials have said may have unreliable information.

Without providing further specifics, the senior intelligence officer said there was additional information pointing to the idea that Al Qaeda was considering or had already started attacks on Shiite targets in Iraq. "This is not the only indication of that," the official said.

The letter also appears to be the strongest indication since the U.S. invasion last March that Zarqawi remains active in plotting attacks, the official said.

According to the U.S. officials here, the Arabic-language document was discovered in mid-January when a suspected member of Al Qaeda was arrested in Iraq. Under interrogation, the Americans said, the suspect identified Zarqawi as the author of the document. The man arrested was carrying it on a compact disc to Afghanistan, the Americans said, and intended to deliver it to people they described as the "inner circle" of Al Qaeda's leadership. That presumably refers to Osama bin Laden and his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

The Americans refused to identify the suspect. But the discovery of the disc coincides with the arrest of Hassan Ghul, a Pakistani described by U.S. officials at the time as a courier for Al Qaeda. Ghul is believed to be the first substantial member of that network to have been captured inside Iraq.

The document is written with a rhetorical flourish. It calls the Americans "the biggest cowards that God has created" but at the same time sees little chance they will be forced from Iraq.

"So the solution, and only God knows, is that we need to bring the Shia into the battle," the writer of the document said. "It is the only way to prolong the duration of the fight between the infidels and us. If we succeed in dragging them into a sectarian war, this will awaken the sleepy Sunnis who are fearful of destruction and death at the hands" of Shiites.

"So if you agree with it, and are convinced of the idea of killing the perverse sects, we stand ready as an army for you to work under your guidance and yield to your command," the writer says.

Before the war, Bush administration officials argued that Zarqawi was the main link between Al Qaeda and Saddam's government and was closely involved with Ansar al-Islam, a group linked to Qaeda and suspected of mounting attacks against U.S. forces.

Since the war ended, little evidence has emerged to support the allegation

of a connection between Al Qaeda and Saddam's government. Last month, Secretary of State Colin Powell conceded that "no smoking gun" had been found.

In the document, the writer indicated he had directed about 25 suicide bombings inside Iraq. That conforms with an American view that suicide bombings were more likely to be carried out by Iraqi religious extremists and foreigners than by Saddam loyalists.

"We were involved in all the martyrdom operations — in terms of overseeing, preparing and planning — that took place in this country," the writer of the document says. "Praise be to Allah, I have completed 25 of these operations, some of them against the Shia and their leaders, the Americans and their military, and the police, the military and the coalition forces."

But the writer details difficulties in combating U.S. forces and in enlisting supporters. The Americans are an easy target, according to the author, who nonetheless claims to be impressed by their resolve.

After significant losses, he writes, "America, however, has no intention of leaving, no matter how many wounded nor how bloody it becomes."

The New York Times

Douglas Jehl contributed reporting from Washington for this article.

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune

February 10, 2004

Chypriotes turcs contre colons turcs

Les colons venus de Turquie redoutent d'être forcés à un nouvel exil par le plan de l'ONU pour la réunification de l'île, soutenu par leurs compatriotes de souche.

Guzelyurt, Karpas envoyé spécial

L'idée d'un nouvel exil ramène des souvenirs douloureux. Mais Sami Solyali, réaliste, serait prêt à laisser sans trop de regrets sa maison de deux étages, construite il y a dix ans, avec son petit jardin amoureusement entretenu. «Nous rendons de la terre, juste un peu de terre, et en échange nous obtenons un statut reconnu et surtout un ticket d'entrée pour l'Europe», soupire ce dentiste quinquagénaire de Guzelyurt, grosse bourgade de 15 000 habitants, au nord-ouest de Chypre. Il y est arrivé enfant avec ses parents lors des grands échanges de populations, en 1975, un an après l'invasion par l'armée turque du nord de l'île, contraint de quitter son village natal près de Paphos, au Sud, en zone grecque. Aujourd'hui, comme tant d'autres Chypriotes turcs de souche, il soutient à fond le plan Annan, le projet de réunification présenté l'an dernier par l'ONU, mais refusé par Rauf Denktash, le très nationaliste président de l'autoproclamée république turque de Chypre du Nord (RTCN).

Partants indemnisés. A quelques kilomètres au-delà des luxuriantes plantations d'agrumes, se dressent les miradors et les barbelés de la «ligne verte» qui divise toujours l'île. Au sud, la république de Chypre, 60% du territoire avec ses 600 000 habitants grecs, qui intégrera l'UE en mai. Au nord, la RTCN, 200 000 habitants, chypriotes turcs et turcs immigrés d'Anatolie, reconnue seulement par Ankara, qui assure près de la moitié du budget et y maintient 35 000 soldats. Dans le projet de règlement de l'ONU, Guzelyurt - Morfou pour les Grecs - serait restitué à la république de Chypre, comme quelques autres portions de territoire de la RTCN. Les partants seront indemnisés.

«Nous savions que nous n'étions pas là pour toujours et, malgré le déchirement, c'est la seule solution pour sortir de l'isolement, car même les hommes d'affaires turcs refusent d'investir ici à cause des incertitudes sur l'avenir», assure Alkan Olsun, patron d'une agence de voyages de Guzelyurt qui rêve d'Europe. Etudiant ingénieur, Ahmet ne cache ni son amertume, ni son impatience. L'ouverture du «mur», le 23 avril dernier, avait été une bouffée d'espoir. Il se rendit aussitôt de l'autre côté voir le village de ses parents, près de Limassol, et leur maison dont il ne reste rien. Né à Chypre de parents chypriotes turcs et donc reconnu comme citoyen par la république de Chypre, il en a profité pour demander un passeport. «Cela n'a pas été simple et les démarches étaient humiliantes», raconte l'étudiant, mais maintenant il a ce document qui lui permet de voyager librement dans l'UE. Comme beaucoup d'autres, il pense quitter l'île si les choses restent en l'état. «Il y a aujourd'hui plus de Chypriotes



A Nicosie : la partie nord de l'île de Chypre, occupée par les Turcs depuis 1974, vue depuis la partie sud et grecque.

turcs de souche à Londres que dans toute la RTCN», ironise Alkan Olsun.

Statu quo. Les «colons», c'est-à-dire les Turcs arrivés d'Anatolie pour s'installer dans le nord de l'île après l'invasion de 1974, représentent aujourd'hui quelque 120 000 des 200 000 habitants de la RTCN. La plupart sont là depuis vingt ou vingt-cinq ans et ont fait souche. Le plan Annan offre à 60 000 d'entre eux, notamment ceux qui sont nés sur place ou ont épousé des Chypriotes turcs de souche, de rester à Chypre. Mais tous

ont peur de devoir partir et défendent farouchement l'actuel statu quo. «Maintenant, on peut traverser la ligne verte mais la séparation est la meilleure garantie d'un bon voisinage», as-

sure Mevlut Akbulut, 62 ans, arrivé avec sa femme et ses quatre enfants en 1977. Ses terres, près de Tokat, au cœur du plateau anatolien, avaient été noyées par un barrage. De grandes affiches proposaient des maisons et des terres dans la partie nord de Chypre. Il a donc débarqué dans le village de Bostasli, dans la péninsule de Karpas, à l'extrême nord-est de l'île, presque totale-

ment vidée de sa population, en grande majorité grecque. Selon le plan de paix, la zone restera dans l'entité turque mais des Grecs pourront progressivement s'y réinstaller jusqu'à représenter 21% de la population. Leur retour inquiète ces colons qui se sont installés dans les petites maisons cubiques des paysans grecs mais continuent de vivre comme en Anatolie, avec les femmes portant le foulard. «Même si la terre est bonne et le temps plus doux, ce n'est pas comme là-bas», souligne avec nostalgie le vieil Ali, venu de Kars, près de la frontière arménienne.

Un dimanche de juin, les anciens occupants de la maison de Mevlut Akbulut sont revenus. «Ils étaient courtois, nous avons bu le café ensemble, ils commentaient les aménagements que nous avions faits, puis ils sont repartis», raconte le paysan qui, désormais, se sent «en sursis». Si les indemnités étaient consistantes, il accepterait peut-être de retourner en Turquie, bien qu'il ne sache où aller. Pour ses fils, c'est hors de question, comme pour la quasi-totalité des enfants de colons qui ont grandi ou sont nés sur l'île. «La vie ici est beaucoup plus facile, on est plus riche, on est plus libre car le poids de la tradition est moins fort»,

explique Mehmet, garagiste qui étouffe à chaque fois qu'il va voir ses cousins près de la mer Noire.

Vieilles peurs. Attablé dans un café en face de la mosquée toute neuve, Gesim Nuncin, fonctionnaire, est farouchement opposé «à un plan qui va peu à peu noyer dans la masse grecque la population turque de Chypre». Les vieilles peurs sont toujours là, alimentées par les récits de ceux qui ont connu la guerre civile de 1963-74, les rafles, les massacres avant que les soldats turcs n'arrivent «en sauveurs». Le pouvoir de Denktash martèle cette propagande. Depuis l'ouverture du mur, Mehmet a été plusieurs fois au Sud et s'y plaît, mais cela n'a pas suffi à changer son état d'esprit : «On ne peut pas faire confiance aux Grecs et ils disent d'ailleurs ouvertement vouloir le départ de tous les colons.»

MARC SEMO

Une «occasion historique»

Les dirigeants grecs et turcs de Chypre, Tassos Papadopoulos et Rauf Denktash, se sont retrouvés, hier, à New York, pour renouer le dialogue et réunifier l'île avant le 1^{er} mai, sinon seule la partie grecque, unique autorité reconnue internationalement, intégrera effectivement l'Union européenne. Le secrétaire général de l'ONU, Kofi Annan, a appelé les deux parties à ne pas manquer «l'occasion historique». Chypre est divisée depuis 1974, après que les troupes turques ont envahi le Nord en réponse à un coup d'Etat d'extrémistes nationalistes grecs. Les discussions se dérouleront sur la base du plan Annan, qui propose un Etat commun, composé de deux entités égales en droit, ainsi que la restitution de quelque 10% des territoires occupés par la RTCN, qui couvre 37,5% de l'île. Accepté par la partie grecque, le plan avait été refusé en mars par Denktash. Mais il est désormais soumis à de très fortes pressions d'Ankara, qui espère qu'un règlement à Chypre facilitera sa route vers l'UE.

D'après AFP

Etat d'alerte au Kurdistan irakien

Frappés par des attentats, les deux partis kurdes songent à s'allier.

11 FÉVRIER 2004



Erbil envoyée spéciale

Avec ses rues droites et nettoyées, ses parcs aménagés et ses automobilistes qui s'arrêtent aux feux rouges, Erbil, la plus grande ville du Kurdistan irakien, affiche une apparente normalité, aux antipodes de l'anarchie qui règne à Bagdad. La cité ne cache pas qu'elle a un maître, Massoud Barzani, leader du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK), dont les immenses portraits trônent à l'entrée des bâtiments administratifs. Seuls les murs effondrés du siège de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK), le mouvement de Jalal Talabani, et la salle des fêtes dévastée du siège du PDK montrent que cette quiétude est peut-être factice. Lundi, les autorités, craignant de nouveaux attentats, avaient appelé les sociétés étrangères, notamment américaines, et les ONG à fermer provisoirement leurs locaux.

Cause commune. Le double attentat-suicide qui a ensanglanté, le 1^{er} février, les fêtes de l'Aïd, faisant plus de 100 morts et 300 blessés dans les rangs des deux partis kurdes, a révélé que cette région, protégée depuis douze ans par les Nations



unies, épargnée par la dernière guerre pendant laquelle ses forces ont fait cause commune avec la coalition, n'est pas préservée des tourments qui agitent l'Irak. Dans cette région plutôt favorable à la politique de Washington, des critiques naissent à l'égard des Américains. «Ils ont ouvert... toutes les frontières et laissé n'importe qui entrer», dit Raouf, chauffeur de taxi, qui exige plus de contrôles.

Frontières. La direction du PDK a été décapitée par l'attentat qui s'est produit le jour où, suivant la tradition, les leaders politiques recevaient les vœux de leurs amis et alliés. Neuf de ses dirigeants ont été tués. La salle des fêtes porte les traces du drame: murs criblés d'éclats, taches de sang et ver-

re brisé. Les premiers résultats de l'enquête pointent en direction de mouvements liés à Al-Qaeda. «Nous avons pris les mesures nécessaires pour renforcer la sécurité au sein du parti et du gouvernement et empêcher les terroristes de recommencer», assure Mekdad Ali, responsable du bureau des relations du PDK. Mais les frontières, très montagneuses, sont, reconnaît-il, difficilement contrôlables.

Le drame qui a frappé les deux principaux partis kurdes, frères tantôt ennemis tantôt alliés, pourrait favoriser leur union. «A l'hôpital, tous les blessés m'ont demandé de dire à Barzani et à Talabani de s'allier et d'unifier leurs administrations», raconte Mahmoud Osman, membre kurde indépendant du Conseil de gouvernement provisoire, mis en place à Bagdad par la coalition. Autonome depuis douze ans, et quoique doté d'un Parlement, le Kurdistan est largement resté un assemblage de deux mini-Etats-partis, l'un qui s'étend sur trois départements, à l'Ouest, que dirige Barzani, depuis Erbil; l'autre, qui couvre deux départements, à l'Est, est aux mains de

Talabani, à Soulaymaniya. Chacun de ces deux ensembles ayant sa propre administration.

Au siège du PDK, Mekdad Ali confirme que les deux partis ont convenu de se répartir les responsabilités, l'UPK prenant la direction du Parlement, le PDK celle du Conseil des ministres, les adjoints revenant à chacun des postes de l'autre parti. «Quatre ministères reviendront à l'UPK, huit pour au PDK, le reste étant pourvu à raison d'un pour les communistes, un pour les islamistes, un pour les Turcomans et un pour les chrétiens assyriens», précise-t-il.

«Pas de région sûre». Les attentats d'Erbil, les plus meurtriers en Irak depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein, ont une dimension qui dépasse le cadre de la question kurde, estime-t-on sur place. «Pour l'Irak, c'est un signal donné à tous que le terrorisme peut frapper partout, qu'il n'y a pas de région sûre», souligne Mahmoud Osman, qui ajoute: «Ce n'est qu'en coopérant que les partis kurdes et arabes irakiens pourront s'y opposer.»

HÉLÈNE DESPIC-POPOVIC

Attentat meurtrier en pays chiite

Au moins 55 personnes ont été tuées et 70 blessées dans l'attentat suicide à la voiture piégée perpétré hier devant un commissariat de police d'Iskandariya. L'explosion s'est produite alors que des centaines de personnes se pressaient devant le commissariat pour s'engager dans la police. Par ailleurs, les chiites ont massivement apporté hier leur soutien à l'ayatollah Ali Sistani - qui réclame des élections directes - en défilant dans la ville sainte de Nadjaf à l'occasion de la fête du Ghadir qui, selon eux, commémore la désignation par Mahomet de l'imam Ali comme son successeur.

Iskandariya :
de notre envoyé spécial
Arnaud de La Grange

La foule en est certaine, l'attentat a été commis avec un missile. Un feu venu du ciel, d'un avion américain évidemment. Des centaines de personnes sont massées devant le commissariat de police d'Iskandariya, dévasté

par la déflagration. La terre est empoisonnée par de sinistres ruisseaux, des carcasses de voitures gisent partout aux alentours.

Un homme désigne l'épicentre de l'explosion, un cratère de trois mètres de diamètre et d'un mètre de profondeur. «Les soldats américains sont venus le reboucher un peu tout à l'heure...», murmure-t-il. Dans cette petite bourgade chiite à



L'explosion s'est produite alors que des centaines d'Irakiens se pressaient devant le commissariat pour s'engager dans la police. L'attentat pourrait être un signal envoyé à la mission des Nations unies qui doit évaluer la faisabilité d'élections directes.

une cinquantaine de kilomètres au sud de Bagdad, on est prêt à croire tout ce que l'on a envie d'entendre.

Le capitaine Abdel Rhaman, lui, hausse les épaules. « C'est une voiture piégée qui a explosé là, alors que la rue était noire de monde, explique-t-il, des centaines de personnes étaient venues pour s'engager dans la nouvelle police. La plupart des victimes sont ces candidats. » Le bilan est lourd. Au moins 55 personnes auraient été tuées et quelque 70 autres blessées.

Selon les militaires américains qui se sont rendus sur les lieux du drame, il pourrait s'agir d'un attentat suicide. « C'était un pick-up Toyota bourré d'une grande quantité d'explosifs », a précisé un officier de la 82^e division aéroportée.

Les policiers irakiens sont depuis plusieurs mois la cible privilégiée de la guérilla. Hier toujours, quatre officiers de police



sont morts à Bagdad quand un engin piégé a explosé au passage de leur véhicule. Selon le chef de la police en Irak, Ahnadh Kazem Ibrahim, plus de 600 policiers ont été tués dans des attentats ou en opérations depuis que ces forces de sécurité ont été reformées par la Coalition. La police semble visée pour deux raisons. Parce qu'elle est le symbole de la collaboration avec

l'occupant. Et parce qu'elle est une cible plus facile que les forces américaines, qui, au fil des mois, ont appris à se protéger de mieux en mieux des coups de la guérilla.

Cette attaque sanglante est sans doute un signal envoyé à la mission des Nations unies, à Bagdad depuis quatre jours, qui a pour mission d'évaluer la faisabilité d'élections directes à court terme en Irak. Ce scrutin, qui est une exigence de la communauté chiite, est suspendu à des considérations liées à son organisation matérielle et aux conditions de sécurité.

L'attentat intervient aussi aux lendemains de révélations des autorités américaines sur un plan visant à faire monter la tension entre chiites et sunnites. La Coalition a confirmé lundi l'existence d'un document lié à al-Qaida appelant à provoquer un conflit entre les deux grandes communautés du pays. Il s'agi-

rait d'un texte de 17 pages rédigé par Abou Moussab al-Zarqaoui, un Jordanien lié au réseau d'Oussama Ben Laden. Le document déplore qu'al-Qaida ne parvienne pas à chasser d'Irak les troupes américaines et suggère d'organiser avant la fin juin des attaques contre la majorité chiite pour susciter des contre-attaques contre la minorité sunnite. La stratégie du pire, pour saper les plans américains.

Le secrétaire d'Etat américain Colin Powell a affirmé que cette découverte « donnait du crédit » à la thèse du lien entre l'organisation terroriste et le régime de Saddam Hussein. Fin 2003, Washington a offert une récompense de 5 millions de dollars pour des informations permettant la capture de Zarqaoui qui serait actif en Irak. Mais jusqu'à présent, aucune preuve formelle de ces allégations n'a été apportée.

A search for common ground in battle-scarred Kirkuk

Coalition administrators are struggling to meet the conflicting demands of ethnic communities in the north as they try to decide on the structure for a federal Iraq

By Nicolas Pelham in Kirkuk

The civil affairs commander of oil-rich Kirkuk is no stranger to ethnic conflict zones, but the rival communities of Kurds, Arabs, Turkomen and Assyrian Christians in the region sandwiched between central and northern Iraq is, he said, the most volatile ethnic mix he has encountered.

"It's harder than Kosovo," said US Army Major Jeff Cantor, as he tried to turn a blind eye to the night-time mortars pounding to and from a nearby airbase. "It's like a civil war going on."

The tension is the backdrop to the occupation authorities' efforts to cajole Kurds and their neighbours into reaching an agreement this month that will determine the interim structure of a federal, but united, Iraq.

The violence - ranging from the February 1 suicide-bombing in Arbil, the deadliest in post-war Iraq, to the shooting of Kirkuk's Turkomen party leader and the killing of his deputy -

threatens to do more to shape events than the negotiating table.

Much hinges on Kirkuk, a million-strong city between the Kurdish-dominated mountains and the Arab-populated plains.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Saddam Hussein deported nearly 200,000 Kurdish fami-

lies from the city and its environs and supplanted them with 270,000 Arabs.

They are now demanding "Tatbia", or normalisation of Mr Hussein Arabisation project, and have overseen the movement of thousands of displaced Kurds now crowded into former police stations and the city's new football stadium. The city's Arabic place names have also been changed: Quds is now again known as Shergja, and the local Saddam hospital is called Azadi Kurdish for freedom.

"Kirkuk is a holy city for Kurds," said Jalal Jawhar Aziz, the leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, the dominant Kurdish party in

Kirkuk. He uses the city's former Ba'ath party club as his office.

Arabs confiscated the land by force, and should be returned just as they came," Kirkuk, he said, must be incorporated into a Kurdistan federation.

Arabs and Turkomens have taken to the streets in protest at what they say are Kurdish plans to annex their city - five people were killed in demonstrations over the New Year. They want early elections in the province to regain control of the city, before their claimed numerical superiority is eroded by an influx of Kurds.

"Arabs - Sunnis and Shias - are seeking elections to stop ethnic federalism. We won't allow Kirkuk to become Kurdish if it takes a million martyrs," said Atar al-Tawil, an Arab member of the provincial council. "How can you ask me to expel people from my own country?"

Charged with adjudicating the simmering dispute, coalition administrators have

appointed Kurds to the most prominent municipal posts, on the grounds that they are Kirkuk's largest community. But they have also appointed some Turkomen and Arabs to senior positions. The city now has both a Kurdish police chief and a Kurdish provincial governor, who wants to redraw the provin-

cial boundaries ahead of elections to secure a Kurdish majority.

"It is not the right time for elections," said Governor Abd-al-Rahman al-Mustafa from his refurbished office, guarded by a detail of Peshmerga guerrillas. "We first have to restore the former boundaries of the province, and return the terrain that was given to [the Kurdish province of] Suleimaniya."

In an attempt to make the increasingly violent settlement of land disputes easier, the governor is also working with the occupation authorities to open a Kirkuk branch of the Iraqi Property Claims Commission.

Coalition officials in the

city said they expected "tens of thousands" of claims, and have provided for oil revenues to be used to compensate those who the Commission rules must vacate their

homes. Funds will also be available to help rebuild Kurdish villages destroyed under Mr Hussein.

Kurdish leaders to the north are also backing the

"normalisation" programme, sponsoring the transfer of Kurdish teachers to Kirkuk. They are overseeing the replacement of Arabic-language tuition with Kurd-

ish and the introduction of a Kurdish curriculum complete with textbooks bearing a map of the Kurdistan federation on their front cover.

CONTINUED INSTABILITY

Car bomb kills 50 at Iraqi police station

By Nicolas Pelham
in Baghdad

A suicide car-bomber killed about 50 people at a crowded police station south of Baghdad yesterday, underlining continued instability in post-war Iraq.

The attacker struck as scores of Iraqis queued to fill in applications to join the police force in the town of Iskandaria, 40km south of Baghdad. A further 75 people were wounded in the blast.

The attack in the mainly Shia town followed US claims that they had discovered a 17-page letter from a militant linked to al-Qaeda, proposing to bomb targets that could ignite a sectarian civil war in Iraq.

US officials said the letter, found on a computer disk, was written by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, an Afghan-trained Jordanian wanted for killing an American diplomat in Amman in October 2002.

A UN delegation held a third day of talks in the city on whether elections were the way to choose a national assembly to select a sovereign Iraqi government.

The call for general elections has been a key demand of Ayatollah Ali Sistani, Iraq's leading Shia cleric.

His religious edicts have brought hundreds of thousands of Shias on to the streets in protest, stymieing a US plan for regional caucuses to select a national assembly.

The Governing Council, which signed up to the original plan, is now divided, with its Shia members largely backing Mr Sistani.

Ahmed Fawzi, spokesman for the UN delegation, said he had detected a willingness from all parties to work with the UN in a search for "a third way".

"The caucus theory is one that is alien to Iraqi society - that's what they are all saying," he said.

Members of the Governing Council who advocate elections say defying Mr Sistani could prove even more destabilising for Iraq than bombs.

"There could be more security problems if there are no elections," Entifadh Qanbar, spokesman for Ahmed Chalabi, a senior member of the Governing Council, told journalists.

As a further reminder of the ayatollah's ability to launch a mass action campaign, thousands of Mr Sistani's his followers again took to the streets of Najaf yesterday.

Since arriving in Baghdad three days ago, the UN delegation, led by Kofi Annan's envoy to Iraq, Lakhdar Brahimi, has met the Governing Council, groups of Arab nationalists and a 40-strong caucus of women.

Mr Fawzi said the team had also met a technical

committee sent by Mr Sistani to discuss using a database for rations distribution as an electoral roll, and shortly hoped to visit the cleric himself in Najaf.

He said Mr Brahimi planned to submit his report on February 20, nine days before Mr Bremer is due to promulgate a Basic Law determining the structure of a future Iraqi government and legislature.

Interior ministry officials say insurgents have killed more Iraqi police than US soldiers as part of a strategy of targeting those collaborating with the US-led occupation.

The security risks inherent in mounting any sort of electoral process were further underscored when US forces, acting on a warning, evacuated hundreds of personnel from a conference centre across the road from where the UN delegation was meeting.



Aftermath: an Iraqi woman stands next to bodies outside the Iskandaria city mortuary following the suicide bombing of a police station

Kurds show their grit

Los Angeles Times

by Peter W. Galbraith 11 February 2004

The Kurds understand why suicide bombers attacked their political leaders in Irbil, Iraq on Sunday. The attacks had all the hallmarks of an operation by extremists - nearly simultaneous detonations at two different locations, use of sophisticated explosives hidden in specially designed jackets and an utter indifference to the collateral damage. In addition to seven senior officials of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the toll included 100 ordinary citizens of Irbil.

Visiting the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, PUK, headquarters a day later, I found it hard to imagine how such a small quantity of explosives could do so much damage. The ground was scorched black. The exterior wall 25 feet from the blast centre had collapsed and all the furniture had been blown to one end of the room.

It was an awful, jarring tragedy. But even though the Kurdistan Regional Government has been America's closest ally in Iraq, and even though the Kurdish military - the peshmerga - fought closely with US special forces in last year's war, almost no one in Kurdistan blames the United States for what happened on Sunday.

That's because they know they were attacked for what they have become during 12 years of self-rule, for the fact that they are virtually independent from the rest of Iraq. Kurdistan was hit because it is secular, pluralistic, increasingly democratic and successful. As such, it is the major obstacle to a terrorist strategy that depends on chaos for success.

The two main Kurdish parties, one-time rivals that fought a nasty civil war in the 1990s, have come together, moving to unify competing Kurdistan governments, one based in Irbil and the other further south in Sulaymaniya.

But in the long run, Iraq's fragile unity may be the attack's main victim, in spite of brave words from Kurdish leaders to the contrary. Though the leaders have long understood that full independence is not a realistic option at this time, there is a grass-roots movement that disagrees. Since the US takeover of Iraq, a new Kurdish movement towards referendum on the issue has gathered two million signatures, more than 50 per cent of Iraq's adult Kurds. The movement is widely seen as a proxy campaign for independence.

The bombings are likely to intensify Kurdish views that Kurds should have little to do with the chaotic south. They do not understand why the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority, CPA, wants to replace their institutions with Iraqi ones.

Certainly, Kurds negotiating Iraq's provisional constitution will now be even more insistent that the Kurdistan Regional Government continue to handle security in the region. The Kurds were already resisting American efforts to introduce a

reformed Iraqi army and intelligence service into Kurdistan. Despite the obvious lapses that allowed the bombers near so many senior leaders, the Kurds have confidence in their own peshmerga and intelligence services. And even after Sunday's massacre, Kurdistan remains relatively peaceful. Home to one-sixth of Iraq's population, just 200 coalition troops are stationed here.

In these circumstances, the Kurds say, the plan to replace their governing institutions is not a formula to bring democracy to Iraq, but rather to bring chaos to Kurdistan. Fortunately, the Kurds have no intention of complying with American proposals. It is neither just nor realistic to turn back the clock in Kurdistan. Allowing the Kurds to retain their autonomous governmental arrangements probably provides the best hope for a stable Iraq.

While the US actively seeks to diminish Kurdistan's successful government, it does nothing about the other issue of great concern to the Kurds: the status of Kirkuk. Kirkuk is possibly the most explosive issue in Iraq today. One hour from Irbil, it sits atop Iraq's largest producing oil reservoir. Home to Kurds, Turkmens and Arabs, Kirkuk is claimed by all three.

Beginning in the 1950s and accelerating in the last 20 years, successive Iraqi regimes tried to change Kirkuk's ethnicity by expelling Kurds (and some Turkmens) and settling Arabs in their place. In 1974, differences between Kurds and Arabs over Kirkuk led to a war that ended a previous attempt to give Kurdistan autonomy.

Today, Turkey's self-professed role as the protector of the Turkmens (and as opponents of Kurdish self-rule) provides additional volatility. No foreigner can fully sort out claims that go back centuries. But there should be a process to determine Kirkuk's future. The Kurds, who now dominate the province politically, have offered to suspend their own claims in exchange for such a process. The handling of Kirkuk is part of a pattern by which the Bush administration is deferring Iraq's most volatile issues until after the US elections in November. But as with the decision not to hold Iraqi elections until 2005, the failure to act on Kirkuk may backfire.

Any spark could ignite the Kirkuk tinderbox. Ideally the people of Kirkuk should decide their status in a referendum that offers both the possibility of joining Kurdistan and options for special autonomy and power-sharing within the province. But, before any vote can take place, evicted Kurds should be able to return to their homes, and Arab settlers should be offered financial incentives to leave. More than a year ago, Pentagon planners endorsed my suggestion for a special commission to sort out property issues. By speedily establishing a system to rectify wrongs, I hoped to ease tensions. Alas, the commission has yet to meet.

For all the suffering they inflicted, the terrorists failed completely in Irbil to destabilise Kurdistan. But by failing to address the status of Kirkuk promptly, the Bush administration may make the problem insoluble. And it leaves a vulnerability that terrorists or insurgents can exploit.

* Galbraith was US ambassador to Croatia from 1993 to 1998. As a senior adviser to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1988 he helped uncover and document Saddam Hussain's campaign against the Kurds.

Cinq chiites arrêtés à Kirkouk alors qu'ils posaient des bombes (police)



KIRKOUK (Irak), 8 fév (AFP) - 22h44 - Cinq chiites irakiens ont été arrêtés dimanche à Kirkouk, alors qu'ils s'appropriaient à poser des bombes dans une rue abritant les permanences des deux principaux partis kurdes irakiens, a indiqué le chef de la police de cette ville du nord de l'Irak.

"Quand ils ont été repérés par une patrouille de police, ils ont tenté de s'échapper à bord d'un pick-up. Ils se sont rendus après un affrontement armé qui a duré dix minutes", a indiqué le général Chirko Chaker.

Selon lui, les cinq hommes ont été surpris alors qu'ils s'appropriaient à poser des bombes à l'entrée d'une rue où se trouvent les permanences des deux principaux mouvements kurdes, l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK), et le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK).

Le général Chaker a indiqué qu'ils étaient des chiites originaires d'Amara, à 365 kilomètres au sud-est de Bagdad, mais qu'on ne connaissait pas encore leur mobile exact.

Néanmoins, lors de leur arrestation ils étaient en possession de quatre engins explosifs, douze grenades, plusieurs kalachnikovs et des plans sur lesquels figuraient l'emplacement des bureaux du gouverneur, de l'UPK et du PDK, ainsi que de certaines positions de l'armée américaine, a-t-il ajouté.

Située à 255 kilomètres au nord de Bagdad, Kirkouk est depuis quelques mois l'objet de rivalités entre les communautés kurdes, arabes et turcomanes. Les Arabes de cette région sont sunnites, les Arabes chiites, qui représentent plus de 55% de la population irakienne vivant essentiellement dans le sud du pays.

Les locaux de l'UPK et du PDK à Erbil (350 km au nord de Bagdad) ont été ravagés le 1er février par un double attentat suicide qui a fait 105 morts.

Un parti kurde de Syrie réclame "une solution à la question kurde"



NICOSIE, 8 fév (AFP) - 15h46 - Un parti kurde de Syrie, "Yakiti", a réclamé dimanche une solution à la question kurde tout en affirmant son "attachement à l'intégrité du territoire syrien".

"Le parti kurde Yakiti, à l'instar de tous les partis kurdes de Syrie, réclame une solution démocratique à la cause kurde dans le cadre de l'intégrité du sol syrien", affirme dans un communiqué le secrétaire de son Comité central, Abdel Baki al-Youssef.

"Vouloir rattacher une partie de la terre syrienne à un Etat étranger est une accusation sans fondement que (les autorités) ont l'habitude de porter contre tous les activistes politiques kurdes", souligne le communiqué.

Des partis kurdes font état de "ségrégations" contre la population kurde en Syrie, estimée à plus d'un million de personnes. Ils réclament aux autorités de leur restituer leurs cartes d'identité à près de 200.000 Kurdes en Syrie qui leur avaient été retirées en 1962.

Le communiqué fait état en outre de la poursuite de la détention depuis plus d'un an du représentant du parti au Liban Farhat Abdel Rahmane Ali, "arrêté en décembre 2002 au Liban par les services de renseignement libanais à la demande des services de renseignement militaire syriens" et qui leur a été remis.

Farhat est accusé par la Cour de sûreté de l'Etat, un tribunal d'exception, d'"appartenir à une organisation secrète" et de "vouloir rattacher une partie du territoire syrien à un Etat étranger", ajoute le communiqué qui demande sa libération ainsi que de "tous les prisonniers politiques en Syrie".

La Syrie est opposée à l'établissement d'un éventuel Etat kurde en Irak.

IRAN Vingt-cinq ans après la révolution islamique, la population a perdu ses illusions même si les conservateurs tiennent toujours les rênes du pouvoir

La théocratie bride la liberté à Téhéran

Le 11 février 1979, il y a tout juste un quart de siècle, une page de l'histoire de l'Iran se tournait : le régime du Chah était définitivement renversé et faisait place à la République islamique sous la pression de foules en délire galvanisées par le très charismatique ayatollah Khomeyni. Des milliers d'Iraniens sont aujourd'hui attendus autour de la place Azadi (Liberté), près de l'aéroport de Téhéran, pour commémorer l'événement. Mais, si les religieux tiennent aujourd'hui toujours le pouvoir, les temps ont profondément changé : le charme est rompu et la population ne croit plus guère aux vertus de la théocratie. Des voix s'élèvent désormais pour remettre en cause le rapport étroit existant dans le pays entre le politique et le religieux.

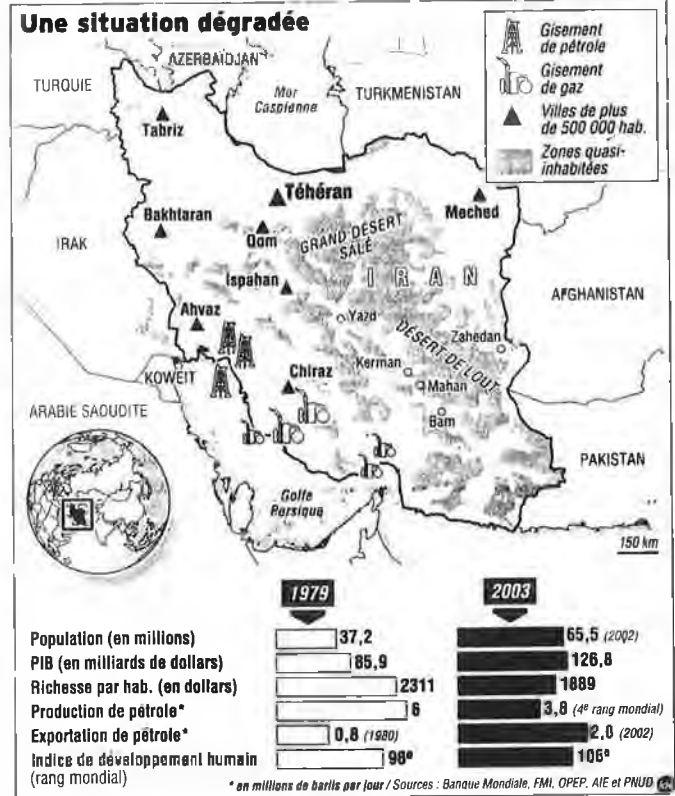
Téhéran :
Delphine Minoui

Accroupie sur un tapis persan, devant un gigantesque portrait de l'ayatollah Khomeyni, une brochette de gamines aux joues rondes coincées dans leurs foulards entonnent des chants révolutionnaires. « Khomeyni, imam, Khomeyni, imam, Oh combattant sacré, Oh symbole de l'honneur... ». A l'école de filles « Refah », encadrée dans une petite allée modeste du sud de Téhéran, l'anniversaire de la révolution a une signification bien particulière : « C'est

ici que l'ayatollah Khomeyni établit son quartier général, à son retour d'exil, il y a vingt-cinq ans », explique Sediga Kanhan, une des institutrices. « Pour moi, dit-elle, la révolution a symbolisé une explosion de lumière. »

Un quart de siècle après la chute du Chah d'Iran et l'accueil de l'ayatollah Khomeyni à l'aéroport de Téhéran par une foule en émoi, la capitale iranienne est sur son trente-et-un : lampions colorés, couronnes de fleurs et posters géants. Mais la majorité des Iraniens restent indifférents aux festivités en cours. « Les temps ont changé », constate Massoumeh, une ancienne mi-

Une situation dégradée



litante islamiste. Elle se souvient que, à l'époque, Khomeyni avait réussi à rassembler tous les groupes. « Même mes amis de gauche

étaient enroués par les paroles du leader », dit-elle. « C'était un homme charismatique. Pour nous, il incarnait ce modèle de sagesse qu'on cherchait depuis longtemps. J'ai encore du mal à expliquer cette attirance magique qu'on ressentait tous pour lui », poursuit-elle. A l'appel du « rahbar » (le « leader »), des milliers de jeunes combattants volontaires se ruèrent ainsi les yeux fermés au front, dans la guerre qui opposa l'Iran à l'Irak de 1980 à 1988.

Aujourd'hui, Massoumeh a pris du recul. Elle a troqué le tchador noir contre un simple foulard et elle s'est inscrite, il y a quatre ans, aux cours de l'intellectuel religieux Abdolkarim Soroush. Cet ancien membre du Conseil de la révolution culturelle, chargé de l'islamisation des universités, est devenu l'un des théoriciens les plus en vogue du « post-islamisme ». Défenseur d'un « islam personnel », il rejette en bloc l'instrumentalisation de la religion



En février 1979, l'ayatollah Khomeyni, fondateur de la République islamiste, était acclamé par la foule à Téhéran à son retour d'exil. Aujourd'hui, de nombreux penseurs iraniens osent remettre en cause le rapport étroit entre politique et religion. (Photo Gabriel Duval/AFP.)

et ose questionner la clef de voûte du système iranien : le velayat-e faqih, cette fonction de juridiction suprême qui a échoué à Ali Khamenei à la mort de l'ayatollah Khomeyni, en 1989.

Il n'est pas le seul : de Qom, la ville sainte, à Téhéran, de nombreux penseurs osent désormais remettre en cause ouvertement le rapport étroit entre politique et religion. « Nous revenons de loin », commente Hamid Reza Jalai-pour, professeur de sciences sociales à Téhéran. « Il y a vingt-cinq ans, on était nombreux à croire que la théocratie pouvait résoudre tous les problèmes », précise-t-il. « Mais on le voit bien : depuis la révolution, le nombre de fidèles n'a pas augmenté, les mosquées ne sont pas devenues plus populaires et l'Etat n'est pas plus efficace », dit-il. Parmi les anciens radicaux d'hier se trouvent d'ailleurs de

nombreux réformateurs d'aujourd'hui. Abbas Abdi, pour ne citer que lui, un des « mentors » de la prise d'otage à l'Ambassade américaine, en novembre 1979, s'est fait remarquer il y a plus d'un an par la publication d'un sondage « choc » qui révélait que trois quarts des Iraniens se prononçaient en faveur de la reprise du dialogue entre l'Iran et l'Amérique. Son enquête ne manqua pas de provoquer la grogne de la justice conservatrice qui l'envoya derrière les barreaux. « Cette révolution, poursuit Hamid Reza Jalai-pour, nous a permis d'expé-

menter le fondamentalisme religieux. Et, cela, c'est un grand

acquis par rapport à nos pays voisins qui ne font que le découvrir maintenant », poursuit-il. « Aujourd'hui, dit-il, l'ouverture sur le monde et la démocratie sont inévitables en Iran ».

La démocratie, voilà un mot qui circule dans tous les milieux : des banquettes arrière des taxis collectifs – véritables lieux de débats – aux couloirs des universités, en passant par les cercles qui gravitent autour du président Khatami. Elu triomphalement en 1997, par un électoralat largement jeune et féminin, ce clerc réformateur parle, plus précisément, de « démocratie religieuse ». « En Iran, il faut savoir peser ses

mots, et avancer à pas feutrés pour ne pas provoquer les durs du régime », confie un de ses proches.

Il est vrai que les conservateurs, fervents défenseurs du guide religieux, qui continuent à tenir les principales rênes du pouvoir, ne sont pas prêts à céder leurs acquis. Ils viennent récemment de le prouver avec le blocage de milliers de candidats réformistes aux élections législatives du 20 février prochain. Raison avancée : non-respect de l'islam.

Quant à la justice, également sous la coupe des conservateurs, elle multiplie les convocations au tribunal et les condamnations à la prison d'intellectuels. Sans compter la fermeture en série des journaux libéraux.

« C'est le combat de l'islam idéologique contre l'islam culturel et tolérant », commente l'écrivain Mashallah Chamsolvaezine, qui ose même effleurer le mot de « laïcité ». Cet activiste de la presse réformatrice, aujourd'hui à la tête de l'association de défense des droits des journalistes, sait de quoi il parle : il vient d'être à nouveau appelé à rendre des comptes au tribunal pour « diffusion d'informations mensongères ». L'homme, qui a connu

la prison pendant dix-huit mois, se refuse pourtant à songer à l'exil, comme certains de ses proches qui ont fini

par quitter le pays. « Malgré les pressions, je sens que le cœur de la démocratie bat en Iran », dit-il. « Après cette expérience douloureuse que fut la révolution, la société iranienne est en train d'atteindre sa maturité », commente la sociologue iranienne Masserat Amir Ebrahimi.

Et de citer l'exemple des femmes, « plus entrepreneuriales et plus actives que sous le Chah ». Ou encore celui des jeunes : « Ils sont plus réalistes que leurs parents. A la passion idéologique, ils opposent la volonté de vivre comme tous les jeunes de leur âge ». Boom des ONG, associations culturelles, galeries d'art, cours de théâtre : autant de voies qu'empruntent aujourd'hui les Iraniens pour s'exprimer à leur façon, à la marge des conflits politiques.

Parmi les anciens radicaux d'hier se trouvent de nombreux réformateurs d'aujourd'hui

Un nouvel Iran émerge : jeune, lettré et en rupture avec le passé

La révolte silencieuse de Behrouz

Il porte un jean noir. Il met du gel dans ses cheveux. Il ne regarde jamais la télévision d'Etat, mais il connaît par cœur les chansons des Pink Floyd. Behrouz a 25 ans, l'âge de la République islamique. Le culte de Khomeyni et les slogans révolutionnaires, ce n'est pas vraiment sa tasse de thé.

« Une page s'est tournée, il faut regarder vers l'avenir », avance le jeune étudiant en chimie, comme un cri du cœur, en rappelant que sa génération, les « moins de 25 ans », représente plus de 60 % de la population.

En 1979, ses parents descendaient dans la rue en brandissant leurs idéaux révolutionnaires : la lutte contre la corruption occidentale, contre la modernisation à outrance imposée par le Chah, et l'appel à l'exportation de la révolution. Aujourd'hui, Behrouz reste indifférent à ces formules.

Élevé sur les bancs de la propagande islamique et à l'école de l'Internet et du satellite, il reconnaît que les jeunes de son âge sont « pleins de contradictions ». Mais il est convaincu d'une chose : « L'idéologie collective ne sert à rien. Ce que nous cherchons avant tout, c'est le respect des libertés de chacun ». Vingt-cinq ans après

la révolution, un nouvel Iran émerge : jeune, lettré et en rupture avec les discours conservateurs de certains dirigeants. Ce sont les enfants du « baby-boom », encouragés par Khomeyni pendant la guerre Iran-Irak. Au sortir du conflit, et sous l'impulsion de la reconstruction du pays, ils ont envahi les nombreuses écoles du pays. Plus récemment, ils se sont engouffrés dans les universités, qui ont

« Ce que nous cherchons avant tout, c'est le respect des libertés de chacun »

poussé comme des champignons à travers l'Iran. Résultat : plus de 80 % des jeunes Iraniens sont aujourd'hui alphabétisés. Parmi lesquels de nombreuses filles : elles représentent même plus de la moitié des effectifs qui réussissent au difficile concours d'entrée à l'université... Une véritable force, qui cherche aujourd'hui à s'affranchir du pouvoir.

Difficile pourtant d'imposer ses désirs de changement. Behrouz a tout expérimenté : les émeutes étudiantes de l'été 1999, les coups de bâton, la

grève de la faim, la prison. Par trois fois, il a voté en faveur des réformateurs, dans l'espoir d'une démocratisation : les présidentielles de 1997, les municipales de 1999 et les législatives de 2000. « La liberté qu'on a obtenue jusqu'ici est artificielle : la presse a bien sûr connu un essor sans précédent, mais les intellectuels n'ont jamais été autant convoqués au tribunal. Regardez le nombre de jour-

naux fermés, le nombre de journalistes arrêtés », dit-il. « En plus, avec un taux de chômage qui atteint les

20 %, quelles sont nos perspectives d'avenir ? », s'interroge-t-il. C'est décidé : Behrouz n'ira pas voter la semaine prochaine. Pour lui, « la politique se trouve dans une impasse ». Et, dans ces conditions, « il faut mieux trouver des voies détournées pour aider le pays à se développer ».

Il y a quelques mois, il a rejoint une ONG qui vient en aide aux enfants de la rue. Et sa révolte ? « Je l'exprime dans des petits poèmes, que j'espère un jour publier... », dit-il.

D. M.

The
Economist

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Iraq

The spectre of a civil war

BAGHDAD

The latest suicide-bombs make it harder for Iraqis to build a new country. Will they make peace—or fight each other?

TWO suicide car-bombers drove home the price of helping the United States in Iraq, when they rammed the recruitment offices of the country's new security forces, two days in a row. About 100 Iraqis were killed in all, the first lot outside a police station in Iskandariyah, just south of Baghdad, the second in sight of the American enclave that is supposed to be the safest zone in the heart of the capital.

Officials of the American-run Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and its Iraqi appointees in the Governing Council deny the attacks as the death rattle of a desperate force. Their enemies say they are just the beginning. *Jihadis* from outside Iraq, who are suspected of involvement, say they want not only to throw Americans out of Iraq but also to drive a path through to Saudi Arabia, whose ruling establishment they want to destroy too.

A 17-page letter addressed to al-Qaeda leaders, which the Americans say they recently got off a wanted Jordanian *jihadi*, lays out a plan to spark a civil war between Iraq's main sectarian groups by setting off bombs, such as this week's, and hoping that Iraq's communities will blame each other. With copious funds, the *jihadis* have apparently had little difficulty in finding local logistical help.

The insurgents say it is the Americans who are in retreat, by promising to abolish their ruling civilian arm, the CPA, in time to hand over power to Iraqis by July 1st.

The Americans have also started to thin their military bulk, and have already cut the number of their encampments in Baghdad from 60 to 26. In due course the figure will fall to eight, with just one position inside the city and the rest on the edge.

Despite the coalition troops' reduced visibility, their January death toll was higher than in any previous month, bar November. The official line in Washington is that the attacks are "not a strategic threat". But the persistence of violence is making it harder for the Americans to prepare a convincing exit strategy.

Much had been staked on the visit of a team led by the UN secretary-general's special envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, who has been assessing what role the international body might play in a handover. After this week's carnage, with its echoes of the car-bomb that killed 22 of the UN's employees in Iraq last August, including its previous envoy, and forced the survivors to evacuate, Mr Brahimi may be wary of recommending the UN's return.

The attacks may also make it harder for the Americans to hand responsibility for Iraq's security to Iraqis. This week they released detailed plans to cede control of Baghdad's security to the capital's 9,000 Iraqi police. A further 10,000, said the Americans, would be on the streets by next year.

After the latest attacks on the recruitment centres, that confident prediction

may be in doubt. Four of the city's five deadliest bombs since Saddam Hussein was toppled last April have gone off in the past few weeks. To many in the centre of Baghdad, the American plan to withdraw to the edge of the city sounds similar to what has happened elsewhere in the disaffected "Sunni triangle" in the centre of Iraq, where American troops have vacated most of the town centres while failing to suppress the insurgency.

Plans for the civilian handover seem foggy too. With four months to go, Iraq's American ruler, Paul ("Jerry") Bremer, still seems unsure who or what will succeed him. The Shia Muslims' most influential cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, has confounded Mr Bremer's plans for appointed caucuses to choose an interim national assembly, insisting instead on direct elections. The 25-strong, American-appointed Governing Council suggested to Mr Brahimi that it should fill the void and form a provisional government, without even the caucuses envisaged by Mr Bremer. Mr Brahimi met the ayatollah in Najaf on February 12th, in an effort to find common ground between the competing voices.

Where's that new Iraqi army?

Iraq's various armed factions are anyway doing more to bolster their own militias against the insurgents than to invest in a united Iraq. The Americans now rarely talk of disbanding party militias. On the contrary, after the bloody suicide-bomb attacks on the headquarters of the Kurds' two main parties a fortnight ago, the Kurds seem to be retreating from central politics to look after their own safety in their northern safe havens.

Elsewhere, Shia militias are enforcing their authority. This week, the Iranian-trained Shia militia, known as the Badr corps, led by one of the Governing Council's nine presidents (who take turns to have a month in charge), opened a book fair in Baghdad to celebrate 25 years of Iran's Islamic Revolution and to laud the late Ayatollah Khomeini's theory of *wilayat al-faqih*, the "supreme cleric's" rule.

"After years of deprivation under Saddam, Iraqis are hungry for literature," said a bookseller who introduced himself as a former political attaché at Iran's embassy in Beirut. Funded by Iran's "guidance" ministry and its embassy in Baghdad, the fair's hallway was festooned with murals portraying the early Muslim community's massacres of Jews and others.

The Iranians are bolstering Iraq's Shias with cash. With pilgrimages to their holy sites no longer shackled by Mr Hussein's secret police, a record 10,000 religious tourists a day, bringing in about \$2 billion a year, are flocking across unguarded borders with Iran, turning Baghdad's few public parks into a sea of picnicking chadors.

"Iran is reviving our economy," says Abu Ali, who owns one of many restaurants to open in the shadow of Baghdad's Kathimiya shrine.

Whether Iraq's Shias privately think

they can grab a monopoly of power is a matter of conjecture. Gertrude Bell, an administrator when Britain tried to run Iraq in the 1920s, warned of the ayatollahs' wiles. "A theocratic state", she wrote in 1920, the year the ayatollahs revolted against the British, "is the very devil."

The Yankees bowing to the beards

So far the Americans have been careful to respect Shia tradition, hailing Mr Sistani as a force for good, not of obscurantism. Meanwhile, Mr Sistani's supporters are still keeping up the pressure on the Americans for direct elections, which they presume they will win. The Shias have returned to the streets of Najaf, their holiest city and home to Mr Sistani, using a Shia

pilgrimage known as al Ghadir to chant more calls for elections.

For Mr Bremer, this is an unsettling foretaste of things to come. He has until the end of the month to promulgate his "basic law" setting out guidelines for the road towards a full-fledged election in 2005 under a popularly endorsed constitution. If Mr Sistani is still dissatisfied, he might use a much bigger pilgrimage, known as Ashoura, to press his case on the street.

As the clock ticks away at Mr Bremer's rule, many Iraqis are already taking the law into their own hands. While liquor stores have proliferated since Mr Hussein's fall, so has the murder of their owners. Iraqi singers, journalists, doctors, engineers and intellectuals have all been mur-

dered, quite possibly by extreme Islamists. The latest victim was Abdel Latif al-Miah, a witty head of the strategic-studies centre at one of Baghdad's universities.

When the Americans recently raised the siege of Aouj, a town in Mr Hussein's old heartland, many people in the town were terrified that the removal of barbed wire surrounding it would leave them exposed to the attacks of Shia militia. Thousands of Iraqi civilians have been killed since Mr Hussein's fall (see our article, left).

So far, however, the violence and coercion have yet to take on a plainly sectarian character. Some of it is inspired by Islamism, and much of it is directed at the Americans. Since Iraq's sects are not yet turning on each other, this does not yet amount to a civil war. But fear of one is mounting. ■

Le Monde 14 FÉVRIER 2004

Le chef de la mission des Nations unies en Irak se dit « d'accord » avec l'ayatollah Al-Sistani

Lakhdar Brahimi a souhaité des élections générales mais s'est gardé de préciser un calendrier. Jeudi, le chef du commandement américain a échappé à une attaque à la roquette

LE CHEF du Commandement central américain (Centcom), le général John Abizaid, a échappé, jeudi 12 février, à une attaque aux roquettes à Fallouja, à 50 km à l'ouest de Bagdad, selon le général Mark Kimmitt, directeur adjoint des opérations militaires américaines. Le général Abizaid et le général Charles Swannack, commandant de la 82^e division aéroportée, qui l'accompagnait, n'étaient toutefois pas directement visés, a précisé le général Kimmitt. « Ils visitaient le quartier général des forces de la défense civile irakienne, lorsque trois RPG ont été tirés sur le convoi à partir des toits voisins. Aucun soldat ni aucun civil n'a été touché » par les tirs. « Les soldats de la coalition et les membres de la défense civile ont riposté aux tirs et pourchassé les assaillants. »

Le général Kimmitt a par ailleurs affirmé que le Jordanien Abou Moussab Al-Zarqaoui, dont la tête a été mise à prix par Washington pour 10 millions de dollars, était le « suspect numéro un » dans les attentats sanglants survenus en 2003 à Nadjaf au sud de Bagdad, et contre les bureaux de l'ONU dans la capitale. Cet homme, soupçonné d'être lié au réseau terroriste Al-Qaida, est « le pire terroriste qui puisse se trouver en Irak » et a de nombreux contacts dans toutes



A Nadjaf, jeudi 12 février, Lakhdar Brahimi a indiqué que « l'ayatollah Sistani est totalement dans son droit de demander la tenue d'élections, et nous sommes tout à fait d'accord avec lui ».

les régions du monde, a ajouté l'officier américain. Dans un document de 17 pages, attribué à Zarqaoui et publié par la coalition mercredi, l'auteur affirme avoir participé à 25 opérations en Irak.

« LES MEILLEURES CONDITIONS »

Le chef de la mission de l'ONU en Irak, Lakhdar Brahimi, a proposé un compromis entre la position de la coalition dirigée par les Etats-Unis et celle du grand ayatollah

chiite Ali Al-Sistani, à propos de l'organisation d'élections au suffrage universel. « L'ayatollah Sistani est totalement dans son droit de demander la tenue d'élections et nous sommes tout à fait d'accord avec lui car c'est le meilleur moyen pour résoudre le problème irakien », a déclaré M. Brahimi à l'issue d'une réunion de deux heures au bureau du dignitaire chiite, dans la ville sainte de Nadjaf, au sud de Bagdad. « Nous sommes

d'accord avec lui sur le fait qu'il faut qu'elles se tiennent dans les meilleures conditions et soient bien préparées pour obtenir les résultats attendus par lui et par le peuple irakien », a-t-il ajouté. M. Brahimi dirige une délégation chargée par le secrétaire général de l'ONU, Kofi Annan, d'étudier la faisabilité d'un tel scrutin.

Dirigeant spirituel de la communauté chiite d'Irak, qui représente 60 % de la population, l'ayatollah Sistani refuse toute désignation de l'Assemblée transitoire, devant être mise en place d'ici au 31 mai, selon l'accord du 15 novembre 2003 conclu entre la coalition et le Conseil intérimaire de gouvernement irakien, qui fixe les étapes du transfert de souveraineté d'ici à la fin 2005. Il exige la tenue d'élections directes, quitte à ce que le calendrier soit bouleversé. La coalition s'est refusée à réagir immédiatement aux propos de M. Brahimi jusqu'à ce que les experts de l'ONU soumettent leur rapport officiel.

Selon des responsables américains, cités vendredi par le *Washington Post*, le plan américain pour un transfert de souveraineté en Irak pourrait être totalement revu et une option serait de repousser la passation de pouvoirs au début de 2005. - (AFP.)

William Safire

Saddam's links to terror, on disc

WASHINGTON
In the town of Kalar, about 160 kilometers northeast of Baghdad, Kurdish villagers recently reported suspicious activity to the pesh merga.

That Kurdish militia has for years been waging a bloody battle with Ansar al-Islam, the terrorist group affiliated with Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and supported by Saddam Hussein in Iraq. It captured a courier carrying a message that demolishes the repeated claim of Bush critics that there was never a "clear link" between Saddam and Osama bin Laden.

The terrorist courier with a CD-ROM containing a 17-page document and with other messages was Hassan Ghul, who confessed he was taking to Al Qaeda the Ansar document setting forth a strategy to start an Iraqi civil war, along with a plea for reinforcements. The Kurds turned him over to Americans for further interrogation, which is proving fruitful.

The New York Times reporter Dexter Filkins in Baghdad, backed up by Douglas Jehl in Washington, broke the story exclusively (IHT, Feb. 10). Editors marked its significance by placing it on the front page above the fold. Although The Washington Post the next day buried it on Page 17 (and Newsweek may construe as bogus any Saddam-Osama connection) the messages' authenticity was best attested by the amazed U.S. official who told Reuters, "We couldn't make this up if we tried."

The author of the lengthy Ansar-to-Qaeda electronic message is suspected

of being the most wanted terror operative in the world today: Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, long familiar to readers of this space as "the man with the limp," who personifies the link of Ansar and Al Qaeda.

On Sept. 24, 2001 — not two weeks after the Sept. 11 attacks — Kurdish sources led me to report: "The clear link between the terrorist in hiding (Osama) and the terrorist in power (Saddam) can be found in Kurdistan. The Iraqi dictator has armed and financed a fifth column of Al Qaeda mulahs and terrorists. Some 400 'Arab Afghan' mercenaries ... have already murdered a high Kurdish official as well as a Muslim scholar who dared to interpret the Quran humanely."

The CIA blew off that report. The National Security Council did not learn of subsequent warfare against the Kurds by the Qaeda affiliate doing Saddam's bidding until its members read it in The Times. After Jeffrey Goldberg of The New Yorker and C.J. Chivers of The Times developed the story from inside northern Iraq, it dawned on some intelligence analysts that a "clear link" was probable.

On Oct. 7, 2002, President George W. Bush said, "We know that Iraq and Al Qaeda have had high-level contacts that go back a decade. Some Al Qaeda leaders who fled Afghanistan went to Iraq. These include one very senior Al Qaeda leader who received medical treatment in Baghdad this year."

The leader whose leg was treated, perhaps amputated, in Baghdad was identified here in January 2003, as Zar-

qawi (twice, after one misspelling). The presence of this international terrorist for two months in a Baghdad hospital required the approval of Saddam's ubiquitous secret police.

In his UN speech the following month, Colin Powell publicly identified the Palestinian, born in Jordan, as one who oversaw a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan three years before: "Iraq today harbors a deadly terrorist network headed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, an associate and collaborator of Osama bin Laden."

Now there is documentary evidence of Ansar's current operation: Employing suicide bombers to foment a civil war in Iraq that would reinstate safe haven for terrorists. The notion that these serial killers are not central players in the global network that attacked America — that the Ansar boss in Iraq must be found carrying an official Qaeda membership card signed by bin Laden — is simply silly.

Of the liberation's three casus belli, one was to stop mass murder, bloodier than in Kosovo; horrific mass graves have been found in Iraq. Another was informed suspicion that a clear link existed between world terror and Saddam; this terrorist plea for Qaeda reinforcements to kill Iraqi democracy is the smoking gun proving that.

The third was a reasoned judgment that Saddam had a bioweapon that could wipe out a city; in time, the coalition is likely to find a buried suitcase containing that, too.

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2 bombs, 100 dead, but Iraqis seem unbowed

By Jeffrey Gettleman

BAGHDAD: Two days, two blasts, one message.

That is how many Iraqi politicians and others are interpreting the back-to-back suicide bombings on Tuesday and Wednesday, which killed more than 100 people at the time when a delegation of United Nations election experts is examining whether early elections can be held in Iraq.

"These terrorists want to inflame the area to get the UN to give up on the idea of elections," said Wael Abdullatif, a judge from the southern city of Basra

who sits on the Iraqi Governing Council. "A week ago, things were quiet. But as soon as the delegation arrived, the

violence exploded."

Hamid Al Kifaei, spokesman for the council, said: "There's no doubt this violence is a signal to the delegation that security is not present. But they can't bomb us into submission."

He added, "And the suicide bombers can go to hell, which they will, because Islam doesn't condone this."

The UN team, which arrived over the weekend, has revealed little about which way it is leaning — whether to push for elections by June 30 or to stick

to the American plan of a caucus-style selection system for Iraq's first democratic government.

Discussing the explosions, Abdul Kadem Jassim, a deputy interior minister, said: "The guys getting killed were

just ordinary people who wanted a job. If the terrorists are trying to win converts, this will only do the opposite."

On Monday, the victims were aspiring policemen, blown apart while waiting in line outside a police station south of Baghdad.

Wednesday it was dozens of young men shivering in the rain in front of an army recruitment center. Many of them waited with suitcases and plastic bags of clothes slung over their shoulders. They were signing up for the army and eager to start training now.

"I want to wear our uniform," said Raid Abdul Zahara, who was cut on the head by shrapnel and narrowly escaped being killed.

Asked if he was scared to return to

such work, he shook his head.

"Never," he said.

So far, more than 300 policemen have been killed, along with scores of other security forces. Iraqi officials say they are being singled out as collaborators of the American-led occupation.

Jassim Tahir, a traffic policeman supervisor, acknowledged his job was like "a dance with death."

"But I can't quit," Tahir said. "Evil can't win, can it?"

The men who were killed Wednesday were standing outside the recruiting station around 7:30 a.m., when an explosive-packed Chevrolet Celebrity driven by a masked man swerved into them. Though the base is fortified with hundreds of sand-filled barriers, most of the recruits

were outside the protection zone.

The circumstances were very similar to the truck bombing in Iskandariya on Tuesday, where at least 50 men were killed by a suicide truck bomb while they were lining up for jobs at a police station. "We were just talking, about this and that," said Saad Shilal, a 27-year-old army recruit. "The next thing I know, there is noise, there is fire and then I'm out."

At least 47 people were killed and 50 wounded in the blast on Wednesday, American military commanders said.

An hour after the explosion, the scene was a swirl of chaos. Distraught mothers screamed for their missing sons. Ambulances raced in and out.



U.S. Army investigators at the site of a car bombing Wednesday outside an Iraqi Army recruitment center in Baghdad, where about 300 Iraqis had waited for it to open.

American soldiers jostled with Iraqi policemen.

In the past 10 days, more than 200 people have been killed in suicide attacks, the most blood shed by the insurgency since it started.

But despite the grim familiarity, the

violence hasn't made cities like Baghdad feel like combat zones. At the same time bombs are ripping into crowds, shops are open, children are going to school and traffic police are standing, unarmed, in the middle of surging streets.

The New York Times

Syria frees 130 political prisoners

By Ian Fisher

DAMASCUS: The news came, Faris Mourad said, as "a total surprise." For 30 years, he endured life as a political prisoner here, suffering torture, harsh conditions, an untreated disease that curved his spine, permanently and painfully. Then on Jan. 31, along with almost 130 other political prisoners in Syria's police state, he was suddenly freed.

Syria has still not explained to the nation this act of unexpected clemency toward a handful of perhaps 3,000 such prisoners — or even acknowledged publicly that it happened. But some human rights officials say it is a sign, if a small and ambiguous one, of the larger pressures Syria is under these days, with more than 100,000 American soldiers next door in Iraq and increasing impatience for change at home.

It was the first release of a large number of prisoners since 2001, in the early days of promises by a new, young president, Bashar al-Assad, for greater democracy.

"Time is running out," said Haitham al-Maleh, a lawyer and human rights activist who has defended many political prisoners. "Everything is changing all over the world. The United States is trying to make pressure. The European Union is trying to make pressure."

And so are Syrian people, if gingerly for fear of a backlash from a state ruled with iron for 30 years by Hafez Assad and, since his death in 2000, with something slightly softer by his son, Bashar, 38.

But there is a paradox here that says much about the state of mind around the Middle East: the United States is exerting the most pressure on Syria — which it accuses of sponsoring terror groups — and talks loudest about democracy in the region. Yet human rights activists, intellectuals and released prisoners like Mourad say they distrust America deeply, seeing it working more for its own larger strategic interests than pushing for improvements in civil rights for ordinary Syrians.

"Where is American democracy?" asked Mourad, 54, arrested for activity in the Arab Communist Organization and one of the two longest-serving political prisoners. "Where are American human rights?"

American pressure has focused almost wholly on terrorism and the war in Iraq, and on those fronts the pressure has been unrelenting. U.S. and Israeli officials accused Syria last week of resuming shipments of arms to the Lebanese guerrilla group Hezbollah, and Secretary of State Colin Powell suggested that Syria should take "a hard look" at its policies now that it is largely encircled

by allies of the United States: Israel, Jordan, Turkey and, since last year, Iraq.

The accusation comes as American officials prepare a report on Syria that could lead to economic sanctions. An act passed by Congress last year demands that Syria cut ties with Hezbollah and Palestinian militant groups fighting Israel, withdraw its nearly 20,000 troops from Lebanon, and close off its border with Iraq to anti-American insurgents.

The act does not address the issue of political prisoners. But the European Union has made their freedom part of its negotiations over a new trade agreement with Syria.

The workings of the Syrian state is a mystery to most observers, foreign and domestic, so it is hard to say with any precision how exactly Syria is reacting to these many pressures.

Many experts on Syria say they believe the prisoner release was partly a gesture to the European Union and partly to show some movement on reforms to Syrians themselves.

In all, human rights activists, diplomats and other experts say the prisoner release seems consistent with what they see as other recent steps to ease pressure on several fronts: give a little but make no dramatic changes that could loosen the government's hold on power.

The New York Times

February 16, 2004

Herald Tribune



The GIs who have guarded Iraq's frontiers are about to leave. But the country's new border police—hastily trained and poorly armed—aren't eager to say goodbye.

BY JOSHUA HAMMER

ON A MURKY NIGHT ALONG Iraq's border with Syria, a flickering kerosene lamp casts long shadows on the graffiti-scarred walls of a dilapidated border post. Armed with only a rusting pair of binoculars, an AK-47 and a half magazine of bullets, border guard Ghissa Ali Fatih leads a visitor up a rickety ladder to the roof. Three months ago U.S. troops stopped a truck heading into Iraq not far from here with four foreign fighters—including a woman and two vests laden with explosives. But tonight Fatih is more concerned about what he can't see. Gesturing through the

darkness toward the winding Euphrates below, he says a foreign jihadi creeping across the desert into Iraq would be invisible. "This is a big problem for us," he says.

It was impossible for the strongest military in the world to secure Iraq's vast borders. And, as of next month, the job will belong to Fatih and his ragged comrades. The U.S. Army's Third Armored Cavalry Regiment, which guards 500 miles of rugged semidesert along the Syrian, Saudi and Jordanian borders, is pulling out at the end of the month. Other U.S. Army troops are leaving Iraq, too, including the 101st Airborne Division, which controls 100 miles of the Syrian border and Iraq's frontier with Turkey. As the troops withdraw, smaller contingents

of both the U.S. Army and the Marines will replace them, but the job of protecting the country's perimeter will fall mostly to a poorly equipped and hastily trained Iraqi police force. Both Iraqis and the Coalition have reason to worry. Analysts believe the most devastating attacks in the war against the occupation—the suicide bombings that have killed hundreds of Iraqis—are the work of outside infiltrators who have passed virtually at will across the unprotected borders.

Critics say the Americans have only themselves to blame. "There was this idea that we could abolish the Army and security forces, and then [we were surprised that] there was no control of the border," says one State Department official who worked on the postwar plan. U.S. forces lacked the manpower to secure the borders themselves and, in the vacuum, the foreign jihadis moved in. European law-enforcement officials say Al Qaeda has established a network across Europe to recruit foreign fighters, providing them with fake passports, train-



ing and cash, and guiding them along infiltration routes into Iraq. Military sources say that tens of thousands of dollars in cash to fund the insurgency and some weaponry—including Chinese-made missiles capable of penetrating an M1 Abrams tank—are being smuggled into Iraq.

Nobody knows how many foreign fighters have entered the country. While some Iraqi officials believe the number could be as high as several thousand, U.S. military sources say foreigners probably number only 10 percent of the 3,000 to 5,000 insurgents. Yet even a small number of jihadis can do tremendous damage. "If you've only got 50 foreign fighters coming through, that's a lot," says Col. Greg Reilly, commander of Tiger Base, an outpost 17 miles from the Syrian border.

Both the Americans and the Iraqis are overextended. The Third Armored Cavalry Regiment conducts satellite surveillance and air patrols. But they remain preoccupied with

REASON TO WORRY: As U.S. supervisors get ready to pull out of Al Qaim, an Iraqi guard stands watch at a post beside the Euphrates

battling local insurgents. For the most part, the troops have turned over responsibility for guarding the Syrian frontier to two battalions of Iraqi Border Police, or about 420 men. They are based in a few dozen observation posts that extend for only about 15 miles in either direction from the main Syrian-border crossing at Al Qaim. That leaves 70 miles of the border zone completely unguarded. The cops undergo a two-week training course and receive salaries of \$160 a month, generous in Iraq. But their equipment is meager, their mobility limited and their motivation is often low. "The Coalition Provisional Authority hasn't given them anything," says Col. Antonio Aguto, who spent some of his regiment's own funds on vehicles and uniforms.

The Coalition is scrambling to bring the Iraqis up to speed. Last month Iraq's Governing Council approved the creation of a new homegrown intelligence unit to crack down on infiltrations and root out foreign fighters.

The controversial outfit—to be funded by the U.S. government and trained by the CIA—will consist of hundreds of agents, including some former members of the Mukhabarat, Saddam Hussein's dreaded security apparatus. The Third Armored Cavalry Regiment will put another battalion of border police on the Syrian frontier before it withdraws. But troops say more is needed, including computers at official crossings to verify the identities of everyone attempting to enter Iraq legally. "Nineteen hijackers slipped into the United States without any problem," says Capt. Justin Brown, commander of Checkpoint Apache, a Syrian-border crossing. "You can imagine how easily [a terrorist] can cross at primitive border points like this one."

Right now Iraq's border security depends on the vigilance of well-intentioned police like Fatih. Hoisting his Kalashnikov over his shoulder and venturing into the frigid night on foot patrol, he says his men are desperate. "We need night-vision goggles, we need vehicles to patrol," he pleads. But it's likely many more jihadis will cross Iraq's frontiers before his pleas are answered. ■

Iraq



PHOTOGRAPH BY YOLA MONAGHAN FOR NEWSWEEK

PRIME TARGET: U.S. soldiers have outsourced the defense of Iraq's vital oil infrastructure

Guarding a Vital Asset

Are Iraqis ready to protect their valuable, vulnerable oil?

BY JOE COCHRANE

IT MIGHT BE A STRETCH TO CALL Ali and Muhammad the guardians of Iraq's future. Pulling guard duty recently in the rain-soaked northern town of Kirkuk, home of one of the world's largest oilfields, the two men sport mismatched uniforms and clutch rusty AK-47s. But looks are deceiving. Faced with continuing attacks by anti-U.S. insurgents and, according to some, insufficient ground troops to stop them, the U.S. military is counting on Ali and Muhammad (not their real names) and thousands of other private guards to protect Iraq's vast oil infrastructure. The task is daunting: dozens of oilfields, refineries and pumping stations, along with thousands of kilometers of pipeline that crisscross Iraq, are prime targets for insurgents bent on denying the U.S.-led occupying force money for long-term reconstruction. They also hope to exacerbate ongoing fuel shortages in hopes of further enraging a population already angered by long queues for petrol and kerosene. "Production at the refineries is already down 40 to 50 percent," says Asim Jihad, a spokesman for Iraq's Oil Ministry,

"so any attacks seriously affect the flow of oil for export and our ability to provide things for the people."

The vast majority of the attacks around the country each day are directed at U.S. troops and the Iraqis who support them, including the Feb. 1 bombing in Arbil that killed 100 Kurds and wounded 247 more. Similar strikes at targets like the Kirkuk fields or Daura oil refinery in Baghdad could seriously disrupt production and oil exports, and have major implications for Iraq's recovery. "One [major] attack could be catastrophic to the oil industry," says Col. Tom O'Donnell, commander of Task Force Shield, which oversees the security of Iraq's oil infrastructure. Anti-U.S. fighters have launched at least 100 attacks against the oil infrastructure since Baghdad fell, including two last fall on a northern pipeline route that halted crude-oil exports to Turkey. The Coalition has been forced to buy oil products from neighboring countries to meet domestic needs.

U.S. war planners gave high priority to seizing Iraq's northern and southern oilfields before Saddam Hussein could sabotage them. But after major combat opera-

tions ended, manpower was shifted elsewhere, leaving the oil industry dangerously exposed. To protect its infrastructure, last September the Pentagon awarded a \$40 million contract to Erinys International, a private, Britain-based security firm. In only four months Erinys has trained, armed and deployed more than 9,000 Iraqi guards across the country, and plans to expand its force to nearly 15,000 in the coming months. The U.S. military also struck deals with tribal leaders to provide an additional 5,000 guards in their areas.

The outsourcing deals have raised concerns that too much responsibility for Iraq's most important national asset is being thrust upon a private guard force, though military officials say they're satisfied with Erinys's work. In Kirkuk, which lies atop about 6 percent of the world's proven oil reserves, a lone U.S. military officer oversees a guard force responsible for a 150-square-kilometer area. The vast majority of attacks and sabotage have occurred there, as well as in the pro-Saddam Sunni Triangle area northwest of Baghdad. On Jan. 14, security guards chased off insurgents from near the Kirkuk fields and recovered a dozen 82-millimeter mortar rounds.

Several international security companies submitted blind bids last summer for the lucrative contract to guard the oil industry. After the Coalition Authority awarded the contract to Erinys, a relatively obscure outfit formed only two years ago, allegations of impropriety surfaced. Some senior Erinys officials are associated with Ahmad Chalabi, a member of the Iraqi Governing Council and the darling of officials in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill. U.S.-trained militiamen from Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress, or INC, were hired as security guards, and the son of a senior INC member is a director of Erinys's Iraq operation. Coalition and U.S. military officials deny any impropriety in the bidding process, and Jonathan Garratt, Erinys's managing director, dismissed the allegations as sour grapes. "People have accused us of low-balling [the bid]," he told NEWSWEEK. "We just priced it right."

The Coalition is already touting the success of its new "oil police." The number of attacks on oil facilities fell dramatically in December. Still, they rose again last month, and the industry remains vulnerable. Decades of war and economic sanctions have taken their toll, and infrastructure will need several years to be rehabilitated. Coalition and Iraqi officials say they expect to reach prewar production levels of 2.8 million barrels of crude a day by April—barring any bad news. ■

Intelligence

The Tale of The Lying Defector

How an Iraqi 'fabricator' duped America's spooks

BY MARK HOSENBALL AND JOHN BARRY

IF THE CIA HAD A SMOKING GUN, evidence of Saddam Hussein's mobile weapons labs was it. The agency's first tip-off came in 2000. "The source was an eyewitness, an Iraqi chemical engineer who had supervised one of these facilities," Secretary of State Colin Powell told the world in his address to the U.N. Security Council on Feb. 5, 2003. Elisa Harris, who was in charge of the WMD brief at the National Security Council in 2000, doesn't remember the report as being that detailed. But the tip was "worrisome," she says. There seemed to be evidence to suggest Iraq was reconstituting a program to both make and spread so-called BW—biological weapons.

In 2001 a second informant emerged: an Iraqi engineer, as Powell later described him. The CIA hardened its view, but still hedged in its white paper in the second half of 2001. "Baghdad continues to pursue a BW program," the report said, expressing concern about "the likely availability of mobile covert facilities." In 2002 two more informants on mobile labs turned up, one of them a "major" who defected. Now the CIA's 2002 National Intelligence Estimate took on a tone of certainty: Baghdad "has established a large-scale ... BW production capability, which includes mobile facilities." Cit-



'NO CONSENSUS': Tenet admits the CIA is still puzzled

ing the four informants, Powell told the U.N.: "The description our sources gave us of the technical features required by such facilities is highly detailed and extremely accurate." When three suspicious tractor-trailers were found in Iraq after the war, the CIA crowed that its intelligence had been solid.

Ten months later, all that was once solid seems to be melting away. Like so much else about Saddam's elusive WMD, the mystery of the mobile labs has only deepened. "There is no consensus within our community over whether the trailers were for [weapons] use or if they were used for the production of hydrogen," CIA Director George Tenet admitted in a speech last week. David Kay, until recently head of the agency's Iraq Survey Group, says he believes the trailers weren't used for weapons at all.

So how did the trucks become one of the most compelling briefs in America's case for

war? The transformation of the mobile-lab intel from speculation to fact is a case study in the enduring fallibility of "humint," human intel-gathering—and how U.S. agencies fail to communicate. NEWSWEEK has learned that as early as May 2002, analysts at the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency issued a warning about the credibility of one of the mobile-lab informants, believed to be the Iraqi major. According to an official who has read the still-secret warning, known as a "fabricator notice," the document reported that he had been "coached by Iraqi National Congress," an exile group eagerly pushing to Pentagon hawks the urgent need to depose Saddam.

Intelligence officials say the warning notice was widely circulated within intelligence agencies, including the DIA and CIA, before the defector's

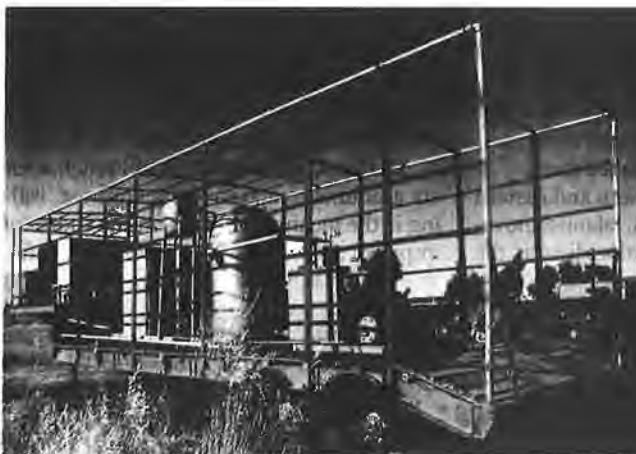
story was included in Powell's speech. But apparently the warning was not properly cross-referenced in intelligence computers. As a result, officials explained, the analysts drawing up administration papers and speeches on Saddam's WMD continued to use the original reports. A Powell aide said the secretary learned of the glitch only in the past few weeks. One official said that at least one other of the four Iraqi informants cited by Powell is also now considered to be less than reliable.

The bottom line is that the CIA was relying on informants—and little else. The genesis of the tale of the mobile labs is now being examined by Senate investigators. The informants' stories are also likely to provide fodder for a new bipartisan commission, announced by President George W. Bush last week, to examine the flawed intel on Iraq, and the larger issue of why America's intelligence community seems to get so much so wrong.

The CIA insists that its main source—the chemical engineer—is still credible. Officials say he has nothing to do with the INC and they insist the trucks found in Kurdistan could still be mobile germ-warfare factories (though intelligence officials acknowledge they are less certain now). Tenet insisted last week that the CIA still gets a lot right. But that's hardly a reassuring case for the next pre-emptive war. ■

Like so much else about Saddam's WMD, the mystery of the mobile labs has only deepened in the months since they were found

TRUCK STOP: One of three strange trailers discovered in Kurdistan



PTC. JOSHUA HUTCHESON—US ARMY/AP

La production de pétrole a redémarré et frôle les niveaux d'avant-guerre

KIRKOUK

de notre envoyé spécial

Manna Al-Oubeidi est plutôt philosophe. Le directeur général adjoint de la North Oil Company (NOC) estime que désormais le plus dur est passé. La production n'a pas encore atteint son niveau d'avant-guerre, soit 700 000 à 750 000 barils par jour, mais, dit-il, « si on le veut, on peut le faire. Pour le moment, on ne produit que ce qui nous est demandé, soit environ 425 000 barils par jour ». Les dégâts causés aux installations ont pratiquement été réparés. « Les vraies difficultés sont d'ordre politique et économique. Il faut que le pays redémarre, que les contrats arrivent et que l'exportation puisse reprendre », affirme Manna Al-Oubeidi, qui confirme que l'oléoduc de 500 kilomètres aboutissant au port de Ceyhan, en Turquie, est opérationnel et n'attend que la décision des pouvoirs publics et les carnets de commandes.

Pour lui, les sabotages des pipelines ne sont pas une véritable source d'inquiétude d'autant qu'ils ont nettement diminué au cours des cinq dernières semaines. « Même s'il y en a eu soixante à soixante-dix, nous savons facilement les réparer », assure-t-il.

Un système de surveillance a été mis en place tout au long des oléoducs. Il repose sur des contrats passés avec les chefs de tribu, qui affectent environ, cinq hommes

par kilomètre pour veiller au bon écoulement de l'or noir. Bien sûr, la surveillance ne peut être complète, car il faut encore de l'équipement, des voitures, du matériel de transmission et des structures fixes. « La tâche est immense, fait remarquer Salah Aziz Karim, directeur général des pipelines, car nous avons 7 000 kilomètres de conduites à travers tout le pays et un gros travail de maintenance doit désormais être effectué après les longues années d'embargo. »

Les sabotages des pipe-lines ne sont pas une véritable source d'inquiétude

Une société britannique Erinsy a été chargée de former le personnel et d'assurer la sécurité à l'intérieur des raffineries et sur les champs pétroliers. « On peut estimer que cela n'avance pas assez vite, souligne Manna Al-Oubeidi, mais pour le moment ça marche et nous avons le temps. » Et de faire remarquer que le pétrole peut attendre, dans ce qui constitue la deuxième réserve du pays. « Voilà 6 000 ans que le feu éternel brûle à Kirkouk. Alors ! ». Il s'agit de remontées de gaz, qui s'en-

flamment naturellement au contact de l'air libre.

Thamer Ghadban, vice-ministre du pétrole, est lui aussi plutôt optimiste. Certes, la production totale du pays n'a pas encore atteint les 2,8 millions de barils par jour d'avant la guerre, mais il est convaincu que ce sera chose faite au mois de mars. Pour le moment, 2,3 millions de barils sont extraits chaque jour et 1,7 million est exporté par le port de Bassora au sud. « Le principal problème reste la sécurité, et, pour le moment, il est impossible de dire quand il sera surmonté, même si d'énormes progrès ont été accomplis dans ce domaine. »

En dépit d'une amélioration évidente de la situation, les Irakiens doivent cependant toujours faire la queue aux stations-service. En effet, si la production de brut est en nette progression, il y a toujours d'énormes difficultés en ce qui concerne les produits finis. Les trois raffineries du pays sont loin de tourner à plein régime.

Dathar Yhai Al-Kashab, directeur de la raffinerie d'Al-Dora, à Bagdad, refuse de révéler la capacité de cette installation, de peur que « ces informations soient utilisées par les saboteurs ». Après avoir défendu les armes à la main ce bien collectif contre les pillards, il doit aujourd'hui faire face à la remise en état de sa raffinerie. « Si le problème de l'approvisionnement en électricité va être résolu

avec l'installation de deux générateurs, il faut néanmoins assurer la maintenance et se procurer des pièces détachées pour remplacer un matériel usé », dit-il. « Cela prendra du temps. Pour satisfaire complètement la demande, il faudra construire une, sinon deux nouvelles raffineries. » Ce qui est prévu. En outre, les stocks ont été épuisés et au moins 300 000 voitures nouvelles sont arrivées de l'étranger. Ce qui fait dire à Thamer Ghadban que « la situation ne sera pas normalisée avant la fin de l'année ».

En attendant, l'Irak importe des produits finis des pays voisins pour tenter de combler son déficit. Un paradoxe, dans un pays qui est au deuxième rang des réserves mondiales prouvées et numéro un des réserves probables. C'est bien connu, l'Irak est une éponge de pétrole et les potentialités sont énormes.

« Nous avons, selon tous les experts, 214 milliards de barils de réserves probables et 115 milliards de réserves prouvées. Nous avons désormais besoin d'investissements pour explorer et mettre en production les richesses de notre sous-sol », assure M. Ghadban. Comme le dit le patron de la raffinerie d'Al-Dora : « Nous avons du brut à profusion, mais on ne peut pas remplir les réservoirs des voitures. » Telle est l'incroyable réalité de l'Irak, neuf mois après la fin officielle de la guerre !

Michel Bôle-Richard

UN envoy leaves Iraq with doubts on election

By Neela Banerjee

BAGHDAD: The United Nations special envoy to Iraq, Lakhdar Brahimi, completed his mission to Iraq on Friday, leaving unresolved the contentious question of holding elections before the June 30 transfer of sovereignty to Iraqis but warning that the country faced a significant chance of civil strife.

Grand Ayatollah Ali Hussein al-Sistani, the most revered cleric among Iraqi Shia Muslims, has spearheaded the call for elections in place of a caucus system favored by the American-led occupying authorities. But after two recent meetings with Sistani, a range of Shiite and Sunni Iraqis, representing some of the

country's intellectual and tribal elite, said the cleric was flexible on the timetable for elections and how they would be held.

Moreover, they said, the meetings signal a keen willingness on the part of Sistani and Sunni leaders to thwart the possibility of sectarian strife, as other politicians and clerics appeal to religion and ethnicity in advancing their demands.

"He is flexible on the dates for general elections, though they should be before the American elections which should be by December 2005," said Ghassan al-Atiyyah, the organizer of the meetings with Sistani last week and executive director of the Iraq Foundation for Democracy and Development, a Baghdad research group. "And any position on elections should be endorsed by the UN Security Council."

Another participant in the Feb. 5 meeting during which elections were discussed confirmed Atiyyah's account.

Whether Sistani communicated such flexibility to Brahimi, the UN special envoy to Iraq, when they met yesterday at the cleric's home in Najaf remains unknown.

The reclusive Sistani did not com-

ment on the discussions.

At a news conference in Baghdad Friday, Brahimi recounted that "Ayatollah Sistani said that he agrees with me that elections cannot be established unless the appropriate circumstances are provided."

Brahimi added, "Elections should be held as early as possible but not earlier than possible."

Dr. Mahmoud Othman, a member of the Iraqi Governing Council, the advisory body to the occupying authorities, said that after a Friday meeting between the council and Brahimi, he had the impression the envoy would not recommend holding general elections before June 30.

Ahmad Fawzi, a spokesman for Brahimi, told BBC Radio that elections were not likely before the handover date agreed to between the Bush administration and the Governing Council in an agreement completed Nov. 15, 2003.

"It's not a question of delaying" the handover, Fawzi said. "It's finding a new timetable. Elections will take place when the country is ready, and that will be after the handover of power."

The New York Times

IRAK La criminalité explose et la reconstruction tarde

La justice aux mains des chefs de tribu

Un enfant a été tué et un autre a été blessé, hier après-midi, lors d'une explosion dans une école primaire du quartier chite de Kadhimiyah, à Bagdad. Plus tôt, deux soldats américains avaient été tués et quatre autres blessés par une explosion au passage de leur convoi à Baaqouba, au nord-est de Bagdad. Par ailleurs, cinq suspects ont été interpellés pour le meurtre d'Akila Hachemi, membre du Conseil intérimaire de gouvernement irakien assassiné en septembre, a annoncé un responsable du ministère de l'Intérieur.

Mossoul :
de notre envoyé spécial
Arnaud de La Grange

Il est des pays où la justice se rend la main posée sur la Bible. Ou sur le Coran. En espérant que la sagesse divine imprègnera la sentence. Étrangement, l'émir Farouk tente de faire la paix entre les hommes sous la représentation du « diable », un paon explosant de couleurs dans une roue altière. Le prince du nord de l'Irak est le numéro deux des Yezidis. Et au Moyen-Orient, cette communauté surgie des profondeurs du temps se voit affublée de l'appellation d'« adorateurs du diable ».

Cette dénomination sulfureuse, l'émir Farouk la récuse. Elle a valu aux siens maintes persécutions. Et, selon lui, relève

d'un raccourci d'ignare. Le paon qui orne son diwan n'est pas Satan mais Tawus Malek, un ange rebelle qui a finalement retrouvé sa place auprès de lui (voir encadré). Cette image, l'émir Farouk n'en souffre pas. Ou plus. Des faubourgs de Mossoul aux premières pentes des montagnes kurdes, court devant lui une réputation de sage et de médiateur des causes perdues. Demain, il va reprendre la route pour tenter de faire taire une nouvelle fois les armes entre deux tribus.

Si l'émir Farouk doit sans répit courir la campagne, c'est

qu'aujourd'hui en Irak, l'appareil judiciaire a comme tout le reste volé en éclats. Et la reconstruction est lente. Du coup, la justice tribale occupe le vide. Elle a toujours existé, mais ne réglait plus que des différends mineurs. Parce que Saddam s'évertuait à

briser le pouvoir des tribus. Et parce que les tribunaux de la république, même partiellement, fonctionnaient. « Les tribunaux ont commencé à travailler mais les armes parlent plus fort que la loi aujourd'hui », explique l'émir. Ici, trois juges et le chef du syndicat des avocats ont déjà été assassinés. Vous comprenez pourquoi la justice traditionnelle a tant d'importance. C'est nous qui faisons tout le travail. » Et le travail, dans ce domaine ne manque pas.

La criminalité explose et les règlements de comptes politiques sont légion. « La sécurité est entre les mains des Américains qui n'arrivent pas à comprendre ce qui se passe. Et les nouveaux policiers, pas expérimentés, ne saisissent guère plus... poursuit l'émir Farouk. Saddam a distribué des armes aux tribus et l'armée en a laissé beaucoup en se retirant. Les Américains ont commis l'erreur de ne pas chercher à ramasser les armes et à contrôler les frontières. »

L'aura de l'émir yezidi est si grande à Mossoul que sa justice dépasse largement le cadre de sa communauté. Il peut arbitrer des conflits entre tribus arabes, entre

kurdes et arabes... « Je ne fais pas de différence entre les religions, les nationalités », explique-t-il. Souvent, le dignitaire yezidi officie de concert avec un notable arabe, Cheikh Salem Malla Alo, le chef de la tribu des Alhamdan. Le jugement dont l'émir Farouk est le plus fier est d'ailleurs celui qui a permis aux tribus arabes des Hadidi et des Daoudi de cesser de s'entre-tuer. « Ils en étaient à plusieurs assassinats, par balles ou à coups de couteau, raconte-t-il, toujours pour une histoire de têtes de bétail et de terres. » Le conflit avait fini par paralyser la région. Les chefs des tribus arabes du nord, le gouverneur, tout le monde avait essayé de calmer les esprits. Sans succès. A tous, le chef des Hadidi répondait : « Pas question de laisser impunément mon sang couler sur cette terre. » La réconciliation obtenue par l'émir Farouk a été scellée devant 2 000 personnes.

Comment explique-t-il le respect dont il jouit ? « Sans doute parce que nous sommes une vieille famille d'émirs depuis 800 ans. » Son frère est le chef suprême des Yezidis. A force de rendre la justice pour les autres, l'émir Farouk se prend à rêver que les siens vont en bénéficier. « Nous voudrions avoir comme les autres nationalités et religions un siège dans les autorités intérimaires irakiennes », dit-il encore, en expliquant que l'ancien régime empêchait les Yezidis d'atteindre des niveaux hiérarchiques élevés. « Et puis, Saddam Hussein avait envoyé des tribus arabes pour prendre nos villages, nous espérons que le nouveau pouvoir va régler tout cela. » Il regrette que, pour le moment, les Américains ne se soient guère montrés sensibles à ses doléances.

« Nous n'adorons pas le diable »

Au fond d'un vallon niché dans les montagnes kurdes, émergent d'étranges chapeaux de pierres coniques perchés sur de solides bâtisses. Cheikh Adi est le lieu sacré des Yezidis. On y est accueilli par des religieux portant de longs cheveux de chaque côté du crâne, ce qui leur donne de faux airs de Gaulois. Pour leur parler, on doit impérativement enjamber le seuil des maisons sans l'effleurier et ne pas porter la couleur bleue. « On nous méprise parce que nous vénérons le diable alors que c'est faux », explique l'un d'eux. Nous prions Tawus Malek. Nous ne sommes pas des athées puisque nous adorons Dieu. » Tawus Malek serait un diable repenté de ses péchés, à qui Dieu aurait

pardonné pour en faire le chef de ses anges. En priant Tawus Malek, les Yezidis se concilient l'esprit du mal pour l'empêcher de nuire. C'est avec le plus puissant de ses anges que Dieu a créé le monde. « Les adorateurs de l'ange », comme ils préférèrent se définir, ont été l'objet de nombreuses persécutions de la part des musulmans. Pour cette raison, cette ethnie kurde a trouvé refuge dans les montagnes des confins de l'Irak, de la Turquie et de la Syrie où se trouvent la majorité des 800 000 Yezidis. Mais 40 000 d'entre eux ont aussi fait souche en Allemagne tandis que 180 000 ont migré en Arménie, en Géorgie et dans le sud de la Russie.

A. L. G.

Iraqi Kurds reject coalition's call to disband militia

Michael Howard
in Sulaimaniya

Kurdish leaders in the northern autonomous area are refusing to disband their military forces, the peshmerga, and are pushing for a veto over any deployment of the Iraqi army in their region.

Kurdish officials are proposing that the 50,000-60,000 fighters controlled by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic party, both of which have a seat on the Iraqi governing council, should be transformed into a regional self-defence force similar to the US national guard.

The proposal comes amid alarm in the Kurdish areas at

the suicide bombings in Irbil, and the violence in neighbouring Sunni Arab areas. It also highlights the problems faced by US and British administrators trying to find common ground among the country's ethnic and sectarian groups.

Mustafa Sayid Qadir, the deputy commander of the PUK's peshmerga, said: "After the Irbil attacks, security has become our number one concern. Our history has taught us the risks of leaving ourselves defenceless."

The new force would be recruited, trained and commanded locally. It would not be deployed outside the Kurdistan federal region, the boundary of which still has to be decided, without the

approval of the Kurdish parliament.

Kurds want a provision for the new force in the interim constitution which must be finalised by the end of the month. They are also insisting on the inclusion of a federal state under which they will retain many of the powers of self-rule they have had for the past 13 years.

Their plans for more autonomy are opposed by Sunni and Shia Arab leaders as well as by Turkey, Iran and Syria, which believe any advance by Iraq's Kurds will agitate their own Kurdish populations.

The Kurds' stance has also unsettled US and British officials, who have said they want to dismantle Iraq's various militias. Paul Bremer, the American chief administrator, and Sir Jeremy Greenstock, Tony Blair's special envoy to Iraq, flew to the town of Salaheddin on Sunday to persuade Kurdish leaders to tone down their demands.

Iraq's major militias are attached to Kurdish and Shia parties. Both were excluded

from power by the Sunni Arab elite, who now fear retribution. Kurds say that the new force, and their desired federal state, would be multi-ethnic and multireligious.

"The national guard ... would be representative of all the peoples of the Kurdistan region including Kurds, Turkomans, Christians, and Arabs," said Barham Salih, the Kurdish prime minister.

If the Kurds are allowed to retain the peshmerga, it could cause other armed groups, few of them as pro-American, to demand the same treatment.

The Shia Badr brigade, thought to number about 10,000, is the best organised after the Kurds. Though opposed to US forces, it has not confronted them. More worrying for the US and Britain is the Al Mahdi army, led by Muqtada al-Sadr, a Shia cleric and vehement opponent of the western presence in Iraq.

Les autorités turques saisissent et mettent sous tutelle 219 sociétés du groupe Uzan

La déconfiture de cet empire familial a démarré avec la faillite frauduleuse de sa banque, lmar.
Les dirigeants, en fuite, risquent jusqu'à 36 ans de prison

ISTANBUL

de notre correspondant

« La fin d'une époque », « le bout du chemin », « l'effondrement d'un empire » : c'est ainsi que la presse turque a décrit la saisie spectaculaire, samedi 14 février, par les autorités turques, de 219 sociétés appartenant au groupe Uzan. L'opération vise à « récupérer des fonds publics », a déclaré le SDIF, le fonds de gestion des banques saisies par l'Etat.

Les autorités ont agi vite pour éviter que les avoirs des sociétés soient détournés par leurs propriétaires. La justice s'est appuyée sur une loi bancaire votée récemment, qui facilite la confiscation des biens des propriétaires de banque en cas de faillite frauduleuse – c'est celle de la banque lmar qui a précipité la chute de l'empire Uzan. De nouveaux administrateurs ont été nommés, dont la priorité sera de contrôler les revenus du groupe.

La débâcle de ce géant longtemps intouchable, présent dans l'industrie, la finance, les télécommunications et les médias, avait débuté en juin 2003 avec l'annulation, par le ministère de l'énergie,

de la licence de Cukurova Elektrik et Kepez Elektrik, pour la production et la distribution d'électricité. Cette première mesure avait été suivie, en juillet, par la mise sous tutelle d'Imar ; une enquête approfondie avait révélé un trou dans les comptes de 5,7 milliards de dollars. Les dépôts bancaires étant garantis par l'Etat, celui-ci a dû entreprendre un remboursement échelonné, coûteux pour le contribuable.

La controverse autour de la famille Uzan, de son train de vie – appartement de 40 millions de dollars dans la Trump Tower à New York, hélicoptères, yachts –, n'est pas limitée à la Turquie. Un procès, intenté aux Etats-Unis par Motorola et Nokia, qui accusaient le groupe

de n'avoir pas remboursé un emprunt de 2,7 milliards de dollars pour sa compagnie de téléphonie mobile Telsim, s'est soldé par une condamnation pour fraude en juillet 2003. La procédure d'appel lancée par la famille Uzan vient d'être rejetée.

EN FUITE À L'ÉTRANGER

Le fondateur du groupe, Kemal Uzan, fils d'un fermier bosniaque qui s'était installé en Turquie dans les années 1920, avait posé les premiers jalons de son empire dans le domaine de la construction. Ses liens avec le premier ministre Turgut Ozal, dans les années 1980, lui avaient permis d'étendre son empire notamment en bénéficiant du

programme de privatisation d'entreprises publiques. En 1989, son fils aîné Cem, aujourd'hui dirigeant du Parti jeune (le Genc), avait fondé la première télévision privée turque avec le fils de Turgut Ozal, contournant le monopole étatique en vigueur, en diffusant ses émissions de l'étranger.

Cem Uzan, qui avait pris soin de transférer ses parts du groupe avant de se lancer dans la politique, n'a pas été inculpé. Les autorités l'ont néanmoins sommé de quitter sa villa sur la rive asiatique d'Istanbul, qui figure parmi les avoirs du groupe, dans un délai d'une semaine. Le procès de Kemal Uzan, de Yavuz (son frère) et de Hakan (son fils cadet), ainsi que de plusieurs de leurs administrateurs, avait débuté en janvier en l'absence des principaux accusés, en fuite à l'étranger, qui risquent des peines allant jusqu'à 36 ans de prison.

Cem, qui a de nombreux supporters grâce à son parti populiste nationaliste, a accusé le gouvernement de « lynchage » politique à l'approche des élections municipales, fin mars.

Nicole Pope

Une famille très puissante

- **Famille.** La fortune des Uzan a été estimée par *Forbes* à 1,3 milliard de dollars (1 milliard d'euros). Le groupe était dirigé par son fondateur, Kemal Uzan, son frère Yavuz et ses deux fils, Cem et Hakan.
- **Secteurs.** Le groupe compte des centaines de sociétés, qui emploient quelque 40 000 salariés,

dans la construction, l'énergie, la finance, les médias, les télécommunications...

- **Médias.** Le groupe Uzan contrôle la chaîne de télévision Star et le quotidien *Star*.
- **Telsim Mobil.** Le numéro deux turc de la téléphonie mobile figure parmi les 219 entreprises saisies par l'Etat.

3 U.S. soldiers are killed in bomb attacks in Iraq

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD: Roadside bombs have claimed more American lives, killing three U.S. soldiers in separate attacks in Baghdad and Sunni Muslim areas north of the capital. At least six soldiers were wounded in the attacks, one critically.

In the biggest attack, one soldier from Task Force Iron Horse was killed and four were wounded in a roadside bombing in Baquba, 55 kilometers, or 35 miles, northeast of Baghdad. One of the wounded was critically injured and the other three were in guarded condition, the military said.

The first soldier from the Stryker brigade to be killed by hostile fire died Monday evening in a roadside bombing in Tall Afar in northern Iraq. Another soldier from the recently deployed brigade was wounded in the blast. The 5,000-member Stryker brigade is named after a new army wheeled armored vehicle which the unit is using in Iraq for the first time since the conflict began.

A soldier from the 1st Armored Division died and another was wounded in a bombing Monday in central Baghdad.

The latest deaths brought to 541 the

number of Americans who have died since President George W. Bush launched the Iraq war last year on March 20. Most of the casualties have occurred since Bush declared an end to active combat on May 1.

Witnesses said two roadside bombs exploded Tuesday outside the Anbar Medical College and hospital in Ramadi in the Sunni Triangle, damaging a U.S. Army Humvee. It was unclear if any soldiers or civilians were injured. A third bomb was defused.

As the casualties mount, the United States and its allies are preparing to hand over sovereignty to the Iraqis by July 1, despite disagreements over the best way to choose a new government.

Some members of the Iraqi Governing Council said the U.S.-favored use of caucuses was losing support.

"This system is alien to us," said Naseer Kamel al-Chaderchi, a Sunni Muslim. "It's based on city councils and the integrity of these councils is in question."

He added that the governing council, which is sticking to the June 30 deadline for the transfer of power, hasn't had a formal discussion about caucuses, but



Peter Andrews/Reuters
American soldiers and members of the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps patrolling Baghdad on Tuesday. The U.S. and its allies are preparing to hand over sovereignty by July 1.

said there is an "inclination" toward rejecting them.

Mahmoud Othman, a Kurdish Sunni member of the council, agreed that the caucus plan has little support. He said the Americans could simply hand over sovereignty to the governing council but most Iraqis wouldn't accept it because the body was appointed by the United States.

Islamic terror sect in north Iraq may be more dangerous than ever

By Jeffrey Gettleman

BIYARA, Iraq: Ali Hamaamin was whipped with electrical cords, hung by his arms and kicked in the face. Because he was not a religious man, Hamaamin says, he was tortured by thugs from Ansar al-Islam.

"They used to come to me at night, wearing masks, and do the most horrible things," Hamaamin said.

All that ended in his village of Biyara at the beginning of the war last spring, when American special forces and Kurdish militias routed Ansar al-Islam, a militant Islamic group that once tried to set up a Taliban-like state in the jagged mountains along the border with Iran.

Villages like Biyara were liberated and men like Hamaamin were freed.

But Ansar is making a resurgence, intelligence sources say, and scattered from its border enclave, it is perhaps more dangerous than ever. What worries intelligence agents, especially as suicide bombings become more common in Iraq, is that Ansar has a history of such tactics and a pipeline of young men trained to die.

According to interviews with imprisoned Ansar members, the group is

branching out from its former mountain strongholds to cities across Iraq. Its mission, too, has expanded, they say, from terrorizing villagers to planning suicide strikes against the American-led occupation.

American and Kurdish intelligence agents suspect that the deadliest attack carried out so far in Iraq — this month's twin suicide bombings of the Kurdish headquarters in Erbil, which killed at least 105 people — was Ansar's work.

On several Islamic Web sites, a wing of Ansar al-Islam took responsibility, calling the Kurdish leaders American pawns.

"Ansar is not finished," said Anwar Haji Osman, security chief for the Halabja area of Kurdistan. "In fact, we have word they are planning another serious operation. The Erbil bombings will only encourage them."

Ansar lives in a landscape of shadows. The contours of its operations are known, but the details remain murky.

Several Ansar members captured in the last several months said the group is trying to reorganize in Erbil, one of the largest cities in northern Iraq. The prisoners, kept in a jail in Sulaimania, in

northeastern Iraq, were made available to The New York Times by Kurdish security forces.

"Our leaders have been looking for men to send back to Erbil to make operations," said Mohammed Khalid, a 30-year-old Ansar fighter captured this summer as he crossed from Iran into Iraq. "That's where I was going."

Shahab Achmed, another Ansar prisoner, said: "Our mission has become bigger than Kurdistan. We made car bombs from rockets and we were told that if we killed Americans, we would go to paradise."

Achmed, who warmed his handcuffed hands in front of a space heater as he talked, said there were Ansar suicide cells in Baghdad, Kirkuk, Falluja and Mosul.

A senior counterterrorism official based in Europe, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said there are 50 to 100 Ansar members in Germany, Italy, Norway and Spain, focused on recruiting Islamic fighters to go to Iraq to oppose the American-led coalition.

The official also said Ansar was closely connected to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian with well-established

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links to Al Qaeda. In a recently intercepted letter to Al Qaeda's top leaders, Zarqawi took responsibility for 25 suicide bombings in Iraq.

"We believe Ansar and Zarqawi were responsible for the UN building bombing in Baghdad," the official said of the attack on the United Nations headquarters last year.

Two weeks ago, Kurdish security agents said, seven wanted Ansar terrorists were arrested after they slipped

through the porous Iraq-Iran border. They included a Palestinian, a Yemeni and a member of a group committee that issues religious-inspired edicts.

Villagers in Biyara said the Ansar fighters, who included Arabs, Afghans, Turks and Chechens, imposed a strict religious code, prohibiting women from leaving their homes and outlawing television, music and even backgammon.

Since Ansar was driven out, Biyara has tried to move on. The television sets

returned. So did the music. Village elders even built a playground on the side of a mountain.

But Hamaamin says he will never totally recover.

"I know the Americans and the others will do their best to keep Ansar away," he said. "But I still worry." Sometimes, he said, it is hard to fall asleep. He still sees the masks.

The New York Times

In Iraqi city, a dangerous trade

By Edward Wong

BASRA, Iraq: Alcohol and guns seldom make for a wholesome combination, but rarely are the two as lethal in Iraq as they are in this sprawling southern city.

The British military and Iraqi police officials said Tuesday that they were investigating the killings of at least five men who were selling alcohol on a busy street in the old part of the city when they were shot to death Sunday.

The mystery surrounding the shootings has grown with each passing day. The streets are awash with rumors that the men were shot by conservative Shiite Islamic groups. Police officers and witnesses said in interviews Tuesday that the attackers were wearing police uniforms and pulled up in two police trucks, and one officer said the attackers were members of an intelligence unit of the Basra police.

The incident was the latest in a spate of attacks on alcohol salesmen in a city where conservative Islamic movements and political parties are growing in power and influence, much more so than in Baghdad and the north. It raises questions of how closely the police are working with some of the conservative

Shiite groups, and whether the groups are trying to impose sharia law, or strict Koranic rules, on the city.

Nowhere in Iraq are attacks on alcohol vendors as common as in Basra, forcing the salesmen to close down shops and take to the sidewalks, hawking cans of beer and bottles of a hard liquor called arak out of iceboxes.

Killed, beaten or chased away, they

Islamic influence rises, and so do attacks on alcohol vendors.

find little sympathy among police officers. In fact, plainclothes officers were trying to bust armed sidewalk alcohol vendors earlier this month when two of them were accidentally shot and killed by British soldiers rushing to the firefight. This took place in the same area as the attack last Sunday.

"It's not allowed for people to sell alcohol in Islamic countries in the street," said Lieutenant Ahmed Murtada, the policeman in charge of the local station on the night of the latest attack. "We warned them many times,

but they didn't stop."

The attackers, whomever they might be, succeeded in scaring off the alcohol vendors. On Tuesday, none were to be found beneath the overpass on Old Basra Street where they have been congregating in recent months.

The block on which they usually work is on a busy commercial strip near a mosque with a blue-tiled dome and across from shops of cabinet-makers.

The nearest drinks vendor on Tuesday was Ahmed Mahmoud, 20, standing behind boxes filled with cans and bottles of soda.

"I heard a lot of gunfire, a huge barrage of bullets," he said of the incident Sunday. "It seemed like a firefight between the alcohol sellers and the attackers."

"I found the dead bodies," he added. "There were bullet holes in their bodies, about five bullets in each body."

Mahmoud had set up his soda business in front of an empty, gated store called Shtora, the most well-known liquor shop in the city during Saddam Hussein's rule. It closed early last summer after the owner received threats, people in the area say.

Major Tim Smith, a spokesman for the British military, said at a news conference on Tuesday that the shootings Sunday took place around 7:15 p.m. A patrol of British soldiers and Iraqi policemen arrived at the scene afterward and counted three dead people and five wounded, Smith said. Two of the wounded later died in the hospital.

"Every effort is now being made to determine who was involved and bring them to justice," he said. "Many people have their views as to who was involved."

In a dingy police station near the scene of the attack, two police officers related their version of events.

Murtada, the officer in charge on Sunday night, said a total of six people died, some possibly civilians.

He left the room to take care of some business, and his colleague, Lieutenant Muhammad Salih, began discussing the killings with several visitors.

"Policemen working in intelligence attacked the alcohol sellers," he said.

"There were about 10 vendors on the



Men gathering in The Cave, a bar in Baghdad that serves only men. Banned by Saddam Hussein in 1991, bars have reopened quietly across the city.

block at the time," he added.

Murtada walked back into the room and heard the conversation.

"Please don't say it's the secret police," he said to both his colleague and the visitors. "The suspects are un-

known."

But the attackers did pull up in two police trucks and were wearing police uniforms, he said.

"We don't know what the truth is," he added. "They were wearing police uni-

forms and had police cars, but whether they were the real police, we don't know."

The New York Times

Schröder to visit Turkey to back its reform efforts

From news reports

BERLIN: Chancellor Gerhard Schröder of Germany will travel to Turkey this weekend with a message of support for Ankara's efforts to ready itself for European Union membership, a senior government official said Tuesday.

Schröder sets off Sunday evening for a two-day visit — closely following a trip to Ankara by the leader of Germany's opposition, Angela Merkel, who got a frosty response Monday because of her suggestion that Turkey should be granted a special partnership with the EU, not full membership.

In contrast, Schröder has expressed support for Turkey's campaign to join the EU. "The aim of his visit is to stimulate and encourage the reform policies" of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government, said a senior official, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity.

Turkey is hoping that by the end of the year, European leaders will set a date for the start of EU membership negotiations. It has enacted reforms to advance its chances, abolishing the death penalty and granting greater rights for Turkey's estimated 12 million Kurds.

Germany's conservative opposition says the center-left government is backing Turkey's EU bid for domestic reasons — Germany is home to around 2.5

million ethnic Turks. The opposition conservatives want Turkey left out of the EU and have instead proposed a "special relationship" — an offer that Erdogan publicly rejected after talks with Merkel, the leader of the Christian Democratic Union.

Besides meeting with government leaders, Schröder will attend an economic forum in Istanbul and visit a German-owned power station in Isken-derun, near the Syrian border. He will travel with a 13-member industry delegation that includes representatives

from the engineering giant Siemens and the steelmaker ThyssenKrupp.

German officials say Cyprus will also be on Schröder's agenda, following talks this week that the EU hopes will bring about an end to the island's 30-year division, in time for a reunited nation to enter the EU on May 1.

Schröder also will discuss the possibility of cooperating with Turkey in civilian efforts to rebuild neighboring Iraq, the official said, without elaborating.

"There is a common interest in stabilizing Iraq," the official said. Germany, which is overseeing a plan to train Iraqi police officers, has already agreed to coordinate aid efforts with France and Japan.

Schröder will travel Tuesday from Turkey to Malta, which is scheduled to join the EU on May 1. (AP, Reuters)



Prime Minister Erdogan with Angela Merkel of Germany's opposition. On Monday in Ankara, she suggested a special EU partnership for Turkey, instead of membership.

Iraqi Shiites seek vote excluding Sunni area

By Jeffrey Gettleman and Dexter Filkins

BAGHDAD: Shiite leaders are pushing a new plan for the transfer of power in Iraq that calls for partial elections, with balloting in the relatively secure Shiite and Kurdish areas but not in the more turbulent Sunni Triangle.

The proposal, which has grown out of

an emerging alliance between Kurdish and Shiite political parties, is part of the intensifying scramble for power among politicians before the announcement by the United Nations, expected this week, on whether elections are feasible in Iraq.

But partial elections, U.S. officials said, would further alienate the Sunnis, who already are generating the majority of the violence against the Americans and their Iraqi allies.

"Allowing citizens from some regions to vote and disenfranchising others certainly does not inspire credibility and legitimacy," a senior U.S. official in Baghdad said.

Leaders of Iraq's Shiites, the country's largest single group, said their plan was the only feasible way to have any kind of elections while still allowing U.S. administrators to transfer authority to the Iraqi people by June 30, the date set in a U.S.-Iraqi agreement last November.

"Partial elections is one of the possibilities on the table," said Mowaffak al-Rubaie, a Shiite political leader and a member of the Iraqi Governing Council. "There are places secure enough where we can hold elections right now. Those places happen to be in the north and in the south."

Kurdish leaders would not comment specifically on the plan, but they did emphasize a new "strategic relationship" with Shiite clerics in their discussions.

Barham Salih, prime minister of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, one of the leading Kurdish parties, said it was important to work with the Shiite leadership.

"These two major communities in Iraq should share an interest in fundamental change in the politics of Iraq," he said. "Both have been excluded from power for the almost 83 years of the Iraqi state."

On Sunday, Jalal Talabani, head of the

Patriotic Union and a member of the Governing Council, traveled to the holy Shiite city of Najaf, where he met with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, spiritual leader of Iraq's Shiites.

After the meeting, which lasted two and a half hours, Talabani said, "We have big hope in our Shia brothers."

The partial-election plan calls for representatives in the predominantly Sunni areas to be chosen in tightly guarded caucuses, an idea vehemently opposed by members of the country's Sunni minority, who say it is illegitimate and would further divide Iraq's people.

Sunnis represent about 20 percent of Iraq's population, but they were a ruling minority for much of its modern history until Saddam Hussein was unseated.

"Maybe this is their dream," said Ad-

nan Pachachi, a member of the Governing Council and a Sunni. "But it doesn't make any sense, only the north and the south voting. If the center of Iraq is not involved, how could Iraq be considered a sovereign power?"

Pachachi also said the Governing Council had "discarded" the U.S.-backed plans for a caucus-style selection process for a transitional government. Instead, council members want to retain power through the transition period but double the number of seats on the council from 25 to 50 to make it more representative.

Both these developments are complicating U.S. intentions for the handing over of power.

U.S. administrators in Iraq say direct elections are not feasible before the June 30-deadline, but they support elec-

tions sometime in 2005.

U.S. officials were hoping to organize caucuses to select a transitional government that would have more legitimacy than the Governing Council, whose members were picked by U.S. officials.

While Shiite clerics have been pushing for early elections, Kurdish leaders have been pushing to keep the autonomy their region has enjoyed since 1991.

Until now, each of the three main groups in Iraq, Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis, was pursuing its own agenda. The Kurds and Shiites together are 75 percent to 80 percent of the population, and even if the partial-election plan never materializes, the prospect of an alliance between the two groups is terrifying to many Sunnis.

The New York Times

Herald Tribune February 19, 2004

A boost for emerging democracies ■ By Joseph Siegle

After Iraq, let's forgive some other debts

WASHINGTON

The Bush administration is well on its way to meeting the goal of relieving at least two-thirds of the \$120 billion debt accumulated by Saddam Hussein, despite widespread international opposition to the Bush administration's Iraq policy. James Baker 3rd, a former secretary of state, recently traveled to the Gulf region as President George W. Bush's special envoy for Iraqi debt reduction and negotiated commitments to waive much of the \$50 billion that Iraq owes the region. European leaders have made similar promises regarding the \$40 billion held by Paris Club creditors.

The case for forgiving Iraq's debts is compelling. The likelihood of its creditors getting paid anytime soon is scant. The service payments on the debt alone could consume a large share of future oil revenues. Until Iraq's debt overhang is resolved, little new investment can be expected. A stagnating Iraqi economy only further escalates the chance of instability. One can almost hear Baker asking, "Why force ordinary Iraqis to bear the burden for Saddam's recklessness?"

The logic of this argument is so powerful that it suggests the question of why it isn't applied in other cases when a long-suppressed people is rid of a profligate tyrant.

Nigeria, Indonesia, Kenya and now Georgia, among others, have all recently emerged from years of autocratic rule, characterized by rapacious, patronage-driven spending. While these countries are not as prominent as Iraq, having avoided military intervention by a superpower, shouldn't the same principles apply?

Instead, new democracies are often forced to begin their existence on a respirator. On average, a country making a break with an authoritarian past starts with central government debt of 59 percent of gross domestic product — 10 percentage points higher than the norm for countries in comparable income categories.

Debt servicing for new democracies typically consumes a fifth of central government revenue. If a new government refuses to assume this debt, its credibility in international financial markets will plummet.

Forced to soak up the red ink left by its autocratic predecessors makes a new democracy more vulnerable. Pent-up aspirations of an oppressed society are

hard to address when the largest item in the federal budget is debt servicing. Citizens can quickly become disillusioned with democracy.

Add to this the challenges faced from powerful, entrenched interest groups that have prospered under the institutions of the previous regime, and one need not look too hard to find pretexts for a return to authoritarianism. Indeed, the likelihood of a country on the path to democracy reverting to autocratic rule nearly doubles when the country is facing economic stagnation. And as research by Paul Collier and others at the World Bank shows, each percentage point off a country's per capita growth rate raises the risk of civil conflict by a percentage point.

The argument made against forgiving debt is that it debases the rule of law. If debt is not assumed by a new regime, it signals to other emerging markets that they will not be held responsible for debt they incur — the problem of moral hazard. With a diminished likelihood of being repaid, commer-

autocrats lets international investors discount the risks they should be weighing. There is a fundamental difference when loans are extended to governments that are legitimate representatives of their societies.

Most companies understand this. The level of foreign direct investment to democracies in emerging markets, as a percentage of gross domestic product, is double that of non-democracies, on average.

Today, two-thirds of the world's states are on a democratic path — a reversal from just 15 years ago. And this number continues to grow. International lending to an ever diminishing percentage of countries ruled by tyrants should not be perpetuated by skewed notions of sovereign debt.

Moving toward a global system of democracy and rule of law requires ensuring that international financial structures reinforce newly democratic governments — and their investors — who play by the rules. It is right that most of Iraq's debt should be forgiven — but so, too, should the debt for new democracies forced to endure the hangovers from the self-aggrandizing binges of their autocratic predecessors.

The writer is a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.



Proposal to Governing Council on Federalism for Iraqi Kurdistan

From *www.krg.org* February 19, 2004

Kurdistan submitted an addition to the proposed Iraqi Transitional Administrative Law codifying the federal status of Kurdistan. The document was submitted by the President of the Kurdistan National Assembly Rowsch Shaways on behalf of the Assembly and the two principal Kurdistan political parties, the KDP and PUK. Text of proposal to the Iraqi Governing Council below:

CHAPTER : SPECIAL PROVISIONS FOR THE KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ

ARTICLE 1: CONTINUITY OF THE KURDISTAN REGION

Section 1: The Kurdistan Regional Government: --- The Kurdistan Region is a self-governing region, with its own laws and government. The Government of the Kurdistan Region includes the Kurdistan National Assembly, the Council of Ministers, and the Kurdistan Judiciary.

Section 2: Territory of the Kurdistan Region: --- For the purposes of this Transitional Law, the Kurdistan Region consists of those territories in the governorates of Ninevah, Dohuk, Erbil, Kirkuk, Sulaimaniya, and Diyala that were administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government on March 19, 2003 and is the territory within Iraq that is north and west of the former cease-fire line ("Green Line") as it existed on March 18, 2003

Section 3: Continuation of Law: --- Except as otherwise provided in this law, all laws in force in the Kurdistan Region as of the effective date of this Transitional Law shall continue in force. Except as related to matters within the exclusive competence of the Provisional Government of Iraq, the Kurdistan National Assembly shall enact all laws in force in the Kurdistan Region. On the territory of the Kurdistan Region, law enacted by the Kurdistan National Assembly shall be supreme.

ARTICLE 2: THE IRAQI KURDISTAN NATIONAL GUARD; SECURITY OF THE KURDISTAN REGION

Section 1: Establishment of Iraqi Kurdistan National Guard: --- The Kurdistan National Assembly shall raise, regulate, recruit, and officer an Iraqi Kurdistan National Guard, and shall appoint its Commanding Officer. The Iraqi Kurdistan National Guard shall be a component of the Armed Forces of Iraq and under the command of the lawful civilian authorities of Iraq provided:

(1) the Iraqi Kurdistan National Guard may be deployed outside the boundaries of the Kurdistan Region only at the request of the lawful civilian authorities of the Provisional Government of Iraq and only after the Kurdistan National Assembly has authorized such a deployment, provided further that the Kurdistan National Assembly may restrict the deployment of the Iraqi Kurdistan National Guard outside the boundaries of the Kurdistan Region to a specific location and for a specified period of time; (2) No weapons shall be removed from the possession and control of the Iraqi Kurdistan National Guard without the consent of the Kurdistan National Assembly; and (3) The Provisional Government of Iraq is democratic and operating pursuant to all provisions of this Transitional Law.

Section 2: Transition to Iraqi Kurdistan National Guard: --- Within a reasonable period of time after enactment of this Transitional Law, the Kurdistan National Assembly shall authorize the formation of the Iraqi Kurdistan National Guard. Peshmerga units shall be demobilized and all armaments (except for personal weapons) shall be transferred to the Iraqi Kurdistan National Guard.

Section 3: Recognition of Peshmerga Contribution to National Liberation: ---The Kurdistan National Assembly and the Provisional Government of Iraq shall honor, through the striking of a medal or other appropriate means, the contribution the Peshmerga made to the liberation of Iraq.

Section 4: Composition of Iraqi Kurdistan National Guard: --- The Iraqi Kurdistan National Guard shall be representative of all the peoples of the Kurdistan Region, including Kurds, Turcomans, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Arabs.

Section 5: Non-deployment of other Iraqi Armed Forces to Kurdistan: --- Except for the Iraqi Kurdistan National Guard established by this Article, the Armed Forces of Iraq shall not enter the territory of the Kurdistan Region without the consent of the Kurdistan National Assembly. The Kurdistan National Assembly may confine the presence of any Iraqi Armed Forces to specified places within the Kurdistan Region and may limit the numbers and duration of any presence by Iraqi Armed Forces on the territory of the Kurdistan Region.

Section 6: Protection of International Borders: --- In accordance with policies determined by the Provisional Government of

Iraq and decided in consultation with the Kurdistan Regional Government, the Iraqi Kurdistan National Guard shall be responsible for the protection of Iraq's international borders that are the also the borders of the Kurdistan Region.

ARTICLE 3: NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE KURDISTAN REGION

Section 1: Ownership of resources: --- The Natural Resources located on the territory of the Kurdistan Region, including water, petroleum and subsoil minerals, belong to the Kurdistan Region.

Section 2: Public Land: ---All public land in the Kurdistan Region belongs to the Kurdistan Region.

Section 3: Water: --- (a) All water in the Kurdistan Region belongs to the Kurdistan Region. The Kurdistan Regional Government shall regulate the generation and distribution of hydro- electric power within the Kurdistan region, the exploitation of fish and other aquatic resources, and the irrigation of cropland within the Kurdistan Region. (b) Water flowing through the Kurdistan Region shall be managed in close coordination with the relevant ministries of the Provisional Government of Iraq so as to assure an equitable division of water between the Kurdistan Region and other parts of Iraq.

Section 3: Minerals and Petroleum: --- (a) Petroleum and minerals on or under the surface of the land of the Kurdistan Region belong to the Kurdistan Region. (b) Except for petroleum from reservoirs in commercial production on the effective date, the Kurdistan Regional Government shall regulate the exploitation and sale of petroleum and minerals in the Kurdistan Region, and shall receive the proceeds from their sale. (c) The exploitation of petroleum in the Kurdistan Region shall be managed in close coordination with relevant ministries of the Provisional Government of Iraq; (d) Petroleum from reservoirs in commercial production on the effective date may be managed by the Provisional Government of Iraq for the

benefit of all the people of Iraq, provided the Kurdistan Regional Government receives from federal budget the funds specified in Article 4. (e) For the purposes of this article, commercial production means an average daily production over any consecutive twelve month period since January 1, 1998 of 20,000 barrels per day.

ARTICLE 4: FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS

Section 1: Taxation: --- The Kurdistan Regional Government and the Provisional Government of Iraq shall conclude an agreement regarding the applicability of federal tax laws in Kurdistan, which shall be binding when approved by the Kurdistan National Assembly and the Transitional Assembly of Iraq. Pending such an agreement, only taxes enacted by the Kurdistan National Assembly shall be valid in Kurdistan.

Section 2: Administration of Taxes: ---The Kurdistan Regional Government shall be responsible for the administration of all taxation laws within the Kurdistan Region. It shall remit to the Treasury of the Provisional Government of Iraq all revenues (less the costs of administration and enforcement) from any applicable federal taxes.

Section 3: Block Grants: --- For the purpose of governmental functions in the Kurdistan Region, the Kurdistan Regional Government annually shall receive, after permitted deductions, a sum of money that is a percentage of the total revenues of the Provisional Government of Iraq that is not less than the percentage the population of the Kurdistan Region is of the population of Iraq.

Section 4: Permitted Deductions: --- For the purpose of this Article, "permitted deductions" means (1) Kurdistan's proportionate share (based on population) of Provisional Government expenditures for activities within the exclusive competence of the Provisional Government, (2) an amount not more than the revenues anticipated from federal taxes in Kurdistan where such taxes are applicable all parts of Iraq except Kurdistan and (3) any revenues from the sale of petroleum retained by the Kurdistan Regional Government where the Kurdistan Region would retain more revenues from the sale of petroleum than any other region or governorate in Iraq.

ARTICLE 5: KURDISTAN REGION RATIFICATION OF SUCCESSOR LAWS TO THE TRANSITIONAL LAW

The Permanent Constitution of Iraq, or any successor law to this Transitional Law, shall be valid in the Kurdistan Region only if approved by a majority of the people of the Kurdistan Region voting in a referendum.

ARTICLE 6: EFFECTIVE DATE IN THE KURDISTAN REGION

This Transitional law will come into effect in the Kurdistan Region when conforming changes are made in the Constitution and laws of the Kurdistan Region.

* * * * *

Abou Hatem est le seul membre du gouvernement transitoire à avoir bataillé contre Saddam à l'intérieur du pays

Les derniers combats du seigneur des marais

LE FIGARO JEUDI 19 FÉVRIER 2004

Amara :
de notre envoyé spécial

L'histoire n'est pas celle de la forêt de Sherwood, mais, racontée autour d'un narguilé dans un café de la petite bourgade d'Amara, elle y ressemble. Ici, au cœur de la grande région chiite d'Irak, la geste du « seigneur des marais » s'enfle et s'orne de mille appareils. Cette légende, pourtant, fait sourire l'intéressé lui-même. « Les gens finissent par faire de moi une sorte de Robin des Bois, lâche avec un doux sourire Abou Hatem. Ne les écoutez pas, ils aiment les grandes histoires. La mienne est simple. » Simple, mais pavée de peurs et de fracas. Ecrite dans le bois fin des roseaux qui couvraient autrefois les grands marais chiites.

Dans le paysage politique de l'Irak d'après-guerre, Abdel Karim Mahoud, nom de guerre Abou Hatem, est une figure à part. Il est l'un des 25 membres du Conseil de gouvernement transitoire. Et le seul de cette instance à avoir réellement fait le coup de feu contre Saddam. A l'intérieur du pays, et durant plus de quinze ans. Comme beaucoup de grandes histoires, celle d'Abou Hatem a commencé en prison. Quand les sicaires de Saddam Hussein ont arrêté le jeune étudiant en télécommunications pour menées subversives. Il passera sept ans, entre 1979 et 1986, dans les sinistres geôles d'Abou Ghrib. « A ma sortie, j'ai formé un groupe de résistance, raconte-t-il, nous étions dans les marais, dans le triangle chiite, entre Nassiriyya, Amara et Bassora. »

Dans ce pays d'eau et de boue, où l'on se déplace en barque et se repose dans des huttes de roseaux. Les premières années, jusqu'en 1990, sont celles de l'action clandestine. Puis, vient le temps des batailles au grand jour, fusils d'assaut contre chars et avions. Le souffle de la première guerre du Golfe attise les braises du Sud irakien. Les chiites vont payer cher leur rébellion. En 1992,

Bagdad décide d'en finir avec le chef de guerre des marais. Pendant trois mois, trois unités d'élite de la Garde républicaine – les divisions Hamourabi, Na-

buchodonosor et Medina Mounarawa – traquent les maquisards. En vain. « Ce furent les moments les plus durs. On nous bombardait au napalm. Et puis, en 1993, Saddam a asséché les marais pour détruire nos sanctuaires. Je crois que j'ai passé plusieurs fois la ligne qui sépare la vie de la mort. »

Ses détracteurs disent qu'il tenait alors plus du bandit de grand chemin que du résistant. La tête d'Abou Hatem est mise à prix. Lui, nargue ses poursuivants. On raconte à Amara que, un jour, il a payé l'addition d'une assemblée de chefs des

services secrets de Saddam qui déjeunaient dans le même restaurant que lui afin d'échafauder des plans pour le capturer... Modeste, Abou Hatem dément. Modeste toujours, il ne revendique pas des milliers d'hommes en armes sous sa bannière. « Nous agissions par petits groupes de 10 à 30 hommes, raconte-t-il, je réunissais plus de monde pour les grandes opérations. » C'est le cas début avril 2003, quand la troupe d'Abou Hatem s'empare de la ville d'Amara avant les forces de la coalition. « Avec 300 hommes, nous avons

d'abord attaqué un dépôt de l'armée au sud de la ville, poursuit-il, nous voulions la libérer pour lui éviter les dégâts que les troupes américaines allaient y faire. »

Était-il en liaison avec l'US Army ? « Non, ils nous ont même menacés et demandé de reculer... » L'opposant à Saddam n'a pas une sympathie démesurée pour les Américains. Il préfère les Britanniques, qui ont désormais la responsabilité de la région et l'apprécient plutôt. « Ils sont plus souples,

confie-t-il, ils connaissent le comportement des gens, leur caractère. » De toute façon, cette figure de la grande tribu des Mohamedaoui aimerait



S'il insiste sur un transfert de souveraineté rapide, Abou Hatem n'exige pas des élections à tout prix et au plus vite : « Il faut un peu de temps, parce que la sécurité minimale n'existe pas et parce que les gens ne sont pas préparés ». (Photo Fedouach/AFP)

bien voir les forces d'occupation partir au plus vite. « Il faut que le pouvoir revienne aux Irakiens le plus vite possible, martèle-t-il, regardez les entreprises étrangères : elles ne viennent pas à cause de l'insécurité mais aussi parce qu'elles veulent traiter avec un gouvernement irakien. »

Son discours politique est mesuré. Car, s'il insiste sur un transfert de souveraineté rapide, il n'exige pas des élections à tout prix et au plus vite. « Il faut un peu de temps, parce que la sécurité minimale n'existe pas et parce que les gens ne sont pas préparés, dit-il. Par contre, j'ai parlé avec Sistani et nous sommes d'accord sur le refus d'élections indirectes. Nous refusons aussi toute désignation de responsables irakiens par la coalition. »

Aujourd'hui, à 45 ans, Abou Hatem est fatigué. Parce qu'il revient du pèlerinage à La Mecque, où il a pu se rendre cette fois-ci au grand jour. Et parce que chaque jour voit défiler devant sa porte des dizaines d'habitants d'Amara égrenant doléances et reproches. « On m'accuse d'oublier les gens, de n'apporter ni eau, ni

« Les gens font de moi une sorte de Robin des Bois. Ne les écoutez pas, ils aiment les grandes histoires. La mienne est simple »

électricité... Alors je fais le tour des chefs de tribu pour qu'ils exhortent

leurs hommes à la patience. » Bien qu'il en soit membre, Abou Hatem ne masque pas les limites de l'actuel Conseil de transition irakien. « Il nous faut un vrai gouvernement, qui dirigera une vraie administration, alors la reconstruction pourra démarrer. »

Même s'il a créé sa propre formation, le Hezbollah (parti de Dieu), Abou Hatem affirme vouloir passer la main, quitter cet autre maquis qu'est la politique. Redevenir un citoyen ordinaire, faire du commerce peut-être. On imagine pourtant mal Robin des marais vendre des téléphones portables dans une échoppe d'Amara ou de Bagdad.

A. L. G.

IRAK L'administrateur américain ne souhaite pas que l'islam soit la base de la législation

L'avertissement des chiites irakiens à Paul Bremer

Onze Irakiens au moins ont été tués et 58 soldats étrangers blessés hier dans un double attentat suicide contre une base militaire du centre de l'Irak, au moment où l'ONU doit se prononcer sur la possibilité d'élections directes. Des gardes postés devant la base ont réussi à stopper l'une des voitures en ouvrant le feu sur elle, mais un second véhicule a ex-

plosé après avoir percuté un mur. Les déflagrations ont détruit les façades et les toits de plusieurs maisons voisines de la base. Comme après les attentats à la bombe, qui avaient tué la semaine dernière une centaine de personnes attendant de s'enrôler dans l'armée et la police irakiennes, des habitants d'Hilla ont accusé les forces américaines de les avoir attaqués.

Amara (sud de l'Irak) :
de notre envoyé spécial
Arnaud de La Grange

Aujourd'hui, dans les villes chiites du Sud irakien, il ne faut pas trop parler de Paul Bremer. Très posé jusque-là, Abou Ammar al-Mayahi, numéro deux des milices Bader dans la région de Bassora, voit rouge quand on lui parle des

dernières déclarations de l'administrateur américain en Irak. Celui-ci a menacé de mettre son veto au projet de loi fondamentale, si celui-ci prévoit de faire de l'islam la source principale de législation. « Ce n'est pas à Washington de décider de l'avenir de millions de musulmans, lance-t-il, il faut qu'ils fassent attention, nous avons perdu des centaines de milliers de gens dans la lutte contre Saddam

Hussein, on est encore prêt à en perdre pour atteindre notre but ».

Les milices Bader dépendent du CSRII (Conseil suprême de la révolution islamique en Irak), le principal mouvement politique chiite. De son côté, Abdel Mahdi al-Kerbalai, porte-parole de l'ayatollah Sistani, le plus grand dignitaire chiite d'Irak, a réaffirmé que « le peuple irakien est le seul qui puisse poser son veto à

toute législation et personne n'a le droit d'intervenir dans la Constitution ». « L'islam est la source de la loi, et c'est normal dans un pays où la majorité est musulmane » a-t-il ajouté. Paul Bremer avait averti « qu'il n'y aurait pas de loi fondamentale si je ne la signe pas ». Cette loi, en cours de discussion, doit être approuvée d'ici à la fin février et rester en vigueur durant dix-huit mois, pendant la période

de transition.

Cette polémique entre Paul Bremer et les chiites intervient dans une période de tensions croissantes, alors que les grandes échéances politiques se rapprochent. Par la voix de Colin Powell, les Etats-Unis ont réaffirmé mardi vouloir que le

pouvoir soit rendu comme prévu aux Irakiens le 30 juin. Mais la direction religieuse des chiites continue de réclamer, contre l'avis des Américains, que l'Assemblée nationale transitoire – qui désignera le gouvernement auquel la coalition remettra le pouvoir – soit élue au suffrage universel direct avant le 30 juin. Et non par un collège de grands électeurs, comme l'avait imaginé Washington.

La mission de l'ONU qui s'était rendue en Irak il y a dix jours pour tenter d'arbitrer le différend est rentrée mardi à New York. Le secrétaire géné-

ral des Nations unies, Kofi Annan, a indiqué qu'il espérait donner cette semaine son avis sur la faisabilité ou non d'élec-

tions directes à court terme. En quittant Bagdad, le chef de la mission onusienne, Lakhdar Brahimi, a déjà donné une idée de la teneur du verdict en estimant qu'il serait extrêmement difficile d'organiser un tel scrutin avant le 30 juin. Dans la ville sainte de Nadjaf, on attend les conclusions de l'ONU avec impatience et la riposte est prête. « La marjaiya (direction religieuse chiite) a établi une série de solutions de rechange que nous ne pouvons pas dévoiler maintenant car nous attendons la réponse de l'ONU », a encore déclaré Abdel Mahdi al-Kerbalai au nom d'Ali Sistani. Nul doute qu'à Washington, on planche aussi nuit et jour sur des plans de secours, afin d'éviter la crise ouverte.

Les firmes allemandes veulent leur part du gâteau irakien

CONTRATS. Désormais, tous les pays peuvent participer à la reconstruction de l'Irak. Une aubaine pour les Allemands, qui vont notamment pouvoir investir dans le secteur public irakien, en pleine privatisation.

DIE TAGESZEITUNG
Berlin

La liberté commence avec la voiture. A cet égard, l'Irak de l'après-Saddam Hussein n'est guère différent des pays d'Europe de l'Est après l'effondrement du communisme : 250 000 automobiles d'oc-

casion y auraient été importées rien que dans la seconde moitié de l'année 2003, et il suffit de jeter un œil sur les marchés de Bagdad pour constater que le commerce se porte tout aussi bien dans d'autres domaines. Téléviseurs et ordinateurs en provenance de Corée du Sud, électroménager turc, jouets importés de Chine, tissus et Pepsi-Cola du Proche- et du Moyen-Orient, bière et vêtements d'Europe : l'Irak croule sous les marchandises.

Après des années de privations et d'embargo, le pays renoue avec la consommation. L'augmentation du pouvoir d'achat est essentiellement due à la réforme des rémunérations instaurée par Paul Bremer, l'administrateur civil américain. Les centaines de milliers de fonctionnaires irakiens ont ainsi bénéficié d'importantes augmentations de salaire – qui équivalent dans certains cas à une

multiplication par quarante.

Après des décennies de mauvaise gestion et d'embargo, l'industrie irakienne est au moins aussi avide d'investissements que le marché des biens de consommation. Il y a beaucoup d'argent à gagner maintenant que les entraves au commerce sont tombées, et les entreprises allemandes veulent, elles aussi, leur part du gâteau. Elles étaient cinquante à participer à une foire pour la reconstruction de l'Irak à Koweït City il y a quelques semaines. Seuls l'Iran, l'Italie, le Koweït, l'Arabie Saoudite et la Turquie affichaient une présence plus importante. Au même moment, des membres de la Chambre de commerce germano-arabe se réunissaient en Jordanie pour jeter les bases de contrats futurs.

Le principal donneur d'ordres est actuellement le gouvernement améri-

cain, qui a débouqué 18,6 milliards de dollars pour la reconstruction de l'Irak. L'attribution des contrats se fait par le biais de l'Iraq Program Management Office (PMO), qui a repris cette tâche en octobre dernier des mains de l'USAID, un organisme gouvernemental américain. Le PMO envisage dans les prochains mois de lancer 2 300 projets dans les secteurs de l'eau, de l'électricité et de la fonction publique.

LES APPELS D'OFFRES SONT DÉSORMAIS OUVERTS À TOUS

Jusqu'à présent, les entreprises des pays opposés à la guerre étaient exclues des appels d'offres et ne pouvaient prétendre qu'à des missions de sous-traitance. Siemens a cependant obtenu un contrat de plusieurs millions pour la mise en place d'un réseau de téléphonie mobile dans le nord de l'Irak.

La prochaine série d'appels d'offres pour la reconstruction de l'Irak sera lancée en mars pour un montant total de 5 milliards de dollars, et les entreprises allemandes, françaises et russes pourront y répondre directement.

Jusqu'ici, ce sont avant tout les grands groupes américains, comme le constructeur Bechtel ou le pétrolier Halliburton, qui ont tiré leur épingle

du jeu. Halliburton, que Dick Cheney, le vice-président des États-Unis, a dirigé jusqu'en août 2000, a été accusé depuis d'avoir obtenu ses contrats grâce à diverses manipulations. Le groupe [qui est également soupçonné d'avoir surfacturé ses prestations au gouvernement américain] a d'ores et déjà annoncé qu'il allait rembourser 6,3 millions de dollars.

Mais ce sont essentiellement les projets de restructuration des entre-

prises publiques irakiennes qui contribuent à l'optimisme des milieux d'affaires. La privatisation et l'ouverture aux capitaux étrangers décrétés en juin 2003 par Paul Bremer n'ont pas été suivies d'effet parce qu'elles allaient bien au-delà des attributions de la force d'occupation américaine. Mais le gouvernement irakien a décidé depuis que ses entreprises publiques pourraient être gérées par des sociétés étrangères. Sur les 250 entreprises d'État irakiennes, 68 sont désormais ouvertes à ce type de gestion pour une période de cinq ans. La seule condition, c'est que leurs salariés actuels restent en place. De nombreuses propositions ont déjà été lancées, y compris de la part d'entreprises allemandes, mais l'identité des intéressés n'a pas encore été révélée.

Inga Rogg

UNION EUROPÉENNE

La Turquie, un "partenaire privilégié"

En visite à Ankara, Wolfgang Schäuble, vice-président des chrétiens-démocrates au Bundestag, donne son point de vue sur les limites de l'élargissement.

SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG (extraits)

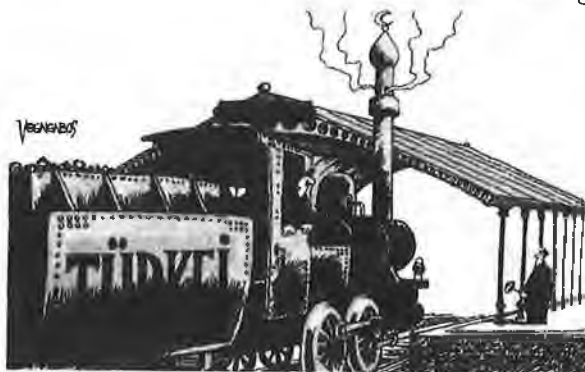
Munich

A l'instar d'Angela Merkel, la présidente de votre parti [chrétien-démocrate, CDU], vous vous opposez à ce que la Turquie adhère pleinement à l'Union européenne (UE). Or cette perspective est évoquée depuis 1963. Pourquoi la remettre en question ?

WOLFGANG SCHÄUBLE* Nous ne voulons pas rompre un engagement de manière unilatérale. Mais nous attendons de la Turquie qu'elle accepte des pourparlers qui puissent *in fine* aboutir à une forme de partenariat équilibré. L'UE doit continuer à se développer pour devenir une entité politique à laquelle les États délèguent une part de plus en plus grande de leur souveraineté. Cela ne peut réussir que si les citoyens ont le sentiment de faire partie d'une communauté de destins, s'ils ont une identité commune fondée sur des expériences partagées. Ce sentiment d'identité commune n'est possible que sur un territoire géographique limité.

Mais, selon les règles de l'Union européenne, un État peut devenir membre dès lors qu'il respecte certains critères [dits "critères de Copenhague"].

S'il ne s'agissait que de cela, le Japon ou l'Australie pourraient être



membres de l'UE. Aux critères de Copenhague s'ajoute la capacité d'intégration de l'UE elle-même. Et je doute que l'UE, au lendemain du 1^{er} mai, soit en mesure de mener des discussions sur un nouvel élargissement. Nous devrions sans plus tarder chercher, dans un climat de confiance, une solution raisonnable.

Quel intérêt la Turquie peut-elle y trouver ?

Si les Turcs comprennent ce que signifie l'union politique, quelle perte de souveraineté cela pourrait représenter, ils en viendront eux-mêmes à l'idée qu'un autre type de lien étroit avec l'UE est dans leur intérêt.

Pourquoi ne pas appliquer le même système à la Roumanie et à la Bulgarie, qui attendent leur intégration, en 2007 ?

Je pense effectivement que la prochaine vague d'adhésion nous demandera de gros efforts. C'est pour-

quoi je n'exulte pas face à l'échéance de 2007. Vu la situation de ces deux pays, ce délai est-il tenable ? On devrait y réfléchir.

Et qu'en est-il des Balkans ?

En ce qui concerne l'ouest des Balkans, je suis d'avis qu'il serait bon, et même souhaitable pour la stabilisation de toute la région, de proposer une perspective concrète à un pays comme la Croatie, qui a déjà considérablement progressé. Pour moi, il est évident que l'ouest des Balkans fait partie de l'Europe. En revanche, après une adhésion de la Turquie, il n'y aurait plus aucun argument pour rejeter une demande d'adhésion de

l'Afrique du Nord ou de la Russie. Mais imaginer Vladivostok au sein de l'UE, cela dépasse mon imagination !

Pourtant, vous ne pourrez pas empêcher le Conseil européen de décider cette année de l'ouverture de négociations avec la Turquie... Nous demandons que ces négociations, si tant est qu'on en arrive là, ne se concentrent pas exclusivement sur l'objectif d'une adhésion, mais envisagent la possibilité d'un "partenariat privilégié".

En quoi consisterait ce "partenariat privilégié" ?

La participation au marché unique européen en ferait partie, sans aucun doute. Et l'on peut régler de nom-

▲ Gare de l'UE. Turquie. Dessin de Veenbos paru dans la Süddeutsche Zeitung, Munich.

breuses questions dans l'intérêt de la Turquie et de l'UE sans devoir nécessairement aborder la délicate question de l'identité commune.

Votre parti et l'Union chrétienne-sociale (CSU) bavaroise veulent faire de la Turquie un thème de campagne lors des élections euro-

péennes de juin. N'en avez-vous vraiment pas trouvé de meilleur ?

Ce n'est pas notre seul thème. Mais permettez-moi une remarque : on a tout de même bien le droit de parler aussi des sujets qui préoccupent les électeurs. Ils ne sont pas convaincus du bien-fondé de l'élargissement. Si nous leur disons : eh bien, maintenant,

on continue, on s'agrandit jusqu'à la frontière de l'Irak, ils vont se dire que nous sommes tombés sur la tête !

**Propos recueillis
par Susanne Höll et Nico Fried**

* Wolfgang Schäuble est aussi de ceux qui, en 1994, lancèrent le concept de "noyau dur européen".

In Iran, a leader of a revolution is now its victim

By Nazila Fathi

TEHRAN: Mohammad Reza Khatami's revolutionary credentials are impeccable.

Nineteen at the time of the 1979 Islamic revolution, he was part of the group that stormed the American Embassy and took its diplomats hostage for 444 days.

He volunteered to fight in the war against Iraq during the 1980s and was wounded in the leg. He returned to medical school and married the granddaughter of the founder of the revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Since 1997, his older brother, Mohammad Khatami, has been president of Iran.

But none of that could prevent the 44-year-old physician and his wife, Zahra Eshraghi, from being disqualified last month to run for parliamentary elections on Friday.

Today he is part of the growing ranks of architects of the revolution who are challenging the Islamic system they helped create, warning that it is veering toward religious despotism. He leads the Islamic Participation Front, the major reform party, and the top vote-getter in the last elections four years ago.

This time, his conservative opponents were taking no chances. In January, along with more than 2,000 other candidates, Khatami was informed by the Guardian Council, the government watchdog group, that he was not considered loyal to the supreme religious

leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and had been barred from running for office.

Despite her revolutionary bloodline, his wife was told she was rejected because of an interview she gave last year to The New York Times and because she greeted the Noble Peace Prize winner, Shirin Ebadi, a human rights activist, on her return from receiving her award.

The two brothers have risen politically together and remain close, Khatami says. He said he wrote his brother's speeches and statements during the president's first two years in office.

Since 2000, when he became the

leader of their political party, greater differences have emerged, however.

Like many of the president's supporters, Khatami blames his brother, 16 years his senior, for his hesitancy in the crisis, and now for acquiescing in a vote that critics say is fundamentally flawed.

For his part, the younger brother has adopted a firm stance and has encouraged Iranians to shun the election.

"The president believes that he needs to compromise to keep reforms alive, but I believe that this is a killing poison for it," he said.

In an interview, Khatami said he worried that the reform movement might now be crippled by the disqualifications and consigned to the political sidelines for years. Even so, he says, a broader awakening is taking place that even exclusion from the election cannot undo.

"The situation has changed compared to 1992," he said. "Society is more conscious of its rights, and there are many

civil institutions that we can use."

Khatami is representative of the evolution that many in the reform movement have undergone. After the 1979 Islamic revolution, he shared the animosity toward the West common in the political vanguard and advocated limiting social and political freedoms, particularly for women, to raise a generation devoted to revolutionary ideals.

But with the death of Khomeini in 1989, many of those close to the founder of the revolution were marginalized by supporters of Khamenei, his successor, in much the same way the reformers have been pushed aside today.

The president's brother fights a system he helped create.

Khatami said he realized in the years after they were shunted from power that the country needed to emerge from its political isolation to move toward greater development and democracy. He and others, including his brother, took that

time to rethink their agenda, he said.

"There were a series of ideals at the time of the revolution which were forgotten right away," he recalled. "We think the revolution should have put the country on the course toward democracy. That was the need, and we have to adopt modern methods to move that way."

Khatami himself lived for a year and a half in London on a postdoctoral fellowship and left his practice to return to politics when his brother entered the presidential race in 1997.

He recalled that at that time the reform group, which was not yet a political party, had no intention to seek power.

"We just wanted to use the election as a platform and spread new ideas about democracy and civil society," he said. "We did not have a good understanding of society and were caught by surprise when people so overwhelmingly supported our ideas."

The party's Western-style campaign, with concerts and promises for more political and social opening, attracted young people who were frustrated with the religious strictures. His wife became the first wife of a politician to campaign along with her husband.

Since then, the party has suffered many setbacks at the hands of its conservative opponents, including their exclusion from the current election. Still, he says, whether or not the reformers sit in Parliament, the lessons they have learned are enduring, and the movement itself is not going away.

"We learned that we cannot believe the whole world is against us," he said. "We can have common interests with other countries and can collaborate with the world. We learned that human rights, which we argued was a political instrument against us, was indeed a value. We learned that we cannot limit people's freedom for the sake of independence."

The New York Times

Herald  Tribune

February 19, 2004

PROFIL

Mgr Rabban, père courage irakien*Opposant de Saddam aux côtés des Kurdes, l'évêque œuvre aujourd'hui pour l'éducation de tous*

Il parle araméen, arabe, kurde, anglais, italien et français, mais il se définit lui-même comme « kurdistanaï ». Il y tient. Non seulement parce qu'il est évêque chaldéen d'Amadiyah, dans le nord de l'Irak, en plein pays kurde, mais surtout en raison de son engagement aux côtés des victimes innombrables de Saddam Hussein. Mgr Rabban al-Kass, assyro-chaldéen de naissance, ne cache pas ses opinions : « Pour moi, proclame-t-il, l'intervention américaine est une libération, pas une occupation, car elle n'a pas vocation à durer. Et, même si nous souffrons du désordre et des privations

depuis presque un an, ce n'est rien en comparaison de ce qu'il nous aurait fallu continuer d'endurer si Saddam était resté au pouvoir. »

Ite, missa est... Ce digne représentant d'une des plus anciennes Eglises au monde, dont la branche majoritaire est rattachée à Rome depuis le XVI^e siècle, jouit d'un grand



Mgr Rabban al-Kass.

prestige au Kurdistan, car il s'est toujours conduit très courageusement. D'abord, en refusant de prêter serment de soumission au « Grand Saddam », lors de son intronisation épiscopale ; ensuite, en faisant corps avec les Kurdes persécutés par le tyran ; enfin, en œuvrant pour l'éducation de tous. Il s'est en effet lancé, avec le soutien d'Edouard Lagourgue et de l'ONG Mission Enfance, sise à Monaco, dans la construction d'un lycée international, à Dehoc, près d'Amadiyah, qui accueillera 500 élèves des deux sexes (une première, pour une institution privée en Irak !) et de toutes les communautés. On y enseignera, notamment, le français. Même s'il manque encore 250 000 euros pour construire l'internat, Mgr Rabban déborde d'optimisme. Rien d'étonnant si, assyro-chaldéens, kurdes ou arabes, tous l'appellent « *abouna* », « père ». ●

Christian Makarian

Cyprus

Making up is hard to do*After years of stale rows, the island needs fresh air*

WHEN a dispute remains unresolved for a very long time, despite great efforts by well-meaning outsiders to sort it out, that could mean that the parties involved don't really want to see the matter settled. Each side may simply be feign-

ing sweet reason, while nursing a secret hope that the other side will oblige by sabotaging any real progress. Might the future of Cyprus be one of those problems?

Now the island's Greek and Turkish politicians, and their respective "mother countries", have a chance to prove the cynics wrong. Enough progress has been made to convince Kofi Annan, the UN's secretary-general, that a deal to make Cyprus a loose two-part federation—with security and prosperity guaranteed by the European Union—is at last attainable. New talks were to start this week. Both sides are under pressure to strike a deal soon, so all Cypriots can benefit when the EU enlarges in May.

What if there is no settlement by then? In that case, the Greek-Cypriot administration will join the Union alone. So how much incentive, sceptics wonder, do the Greeks have to behave constructively? Quite a lot, if they calculate wisely. Tens of thousands of Greek-Cypriots who were uprooted by fighting in 1974 would regain their homes. The broader Greek-Turkish stand-off would be greatly eased. Besides, if it looked obvious that Hellenic intransigence had wrecked the deal, the Greeks (in Athens and Nicosia) would see their moral authority collapse. That is a big price to pay at a time when competition for influence in an enlarged EU is heating up.

The stakes are high for the Turks as well. If they seem to be

digging their heels in, then the people in Europe who oppose Turkey's bid to join the Union will find a new argument. So both sides have strong reasons to take risks for peace.

Can they cross the Rubicon together? It will not be easy for the island's jaded and elderly politicians to move so suddenly. For years, each side has used the (real enough) memory of horrors committed by the other as an argument for caution. On neither side has there been much self-examination. Greek-Cypriots say they were victims, not perpetrators, of the tragic events of 1974: a coup in Nicosia fomented by Greek dictators which prompted the Turkish army to overrun nearly 40% of the island. Turks retort that Greek atrocities in the 1960s gave them good reason to live behind high walls.

Changing the music

Now these well-rehearsed tunes will have to change. Politicians who have built their careers on ritualised Greek-Turkish conflict will have to plead the interests of an entire, reunited island before the outside world. That is hard to imagine, unless wholly new thinking enters the island's political life.

The most hopeful sign is that ordinary people in Cyprus, especially on the Turkish side, helped to break the logjam. Nearly half the population of Turkish Cyprus took to the streets last year to support a settlement. The catalyst for change in the last few weeks has been a shift of ground by Turkey's generals and politicians. But people power, and the big liberal vote in December's Turkish-Cypriot election, helped to change the mood in Ankara. Indeed, if there are heroes in the island's recent history, it is the moderate Turkish-Cypriots who defied their authoritarian leaders, and in some cases risked jail by daring to criticise the army. The Greek-Cypriots should respond with a similar generosity of spirit. ■



The
Economist

FEBRUARY 21ST-27TH 2004

Iraq's Governing Council

A dangerous place between B and C

BAGHDAD

Having tasted power, the 25 members of Iraq's Governing Council quite like it

IN THEORY, nothing much has changed. Though the violence continues—on February 18th suicide bombers killed at least 11 Iraqis and wounded nearly 60 coalition soldiers in a base at Hilla, south of Baghdad—the plan America announced last November still stands. Under that plan, America intends to transfer power to an Iraqi provisional government by July 1st. In practice, as all of Iraq knows, the details of this transfer of power are looking increasingly foggy.

The November plan was itself a Plan B, a much faster procedure than the one Paul Bremer, America's proconsul in Baghdad, had originally mapped out for giving Iraqis power over their own affairs. But Americans and Iraqis are now awaiting yet another plan, this time from Kofi Annan, the United Nations' secretary-general. This one, the Americans hope, will enable them to stick to their timetable while keeping the foremost spiritual leader of Iraq's majority Shia community, Ayatollah Ali Sistani, reasonably happy.

Mr Annan has the advantage that his own emissary to Iraq, Lakhdar Brahimi, was at least able last week to meet Mr Sistani in Najaf. Mr Bremer was never granted that honour and had to treat with the reclusive cleric via intermediaries. But squaring the differences between the ayatollah and the proconsul will still be hard. Mr Sistani had wanted the provisional

government to be directly elected. Mr Bremer, insisting that Iraq lacks the machinery to organise such elections in time for the July handover, has stuck to the idea that a legitimate enough provisional government can be selected by local caucuses, with no proper elections until 2005.

No one is yet sure what the UN will propose. But rumour says the proposed compromise might be to bring those proper elections forward to the end of this year. The Americans, who in desperation have been signalling their flexibility, would then have to decide whether to adopt this as their plan C. And they would still have to work out how, when and indeed whether to create an Iraqi provisional government before then.

One complication is that Mr Bremer and Mr Sistani are not the only people who need to be satisfied by a plan C. There are Sunni and Kurdish sensitivities to take into account as well. And on top of this is the vested interest of the existing Governing Council, the 25-member body that Mr Bremer himself appointed and which is the nearest approximation Iraq has right now to a government of its own.

When Mr Bremer produced Plan B in November, the council seemed happy enough to go along with it. Its co-operation was deemed crucial in making Mr Bremer's programme of caucuses work. But now that a Plan C is in the air, its mem-

bers' enthusiasm for the caucuses is waning. Having tasted power, they are not in a hurry to give it up. If the new idea is going to be to hold earlier elections, some of the councillors ask, why should they not stay in charge of things until then?

Why indeed? Though appointed and not elected, the council is reasonably representative of Iraq's various groups. But it also has its flaws, one of which is a growing allergy to criticism. Its members say they believe in a free press but have shut down, albeit temporarily, the Iraqi operations of two of the Arab world's most popular satellite channels. They have formed a committee to investigate complaints of corruption, but have yet to name its head, its location or the sanctions at its disposal.

The councillors' nepotism rankles, too. Sons, nephews and cousins abound in ministries and on committees. And there are growing signs of authoritarianism. As before the war, senior officials honk furiously through the traffic jams of Baghdad, their convoys bristling with gun muzzles like hedgehogs. The chairman of the council's security committee, Ayad Allawi, has begun creating a new version of the feared secret police. Iraq may well need a counter-insurgency force, but Mr Allawi's rivals accuse him of recruiting former torturers to man a new apparatus of oppression.

Some council members are now calling for elections as soon as possible, starting in the more stable north and south, including ten mainly Shia provinces and three mainly Kurdish ones, but excluding the five provinces of Baghdad and the "Sunni triangle" where violence is concentrated. It may be that a proper democratic spirit animates such calls. But, this being Iraq, there are those who see the councillors' haste as a complex ruse to stymie any alternative to their own continuation in office. ■

Iraqi Kurdish Leaders Resist as the U.S. Presses Them to Moderate Their Demands

By DEXTER FILKINS

BAGHDAD, Iraq, Feb. 20 — The alliance between the United States government and Kurdish political parties in Iraq has come under intense strain in recent days, with Kurdish leaders accusing the Americans of trying to block their long stifled hopes for autonomy in the new Iraqi state.

Kurdish leaders say American officials are putting pressure on them to drop some of their main demands for autonomy in negotiations with the other major Iraqi groups, the Shiites and Sunni Arabs, over a temporary constitution to guide the country until the end of next year.

Iraqi leaders on both sides of the negotiations say the talks on the constitution are deadlocked over three main issues: the fate of the 60,000-member Kurdish militia, which Kurdish leaders want to keep; the boundaries of the autonomous Kurdish region, which Kurdish leaders want to expand; and the amount of oil revenue to be set aside for the Kurdish region.

Kurdish leaders also say they want years of Arab migration into Kurdish lands reversed before nationwide elections for a permanent government are held next year.

They say they are especially embittered by American leaders, who they say have forgotten the special relationship that grew up between the Kurds and the United States in the Persian Gulf war of 1991, when they were united against Saddam Hussein.

"Have the Americans forgotten that the Kurds are their best friends in the Middle East?" said Mahmoud Othman, a Kurdish member of the Iraqi Governing Council. "After all the Kurdish people have been through, the killings, the genocide, I cannot go to my people and tell them to accept the things the Americans are trying to force on us. The Kurdish people will not accept them."

According to Kurdish and other Iraqi officials, L. Paul Bremer III, the chief American administrator here, has told Kurdish leaders that he will not yield on the three major issues holding up the negotiations.

Mr. Bremer, the Iraqis say, has flatly rejected the Kurds' demand that they keep their militia intact, that they be guaranteed a percentage of oil revenue proportional to their population and that their region be expanded to include heavily Kurdish areas once held by Mr. Hussein's forces.

The deadlock cuts to the heart of the future of the Iraqi nation, a patchwork of ethnic and religious groups cobbled together from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire after World War I.

It poses a test for Mr. Bremer, who is faced with the task of reconciling the demands of the three Iraqi groups while putting in place a framework that will hold the country together after the Americans leave.

Kurdish officials said Mr. Bremer, trying to break the deadlock, flew by helicopter earlier this week to the home of Massoud Barzani, the long-time Kurdish guerrilla chieftain and political leader. He stayed overnight, Kurdish officials said, but left empty-handed.

Kurdish leaders say they can only compromise on autonomy so much, because an overwhelming majority of their people want independence from Iraq. That desire is shaped by the historic depredations suffered by the Kurds at the hands of the central government in Baghdad.

"These are our rights — we fought hard for them," said Rowsch Shaways, a senior leader of Mr. Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party. "The experiment of Iraqi statehood failed once before. We do not want to repeat the same mistakes."

American officials declined to comment on the negotiations. At a news conference on Thursday, Mr. Bremer was asked about oil, militia forces and disputed territories.

While he declined to address in depth the subjects of oil and territory, Mr. Bremer said he expected the

Oil, land and militias are bones of contention in Iraq.

Kurdish militias, some of whom have been fighting for decades, to disarm or be integrated into an army under the command of the central authority in Baghdad.

"We have made clear in discussions with the Kurdish leaders and other political leaders that we believe there's no place in an independent, stable Iraq for armed forces that are not under the control of the command structure of the central government," Mr. Bremer said.

The issue of Kurdish autonomy has loomed over the fledgling Iraqi government here since the fall of Mr.

Hussein, whose military brutally put down a Kurdish revolt after the 1991 war when the United States and its allies declined to intervene.

Since American and allied forces returned to the area later in 1991 and a no-flight zone was established to exclude Mr. Hussein's air force, Iraq's Kurdish region has largely governed itself. Its flourishing unnerves Turkey, Iran and Syria, which have their own Kurdish populations whose pleas for autonomy they have sought to suppress.

The draft of the constitution that is serving as a basis for the negotiations recognizes the regional government of the Kurdish lands that were held by the Kurds when the latest war started in March 2003.

The document sidesteps an array of contentious issues. It leaves for later, for instance, the settlement of conflicting claims to Kirkuk, an ethnically mixed city that was subjected to a government-encouraged immigration of Arabs during Mr. Hussein's time. Kirkuk is the center for oil production in northern Iraq.

Adnan Pachachi, a member of the Iraqi Governing Council, said he hoped that many of the Kurdish demands could be left for the permanent constitution next year. But the council has already made some compromises to placate the Kurds, he said. In the draft now circulating before the council, Mr. Pachachi said, the temporary constitution enshrines Kurdish as one of Iraq's two official languages.

The council did that, Mr. Pachachi said, even though Kurds make up only about 20 percent of Iraq's population.

But Mr. Pachachi said he opposed the Kurds' demands that they retain their militia and receive oil revenues roughly proportionate to their population.

"This is the national wealth," Mr. Pachachi said of the oil revenue. "In the end, they can't have everything."

Kurdish leaders have been especially adamant on keeping their militia, the force that fought alongside the Americans during the campaign to unseat Mr. Hussein.

Political parties across the country have their own militias, which has raised the prospect of internal conflict. But Kurdish officials say their history of persecution in Iraq has been too traumatic for them to consider surrendering their armed forces yet.

Similarly, Kurdish officials say they will insist that Arab migration

into Kurdish lands be reversed before elections next year for a national assembly. Otherwise, they say, a census would enshrine Arab dominance in many areas rightfully Kurdish, and then, with the elections that are sure to follow, any incentive to

reverse those policies would fade.

Mr. Othman, the Kurdish member of the Governing Council, said he was so frustrated by the current deadlock and by American policy that he was inclined to let Mr. Bremer be the one to explain the situation to the Kurd-

ish people.

"If I try to go back to my people and sell these things to them, they will choke me," Mr. Othman said. "Let Mr. Bremer tell them."

Syria and Iran aiding militants, says Iraq

Intelligence officials say evidence points to neighbours

Michael Howard in Kirkuk

Senior Iraqi intelligence officials believe an Islamic militant group that has claimed responsibility for two suicide bombings in Irbil and a spate of deadly attacks in Baghdad, Falluja and Mosul is receiving significant help from Syria and Iran.

The officials, who have been tracking the activities of domestic and foreign jihadists

in northern Iraq, claim members of Jaish Ansar al-Sunna (the army of the supporters of the sayings of the prophet) have been "given shelter by Syrian and Iranian security agencies and have been able to enter Iraq with ease".

The group is suspected of training and deploying suicide bombers against US forces in Iraq, as well as against Iraqis deemed to be collaborating with the US-led authorities.

Jaish Ansar al-Sunna was among a dozen Islamic militant organisations that issued a joint statement two weeks ago in Ramadi and Falluja, warning Iraqis against cooperating with the occupation.

It distributed CDs carrying

video footage of some of its operations, which included attacks on US military convoys using roadside bombs.

US officials believe that since the capture of Saddam Hussein in December the insurgency in Iraq is increasingly being fought by Islamic guerrillas rather than former regime loyalists.

The emergence of Islamist extremist groups has added to the challenges faced by occupation authorities and local security forces in Iraq.

While Iraqi authorities are struggling to establish an effective intelligence operation in the centre and south of the country, in the north they have been able to build on the existing intelligence network

in the self-rule area that was the Kurds' first line of defence during the Saddam era.

An intelligence official in the northern city of Kirkuk said: "We have arrested a number of foreign Arabs that we believe may be connected to the global terror network."

"They all seemed to have Iranian or Syrian visas in their passports. A number of them told us they had received assistance in those countries."

He said Hassan Ghul, a suspected al-Qaida operative found to be carrying a document calling for fomenting civil war in Iraq, had been arrested by Kurdish forces on the Iraqi side of the Iranian border near the town of Kalar. The Americans have said the

17-page letter was written by Abu Musab Zarqawi, a Jordanian fugitive allegedly linked to Osama bin Laden.

Jaish Ansar al-Sunna is also suspected of coordinating the infiltration of foreign militants — experienced terrorists and young foot soldiers — from Europe through Syria, the intelligence official said.

"We are not talking huge numbers, perhaps 100 since the war, but that is too much," he said. "We believe that there is a safe house for them near Damsacus. They are crossing the border west of Mosul, then heading for Mosul before dispersing to other cities."

The official said Iran and Syria wanted to use the militant issue as a bargaining point in their relations with the US.

Hoshiyar Zebari, the Iraqi foreign minister, said: "There are incidents of infiltration [into Iraq] from the outside."

"I do not want to accuse anyone, but we are not getting sufficient cooperation from our neighbours. If they believe they can play with the security of Iraq, they are playing with fire. It's very dangerous."

Damascus and Tehran reject allegations they are harbouring or facilitating jihadists and point to their increased cooperation with George Bush's global war on terror.

According to the Iraqi intelligence officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, Jaish Ansar al-Sunna is believed to

be a splinter group of Ansar al-Islam (supporters of Islam), an extreme Kurdish group with suspected links to al-Qaida.

The group's leader is identified on its website as Abu Abdullah al-Hassan bin Mahmoud, thought to be the brother of a leading Ansar al-Islam fighter. Until the invasion of Iraq Ansar al-Islam controlled a string of villages high in the Zagros mountains near the Iranian border.

There they introduced Taliban-style rule and despised the secular, pro-American administrations of the two main Kurdish parties in the self-rule area, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, led by Jalal Talabani, and the Kurdistan Democratic party, led by Massoud Barzani, whose Irbil offices were targeted with synchronised suicide bombs on February 1.

A total of 109 people were killed and scores more injured in that attack, the worst since the fall of Saddam.

Ansar al-Islam was ousted from its stronghold at the beginning of the war by a joint operation involving PUK peshmerga forces and US air power. Some 200 fighters fled to Iran, the intelligence official said. They had now had time to reorganise and had been filtering back into Iraq where they have joined Sunni Arab extremists to form the new group.

The Guardian

February 20 2004

Les Iraniens désignent leurs députés alors que les réformateurs ont été écartés des élections

Les islamistes affermissent leur emprise sur l'Iran

Alors que les conservateurs devraient reprendre le contrôle du Parlement lors des législatives qui se déroulent aujourd'hui en Iran, la Maison-Blanche s'est dite hier « gravement préoccupée » par la découverte dans ce pays, par l'AIEA, de pièces d'un modèle sophistiqué de centrifugeuse que Téhéran aurait dû déclarer. Les inspecteurs de l'agence des Nations unies chargée de la sûreté nucléaire ont découvert « les pièces d'une centrifugeuse G 2 », un modèle utilisé pour l'enrichissement de l'uranium, a précisé un diplomate dans la capitale autrichienne. Téhéran a démenti.

Téhéran :
Delphine Minoui

La guerre du silence est déclarée. Environ 46 millions d'électeurs sont aujourd'hui appelés à choisir leurs futurs députés, qui siégeront au septième Majlis iranien. Mais ils sont déjà nombreux à avoir annoncé leur abstention pour protester contre un scrutin qu'ils considèrent antidémocratique. « Pourquoi voter pour des candidats, qui ont déjà été présélectionnés ? », s'interroge Amin, un étudiant de 23 ans.

A travers le pays, les voix s'élèvent pour protester contre le rejet par le Conseil des gardiens de plus d'un tiers des

quelque 8 000 candidats qui se sont présentés au septième Parlement. Pas de manifestation ni de révolte. Mais une fronde discrète qui trouve ses échos dans les courriers des lecteurs de la presse et les weblogs, ces fameux journaux personnels sur Internet. Certains Iraniens disent même avoir reçu des messages sur leur téléphone portable avec comme mot d'ordre :

« Ne votez pas. » Et, dans les rues de Téhéran, plusieurs posters ont été crayonnés et arrachés.

En début de semaine, le président Mohammad Khatami a pourtant appelé les Iraniens à voter pour les candidats indépendants, en guise de protestation contre les conservateurs. Mais les représentants des

principaux partis réformateurs, dont le frère du président en personne, ont confirmé qu'ils boycottaient les élections.

Hier, le ministère de l'Intérieur a, de son côté, annoncé que 888 candidats, dont 12 députés actuels du Parlement, ont décidé de se retirer des élections à la dernière minute. Quant à la seule liste réformatrice, la Coalition pour l'Iran, elle s'est constituée en toute hâte, autour du président du Parlement sortant, Mehdi Karubi. En face, les conservateurs, annoncés gagnants par défaut, mettent l'accent sur le développement économique et le respect des valeurs de l'islam. De son côté, la presse conservatrice a multiplié, ces derniers jours, les appels à se rendre aux urnes « pour dé-

jouer les complots » contre la République islamique.

Vaincus d'avance, les réformateurs ont pourtant marqué le coup, il y a trois jours, en interpellant - phénomène inédit - le guide religieux en personne, l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei. « La question consiste à savoir comment les membres du Conseil

des gardiens ont eu l'aplomb de résister à vos ordres ou si, comme en circule la rumeur, malgré certaines déclarations publiques, ils ont obtenu d'une autre manière de votre part la permission qu'ils pouvaient persister dans les rejets illégaux et massifs de candidatures », peut-on lire dans une lettre adressée par plusieurs députés sortants.

La réponse des conservateurs a été radicale : les deux journaux réformateurs *Shargh* et *Yas-e Now*, qui avaient publié le courrier, ont été provisoirement obligés de fermer hier. Interrogé par l'agence estudiantine Isna, le procureur du tribunal de Téhéran, Saeed Mortazavi, a reproché à ces journaux d'avoir « insulté le guide suprême » et « fait paraître de la propagande contre la République islamique ». Une

telle action radicale laisse présager des semaines, voire des mois difficiles à venir pour tous ceux qui se sont rangés du côté des députés protestataires.

Les conservateurs, qui détiennent les leviers principaux du régime - justice, police, armée -, pourraient user de leur pouvoir pour fermer d'autres journaux, interpellier certains députés sortants et imposer des remontrances aux étudiants. « Ce ne sera qu'une vague de plus », soupire Mehdi, un

chauffeur de taxi désenchanté. « Ils vont fermer des journaux et, après l'orage, de nouveaux vont rouvrir », espère-t-il, en disant que de

toute façon « les Iraniens ont fini par s'organiser en marge

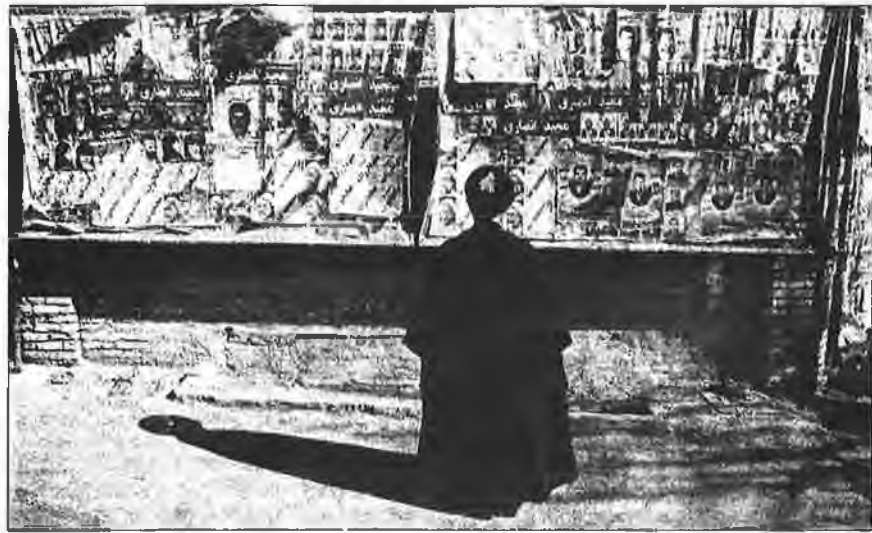
Ils sont déjà nombreux à avoir annoncé leur abstention pour protester contre ce scrutin



Sous un portrait du président iranien Mohammad Khatami, à Téhéran, un groupe de religieux parcourt dans les journaux la liste des candidats aux élections législatives. Quelque 46 millions d'électeurs sont appelés à voter. (Photo Damir Sagolj/Reuters.)

des interdits et des contraintes imposés par les durs du régime ».

Pour le jeune Amin, il est également important de relativiser l'impact de la récente crise politique sur l'abstention annoncée aux élections. « Cela fait bien longtemps que j'avais décidé de ne pas voter, dit-il. Cela fait six ans qu'on espère que les conditions de vie vont changer, mais rien n'a changé. Je pense que, si nous ne votons pas, peut-être que le monde entier va enfin reconnaître que nous rejetons ce gouvernement car il nous force à faire ce qu'on ne veut pas faire. »



Le clergé chiite radical, pourtant massivement contesté par la population iranienne, espèrent reprendre le contrôle du Parlement. (Photo Morteza Nikoubazl/Reuters.)

Les habitants de Mechhed dénoncent l'élection antidémocratique

« On sait qu'on a perdu, personne n'ira voter »

Mechhed
(nord-est de l'Iran) :
de notre envoyée spéciale

Moustache et blazer pied-de-poule, le candidat aux législatives, âgé de 34 ans, sourit gauchement aux rares passants attirés par les chocolats chauds et les gâteaux distribués par son équipe. Dans cette salle des fêtes de Mechhed, transformée en QG de campagne, il n'a pas l'air en forme. Interrogé sur son programme, il répond vaguement qu'il n'est « ni de droite ni de gauche » et qu'il « veut aider les jeunes à trouver du travail », tout en se tordant les mains. A-t-il le tract ? « Non, il a peur, tout simplement », souffle un proche qui se fait appeler Morteza.

Après s'être assuré que personne ne l'entend et que son vrai nom ne sera pas révélé, le jeune homme s'étale en explications. « Tout ce que vous voyez n'est qu'un gros mensonge », insiste-t-il, en révélant ce qu'il appelle les « secrets des élections parlementaires ». « On ne se fait pas d'illusions. On sait d'avance qu'on a perdu les élections, car personne ne va voter », poursuit-il, en ajoutant : « Il faut que le monde entier le sache : tout cela n'est qu'une tactique des conservateurs. »

Et le candidat dans tout ça ? « Il ne voulait pas se présenter.

Il n'a jamais fait de politique. Mais ils sont venus le voir en le forçant à participer aux élections, pour donner l'impression d'une diversité des candidats et d'une expression démocratique », raconte Morteza.

A Mechhed, deuxième ville d'Iran, forte de 2 millions d'habitants, au nord-est du pays, représentée par six députés au Parlement, plus de cinq cents candidats sont en compétition. Leurs posters s'étalent sur les arrêts de bus, les devantures des mosquées et les principaux carrefours. A côté des quelques candidats conservateurs et des rares réformateurs qui n'ont pas boycotté les élections, une multitude de candidats indépendants, dont plusieurs jeunes femmes, ont fait campagne. Ils ont entre 25 et 35 ans. Certains mettent

en valeur des études en Grande-Bretagne ou à Hawaï. D'autres invitent les électeurs à les appeler sur leurs portables ou à consulter leurs sites Internet.

« Tout ça, c'est du bluff », s'exclame Morteza. La plupart de ces candidats indépendants ont été payés pour participer aux élections. » D'après lui, certaines forces conservatrices – les mêmes qui soutiennent le guide religieux, originaire de Mechhed, et qui n'ont cessé de mettre des bâtons dans les roues aux réformes de Khatami depuis son élection en 1997 – n'ont pas hésité à payer des candidats pour

faire croire à une campagne « colorée ». « Nous savons tous que d'avance, c'est une sélection, pas une élection », insiste-t-il en faisant référence à l'invalidation, par le puissant gardien, d'un tiers des quelque 8 000 candidats d'origine.

Certains, comme Mohammad Hossein Salévat, modeste vétérinaire de 33 ans, ont pourtant tenus à rester intègres. Par manque de budget, ce candidat autonome a collé toutes ses affiches à la main. Il sait qu'il n'a pas de grandes chances de gagner. Mais il se bat en espérant trouver une solution aux problèmes du chômage et de la drogue, deux fléaux qui touchent Mechhed, située près de la frontière afghane. Connue pour son atmosphère religieuse, la ville sainte, qui héberge le mausolée de l'imam Reza, voit ses meilleurs « cerveaux » fuir vers la capitale, Téhéran. Nombreux sont les habitants de Mechhed qui se plaignent du monopole de l'Astan-é Qods, puissante Fondation religieuse qui dirige l'essentiel de l'appareil de production et de distribution de la région : du zamzam (le soda national) aux grandes laiteries, en passant par les nombreux terrains qui sont sous son contrôle.

« C'est un véritable Etat dans l'Etat », murmure Morteza, en faisant référence à cette institution opaque. Un système que Mohammad Hossein rêve en se

crot de pouvoir réformer, s'il était élu. Mais de tels projets pourraient froisser les notables, proches de certaines figures conservatrices. Il y a quatre ans, des « groupes de pression » se

sont chargés de molester un autre candidat pour moins que ça : le jeune homme, qui avait drainé le plus grand nombre de votes, avait été sommé de se retirer, sous la menace.

« C'est une mafia », insiste Morteza, en laissant sous-entendre la « main » des puissantes Fondations religieuses dans la campagne de celui qu'il soutient. « Tout a été réfléchi dans le moindre détail pour donner une apparence joyeuse à ces élections », insiste-t-il, en révélant la stratégie de ceux qu'il appelle les « opportunistes de la révolution ». Sur le mur de cette salle des fêtes (dont le loyer s'élève à 400 euros par soir), mise gratuitement à la disposition du candidat, un poster affiche son nom en lettres latines. « C'est pour attirer les jeunes, car on sait que les jeunes aiment se tourner vers les langues étrangères », dit Morteza.

Sur tous les tracts, la phrase « dispute politique » a été soigneusement barrée au feutre rouge, pour mettre en valeur l'« indépendance » du candidat. Devant la salle des fêtes, une brochette de jeunes hommes – certains en cravate – font la navette pour distribuer des tracts. « La cravate, c'est pour donner un air moderne et séduire les électeurs », raconte Morteza, qui confesse avoir suggéré aux cousines du candidat de faire sortir les mèches de leurs foulards et de mettre du vernis à ongles. Des airs de pop crépitent des enceintes d'une grande sono

posée sur une estrade vide.

Mais même si le scénario est bien ficelé, la sauce ne prend pas. « Ces élections, c'est une blague », lâche Amîn, étudiant à l'université Ferdoussi de Mech-

hed. « Personne ne les prend au sérieux, dit le jeune homme. « Vous savez, l'histoire a appris aux habitants de Mechhed à ne pas être dupes. » Et de raconter l'histoire de Shah Abbas, mo-

narque iranien du XVI^e siècle : « Il avait l'habitude de faire venir, chaque semaine, de faux aveugles près du mausolée de l'imam Reza pour faire croire à un miracle et attirer les pèlerins

dans la ville... Alors un miracle de plus ? Personne ne gobe. »

D. M.

Les mollahs jouent la carte du business

Ils portent des costumes dignes des grands tailleurs italiens, mais ils cultivent la barbe « révolutionnaire ». Ils ne quittent jamais leur portable dernier cri, mais pas question de serrer la main à une femme et leurs épouses revêtent le tchador noir. Certains d'entre eux sont passés par les universités étrangères. Ils prônent l'ouverture économique et n'excluent pas un rapprochement avec le Grand Satan (l'Amérique). Mais, quand il s'agit de politique interne, ils veulent serrer la vis. Ce sont les néoconservateurs iraniens, héritiers du courant de l'ancien président Rafsandjani et proches des idées de Hassan Rohani, le chef du Conseil suprême de la sécurité nationale, qui était récemment en première ligne dans les négociations sur le nucléaire avec la troika européenne.

Parmi eux, les Bâtisseurs, la principale liste conservatrice, viennent de mener campagne sur un slogan : « Le développe-

ment économique. » En dépit d'un électorat limité, ils sont déjà quasiment assurés de leur victoire aux législatives d'aujourd'hui, face au boycott des

élections par une vaste partie des réformateurs. Pour séduire les foules, ils attaquent les réformateurs. Il est vrai que le tableau de l'économie iranienne

donne des signes de faiblesse. Le taux officiel du chômage s'élève à 13 %. Mais, d'après les analystes, il serait proche des 20 %. Selon les experts, au moins un million de nouveaux emplois devrait être créé chaque année pour faire face aux colonies de jeunes qui entrent sur le marché de l'emploi. En l'absence de travail, les

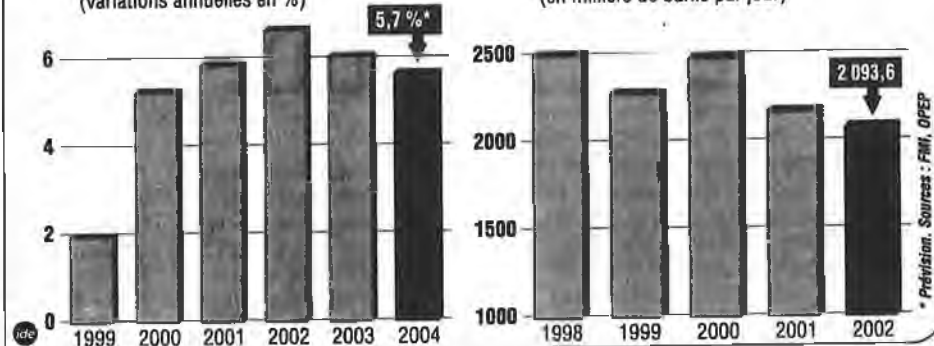
meilleurs diplômés d'université émigrent à l'étranger.

« Quand le président réformateur Mohammad Khatami est arrivé au pouvoir, en 1997, son idée était de légaliser le système économique iranien », analyse Heydar Pourian, rédacteur en chef de la revue *L'Economie de l'Iran*. « Mais il est vrai que, pendant les premières

Un pays dépendant de l'or noir

► Evolution du PIB de l'Iran (variations annuelles en %)

► Exportations iraniennes de pétrole (en milliers de barils par jour)



La Bourse tirée par... le « Grand Satan »

« La Bourse de Téhéran a connu un boom inattendu en l'espace de ces dernières années », constate Albrecht Frischenlager, consultant chez Atieh Bahar, agence iranienne de conseil aux entreprises. Les prix des actions ont connu une croissance de l'ordre de 100 %. Le marché est bien sûr soumis à des hauts et des bas en fonction de l'évolution des relations irano-américaines, rompues depuis la prise d'otage à l'ambassade des Etats-Unis, en novembre 1979. En période de rapprochement ou de bonne nouvelle, comme celle de l'aide américaine apportée aux victimes du séisme de Bam, à la fin de l'an passé, la Bourse est au beau fixe. Mais elle flanche aussitôt dès que le vent tourne dans l'autre sens, comme à la suite du discours de Georges Bush sur l'« axe du mal », en janvier 2002. Il y a un an, au moment des opérations américaines en Irak, les prix des actions dans l'industrie pétrochimique ont tout d'un coup plafonné en Iran. Depuis l'arrivée du président Khatami au pouvoir, en 1997, le gouvernement iranien a largement épongé son déficit budgétaire et réduit de moitié les taxes, dynamisant le secteur privé. A cela s'ajoute la poursuite de la politique de privatisation, lancée au cours du deuxième mandat du président Rafsandjani, au début des années 90. Quant à la nouvelle loi sur les investissements étrangers, en cours d'achèvement, elle laisse présager de belles perspectives pour l'avenir.

D. M.

Enorme contrat pétrolier avec le Japon

Après quatre ans de négociations difficiles, le Japon et l'Iran ont signé mercredi soir un accord de 2 milliards de dollars pour exploiter conjointement le gisement pétrolier d'Azadegan, l'un des plus prometteurs du monde, en dépit de « la profonde inquiétude » de Washington. Un consortium japonais, dirigé par la compagnie d'exploration pétrolière Inpex, détiendra 75 % du projet. Les Iraniens contrôleront les 25 % restants via la firme d'Etat Nioc (National Iranian Oil Company). L'Archipel importe presque la totalité de ses besoins en pétrole et a besoin de diversifier ses sources d'énergie devant la rapide montée en puissance économique de la Chine. Azadegan (nord-ouest de l'Iran) est considéré comme le gisement pétrolier le plus important du pays et ce projet comme le plus ambitieux on shore depuis la révolution islamique de 1979. C'est aussi le plus important projet japonais dans le secteur pétrolier. Il est prévu que la première production de pétrole aura lieu dans quarante mois au niveau de 50 000 barils par jour. Les deux partenaires visent à atteindre une production de 150 000 barils par jours dans cinquante-deux mois, puis de 260 000 d'ici à huit ans, précise ce texte. Les deux tiers doivent être exportés vers le Japon.

(AFP.)

années, ses partenaires se sont contentés de s'occuper de questions politiques », poursuit-il. « En revanche, les parlementaires se sont montrés plus actifs à la fin de leur mandat : 60 % des nouvelles lois votées ont été d'ordre économique, parmi lesquelles le projet d'ouverture aux investissements étrangers, et la réduction des taxes », dit-il. Et d'ajouter : « Aujourd'hui, l'ouverture préconisée par les conservateurs n'est pas différente de celle qu'ont proposée pendant plusieurs années les réformateurs. »

Mais les conservateurs sont mieux à même de mettre à exécution ce rapprochement avec l'étranger, car ce sont eux qui

détiennent les leviers du pouvoir. De l'avis des diplomates étrangers, aussi, il est plus facile de négocier avec la droite conservatrice. « Aujourd'hui, les néoconservateurs ont un programme bien particulier », commente Isa Saarkhiz, le responsable du magazine *Aftab*. « L'idée est de dire aux étrangers : venez faire du business avec nous, mais ne vous mêlez pas de nos affaires internes », dit-il. Un peu un modèle à la chinoise : croissance économique, limitation du champ politique, libéralisation sociale prudente.

La question d'une relance des relations avec le Grand Satan est, explicitement ou non, au cœur du débat économique. Un tel rapprochement aurait un im-

pact immédiat sur l'économie. L'Iran possède aujourd'hui les quatrième et cinquième réserves mondiales de pétrole et les deuxième et troisième réserves mondiales de gaz. Mais l'infrastructure pétrolière souffre de l'embargo et d'un retard technologique. Un partena-

riat avec de grosses entreprises étrangères permettrait de faire exploser les chiffres de la production et de relancer très rapidement la machine économique. Mais, d'après Heydar Pourian, « que ce soient les conservateurs ou les réformistes qui se trouvent au pouvoir, l'Iran a un réel besoin de transformer en profondeur ses structures économiques s'il veut rejoindre les normes inter-

nationales ». A titre d'exemple, la loi sur le commerce date de cent ans. Le dialogue social n'existe pas dans les entreprises. Dans le cadre de la privatisation lancée en 1991, les usines ont souvent été vendues pour une bouchée de pain aux proches du pouvoir, souvent de piètres gestionnaires. Quant aux puissantes Fondations religieuses, nées au lendemain de la révolution de 1979, elles continuent toujours à contrôler une grande partie de l'appareil de production et de distribution. Elles constituent une sorte d'Etat dans l'Etat, qui continue à diriger, de manière très opaque, au moins le tiers des flux financiers du pays.

D. M. (à Téhéran)

LE FIGARO VENDREDI 20 FÉVRIER 2004

Éditorial

Iran : la voie chinoise

VINGT-CINQ ANS après la révolution islamique, l'espoir incarné un temps par les réformateurs a fait long feu. Le président Khatami ne sera pas le Gorbatchev iranien : les mollats conservateurs ont décidé de ne plus rien lâcher de leur pouvoir. En ce qui concerne l'élection législative d'aujourd'hui, tout a été fait pour que le contrôle du Parlement revienne dans le giron de ce clergé chiite radical pourtant de plus en plus contesté par les Iraniens.

L'annulation arbitraire de certaines de candidatures et l'abstention – qui sera sans doute massive – marquent l'échec de la transition démocratique, à laquelle on avait pu espérer lorsque les femmes et les jeunes iraniens avaient, en 1997, porté Mohammad Khatami à la présidence.

Malgré le triomphe de son

camp aux législatives de 2000, Khatami n'a jamais pu se libérer des entraves accumulées par les conservateurs pour faire obstacle à ses réformes. Alors que les étudiants se jetaient dans les rues, l'immobilisme et le refus de la confrontation du clan prétendument progressiste lui ont fait perdre tout crédit dans l'opinion.

La désaffection est générale à l'égard du régime, qu'il s'agisse des conservateurs ou des réformistes. Irrésistiblement tentée par la modernité, la jeunesse paraît aussi distante du pouvoir qu'elle pouvait l'être du temps du chah. De plus en plus de voix osent même remettre en cause le rapport étroit entre politique et religion, le *vilayat-e faqih*, institué en dogme il y a un quart de siècle par l'ayatollah Khomeiny.

Une reprise en main est à prévoir au lendemain du scrutin. L'option chinoise est la plus probable. Elle consisterait à refermer l'espace politique, tout en libéralisant l'économie afin d'offrir des perspectives aux nouvelles générations. Une normalisation avec l'Occident, souhaitée par la grande majorité, permettrait le retour des investissements.

L'homme de la situation pourrait bien être l'ancien président Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, réputé pour son pragmatisme et que l'on présente comme le chef de file des « néo-conservateurs » iraniens.

Après avoir été tenté de pousser les feux de la contestation, le « Grand Satan » américain serait aujourd'hui favorable à un pacte avec les conservateurs. Il s'agirait de les laisser libres de consolider leur pouvoir pour mieux négocier avec eux. Sur le nucléaire, sur l'Afghanistan et la lutte contre al-Qaïda, mais surtout sur l'Irak, où les Etats-Unis ont plus que jamais besoin de la neutralité bienveillante de Téhéran, notamment auprès de la majorité chiite.

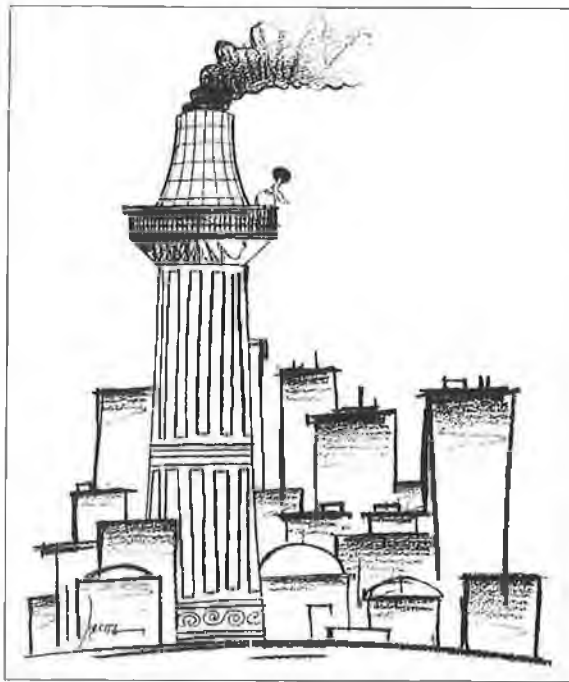
La voie chinoise en Iran servirait ainsi les intérêts immédiats de George W. Bush, même s'il lui sera difficile de l'inscrire dans son ambitieux projet de démocratisation du Moyen-Orient.

Pierre Rousselin

Malgré les promesses faites à l'Europe de se plier aux règles de l'Agence internationale pour l'énergie atomique, Téhéran n'a pas renoncé à la bombe

Le complot nucléaire de l'Iran

LE FIGARO VENDREDI 20 FÉVRIER 2004



Une vingtaine de sites répertoriés



Charles Lambroschini

« Les Iraniens, affirme Pierre Lellouche, n'ont pas renoncé à la bombe. Ils cherchent seulement à gagner du temps. » Quatre mois après la promesse du gouvernement de Téhéran de signer le Protocole additionnel du traité de non prolifération, le député UMP, qui est un expert des questions de défense, affiche son scepticisme. Il applaudit le succès de la visite en Iran, le 21 octobre, des trois ministres des Affaires étrangères français, britannique et allemand : désormais l'Iran accepte de se soumettre aux règles de l'Agence internationale pour l'énergie atomique (AIEA). « Mais, souligne Lellouche, cet engagement ne sera crédible que s'il y a un changement de régime. Or, la façon dont les mollahs conservateurs ont manipulé d'avance les élections du 20 février n'augure rien de bon pour la ratification par le nouveau Parlement de l'adhésion au Protocole. »

L'interprétation iranienne de

ce que Dominique de Villepin et ses collègues croyaient avoir obtenu reste ambiguë. Quelques jours après la réunion au palais Saad Abad entre les trois ministres et Hassan Rouhani, le chef du Conseil national de la sécurité, la cacophonie semblait délibérée. Contrairement aux révélations de l'AIEA qui a démontré l'été dernier que, depuis des années, l'Iran cherchait à se doter d'un arsenal nucléaire clandestin, Mohsen Javilvand, l'un des leaders du clan des faucons, affirmait : « Si nous avons accepté de geler notre processus d'enrichissement, c'est par souci de créer une atmosphère de confiance et non parce que nos actions passées auraient été inappropriées. »

De son côté, le Guide de la révolution, Ali Khamenei, qui, dans ses fonctions héritées de l'ayatollah Khomeiny, ne cesse de contester les initiatives des réformistes gravitant autour du président Mohammad Khatami, déclarait tranquillement : « A travers cet accord, il nous a été facile de prouver au monde

que nous n'avions jamais travaillé à l'acquisition d'armes nucléaires. L'Iran est donc libre d'annuler l'accord s'il estime que ses intérêts sont compromis par les demandes exagérées de l'Union européenne. »

Ce double discours est une tactique. Il s'agit d'enfoncer un coin entre les trois pays européens en jouant sur leurs appétits commerciaux. Parce que la France, l'Allemagne et la Grande-Bretagne ont offert de compenser les concessions de Téhéran en fournissant des équipements pour le nucléaire civil, les Iraniens font monter les enchères. Kamel Kharazi, le ministre des Affaires étrangères, insiste : « Tant que l'Europe ne tiendra pas sa parole en livrant la technologie nécessaire pour l'utilisation du nucléaire à des fins pacifiques, l'Iran ne tiendra pas sa part du contrat. »

Irrité par cette dérive sémantique, Jacques Chirac, qui recevait Rouhani à l'Élysée le 15 janvier, a demandé à l'Iran « d'appliquer intégralement les

On retrouve les empreintes d'Abdul Qadeer Khan, père de la bombe pakistanaise et contrebandier de l'atome

engagements pris en matière de non-prolifération ». Faute de quoi, la République islamique ne pourrait pas compter, dans ses relations avec la France, sur « un nouvel avenir ».

L'avertissement a été ignoré. Le 12 février, l'AIEA annonçait avoir découvert de nouvelles tricheries : des équipements bien plus sophistiqués que ceux d'abord avoués par l'Iran. Il s'agit de centrifugeuses en acier qui, tournant beaucoup plus

vite que les modèles en aluminium, sont mieux à même d'enrichir l'uranium aux niveaux très élevés qui sont nécessaires pour un usage militaire : une

centrale fonctionne avec un enrichissement à 5 % alors que, pour une arme nucléaire, il faut pousser jusqu'à 93,5 %. Là aussi, on retrouve les empreintes d'Abdul Qadeer Khan, père de la bombe pakistanaise et contrebandier de l'atome. C'est lui qui a livré les plans de ces centrifugeuses de la deuxième génération.

Le rêve nucléaire de l'Iran est ancien. Il remonte aux années 70 quand le chah acheta des réacteurs à la France et à l'Allemagne. Avec la bénédiction de Washington, l'objectif était alors de produire de l'électricité pour éviter de trop puiser dans les réserves pétrolières. Mais le chah, déterminé à faire de son pays une puissance régionale, cachait à peine ses arrière-pensées militaires.

L'énorme centrale de Bouchehr, aujourd'hui surveillée de près par la CIA et le Mossad, fut d'abord équipée par Siemens. C'est seulement après la révolution de 1979 que les mollahs, brouillés avec les Etats-Unis pour avoir pris en otages les diplomates de l'ambassade américaine, décidèrent de s'adresser à Moscou. Notamment lorsqu'il fallut réparer les dégâts infligés à Bouchehr lors de la guerre contre l'Irak, de 1980 à 1988.

Pour Bruno Tertrais, l'un des dirigeants à Paris de la Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, il n'est pas étonnant que

la République islamique ait repris à son compte les ambitions du chah : « Elle juge légitime d'avoir une influence proportionnelle à son importance démographique et à sa richesse pétrolière. Mais ce projet bute sur l'encerclement de l'Iran par des puissances nucléaires : Israël et les porte-avions américains déployés dans le Golfe persique qui lui sont aussi supérieurs pour les armements conventionnels. Dans une stratégie du faible au fort, seul le nucléaire peut rétablir l'égalité. »

Le souci de faire durer les réserves pétrolières reste l'explication officielle. Dans un article récemment publié par le *Herald Tribune*, trois universitaires iranais exilés aux Etats-Unis, donc peu susceptibles d'indulgence à l'égard de Téhéran, soulignent qu'au rythme actuel de la consommation l'Iran deviendra importateur de pétrole d'ici à 2010. Comme les géants pétroliers que sont les Etats-Unis et la Russie, il est logique que l'Iran veuille ajouter aux 3,5 millions de barils pompés annuellement une électricité d'origine nucléaire.

Mais tous les moyens sont bons pour bâtir en même temps un arsenal caché. En 1993, des hommes d'affaires iraniens n'hésitent pas à ache-

ter le petit aéroport de Hartenholm, à 50 kilomètres au nord de Hambourg. Sa piste unique n'est longue que de 3 000

mètres, trop courte pour des avions qui auraient volé jusqu'à Téhéran mais suffisante pour de petits avions allant se poser en Europe centrale. Là où attendent les gros porteurs iraniens. Pour des appareils inférieurs à 7,5 tonnes, la

réglementation européenne du moment n'exigeait même pas que les plans de vols précisent la destination. Il était donc facile d'évacuer vers l'Iran des

pièces détachées dont souvent l'usage militaire ne pouvait être compris qu'une fois assemblée la mosaïque finale.

Dans son numéro de l'automne 2003, la revue russe *Contrôle nucléaire* s'inquiète : « Des ingénieurs russes, condamnés au chômage par la faillite de leurs usines aéronautiques, partent comme touristes en Iran où ils sont aussitôt engagés pour construire des missiles. » La revue ajoute : « La fusée Chehab-3, issue du

rationnelle en 2005.

Troisième étape, l'enrichissement de l'uranium. A Natanz, les inspecteurs de l'AIEA constatent en février 2003 que 160 centrifugeuses fonctionnent effectivement, que 1000 autres doivent être assemblées et que, pour 2005, 5 000 centrifugeuses se trouveront en ligne. Assez nombreuses, selon la revue *Contrôle nucléaire*, pour fabriquer deux bombes. Cette découverte est d'autant plus inquiétante qu'il faut y ajouter l'édification en cours, dans la ville d'Arak, d'un centre de production d'eau lourde. Les réacteurs alimentés par ce carburant sont en effet les plus

efficaces pour fournir du plutonium, la matière première de la bombe.

Au bout de la chaîne, Téhéran entend se doter, à l'horizon 2010, de toute une panoplie de missiles : les engins tactiques Okhab et Nazeat, déjà déployés grâce à la Chine mais ne frappant qu'à 200 kilomètres ; les Chehab-4 d'un rayon d'action dix fois supérieur ; les Taepodong-2 qui, utilisant la technologie nord-coréenne, pourraient balancer une charge de 2 000 kilos à 4 000 kilomètres de distance.

Dernière raison, souligne Bruno Tertrais, de prendre au sérieux la capacité de nuisance de cet arsenal : « Le fait que l'Iran a soigneusement organisé la dispersion et la redondance de ses sites nucléaires. Les mollahs ont retenu la leçon du raid de l'aviation israélienne qui détruisit le réacteur irakien en 1981. En concentrant leur potentiel autour de la centrale de Bouchehr par exemple, ils se seraient exposés à un bombardement préventif. En gardant la possibilité de riposter, ils parlent au contraire que la dissuasion jouera. »

L'Occident ne doit pas se faire d'illusions. Si un jour la démocratie triomphe à Téhéran, rien ne dit que l'Iran renoncera à la bombe qui, parmi les nations du monde, est devenue une preuve de statut social. Seul progrès : c'est un régime raisonnable qui contrôlerait alors le bouton atomique.

L'AIEA a découvert de nouvelles tricheries : des équipements bien plus sophistiqués que ceux d'abord avoués

Scud-C soviétique, a une portée de 1 300 kilomètres. Tirée depuis Ispahan, elle atteindrait non seulement Israël mais aussi tout le sud de la Russie où vivent 20 millions d'habitants. »

Alertée par les Moudjahidins du peuple, l'opposition armée à la République islamique, l'AIEA finit, en février 2003, par mesurer l'ampleur du mensonge. L'Iran veut maîtriser la totalité du cycle nucléaire. D'abord, les mines d'uranium : depuis l'ouverture du premier site, près de Yazd, en 1985, des experts chinois, russes, allemands, tchèques et même argentins, se sont succédé pour chercher d'autres gisements. Viennent ensuite les usines de traitement du minerai : dernière en date, l'installation construite, avec l'aide de la Chine, non loin de la ville d'Ardakan et qui sera opé-

Des pistes en France

En août 2003, la réunion annuelle du Groupe des fournisseurs nucléaires, qui rassemble tous les pays occidentaux pratiquant le commerce atomique, se tenait à Séoul. A cette occasion, la délégation du Quai d'Orsay avait rapporté dans une note officielle les tentatives de Téhéran pour se procurer, en France, les moyens de produire, en Iran, les éléments constitutifs d'une arme nucléaire. Ainsi, pour retraiter en toute sécurité des déchets nucléaires, les agents de Téhéran ont cherché à acheter dix fenêtres antiradiation dont le blindage aurait assuré la même protection que du béton épais d'un mètre quarante. Pour forger des morceaux de plutonium, ils essayèrent aussi de mettre la main sur des presses isostatiques et des fours à vide. Autre exemple : par l'intermédiaire d'une société des Emirats, les Iraniens tentèrent de faire l'emplette de 28 télémanipulateurs dont la moitié dépassait le « seuil de contrôle » autorisé par le Groupe des fournisseurs. Enfin, la même note rapportait que l'Iran s'intéressait à des appareils de radiographie éclair permettant de simuler des essais nucléaires.

Ch. L.

Les méandres de la résistance islamiste en Irak

Depuis le début de l'automne 2003, tous les observateurs de la question irakienne s'accordent à dire que la résistance a pris une forme de plus en plus organisée. Ses moyens d'action se sont affi-

PAR
DOMINIQUE THOMAS *

nés et ses méthodes de guérilla ont gagné en efficacité. Certains attribuaient au départ cette montée en puissance au financement direct assuré par des membres de l'ancien régime, et en particulier par son président déchu Saddam Hussein. Or l'arrestation de ce dernier n'a pas vraiment changé la donne. Il est en revanche troublant de remarquer que l'efficacité de la résistance est corrélative à une structuration des mouvements islamistes armés en Irak. Cette structuration se manifeste également sur Internet, avec l'apparition de plusieurs sites officiels liés à des groupes islamistes. Ceux-ci ont pris l'habitude de revendiquer la majeure partie des attaques effectuées, en donnant les détails opérationnels nécessaires pour garantir leur crédibilité. A travers une lecture on-line on peut ainsi établir une première liste des groupes de moudjahidins qui luttent aujourd'hui au nom de l'Islam contre la coalition armée dirigée par les Etats-Unis.

Au nord, dans le Kurdistan irakien, on trouve tout d'abord l'Armée des partisans de l'Islam (en arabe *Ansar al-Islam*). Ses militants ont déjà revendiqué des

attaques contre des milices kurdes fidèles à la coalition, attaques régulièrement reprises par un site officiel. Composée de moudjahidins locaux et de volontaires arabes, l'organisation regrouperait environ 600 combattants. Elle est dirigée sur place par l'émir Abu Abdallah al-Shaheey. Calquée sur le modèle djihadiste, elle possède un conseil de fatwas, alimenté par des oulémas présents en Arabie saoudite, qui joue le rôle de direction politique, une structure militaire et des camps d'entraînement enclavés dans les montagnes du nord irakien. Bien qu'à vocation internationaliste, elle prône à la fois une libération de la zone kurde et une « réislamisation » de sa société, réactualisant le mythe du héros kurde Salah Ed-Din al-Ayyoubi, connu en Occident sous le nom de Saladin et célèbre entre autres pour ses victoires sur les Croisés.

Autour du fameux triangle sunnite, entre Samarra et Bagdad, c'est l'Armée des partisans de la sunna (APS, en arabe *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna*) qui apparaît pour l'instant comme le mouvement le plus influent. Proche d'Ansar al-Islam et dirigée sur le terrain par l'émir Abu Abdallah al-Hassan, ce mouvement affirme dans ses commu-

L'arrestation de Saddam Hussein n'a pas vraiment changé la donne

niqués vouloir combattre sur toutes les parties de l'Irak. Il tente de fédérer le pays sous la bannière du *tauhid* (l'unicité divine), l'un des principes fonda-

teurs du courant wahhabite saoudien. Héritage d'un ancien petit mouvement fondamentaliste sunnite, l'APS s'est constituée à partir des premiers groupes armés apparus en juin dernier. Se réclamant d'une résistance nationale islamiste ira-

kienne, et qui diffusaient leurs premières vidéos aux chaînes arabes internationales. Plus récemment, l'Armée des partisans de la Sunna s'est dotée de relais londoniens qui reprennent ses communiqués, dont le dernier en date revendique l'attentat du 1^{er} février contre les deux partis kurdes pro-coalition à Arbil, qui a tué plus d'une centaine de personnes. Elle a ensuite diffusé une série de fatwas, rédigées par des cheikhs du courant djihadiste saoudien et condamnant toute collaboration avec les forces ennemies.

Ce premier groupe arabe sunnite vient également cohabiter avec une autre mouvance plus confuse, construite sur une base islamo-nationaliste, le Mouvement de la résistance islamique nationale (MRIN). Celui-ci dispose d'une branche armée, les Brigades de la révolution/20 (en référence à la révolte de juillet 1920 contre les Britanniques), elle-même composée de plusieurs cellules locales. Dans son programme politique diffusé sur des forums islamiques, cette organisation affirme être la plus influente au sein de la société irakienne, et disposer de réseaux actifs de Mossoul à Bagdad. Elle axe sa pensée sur le courant des Frères musulmans, prônant un Etat islamique irakien intégré dans le cadre de la communauté internationale. Elle abriterait en majorité des déçus

de l'ancien régime, convertis à la cause islamiste, au service de laquelle ils mettent leur service et leur logistique.

De la même manière, on observe, depuis ces derniers mois, l'émergence d'une nouvelle organisation qui se réclame directement du courant salafiste-djihadiste. Il s'agit du Groupe salafiste des combattants irakiens (GSCI). Cherchant à reproduire à la lettre le modèle afghan, le GSCI dispose de son propre site et d'une publication, dans lesquels on retrouve la littérature djihadiste caractéristique de ces dernières années. Depuis la zone sunnite, son émir, Abu Dajana al-Iraqi, a reçu de nombreuses lettres de soutien de la plupart des oulémas saoudiens favorables à l'option djihadiste. Le GSCI reprend également à son compte certaines de leurs fatwas plus anciennes qui condamnaient à l'apostasie toute personne collaborant avec des troupes étrangères en Irak, et autorisaient l'usage des opérations martyres pour le djihad.

Bien que la référence à la nébuleuse al-Qaïda n'y soit pas clairement mentionnée, l'organisation est composée de petites cellules de volontaires djihadistes étrangers. Un Bureau de service des moudjahidins est aussi mentionné (pour le recrutement ?). On remarque pourtant que certaines unités de ces moudjahidins arabes fonctionnent de manière relativement isolée, comme les Brigades al-Farouq qui revendiquent, preuves à l'appui l'attaque contre le convoi espagnol en novembre.

Ainsi, comme on le voit à travers cette typologie établie à partir du web, la dimension islamiste de la résistance irakienne s'est parfaitement enracinée et l'arrestation de Saddam Hussein ne l'a pas affectée. En revanche, ses origines, sa composition, ses programmes politiques et ses objectifs sont parfois très différents. Cela devrait empêcher, pour l'instant, de voir émerger tout esprit fédérateur autour de la même cause.

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INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

Annan says handover must be led by Iraqis

Quick elections won't work, he insists

By Warren Hoge

UNITED NATIONS: Secretary General Kofi Annan, expanding on his finding that elections in Iraq would not be feasible before the United States hands over power on June 30, says it should be left to Iraqis themselves to decide the best alternative way of restoring sovereignty, UN officials said Friday.

"The ball is back in the court of the Iraqis and the CPA, with the UN willing to be called in to help as requested," said Annan's spokesman, Fred Eckhard, referring to the American-run Coalition Provisional Authority.

Annan, who spoke to reporters Thursday in New York after meeting with his returning special envoy for Iraq, Lakhdar Brahimi, said the United Nations was eager to advise Iraqis on how to proceed. But he insisted on not being seen as imposing an outside solution.

"It is crucial that we not give the impression that Iraq's fate could be decided over the heads of its people," he told representatives of a 46-nation Iraqi support group at the United Nations.

Annan said that he and Brahimi told the delegates "that elections cannot be held before the end of June, that the June 30 date for the handover of sovereignty must be respected, and that we need to find a mechanism to create the caretaker government and then prepare

where the organization was not even mentioned in the Nov. 15 agreement between the Coalition Provisional Authority and the Iraqi Governing Council

that set up the now discredited plan for political transition.

The current entry of the United Nations into the negotiations over Iraq's political future represents its first significant activity in the country since its Baghdad headquarters building was blown up in a bombing in August, killing 22 people, including the mission chief, Sergio Vieira de Mello.

Annan left New York on Friday on a five-day trip to Japan, and his full recommendation on Iraq was put off until after his return late next week at the earliest. Brahimi is on a separate trip to Japan, and the two men will be continuing their conversations on Iraq there, Annan's office said.

Annan is now suggesting that his final report might not be definitive even then, and he is also leaving open the likelihood that Brahimi will need to return to Iraq next month to consult further before reaching a conclusion on how the power transition should occur.

Annan was emphatic in saying that he had not settled on any path of his own choosing. "We have absolutely no preferred options," he told reporters on Thursday after briefing the members of the Security Council. "We need to have the Iraqis discuss it. They must take ownership, discuss it among them-

selves, and we will try and work with them to find a consensus."

For his part, Brahimi, who had just completed a weeklong mission to Iraq, discouraged proposals calling for "partial elections" — votes in those parts of the country secure enough to hold them. "When elections take place," Brahimi said, speaking in Arabic, "all Iraqis from the South, the North and in the middle, all Iraqis must participate."

Among the alternative possibilities under consideration are giving sovereignty to an expanded and more representative version of the Governing Council with elections coming early next year, or having a transitional assembly selected by a broad national conference of Iraqis like the *loya jirga*, or grand council, gathering of leaders in Afghanistan. Brahimi was the UN envoy to Kabul during that process.

Annan strongly implied that he had discounted the possibility that the Americans' caucus plan could be refined to make it locally acceptable. "So we will assist the Iraqis in defining what the next approach should be," he said.

Annan acknowledged concern that the delay in issuing his final recommendation would likely overlap the Feb. 28 deadline for settling on an interim constitution, but he said he thought the two issues had now been "decoupled."

"I don't think one has to come to an agreement on the transitional mechanism for it to be reflected in the basic law,

because I think there has been a decoupling, and we don't have to meet the deadline," he said.

He turned aside questions over speculation that his final report would re-

commend an advanced date for the national elections now proposed for the end of 2005. "It is being looked at," is all he would say.

The New York Times

'It is crucial that we not give the impression that Iraq's fate could be decided over the heads of its people.'

the elections sometime later in the future."

Diplomats say that the United Nations is now intent on avoiding having its independence and neutrality compromised by appearing to associate too closely with American occupation authorities.

Brahimi and a team of UN election experts went to Iraq after the United States asked the United Nations to evaluate a complicated caucus-based plan it had devised for creating an interim government. That plan has been harshly criticized by Iraqi leaders, especially those who are part of Iraq's Shiite majority.

The invitation represented a stark reversal by the White House, which had shunned UN involvement to the point



Osamu Honda/The Associated Press

Secretary General Kofi Annan, right, speaking to reporters along with his special envoy to Iraq, Lakhdar Brahimi, on the options for transferring power in Iraq.

In Iraq • By Noah Feldman

An alternative to rushed elections

NEW YORK

The United Nations secretary general, Kofi Annan, and his envoy to Iraq, Lakhdar Brahimi, confirmed Thursday what realists already knew: There is no way to hold national elections in Iraq by June 30, the deadline chosen by the United States for transferring sovereignty to Iraqis.

The problem is not only logistics, but also security: No one can guarantee the safety of the thousands of polling places that would be necessary for millions of Iraqi voters.

With the United Nations having weighed in, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the Shiite religious leader who has insisted on direct elections before any transfer can occur, becomes again the pivotal player of the drama.

The problem is that while the June 30 date is not inherently significant to Iraqis, it matters greatly to the Bush administration, which has clung to it despite criticism that the timeline is designed to fit the American electoral clock, not the Iraqi one.

Washington's initial hope for establishing a transition government in Baghdad by June 30 was pinned on using some sort of nationwide caucus system, but this foundered when Sistani ruled out caucuses as undemocratic.

The ayatollah's position is not unreasonable: Iraq's novice electorate needs simplicity and transparency.

On Thursday, according to members of the Iraqi Governing Council, Sistani's representatives said he was open to other options, including possibly enlarging the council, but only if they were part of a UN recommendation. But is there is a better solution that would meet the ayatollah's ruling that a new democracy should choose its first real government in free elections, while still allowing a transfer of sovereignty on June 30?

Here's an option: turning over sovereignty initially not to a transitional government but to a special Iraqi commission charged primarily with ensuring that elections occur promptly by the first feasible date, probably next spring.

A similar commission was given sovereignty in Afghanistan in the run-up to the *loya jirga* that established the government of President Hamid Karzai, and while far from perfect, it got the job done.

The difference between a transitional government and government by special commission may seem like a technicality, but it is more than semantics. The mandate of a commission would be to create an unalterable path toward free and fair elections.

Although the Iraqis, perhaps working with the United Nations, would have to work out their own system for deciding who would sit on this caretaker body, it would undoubtedly take in some influential members of the Governing Coun-



cil, alongside other regionally respected, demographically representative figures — including Sunnis.

Most important, the special commission would be created pursuant to a Security Council resolution, which would authorize it to exercise sovereignty for

the period leading up to elections — and not beyond. The resolution would clearly state that the caretaker body would refrain from enacting major legislation and that its focus would be to facilitate elections under international supervision.

The technocratic ministers now overseeing day-to-day administration can remain in their jobs until after real elections; where coalition help is needed in delivering basic services, it should continue.

The commission would not only allow the United States to transfer sovereignty on June 30, but it could be presented honestly as a step toward democracy.

It would enable a cross-section of Iraqis to participate in forming the new state. The Governing Council, scheduled to dissolve at the end of June, would probably embrace the proposal.

The United Nations would have a sovereign government to deal with, not an occupation authority. In doing so, it would again be a major player in Iraq, despite its overly hasty withdrawal after the bombing of its headquarters last August.

As for Sistani, if it were put to him that real elections are the goal shared by everyone — and that the United Nations would set them for a specific date — he might well be prepared to accept the special electoral commission. After

all, his position has always been only that a proper Iraqi transitional government must be elected; he has never specified a timetable.

Contrary to his detractors' skepticism, Sistani is no demagogue. Nor has he called for an Iranian-style theocracy. Rather, he has built his current influence through a laser-like concentration on the message that Iraqi democracy must be born through elections. The way to approach the ayatollah is therefore not to treat him as an ordinary, grasping politician, but to satisfy the spirit of his fatwa demanding elections.

And while it may seem strange for Washington to look to the United Nations to bail it out, the administration has already headed down this road, relying on Brahimi to shuttle around Iraq and bring the various factions into line.

The alternatives to the commission idea — having some sort of half-baked election or turning the whole mess over to an expanded governing council — are grim, and not just for Iraqis. It's time to face facts: Even after Iraqis take office, the coalition military will remain in de facto control of security indefinitely.

The current insurgency has inflicted hundreds of coalition and Iraqi casualties despite being restricted in large part to the Sunni Triangle; resistance to an unelected, illegitimate government would be vastly greater, disrupting Shiite areas that have until now been quiet.

In the end, the Bush administration, with UN cooperation, will have to find a compromise that everyone can live with — or it will have to quietly drop the June 30 deadline and hold on to full sovereignty until real elections can be held.

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For the United States, agreeing to a special commission with international approval means recognizing that plans have to be revised on the fly. But as Americans are learning, improvisation is in the nature of nation-building.

An electoral commission would buy

Washington precious time and political cover. While eager to take control of their own lives, the Iraqis seem to understand better than we do that the goal is to get democracy right, not to get it fast.

Noah Feldman, author of "After Jihad: America and the Struggle for Islamic Democracy," is a law professor at New York University. He was a senior adviser for constitutional law to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq.

Thomas L. Friedman

At least Iraq's got the Arabs talking

One major criticism of the Iraq war is that by invading Iraq, the United States actually created more enemies in the Arab-Muslim world. I don't happen to believe that, but maybe it's true.

What the critics miss, though, is that the U.S. ouster of Saddam Hussein has also triggered the first real "conversation" about political reform in the Arab world in a long, long time. It's still mostly in private, but more is now erupting in public. For this conversation to be translated into broad political change requires a decent political outcome in Iraq. But even without that, something is stirring.

The other day the always thoughtful Osama al-Ghazali Harb, a top figure at Egypt's semiofficial Al Ahram center for strategic studies, the most important think tank in Egypt, published an article in the country's leading political quarterly, Al Siyassa Al Dawliya, in which he chastised those Arab commentators who argue that the way in which the United States captured Saddam was meant to humiliate Arabs.

"What we, as Arabs, should truly feel humiliated about are the prevailing political and social conditions in the Arab world — especially in Iraq — which allowed someone such as Saddam Hussein to... assume the presidency.

"We should feel humiliated that Saddam was able... to single-handedly initiate a number of catastrophic policies that transformed Iraq, relatively rich in natural, human and financial resources, into the poorest, most debt-ridden country in the Arab world, not to

mention the hundreds of thousands killed and displaced.

"We should feel humiliated that some of our intellectuals, supposedly the representatives of our nations' consciences and the defenders of their liberty and dignity, not only dealt with Saddam, but also supported him. ... The Arabs should have been the ones to bring down Saddam, in defense of their own dignity and their own true interests."

Abd al-Hamid al-Ansari, the former dean of Qatar University's law school, just published an essay, in London's

Something is stirring in the Middle East. The Iraq war has triggered a frank Arab conversation.

widely read Arabic-language daily Asharq al-Awsat, which asks whether the world is better off because of the U.S. ouster of Saddam. Those who say it is worse off, he argues, see only half the picture.

"Let us imagine the world if America had listened to the French and German logic saying: Give the murderers of the Serbs and the Arabs a chance for a diplomatic solution. Would Bosnia, Kuwait and Iraq be liberated?

"Let us describe the situation of the Arabs, and especially of Iraq, had America listened to the European counsel, that said: Democracy is not suited to the Arabs, their culture is contrary to it. ... See now how many countries are turn-

ing toward democracy. Even Afghanistan has a constitution. In Iraq [they are drafting] a new constitution and handing over the regime, and Libya has changed." (Translation by the Middle East Media Research Institute.)

Saudi Arabia's leading English-language newspaper, Arab News, published an editorial last week denouncing the murder of Iraqi police recruits by pro-Al Qaeda sympathizers and "Baathist thugs." The Saudi paper asks, What do these terrorists fear? It adds: "Iraqis are keen to take back control of their country, and many are acutely aware of the opportunity they now have to build a new and fairer society. There is once again a pride in being an Iraqi. It is this growing feeling of restored honor and the rising confidence of Iraqis which is now the target of the terrorists."

Reuters reported from Damascus on Feb. 5 that a Syrian human rights group has started circulating a petition via the Internet — so far signed by about 1,000 people — calling for an end to state-of-emergency laws. It says: "We, the signatories, herein demand the Syrian authorities lift the state of emergency and annul all associated measures." Syria suddenly just freed over 100 political prisoners.

The Lebanese analyst Sahar Baasiri, writing in the leading Lebanese daily An Nahar, said the response of Palestinian officials to two corruption charges — one in a French weekly about millions of dollars reportedly transferred to Yasser Arafat's wife in Paris and the other an Israeli report about a Palestinian cement factory, owned by a prominent Palestinian family, that is alleged

to be secretly providing the cement for the wall Israel is building in the West Bank — was not sufficient. "A clear and decisive Palestinian response" is required, the paper wrote.

Maybe the Iraq war made America new enemies. But it's certainly triggered a new discussion.

The UN's moment in Iraq

President George W. Bush may now better understand why his father, at the end of the first Gulf war, wisely decided not to order victorious U.S. troops to go on to Baghdad. All the fears that persuaded the first Bush administration to exercise restraint are coming back to haunt the current American occupation.

Saddam Hussein was a terrible dic-

tator who caused great misery to his people. Yet it would be no great deliverance if Iraq became a splintering nation of bitter civil wars and possible Turkish or Iranian intervention, and it would be a nightmare for the rest of the world. Creating stable and legitimate Iraqi political institutions from scratch is turning out to be far more daunting than the Bush administration ever acknowledged. The

best — perhaps the only — chance for success depends on the United Nations. Fortunately, the White House is finally showing some signs of reconciling itself to reality.

In the absence of a guiding hand with international legitimacy, bolstered by the cooperation of a broad range of allies, Iraqis are torn between impatience to end military occupation and fear that a panicky America might abruptly abandon them to civil war, anarchy or a new

dictatorship. Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish leaders seem far less interested in cobbling together the kind of basic institutions necessary for a future democracy than in maneuvering for advantage. Meanwhile, countries like India, Pakistan and France remain unwilling to contribute badly needed peacekeeping troops before a stable, internationally recognized Iraqi government emerges.

At this vital juncture, the United Nations has suddenly stepped to the center of the stage. Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN official who helped guide Afghanistan's political reconstruction, has returned from a fact-finding mission to Iraq and reported to Secretary General Kofi Annan. Annan has reaffirmed his view that not enough time remains to organize direct nationwide elections in Iraq before the scheduled installation of an interim

Iraqi government by June 30.

That was what Washington wanted to hear; demands from Shiite leaders for hastily scheduled direct elections were unrealistic given the lack of preparation for democracy, but they were hard to resist without the backing of the United Nations. The core issue however, remains unresolved. Handing power to an unelected government could exacerbate tensions in Iraq and discourage other nations from recognizing the new authorities as legitimate. That makes it essential that major Iraqi power centers come to some agreement on an adequately representative method for choosing the interim government.

No major part of the Iraqi population — Shiite, Sunni or Kurdish — can be left feeling disenfranchised. Brahimi will be central to that process and could return to Iraq next month to try to thrash out an accept-

able formula. It is breathtaking, but heartening, to see the administration, after months of reviling the United Nations and trying to marginalize it, now turn to Annan and Brahimi to try to rescue its imperiled transition timetable. Parallel efforts are quietly under way to assuage the feelings of major European allies Washington dismissed and insulted a year ago, but now badly needs. We hope this policy represents a unified administration and will not be undermined by ideologues in the Pentagon or Vice President Dick Cheney's office.

Much of Europe fears that a botched transition in Iraq could create a black hole of violence and terrorism painfully close to Europe's frontiers. That is a fear the current Bush administration appears to be fully comprehending for the first time.

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune

February 23, 2004

Hard-liners lead in Iran elections

Turnout is low after exclusion of many reformist candidates

The Associated Press

TEHRAN: Hard-line Islamic candidates appeared likely to take control in the liberal stronghold of Tehran and held a wide lead nationwide Sunday after parliamentary elections from which hundreds of liberal candidates were barred.

Iran's reformists had urged a nationwide boycott of the Friday elections after their candidates were stricken from the ballot.

They claimed a victory of their own, with the Interior Ministry reporting a turnout between 40 percent and 45 percent. That was down more than 25 percentage points from the reformist-dominated 2000 elections.

State broadcasters reported that turnout would be at least 60 percent nationwide. An Interior Ministry official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said his offices were "under tremendous pressure" from conservatives to inflate the turnout to match the television and radio predictions.

The conservative bloc — a mix of hard-liners and others considered loyal to the ruling clerics — had won at least 135 seats in the 290-member chamber,

according to Interior Ministry figures.

Reformers and self-described independents had about 65 seats.

That put conservatives close to capturing the 146 seats needed for a majority, as had been widely expected after 2,400 candidates, including many reformists, were banned. Definitive results won't be known until Monday.

One reformist who called for a boycott, Ali Shakourirad, pointed to a voter turnout of less than 30 percent in Tehran, the capital, calling the poll "a big defeat for conservatives." The lower the turnout, the more the liberals can claim public backing for their drive to weaken the theocracy's control.

The supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was upbeat about voter turnout and said the election was a victory for Iran.

"The loser of this election is the United States, Zionism and enemies of the Iranian nation," he told the state media.

The conservatives appeared to dominate even in the most liberal bastions. In Tehran, the best-known reformists trailed badly with about half of the vote counted. They include Mahdi Karrubi, the speaker of the outgoing Parliament.

Election-related violence has killed at least four and injured 16 others in two towns in southern Iran, a local official said.

In Firouzabad, a town about 620 miles, or 1,000 kilometers, south of Tehran, violence erupted after local results were announced Saturday evening, said Shah Hasani, an official at the provincial governor's office. He said three people had been killed and 15 injured in clashes between the police and supporters of a candidate who had lost.

Hasani said one person had been killed and another injured during voting in Nourabad Mamassani, another town in southern Iran.

"A person who tried to clear the stamp from his identity card and vote for a second time was attacked by some people who belong to a rival ethnic group and killed," Hasani said.

Reformists have complained that the vote was rigged, and the United States also criticized the disqualification of candidates who included the best-known reformers. Among them was Mohammad Reza Khatami, a brother of the reformist president of the country and the deputy speaker of the outgoing Parliament.

For Marsh Arabs of Iraq, a time to reclaim old life

By Edward Wong

KIRMASHIYA MARSH, Iraq: Steering his wooden skiff between thick clumps of reeds, Kadum Abdullah took one hand off his pole and held it up for a visitor to see.

Two fingers were permanently bent in unnatural positions, broken years ago in a Baghdad prison by torturers who accused him of conspiring against the government, he said.

"I left the marshes in 1992 and went to prison the same year," Abdullah, 40, said as he stood barefoot near the stern of his boat. "Some of my friends were executed, some released, some spent years in prison."

Those were just some of the fates met by the displaced dwellers of these marshes in southern Iraq, once among the largest wetland ecosystems in the world. In the early 1990s, in a move that transformed the face of nature in this country, Saddam Hussein ordered the 20,000-square-kilometer, or 7,700-square-mile, area drained and its residents attacked to flush out Shiites he suspected of resisting his rule.

Last spring, local engineers began breaking dams and levees upriver to re-flood the area, and Abdullah says he now uses his twisted hand again for what it was meant to do — poling his

boat, cutting reeds and casting fishing nets.

But what seemed a simple matter of reflooding the marshes has turned into an endeavor as tangled as the aquatic plants taking root here.

In this large and complex wetlands restoration project undertaken by the American government, scientists and engineers are grappling with problems ranging from dismal water quality to an utter absence of health care to farmers protesting the reflooding.

The dam-breaking last spring brought some early success. The swamp teems with renewed life. Water buffalo lumber through floating algae, and ducks paddle along the surface.

It is an environment in which Abdullah's people, known as the Marsh

Arabs, have been living for 5,000 years, since the early days of Sumerian civilization between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

"It was like a street here after the marshes were drained," Abdullah said while a neighbor carrying a duck-hunting rifle floated by in a small boat. "We need more water. Our lives are connected to the water. If we get more, we'll be content."

The U.S. Agency for International Development has budgeted \$4 million for the restoration effort. Dozens of lo-

cal and foreign scientists met this month in southern Iraq to begin putting together a blueprint, looking at everything from medical needs to the types of fish re-entering the ecosystem.

The central concern is how to reintegrate the Marsh Arabs back into the wetlands environment. Scientists counted 83 settlements, or about 73,000 people, in the marshes around June and July, down significantly from estimates of up to 250,000 in 1991, but up from 40,000 or so early last year, said Peter Reiss, a social anthropologist leading the team. Since that survey, at least thousands more have returned from all over Iraq and from refugee camps in Iran.

Many clamor for electricity and paved roads, and some say they prefer living in concrete or brick homes to the primitive reed houses scattered throughout the marshes. Some of the families who stayed in the area through the 1990s say they want to hold onto the dry-land farming lifestyle they have developed rather than returning to an existence dependent on fishing and water buffalo.

Local engineers have slowed the reflooding for fear of displacing those families. Many homes were put underwater by the destruction of dams and levees over the summer.

"The original situation will be almost impossible to recreate," said Jonathan Greenham, the agricultural officer with the U.S. Agency for International Development in Iraq. "In terms of preserving the culture, I think that is probably a forlorn hope."

One of the biggest complaints from the Marsh Arabs is over the poor qual-



A Fertile Valley Turned to Dust

The marshes in southern Iraq were once among the largest wetland ecosystems in the world but have nearly disappeared since Saddam Hussein ordered them drained. Now the United States Agency for International Development is working to reflood the land.

Source: Scientific Visualization Studio, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center



ity of the water. Reiss said almost everyone here suffers from diarrhea. Many carry giardia, a waterborne parasite.

Water purity plummeted during the draining, and scientists are trying to determine if the reflooding has brought in too much salt. "We can't drink this

water," Zael Hashim, 42, said. "I think the Euphrates side has too much salt. Before we left, the water was good, but now it's too salty."

Most of the water in the reflooded areas is now a half meter to two meters deep, or one-and-a-half to six-and-a-half feet deep, said Badr Muhsen, a water engineer. The variety of fish has begun to increase. The main economic question is whether the marshes can be restored to a degree that allows the water-dwellers to sustain themselves through fishing and the use of their water buffalo.

Along a road leading to Adil Marsh, grimy children stand next to small sacks of silverfish, hoping to sell the tiny catches. Local residents pour water buffalo milk into containers on the back of trucks that make the rounds of local markets. Some people estimate the marshes once provided 60 percent of the fish on tables in Iraq and 70 percent

of the dairy products, said Reiss, the social anthropologist.

But how much of the marshes can be restored might be entirely out of the hands of the Iraqis. All but one of the

ivers that feed this area are controlled by dams in the neighboring countries of Turkey, Syria and Iran. The struggle for precious water resources in this part of the world has only increased the rate of dam-building in recent years.

Here in Kirmashiya Marsh, those concerns remain distant for Abdullah and the other residents. As Abdullah poled his boat through the water,

schools of tadpole flitted beneath the surface. He pointed to the stands of green reeds.

"I collect these and sell them in the markets," he said. "Now it's spring, and the reeds will be thicker and better. If there's more water, then conditions will improve. This is what we call a rebirth."

The New York Times



A Marsh Arab poles his canoe through Kirmashiya Marsh in southern Iraq. Residents are returning as the marshes are restored.

Les conservateurs l'emportent sans surprise

Téhéran :
Delphine Minoui

Ils détenaient déjà les rênes de la justice, de l'armée et du Conseil des gardiens. Maintenant qu'ils sont assurés d'avoir récupéré la majorité au Parlement, les conservateurs forment un bloc uni contre le président réformateur Khatami. Finis les débats menés par les partisans du changement qui ont animé l'hémicycle pendant quatre ans. « C'est une nouvelle ère qui s'ouvre », commente l'analyste iranien Ali Ghezalbash.

La victoire attendue des conservateurs aux élections législatives s'est accompagnée d'un taux de participation le plus bas de l'histoire de la République islamique. Seuls 50,57 % des électeurs sont allés voter vendredi pour élire leurs quelque 290 députés, a annoncé sur son site Internet le ministère de l'Intérieur. Le dépouillement, achevé dans 199 circonscriptions sur 207, a confirmé l'avènement d'une nouvelle génération de conservateurs, qui sonne la fin de la libéralisation politique et sociale.

D'après les résultats disponibles hier soir, les conservateurs l'emportent, sans surprise. A Téhéran, les estimations du ministère de l'Intérieur donnaient en tête Gholamali Haddadadel, le chef du groupe de droite Abadgaran Iran-e-Islami (les Bâtisseurs de l'Iran islamique). Ahmad Tavakkoli, un vétéran de la ligne dure, candidat malheureux aux présidentielles de 1993 et 2001, semblait aussi devoir l'emporter dans la capitale. Et, ce week-end, la radio d'Etat annonçait la victoire d'autres figures conservatrices, telles que Mohammad Reza Fakker, un religieux farouchement antiaméricain qui avait perdu son siège à Mashhad lors du raz-de-marée réformateur de 2000.

Sur son site Internet, le Conseil des gardiens, qui avait invalidé un tiers des candidatures – dont de nombreux réformateurs –, crie victoire. Il remercie les Iraniens d'avoir « déjoué les complots des adversaires ». Des propos qui rejoignent ceux de l'ayatollah Khamenei. « Lors d'élections parfaitement libres, saines et justes, le peuple a déjoué le complot de ceux qui voulaient faire croire que le fossé se creusait entre la population et le régime islamique », a déclaré samedi soir le guide suprême.



Seuls 50,57 % des électeurs sont allés voter pour désigner leurs quelque 290 députés. (Photo AP.)

Les conservateurs se félicitent également du taux de participation qui aurait avoisiné les 50 %, en dépit des appels au boycott des réformateurs. Mais leurs adversaires reviennent à la charge en rappelant que, lors des précédentes législatives, près de 70 % des électeurs s'étaient rendus aux urnes. D'après certains observateurs, une campagne d'intimidation aurait été lancée pour pousser les Iraniens à voter : ins-

tallation de stands de vote dans certains aéroports et le long de grandes avenues, mobilisation des hassidjis, volontaires islamistes, et menaces de sanctions auprès d'employés d'Etat. Une polémique à propos d'un possible trucage des chiffres de la participation et des résultats pourrait aussi émerger : certains s'étonnent que les écoles, transformées en bureaux de vote et de

dépouillement, aient été fermées le lendemain des élections.

Hier, l'agence de presse ISNA rapportait des affrontements, liés aux résultats des élections, dans deux villes du Sud-Ouest de l'Iran. Ils auraient provoqué la mort de 8 personnes.

Selon Rajabali Mazroui, député réformateur sortant, dont la candidature avait été invalidée, « il est difficile de prévoir ce qui

va se passer avec la nouvelle majorité ». Les conservateurs sont loin de former un groupe uniforme. « Il y a, d'un côté, les ultraradicaux, qui veillent au maintien des lois islamistes, et, de l'autre, les pragmatiques qui sont pour le développement et l'ouverture sur l'étranger », précise l'analyste Ali Ghozlbash. Selon lui, « il est encore trop tôt pour dire lequel des deux groupes mènera la danse ».

Iran hard-liners take Parliament

Dispute over election degenerates into a shouting match

The Associated Press

TEHRAN: Hard-liners formally secured enough seats to retake control of Iran's next Parliament, but tension over the election — denounced by reformers as a "historic fiasco" but proclaimed free and fair by conservatives — degenerated Monday into a shouting match inside the chamber.

The conservative victory denies liberals an important forum to challenge hard-liners' policies and appointees, who have final say in almost all affairs. It also leaves President Mohammad Khatami without a vital source of support in his foundering drive to ease social and political restrictions.

Interior Ministry figures released Monday showed that conservative candidates considered loyal to Iran's Islamic rulers took at least 149 seats in the 290-seat Parliament, which has been controlled by pro-reform lawmakers since their landslide win four years ago. That put conservatives past the 146-seat mark for a clear majority in the next Parliament, which will be seated in June.

Reformers and self-described independents had taken about 65 seats in the legislature, according to the tally. The

final count was expected Tuesday.

The results were expected even before the balloting Friday. Reformers widely boycotted the election after more than 2,400 liberal candidates were banned from running by the hard-line Guardian Council.

The nationwide turnout stood at slightly more than 50 percent, a noticeable drop from the 67.2 percent in the last parliamentary elections in 2000. In Tehran, the capital and the country's biggest city, just 33 percent of voters turned out, the Interior Ministry said.

A drop in voter turnout was seen by reformists as public backing for their drive to weaken the almost limitless controls of the theocracy. But despite the lower numbers, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, welcomed the turnout as a "national and an Islamic epic in the true meaning."

European Union foreign ministers Monday denounced the election as undemocratic and warned of a new chill on efforts to warm relations between Tehran and the West.

"It's plain for everybody to see that these were from the start flawed elections," Foreign Secretary Jack Straw of Britain said Monday as he arrived in

Brussels for a meeting with his EU counterparts.

In Brussels, the European Union ministers approved a statement expressing "deep regret and disappointment" at the exclusion of reformist candidates, saying it made "a genuine democratic choice by the Iranian people impossible."

"This interference was a setback for the democratic process in Iran," the statement said, calling on Iran to "return to the path of reform and democratization."

The EU ministers made no mention of possible sanctions, but Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer of Germany had said earlier that Europe would "very carefully analyze" how it should deal with Tehran.

Iranian lawmakers from opposing sides traded accusations — and occasional insults — on Monday during the first session of the outgoing legislature since the election.

"Victory in a competition without rivals is not epic but a historic fiasco," one reformist lawmaker, Rasoul Mehrparvar, said during a session of Parliament broadcast live on state-run radio.

Mehrparvar, who was barred from seeking re-election, said hard-liners must await God's punishment.

The comments angered hard-liners.

"The vote was not a sham election. It was a fair and free election," Ghodrattollah Alikhani, a conservative, said in an emotional speech. He gestured so strongly that his clerical turban fell off his head.

Alikhani said he was unhappy with the mass disqualification of candidates but would not accept reformers' criticism of Khamenei, who has the final say on all state matters.

"If, while debating resignations, you object to sacred values or the leader, I'll be the first to stand up to you with all my power," Alikhani said.

When reformist Reza Yousefian told him, "Don't holler," Alikhani shot back, "Shut up, you idiot," as he ran toward Yousefian, throwing punches in the air. Lawmakers intervened to keep Alikhani back.



Alta Kenare/Agence France-Presse

Ghodratollah Alikhani, second from right, was held back during a Parliament dispute.

February 24, 2004

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

Suicide bomber kills 10 at Iraqi police station

Michael Howard in Kirkuk

A suicide car bomb attack at a police station in Kirkuk yesterday killed at least 10 people and wounded 45 others. The attack raised fears for the fragile peace which has held in the oil-rich, northern Iraqi city since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

The blast was the latest in a wave of suicide and car bomb attacks which have targeted the poorly equipped Iraqi security forces and those deemed to be collaborating with the US-led coalition. More than 270 Iraqis have died in such attacks this year.

The bombing occurred during the fourth visit to Baghdad by the US defence secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, to assess whether Iraqi security forces can take over more responsibilities from the United States after a handover of power on June 30.

Mr Rumsfeld told the Iraqi television station al-Iraqiya: "My impression is that on each one of my many trips to Iraq I see improvements each time ... Every week, the number of Iraqis who are participating in the security forces is growing."

The Kirkuk bomber struck shortly after 8am at a police station in the Rahimawa district in the north of the city. The area has a population of

about 750,000 Kurds, Arabs, and Turkomans.

The police station, one of the largest and busiest in the city, was lightly guarded and had no fortifications.

A group of policemen was outside, ready to start work, when the bomber struck. The previous night had seen the first snow in Kirkuk for some years and some of the officers were throwing snowballs at each other.

Witnesses said that a white Oldsmobile saloon left the main road and drove up to the front of the station compound, which is next to a secondary school.

Ibrahim Nouredine, 17, a police recruit, was sitting on a wall 30 metres (100ft) away.

He said: "I saw a white car passing me, driving slowly. There was nothing strange,

just that I saw that the driver had a shaven head. He drove slowly up to where my colleagues were, stopped and then detonated the bomb."

Those standing nearby were killed instantly, and shrapnel flew in all directions. Four students entering the school next door were seriously injured, and 18 vehicles were destroyed.

A US military rapid reaction team arrived at the scene 45 minutes after the blast.



A spokesman for the 25th Infantry Division said: "We are making no assumptions as to who is responsible for this. The Iraqi authorities are in charge of the investigations."

He said he was not aware of "heightened activity by insurgents" in Kirkuk, but that "terrorism remained a constant threat".

Major Sherzad Marouf, the senior officer at the station, said the bomber had delivered "a lethal terrorist package of 500kg [1,100lbs] of TNT and mortar rounds".

The wreckage of the Oldsmobile's steering column lay in the front garden of the station. Among the metal and wires was a human leg. In the

back yard behind the building, lying in a reddened patch of snow, was a hand.

The station did not appear to have been structurally damaged by the blast but the windows were blown in and flying glass wounded at least 20 officers inside. The walls and floors were smeared with blood and hair.

Community leaders appealed for calm as bystanders, many of them Kurds, blamed either Sunni Arabs or Turkomans. Kirkuk's Kurdish population has been edgy since two suicide bombers killed 109 people at the offices of two Kurdish political party offices in Irbil, an hour's drive away, on February 4.

Kirkuk is claimed by the Kurds as their future capital but this is contested by many Turkomans and Arabs.

"It is a trap by our enemies," said Nawazad Ahmad, a carpenter. "They want to stir up our people to fight, to lead us into a trap so that we will be beaten over Kirkuk by Ankara and the Arab nationalists."

But Kurdish intelligence officers working in the city have reported recent activity by Iraqi and foreign Islamists who they believe are connected to Ansar al-Islam or its offshoot, Ansar al-Sunna — the latter having claimed responsibility for the Irbil attacks.

● Kofi Annan, the UN secretary general, said yesterday that elections in Iraq could not take place until late this year or early next year, depending on whether Iraqis enact an election law, among other things.

In a report to the security council, Mr Annan said elections could be held by the end of 2004 if preparations for a "legal and institutional framework" began immediately. But he said it was more likely that polling could not take place until 2005.

The report was issued after the visit to Iraq, earlier this month, of an electoral team headed by his senior adviser Lakhdar Brahimi.

Mr Annan said that the handover of political power should take place as the US wanted, on June 30, but he did not recommend how Iraq would select a provisional government. UN officials said it was likely Mr Brahimi would go to Iraq again next month and would help mediate a formula if the Iraqis and the coalition did not produce one.

guardian.co.uk/iraq



Brennan Linsley/The Associated Press
Scorched debris filled the street after a bombing at a Kirkuk police station on Monday.

February 24, 2004

The Guardian

TIME

FEBRUARY 16, 2004

MOURNERS Kurdish militiamen honor a leader killed in a terrorist attack



WILL IRAQ START TO UN

Kurdish calls for autonomy are generating fears of ethnic conflict that could complicate U.S. exit plans

By **BRIAN BENNETT** ARBIL

IF YOU WANT A GLIMPSE INTO THE challenge the U.S. faces as it tries to prevent Iraq from coming apart, consider the plight of Salim Izzat. Five months before the U.S. invasion last March, Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime ordered Izzat to vacate his farm outside the northern-Iraq town of Dibagan, 80 kilometers southeast of Mosul. The command was part of the regime's systematic, 15-year-long campaign to populate the predominantly Kurdish reaches of northern Iraq with ethnic Arabs. Kurds like Izzat were pushed out of their homes by

force; dissenters, including Izzat's brother, were executed. A few days before the war, most of the Arabs who had taken up residence in Dibagan left town, but not before they demolished houses, ransacked shops on the main street and plundered every scrap of metal that would move. Izzat's Arab tenants razed his crops, stole more than 200 chickens and ran off with his life savings. Now Izzat lives with his wife and nine children in a crumbling three-room guardhouse in a parking lot in Dibagan; every day a policeman comes to tell him he has to move off city property. Izzat isn't ready to forgive the people he blames for his predicament. "I hate the Arabs," he says.



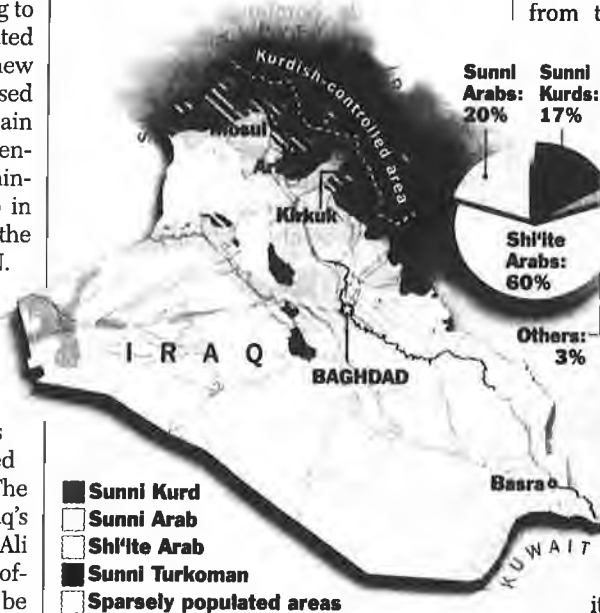
RUINS Kurds survey the wreckage left by one of two bombs on Feb. 1

Ethnic grudges die hard in Iraq. In towns like Dibagan all across the country, long-simmering disputes between Arabs and Kurds, Sunnis and Shi'ites, and even secular and religious Iraqis are bubbling to the surface—all of which has complicated the U.S.'s plan to transfer power to a new Iraqi government by June 30 and raised questions about whether Iraq will remain whole after it does. And so it was not entirely surprising that the Bush Administration last week scrambled for help in sorting out the mess. In a meeting at the White House, President Bush asked U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to come up with a plan for Iraqi self-rule that the country's squabbling factions could accept. A U.N. team arrived in Iraq last week to evaluate the coalition's plans for transition and assess the feasibility of holding broad-based elections before the June 30 deadline. The elections have been demanded by Iraq's top Shi'ite cleric, Grand Ayatullah Ali Husaini Sistani, but are resisted by U.S. officials, who say a general vote cannot be held safely. The intrigue deepened last Thursday when Sistani's bodyguards said the cleric had escaped an assassination attempt outside his home in Najaf. Sistani aides later told U.S. military officials that accounts of the purported attack had been fabricated.

Still, the rumors seemed to underscore fears that the country could quickly slide

A TENUOUS BALANCE

Ethnic and religious tensions threaten to rip Iraq apart, particularly in the oil-rich Kurdish north



toward chaos. Retired General Anthony Zinni, the former top commander of U.S. forces in the Middle East, told TIME that foreign jihadists are trying to incite a civil war in Iraq. "They want Iraq to come apart," he says. "They want the U.S. to fail, and they want to see it become three theocratic states. They don't want to see Iraq hold together as a democracy." Says Herro Kader Mustafa, a Kurdish-American coalition official in Mosul: "We are doing our best to make sure things don't erupt."

Nowhere is that task more delicate than in northern Iraq, home to most of the country's 4 million Kurds. The area has been among the nation's most peaceful since the overthrow of Saddam, but that calm was shattered on Feb. 1 when a pair of suicide bombers detonated themselves in the offices of the two main Kurdish political parties in the city of Arbil, killing more than 100. The attacks raised fears that the violence plaguing the rest of Iraq might now routinely spill into the Kurdish areas and might have strengthened the Kurds' determination to defend the autonomy they have enjoyed since 1991, when the U.S. established a no-fly zone in northern Iraq to protect the Kurds from Saddam. The U.S. has assured the Kurds that the new government in Baghdad will allow them to maintain their own parliament and security forces. But many observers believe such a federal structure is only the first step toward the Kurds' ulti-

mate goal: independence. "The Kurdish problem is the most difficult for Iraq's long-term territorial integrity," says Phebe Marr, a veteran Iraq expert retired from the Pentagon's National Defense University, "because they are really separatists."

The U.S. is worried that Kurdish hopes for greater autonomy could spark clashes with Arabs living in northern Iraq, especially if the Kurds claim control over Kirkuk, an ethnically mixed city in an area prized for its vast oil reserves. The prospect of an oil-rich, autonomous Kurdish state also frightens Iraq's neighbors—Syria, Iran and Turkey—all of which have large, restive Kurdish populations that might be emboldened and financed by wealthy Iraqi Kurds. Turkey, which has fought a 15-year war against Kurdish separatists, has threatened to send its army into Iraq to prevent the Kurds from attempting to secede. In a

press conference in January, the deputy chief of staff of the Turkish army, General Ilker Basbug, warned that "Iraq's future might be very bloody if there was a federal structure, especially based on ethnicity."

The U.S. has so far been able to ward off sectarian violence between Kurds and Arabs. "There isn't obvious ethnic hatred in the north," says Mustafa, the U.S. official in Mosul. "But there is a real conflict that political parties are exacerbating with their attempts to manipulate public opinion." Some locals say Kurdish authorities have incited ethnic hostility by giving benefits to their kinsmen. Nasser Rahim Jusef, a Turkish employee of the Northern Oil Co., says the former regime's program of "Arabization" is being replaced by "Kurdization": at the expense of other ethnic groups, Kurds are being recruited back into jobs Saddam's regime pushed them out of. "The oil business needs to be a meritocracy," says Jusef, who has worked at the company for 28 years, "not one based on racial discrimination." Yehya Assi Mahmoud, an Arab attorney in Kirkuk, says he saw Kurdish militias seize 28 Arab homes in his village of Shaheed last April. In June he quit the city council to protest what he considered to be American favoritism toward the Kurds; now he fears that the coming transfer of power will result in wide-scale reprisals by Kurds against their Arab neighbors. "If the U.S. left now, Kurds would move in to

RAVEL?



TIME, FEBRUARY 16, 2004

ethnically cleanse the remaining Arabs in Kirkuk," he says.

Kirkuk may be the most combustible place in northern Iraq. The city is fairly evenly divided among Arabs, Kurds and ethnic Turkomans. Kurdish leaders want the city and its environs, which hold some 40% of the country's oil reserves, to be part of Kurdistan within a federal Iraq. That way, says a U.S. official in Kirkuk, the Kurds hope to secure a sustainable source of oil income for themselves in case a new government in Baghdad proves incapable of

ity of oppression by Iraq's Arab majority. And as mostly Sunni Muslims, the Kurds fear domination by a directly elected Shi'ite government. While the perpetrators of the suicide bombings in Arbil are unknown—some Kurdish officials suspect loyalists of Saddam's regime, whereas others finger foreign terrorists from Ansar al-Islam, a radical Islamist outfit linked to al-Qaeda—the attacks served as a grisly reminder to the Kurds of the ruthlessness of their enemies. At the P.U.K. headquarters, where a suicide bomber blew up more than

his relative. "Most are enemies of the Kurdish people."

The shock of such a brutal atrocity is likely to bolster calls for revenge. Yet in towns where Arabs and Kurds have lived together for generations, members of both groups say they are determined to stay. In Mukhmur, 50 kilometers south of Arbil, locals have painted over the portrait of Saddam with a picture of an Arab and a Kurd holding a flagpole. Hanging together above the two men are the Kurdish and Iraqi flags, and above these fly the

American and British flags. Naffisa Abdullah, an Arab woman dressed in a black head scarf and a navy blue abaya, says she will resist any attempts to force her out of her home. "I consider this area my native place," she says. "We just want to have a good life and get along with each other."

Such sentiments seem wishful in a land where so many still have grievances to settle. In Arbil last week, Hajji Maluwd, 62, a mechanic, walked in the funeral procession for a Kurdish leader who was killed in the 'Id bombings and ran down a list of personal demands: he wants his demolished home rebuilt, and he wants to move back to the land that Saddam's regime

took away. At the same time, Maluwd doesn't think a civil war will erupt between the Kurds and the Arabs, and he says he's willing to wait for his house and his land and let democracy work. Gesturing his cigarette at the procession of Kurds mourning the death of a fallen leader, he says, "We've walked in too many of these." Iraq's only hope is that many more of his countrymen feel the same.

—With reporting by Massimo Calabresi and Mark Thompson/Washington, Andrew Purvis/Vienna, Philip Smucker/Mosul and Vivienne Walt/Najaf



NEIGHBORS: In a mixed town, an Arab woman stands watch as a Kurdish boy plays with a toy gun

YURI KOZMAYEV FOR TIME

running the country once the U.S. hands over power. U.S. and Iraqi officials fear that Kurdish authorities may try to run Arabs and Turkomans out of Kirkuk and move Kurds south into the city, then hold an independent referendum to decide whether Kirkuk should join Kurdistan. Says Rogar Ali, a political adviser to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (P.U.K.), one of the two large Kurdish political groups: "Elections will decide the destiny of Kirkuk and other Kurdish areas."

For their part, the Kurds say autonomy is their only safeguard against the possibil-

ity of oppression by Iraq's Arab majority. And as mostly Sunni Muslims, the Kurds fear domination by a directly elected Shi'ite government. While the perpetrators of the suicide bombings in Arbil are unknown—some Kurdish officials suspect loyalists of Saddam's regime, whereas others finger foreign terrorists from Ansar al-Islam, a radical Islamist outfit linked to al-Qaeda—the attacks served as a grisly reminder to the Kurds of the ruthlessness of their enemies. At the P.U.K. headquarters, where a suicide bomber blew up more than

“If the U.S. left now, Kurds would move in to ethnically cleanse the remaining Arabs in Kirkuk.”

—YEHYA ASSI MAHMOUD,
Arab lawyer in Kirkuk

Anti-U.S. Kurdish Militants Rebounding, Officials Say

Ansar al-Islam Reported Spreading in Iraq

By JEFFREY GETTLEMAN

BAGHDAD, Iraq, Feb. 24 — Ali Hamaamin said he had been whipped with electrical cords, hung by his arms and kicked in the face. Because he was accused of not being religious, he was repeatedly tortured by men from the militant Islamic group Ansar al-Islam.

"They used to come to me at night, wearing masks, and do the most horrible things," said Mr. Hamaamin, who lives in Beyara, a village near the Iranian border.

His ordeal ended with the United States-led invasion of Iraq last year, when American Special Forces and Kurdish militias routed Ansar al-Islam, which once tried to set up a Taliban-like state in the jagged mountains along the border with Iran.

But Ansar is making a resurgence, Kurdish and American officials say.

According to interviews with captured Ansar members, the group is branching out from its former mountain strongholds to cities across Iraq. Its mission, too, has expanded, they say, from terrorizing local villagers to planning suicide bombings against the American-led occupation.

American officials are now blaming Ansar for many of the recent suicide attacks that they say pose the greatest threat to the fragile Iraqi state. So far this month at least 230 people, primarily members of Iraqi security forces, have died in suicide bombings.

"We've seen a real step up on the part of these professional terrorists from Al Qaeda and Ansar al-Islam conducting suicide attacks," L. Paul Bremer III, the top American administrator in Iraq, said on Monday.

A senior United States military official said Ansar was in "an intense period of evolution" and had recently formed a partnership with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian suspected of having ties to Al Qaeda.

"Mr. Zarqawi is the senior partner and Ansar supplies the local expertise," said the military official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

American officials announced Tuesday that troops killed one of Mr. Zarqawi's top aides, a bomb maker named Abu Muhammad Hamza, in a shootout on Thursday in Habbaniya, about 50 miles west of Baghdad. The



The New York Times

soldiers discovered explosive materials and Jordanian documents with Mr. Hamza, but American officials said they did not know what his connection was to Ansar.

Ansar lives in a landscape of shadows. The contours of its operations are known but the details remain murky.

Several Ansar members captured in recent months said the group was

trying to reorganize in Erbil, one of the largest cities in northern Iraq. The prisoners, kept in a jail in Sulaimaniya in northeastern Iraq, were made available to The New York Times by Kurdish security forces.

"Our leaders have been looking for men to send back to Erbil to make operations," said Muhammad Khalid, 30, an Ansar fighter captured last summer as he crossed from Iran into Iraq. "That's where I was going."

Shahab Ahmed, another Ansar prisoner, said: "Our mission has become bigger than Kurdistan. We made car bombs from rockets, and we were told that if we killed Americans we would go to Paradise."

Mr. Ahmed, who warmed his handcuffed hands in front of a space heater as he talked, said there were Ansar suicide cells in Baghdad, Kirkuk, Falluja and Mosul.

According to a report prepared by the Kurdish authorities, Ansar recently had a pipeline of young men schooled to die. In June 2002, the report says, a 19-year-old former mechanic, Didar Khalan, was tackled at a Kurdish political party headquarters in Seyed Sadiq, in northern Iraq, just as he was about to blow himself up.

Mr. Khalan told investigators that Ansar's leaders sent him to the offices of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan wearing a vest packed with TNT. To get into the office, Mr. Khalan was instructed to ask for Muhammad, a common name. Once inside, if 20 people or more were present, Mr. Khalan was to connect two wires in his pocket.

But as soon as he arrived, guards noticed that he was acting nervously and surrounded him, the report says.



The Iraqi town of Beyara is on the border with Iran, and Iraqi Kurds ride freely back and forth. Guerrillas from Ansar al-Islam, a Kurdish group driven from Iraq by mainstream Kurdish forces, are said to be slipping back from Iran through ungaurded openings along the border like this one.

"They put me on the ground, and they gathered around me and they took off the clothes and cut off the wire," the report quoted Mr. Khalan as saying.

He said seven other Ansar members in his operational cell had also been given TNT suicide jackets and trained to be human bombs. Some were Kurds, others Turkmen. All were from northern Iraq, like himself.

According to the report, they were told to attack the leading Kurdish political parties because they "were working for American intelligence and were Jewish."

He also said that for three days before his mission, he had been locked in a room with an Ansar mullah who had talked about Paradise and fed him a special soup that made him feel strong.

Kurdish officials say Mr. Khalan is now in American custody and may be a witness against Mullah Krekar, the Ansar leader arrested in January in Norway on terrorism charges.

American and Kurdish intelligence agents suspect that the deadliest attack carried out so far in Iraq — the twin suicide bombings on Feb. 1 of Kurdish headquarters in Erbil, which killed at least 105 people — was the work of Ansar. On several Islamic Web sites, a wing of Ansar al-Islam took responsibility, saying the Kurdish leaders were American pawns.

"Ansar is not finished," said Anwar Haji Osman, security chief for the Halabja area. "In fact, we have word they are planning another serious operation. The Erbil bombings will only encourage them."

And Ansar activity seems to be

increasing. Three weeks ago, Kurdish security agents said, seven wanted Ansar terrorists slipped through the porous Iraq-Iran border and were arrested, including a Palestinian, a Yemeni and a member of the group's fatwa committee, which issues religious-inspired edicts.

Though the border with Iran is a flash point in the campaign against terror, where the American-led occupation rubs up against part of what President Bush has called an "axis of evil," it is not heavily patrolled.

In many places there are no guards or even fences marking the border, just thick, muddy roads plied by sinewy herdsman and donkeys.

"This is Iran," Khalid Karim, a Beyara village official, said as he planted one boot in a seemingly arbitrary spot. "And this is Iraq," he said, straddling the frontier. There was not a checkpoint in sight.

About an hour away along the border stands a tall metal gate where Iranian border guards face off with Kurdish militiamen. On the Iranian side is a large sign that reads: "Death to Israel. Death to America."

Kurdish officials say more than 100 Ansar fighters live just across the border in Iranian villages.

During a trip to Baghdad this week, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said Syria and Iran were continuing to allow terrorists to slip across their borders. "We are not getting good cooperation with Iran and Syria," he said.

Ansar al-Islam, whose name means Supporters of Islam, started in northern Iraq in 2001 as a merger of several militant Kurdish groups dissatisfied with the mainly secular policies of the two leading Kurdish

political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

After the Taliban fell in Afghanistan, in December 2001, many members of Al Qaeda working with the Taliban fled across Iran and eventually linked up with Ansar fighters in northeastern Iraq.

Villagers in Beyara said the Ansar fighters, who included Arabs, Afghans, Turks and Chechens, imposed a strict religious code, prohibiting women to leave their homes and outlawing television, music and even backgammon. They meted out public beatings and strutted around with swords.

"Sometimes they told us it was against the Koran to laugh," said Mr. Hamaamin, the construction worker who was tortured.

What was curious, many villagers said, was that the Ansar fighters did

not work in the terraced walnut groves or collect timber like most other people. "But they always had money, lots of American money," said Hamatofiq Abdul Ghafur, owner of a tea shop.

Kurdish and American officials said interrogations of Ansar prisoners and contacts in Iran led them to believe that Al Qaeda was funneling Ansar cash through Iran.

Beyara has changed since Ansar was driven out. The television sets returned. So did the music. Village elders even built a playground on the side of a mountain.

But Mr. Hamaamin says he will never totally recover.

"I know the Americans and the others will do their best to keep Ansar away," he said. "But I still worry." Sometimes, he said, it is hard to fall asleep. He says he still sees the masks.



Shahab Ahmed, an Ansar al-Islam fighter, in the main prison in Sulaimaniya, Iraq. He said, "We made car bombs from rockets, and we were told that if we killed Americans we would go to Paradise."

Des Kurdes irakiens veulent un référendum sur l'avenir de leur région



BAGDAD, 25 fév (AFP) - 17h21 - Une organisation basée au Kurdistan irakien veut demander la tenue d'un référendum pour que la population de cette région détermine si elle veut rester au sein de l'Irak ou non.

"Nous sommes un mouvement apolitique qui essaie de faire entendre la voix du peuple du Kurdistan (irakien) pour qu'il détermine son avenir", a indiqué mercredi lors d'une conférence de presse à Bagdad Halkaut Abdallah, un des membres du Mouvement pour le référendum au Kurdistan irakien.

"Nous avons rassemblé 1,7 million de signatures demandant la tenue d'un référendum d'autodétermination auprès de personnes âgées de plus de 16 ans, de toutes les confessions et de toutes les parties du Kurdistan irakien", a-t-il précisé. Selon lui, ces signatures ont été collectées entre le 24 janvier et le 15 février.

Le Mouvement pour le référendum au Kurdistan irakien a été créé après la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein avec le soutien des deux principaux partis kurdes, l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK, de Jalal Talabani) et le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK, de Massoud Barzani).

Lors d'une conférence tenue à Erbil (350 km au nord de Bagdad) en décembre et réunissant 135 membres venant de tout le Kurdistan, les participants avaient décidé de collecter des signatures pour faire pression sur les autorités américaines et irakiennes.

Cette organisation avait rencontré mardi deux membres du Conseil de gouvernement transitoire irakien, Salaheddine Mohammad Bahaeddine, de l'Union islamique du Kurdistan, et le chiite Mohammad Bahr al-Ouloum, indépendant.

"J'ai rencontré un groupe de Kurdes du Mouvement pour le référendum et j'ai compris, d'après ce qu'ils m'ont dit, qu'ils veulent l'indépendance pour les Kurdes et l'organisation d'un référendum au Kurdistan sur cette question", a indiqué mercredi M. Bahr al-Ouloum, lors d'une conférence de presse.

"Je leur ai dit que le référendum devait être étendu aussi aux Arabes pour qu'ils donnent leur avis sur cette question. Mais comme ils ont insisté (pour que la consultation populaire ne concerne que le Kurdistan, NDLR), je leur ai dit de présenter une demande officielle afin que le Conseil de gouvernement leur réponde", a-t-il souligné.

Ce mouvement effectue cette démarche au moment où le PDK et l'UPK insistent pour la création d'un Etat fédéral. Le Kurdistan bénéficie d'un statut d'autonomie depuis 1991.

Vive tension à Kirkouk après des heurts entre Turcomans et Kurdes



KIRKOUK (Irak), 29 fév (AFP) - 17h26 - Des Turcomans se sont heurtés dimanche à Kirkouk à des Kurdes, dont des éléments armés ont ensuite saccagé le siège d'un parti turcoman, entraînant la mise en place d'un couvre-feu nocturne dans cette ville du nord de l'Irak.

Dans la matinée, des milliers de Turcomans ont laissé éclater leur joie en accueillant des grévistes de la faim qui revenaient de Bagdad où ils estiment avoir obtenu satisfaction de leurs revendications sur le respect des droits de ce groupe ethnique dans la loi fondamentale en discussion.

Des manifestants ont tiré en l'air et d'autres se sont heurtés à des Kurdes, a indiqué à l'AFP le chef de la police de la ville, Tourhane Youssef, faisant état de deux blessés et de cinq arrestations.

Il a admis que ses forces n'avaient pas "réussi à contenir la situation", dans la ville où vivent Arabes, Turcomans et Kurdes sur fond de tensions interethniques.

Quelques heures plus tard, des Kurdes armés ont saccagé le siège du Front irakien turcoman (FIT), la principale formation de cette communauté. Ils ont détruit des meubles et du matériel informatique et endommagé une vingtaine de véhicules garés devant le bâtiment, selon des sources locales.

"Les Kurdes armés portaient des drapeaux kurdes et des portraits des deux principaux chefs kurdes (Massoud Barzani et Jalal Talabani) mais on ne sait pas s'ils ont agi spontanément ou sur ordre de leurs leaders", a déclaré à l'AFP un responsable du FIT, Sobhi Saber.

Les forces américaines et la police ont imposé un couvre-feu à Kirkouk à partir de 18H00 locales (15H00 GMT) et fermé plusieurs artères principales pour prévenir les troubles éventuels dans la ville d'un million d'habitants.

Une femme a été tuée et 10 personnes ont été blessées par balles lors de manifestations de joie samedi soir de Turcomans à Kirkouk après des informations sur une promesse de l'exécutif irakien de garantir les droits de ce groupe.

Des Turcomans ont observé samedi une grève générale à Kirkouk, à 255 km au nord de Bagdad, et manifesté dans la capitale pour réclamer plus de droits pour cette troisième ethnie d'Irak après les Arabes et les Kurdes.

Les Turcomans représentent, selon des sources diverses, entre 1% et 2% des 25 millions d'habitants que compte l'Irak. Ils sont représentés au Conseil de gouvernement par une femme, Songoul Chapouk, et au cabinet par le ministre de la Reconstruction et du Logement, Bayane Baqer Soulagh.

The Ankara-Erbil Axis: America's Turkish and Kurdish allies are cooperating

National Review, February 26, 2004

By Andrew Apostolou

ERBIL -- One of the greatest headaches facing the U.S. in Iraq is how to address the aspirations of the long-repressed Iraqi Kurds, who work closely with U.S. forces, while not antagonizing its longest-standing ally in the region, Turkey. A year ago Turkey was threatening to invade Iraqi Kurdistan, whether the U.S. liked it or not - prompting the Iraqi Kurds to threaten to fight both Baghdad and Ankara simultaneously. Much has changed in the last year, but few Americans reading the op-ed columns or listening to the Beltway pundits would know this. The belief that Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds are almost at daggers drawn is still widely held.

The reality, as seen from Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan, is that the two U.S. allies are drawing closer together.

The best evidence of burgeoning Turkish-Iraqi Kurdish relations is the traffic jam on the road to the Turkish-Kurdish border crossing at Habur. Until last year the only trade in this region was illicit: smuggled oil from Iraq, and the usual shipments of cigarettes, whiskey, and bootleg films from Turkey. There were U.N. sanctions on Iraq while Turkey applied its own partial embargo against the Iraqi Kurds. Now the border is open and trade is flourishing, giving the underdeveloped southeast of Turkey a significant lift. Getting to the border can be tricky. The roads are narrow and the snow has been deep in recent days. The biggest challenge is weaving your way through the line of hundreds of tankers and trucks that stretches for a couple of dozen miles on both sides of the crossing point. Turkey sells Iraq gasoline, liquefied natural gas, and consumer goods. In return, Turkey buys Iraqi diesel and fuel oil. Perhaps the strangest sight on the road going north out of Iraq is of trucks carrying broken-down Iraqi armored cars, made in Russia but now heading for Turkey where they will be turned into scrap.

The growing Turkish-Iraqi Kurdish rapprochement is based on the notion that by cooperating commercially the two sides can build confidence politically. Turkish companies are winning contracts all over Iraqi Kurdistan. With a healthy appetite for the sort of risky environments in which U.S. companies barely dare to dream to operate, working in places like Iraqi Kurdistan is second nature for Turkish firms. For their part, the Iraqi Kurds are keen to open the door to foreign investors. The unquestioningly pro-U.S. Iraqi Kurds have created the most secure region in Iraq and their administration works more efficiently than any other in Iraq, including that of the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority.

One of the most important deals between the two sides is to develop an oil field at Taq Taq in the center of Iraqi Kurdistan. The Taq Taq contract was signed by a Turkish company and the Iraqi Kurdish administration of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (one of the two dominant Kurdish parties) based in Suleimani. The Taq Taq field could contain a couple of billion barrels in oil reserves. By way of comparison, Britain, with all its North Sea oil wealth, only

has total national oil reserves of five billion barrels of oil. Development of the field is currently on hold pending approval by the U.S. and Iraqi authorities in Baghdad. Far from objecting to one of its companies striking an oil deal with the Iraqi Kurds, the Turkish government has been thoroughly supportive, lobbying the U.S. government to sign off on the contract so that work can begin.

Publicly, the Turkish government has said that it rejects the idea of an autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan, fearing that this could lead to the breakup of Iraq. Turkish officials also avoid referring to Iraqi Kurdistan or the Kurds, preferring to talk of "northern Iraq" and the "northern Iraqi people." Turkey has also had discussions with Iran and Syria, not countries well respected in Washington, D.C., to build a diplomatic front against a possible independent Iraqi Kurdish state.

Yet while the careful choice of language seems to mask latent hostility to the Kurds, an inability to acknowledge that they are a separate ethnic group, Turkish officials stress their years of help to the Iraqi Kurds. Claiming that Turks and the "northern Iraqis" are relatives, Turkey was involved in reconciling the two main Iraqi Kurdish parties after bloody infighting in the mid-1990s. The reconvening of the Kurdistan parliament in October 2002, the most democratically elected body in Iraq's recent history, was facilitated by patient Turkish diplomacy. The Turkish desire to stress good intentions, not ethnic hostility, was made clear when Turkey stepped in with medical assistance following the al-Qaeda-linked suicide bombing in Erbil on February 1, 2004. The worst suicide bombing in Iraq to date, the Erbil atrocity claimed more than 100 lives and injured scores. The Turkish foreign minister, Abdullah Gul, made a point of visiting the wounded in Turkish hospitals, drawing praise from the Iraqi Kurds. Turkey, which opposed the Iraq war, now says that it backs the U.S. policy of democratizing the Middle East. The best example of how pluralism can be promoted in the Middle East has been the experiment in democratization in Iraqi Kurdistan, which began during the northern "no-fly zone" years between 1991-2003. The "no-fly zone" could not have existed without Turkish support. For all the occasionally barbed rhetoric between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds, both parties know that they are the two Muslim nations in the Middle East with the closest links to the U.S. Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds look at the rest of the Islamic Middle East with ill-disguised dismay. Both favor the emancipation of women and a predominantly secular political system. Close to a year on from the liberation of Iraq, the promise of trade, rather than the threat of war, between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds shows how the Middle East can change for the better.

Andrew Apostolou is director of research at the Defense Foundation for the Democracies. He is presently traveling in the Middle East and went into Iraq with an engineer working on the Taq Taq oilfield

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Kurds Demand Vote On Independence

RFE/RL, Prague, 26 February 2004
By Valentinas Mite

Kurdish activists have collected 1.7 million signatures on a petition demanding a referendum on the future status of northern Iraq's Kurdish region. Organizers want the opportunity to decide whether the region should declare independence or become a part of federal Iraq.

Iraqi Kurds have taken a step toward their goal of achieving an independent state. Yesterday, a Kurdish popular movement delivered a petition to the Iraqi Governing Council. The group claims the petition, which demands the right to hold a referendum on the future of the Kurdish region, bears 1.7 million signatures. The group, called Referendum Movement, was established following the ouster of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein last spring.

Referendum Movement spokesman Halkaut Abdullah says the signatures were collected in a relatively short time, between 24 January and 15 February. Only Kurds aged 18 and over and living in the Kurdish autonomous region of Iraq were permitted to sign the petition. Mahmud Uthman is an independent Kurdish member of the Iraqi Governing Council. He told RFE/RL the Referendum Movement has also appealed to the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority, the United Nations, and other international bodies for support. "They [informed] the coalition forces [about the petition], they gave [the signatures] to our GC [Governing Council]," he said. "And they appealed to the United Nations, to the European Union, and to other outside organizations -- even to the Arab League."

Uthman says the main aim of the Referendum Movement is to give Kurds the possibility of deciding their future for themselves -- an opportunity they have been denied since the founding of the Iraqi state. He says the group wants to get a clear picture of what the Kurdish people want -- to remain a part of Iraq, or to be an independent state. "They have gathered those signatures and they ask for a referendum to be held in Kurdistan to ask the Kurdish people what they really want. And they think they should have this right, because since the establishment of the Iraqi state in 1921 this right has not been given to the Iraqi Kurds," Uthman said.

Uthman says the Referendum Movement is not a political party but a grassroots organization with no official ties to the main Kurdish political parties. "Officially, there is no relation to the main Kurdish political parties but obviously the main Kurdish political parties are also part of the Kurdish population," he said. "They can't go against such a demand, which is quite a fair demand. There is nothing wrong with it." Sami Shores of RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq says the main force

behind the Referendum Movement are not politicians but intellectuals like Asso Karim, a well-known publisher and journalist. Poet Sherko Bekes and journalist Saro Kard also took part in the petition drive. He says many Kurds support the idea of a referendum, and notes several large demonstrations were held in Al-Sulaymaniyah and Irbil last week to support the plebiscite.

Shores says recent terrorist attacks in Kurdistan have heightened anxiety about the region's political future. The continued refusal of neighboring Turkey and Iran to grant their own Kurdish populations autonomy have further intensified the desire among Iraqi Kurds for the right to self-determination. Uthman says the Referendum Movement is seeking to hold the plebiscite before the future of Iraq is decided and a basic law is adopted.

The Coalition Provisional Authority has yet to comment on the Kurdish petition. The proposal, however, could complicate U.S. efforts to transfer power to an Iraqi interim government. Yahia Said of the London School of Economics and Political Science says the demands for a referendum could seriously destabilize the country. "Obviously it won't be a positive development, especially if the referendum will lead to a demand for independence," he said. "I think it will play into the hands of forces that are trying to ignite civil strife in Iraq."

Said says normally a referendum is the best way to gauge public opinion. But, he says, it is not a process that can be used effectively or fairly in present-day Iraq. "First of all, there has to be an Iraqi government in place. Iraq is under occupation, in a transitional setup," he said. "The decision about Kurdish [independence] -- if it is about Kurdish independence -- would have, somehow, to involve the rest of Iraq -- and the rest of Iraq is incapable at this point of addressing this issue."

Said says the organizers of the referendum did not formulate in which parts of the country a referendum will be organized.

"There are tens of thousands of Kurds in Baghdad," he noted. "Will they be given an opportunity to vote? Will the Kurds, living in Kirkuk, an oil-rich town, vote? Will Kirkuk be a part of an independent Kurdistan?"

To questions like these, Said says, there are no answers

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Iraqi Council Weighs Return of Jews, Rejecting It So Far

By DEXTER FILKINS

BAGHDAD, Iraq, Feb. 27 — For several weeks, members of the Iraqi Governing Council have been trying to decide whether they should allow tens of thousands of Iraqi Jews who fled the country in the 1950's and in later years to return.

So far, the answer appears to be no.

Late last year, the council approved proposed legislation that would have allowed thousands of Iraqis who fled or were expelled from the country to reclaim their Iraqi citizenship — unless they were Jewish, council members said. The proposal did not specifically mention Jews, they said, but it contained language that would have kept in place the revocation of citizenship of tens of thousands of Jews by the Iraqi government in 1950.

"My feeling is, as long as the Palestinian problem exists, as long as there is a state of war, then we should not allow the Jews to return," said Muhammad Bahaddin Saladin, a member of the Governing Council. "The minister of defense in Israel is an Iraqi Jew. Should we let him return?"

But the proposal did not become law because the chief American administrator here, L. Paul Bremer III, did not sign it.

Although council members said they had sent it to Mr. Bremer for his approval, his spokesman, Dan Senor, said Mr. Bremer had never seen it. "Ambassador Bremer never considered it, never read it," he said.

Mr. Senor said that international treaties signed by the United States prohibit it from altering a country's citizenship laws.

But some Iraqis say the Americans played a role in trying to settle the Jewish issue. Some governing council members say they met with Mr. Bremer on the proposed law, and a lawyer who helped draft the legislation said he discussed it with a member of the American-led civilian administration.

A spokesman for Iraqi Jews in the United States said he traveled to Baghdad in December and discussed the issue of Jewish repatriation with American officials.

The debate over the possible return of Iraq's Jews reopens a turbulent chapter in the country's history, which included the official harassment and killing of Jews and the flight of tens of thousands of them to Israel.

While the number of Jews in Iraq has dwindled to near extinction, they

used to make up one of the oldest and most storied communities in the Diaspora. Many traced their origins to the sixth century B.C. and the release, by Cyrus the Great, of the Jews held captive in Babylon. By 1948, the year of Israel's independence, the Jews of Baghdad numbered nearly 120,000.

The trouble for Iraq's Jews began in the 1930's with the end of the British Mandate, when successive Iraqi governments embarked on discriminatory policies against them. With Israel's independence, the Iraqi government at first discouraged and finally allowed the Jews to emigrate, and in 1950 enacted a law requiring that any Jews leaving for Israel renounce their citizenship.

By the early 1950's, all but a few thousand of Iraq's Jews had fled. Many of those who remained left after 1969, when a dozen men, seven of them Jews, were hanged from lampposts in Liberation Square in Baghdad on charges of treason. Saddam Hussein, then a senior Baath Party member, toured the scene.

Today, the Jewish community in Iraq has dwindled to just 13 members. The old Jewish neighborhoods along the Tigris River have long since been bulldozed.

An estimated 250,000 to 400,000 Iraqi natives and their descendants now live in Israel, with 40,000 more elsewhere, primarily in North America, Britain and Australia.

Despite the history, Iraqi society has seemed to exhibit less of the intense anti-Semitism visible in other countries in the Arab world. With the fall of Mr. Hussein's government, that may be changing.

Members of the Iraqi Governing Council said they first took up the issue of the Jews in December, when they began considering a broad piece of legislation that would allow tens of thousands of Iraqis who had been expelled from the country to return. Among those are thousands of Shiite Muslims and Kurds sent into exile by Mr. Hussein.

Many council members said they favored restoring the revoked citizenship of Iraqis until the discussion turned to the Jews. Some said they were ardently opposed to the idea of allowing the Jews to return. Others said they were more concerned about whether the issue might isolate Iraq among its neighbors in the Arab world.

Council members said they ultimately agreed that that they would allow all Iraqis who had been stripped of their citizenship to return except for the Jews.

"No one said the Jews, but this was the clear intention," said Mahmood Othman, a council member. "The

law was written in such a way as to exclude them."

Dara Nuradin, a Kurdish judge on the governing council, said most council members supported preventing Jews from returning to Iraq.

"Because they are Jews and connected to Israel, it's very sensitive," Mr. Nuradin said. "Everybody on the council but two or three people wanted to keep them out."

Some governing council members said they feared a mass return of Jews to Iraq.

The Israeli defense minister mentioned by Mr. Saladin was Yitzhak Mordechai, who was born in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq in 1944. He was Israeli defense minister in 1999.

The specific language used to prohibit Jews from returning is unclear. Neither the Iraqi Governing Council nor the American authorities would provide a copy of the law.

There are indications that American authorities here took part in discussions on the Jewish provisions of the law.

Heskel Haddad, president of American Committee for the Rescue and Resettlement of Iraqi Jews, said he came to Iraq in December to meet with American officials.

"We told the Americans that if Iraq restored citizenship that the Jews lost in 1950, they might come back," he said.

Dr. Haddad, a Manhattan ophthalmologist, said he had talked to hundreds of Iraqi Jews about the possibility of returning. "For so many of us, it is a dream to go back," he said.

Dr. Haddad said he met with an American official in Baghdad named Mike Adler. Mr. Senor, Mr. Bremer's spokesman, said he had spoken with Mr. Adler, who he said denied that he ever met with Dr. Haddad.

Instead, Mr. Senor said, Mr. Adler exchanged e-mail messages with Dr. Haddad in which they discussed Jewish claims on property in Iraq and the possibility of Dr. Haddad shipping medical equipment there.

Other council members said that as they were discussing the legislation, they met with Mr. Bremer and sent him a copy of the law for his signature. They said they never heard back.

With the failure of the nationality legislation to be enacted into law, it is unclear what will become of the issue. Some council members said they had discussed the possibility of inserting the language into the country's temporary constitution, which is still under discussion.

But not everyone on the council supported the legislation. Yonadam Kanna, an Assyrian Christian, said he opposed the idea of keeping the Jews out. "I think we should allow everyone to return," Mr. Kanna said. "It should not matter that they are Jewish."

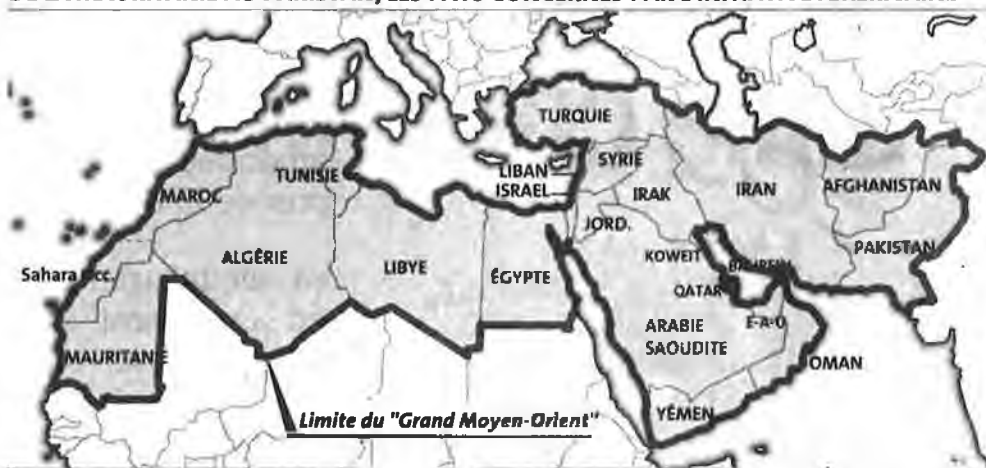
John F. Burns and Jeffrey Gettleman contributed reporting for this article.

Les Etats-Unis lancent leur projet d'un « Grand Moyen-Orient »

27 FÉVRIER 2004

Le Monde

DE LA MAURITANIE AU PAKISTAN, LES PAYS CONCERNÉS PAR L'INITIATIVE AMÉRICAINE



L'EXPRESSION s'est répandue comme une traînée de poudre. En quelques semaines, dirigeants, diplomates, experts en relations internationales se sont mis à parler du « Grand Moyen-Orient », certains avec inquiétude ou condescendance comme la dernière lubie en date de l'administration Bush, d'autres avec un réel ou prudent intérêt.

L'initiative pour le « Grand Moyen-Orient » – *Greater Middle East* – est devenue le thème imposé de la diplomatie occidentale. Elle est inscrite à l'ordre du jour des prochains grands rendez-vous euro-américains de juin. L'Union européenne, obligée de définir une position commune, a rajouté ce sujet au menu de son prochain sommet de la fin mars.

Le projet des Américains consiste à définir, avec leurs alliés européens et leurs partenaires du G8, une stratégie globale susceptible de favoriser un cercle vertueux dans une région allant « du Maroc à l'Afghanistan ». Au sommet du G8, du 8 au 10 juin à Sea Island, en Floride, Washington exposera à ses partenaires des propositions liées aux aspects civils et politiques de cette initiative. Le volet sécurité sera discuté au sommet de l'OTAN à Istanbul, les 28 et 29 juin.

Pour Nicole Gnesotto, qui dirige l'Institut d'études stratégiques de l'Union européenne, cette affaire est issue des difficultés rencontrées par l'administration Bush non seulement sur le terrain en Irak, mais dans les relations des Etats-Unis avec le reste du monde. « *George Bush devait trouver une idée plus consensuelle que celle qui a présidé à l'intervention en Irak, dit-elle. En année électorale, il doit réconcilier l'Amérique avec ses alliés, ainsi que*

les différents courants de son administration, au moyen d'un concept dans lequel chacun puisse se retrouver. »

Cette analyse est partagée par nombre de responsables européens, qui rappellent d'autre part que le projet américain, à l'origine,

tire son inspiration des idées de remodelage du Moyen-Orient développées par George Bush. Mais, avec ce projet, l'administration Bush n'en reconnaît pas moins pour la première fois qu'il faut s'attaquer au sous-développement, à la pauvreté et aux retards économiques pour espérer extirper les racines du terrorisme et de l'instabilité politique. Une thèse que les Européens ne cessent de défendre.

Le premier à réagir publiquement en Europe a été Joschka Fischer. Lors de la rencontre atlantique annuelle de Munich, le 7 février, le ministre allemand a saisi avec enthousiasme la proposition américaine et développé la façon dont il envisage un partenariat euro-atlantique pour le Proche et le Moyen-Orient. Mais d'autres Européens, parmi lesquels les Français, restent beaucoup plus circonspects.

LE CONFLIT ISRAËLO-PALESTINIEN

En premier lieu, toute entreprise de stabilisation et d'aide à la réforme dans cette région doit, pour eux, être précédée d'un traitement à fond du conflit israélo-palestinien. A propos du volet politique et éco-

nomique, ils font remarquer que l'Europe n'a pas attendu les Etats-Unis. Le « processus de Barcelone », lancé en 1995 entre l'Union européenne et les pays du sud et de l'est de la Méditerranée, a lui aussi pour but de nouer avec ces pays des relations stabilisatrices, en les tirant vers le développement économique et vers la modernisation des sociétés civiles. L'Europe a consacré depuis 1995 des milliards d'euros à cette politique. Les Etats-Unis n'ont pour l'instant assorti leur projet que de crédits se chiffrant tout au plus à 150 millions de dollars.

« *Notre crainte, déclare un expert européen, est que les Etats-Unis veuillent se servir de nos instruments pour faire avancer leur vision géopolitique du Proche-Orient, qu'ils nous demandent de financer ce plan titanesque.* »

A lire le document de travail américain préparatoire au sommet du G8, il est frappant de voir à quel point il reprend, jusque dans les détails, des idées de coopération déjà mises en œuvre par l'Europe avec ses voisins méditerranéens. Il puise ainsi sans complexe dans les conclusions du dernier sommet euro-méditerranéen consacré aux moyens de réduire la « fracture numérique ».

« LE PIRE DES INSTRUMENTS »

Lors de la réunion des ministres européens des affaires étrangères, lundi 23 février, Javier Solana, haut représentant de l'Union, a mis les choses au point : « *L'impulsion doit venir de la région. L'Union européenne doit définir une approche distincte qui complète celle des Etats-Unis, et travailler à travers ses propres institutions et instruments.* »

Quant à la dimension sécurité de ce projet et l'idée d'y impliquer

l'OTAN, elle laisse perplexe à Paris comme dans les milieux bruxellois, où l'on estime que ce serait « le pire

des instruments » et qu'il ne peut provoquer qu'une réaction de rejet.

Les premières réactions dans les pays concernés ont été négatives. Les dirigeants arabes soupçonnent les Etats-Unis de vouloir faire diversion par rapport à la question israélo-palestinienne. Ils n'ont été informés des projets en gestation à Washington que par des diplomates européens; ce qui leur paraît de mauvais augure sur l'idée du « partenariat » que peuvent se faire les Américains.

Ces dernières semaines, l'administration américaine s'est efforcée de corriger l'impression que les Etats-Unis pourraient vouloir imposer une « démocratie clés en main » aux pays musulmans. A l'OTAN, les diplomates américains s'efforcent de relativiser le volet sécuritaire de ce plan. « *Plusieurs pays veulent des relations plus étroites avec l'OTAN, assure l'un d'eux. Il pourrait s'agir d'entraînement militaire, de formation d'officiers, de l'assistance dans la lutte contre le terrorisme et la prolifération d'armes de destruction massive.* »

Des Européens font remarquer qu'il s'agit là, peu ou prou, des tâches remplies dans le cadre du « Dialogue méditerranéen » que l'Alliance atlantique poursuit avec sept pays de la région (Algérie, Maroc, Tunisie, Mauritanie, Egypte, Jordanie et Israël). « *Mais avoir une même stratégie de l'Afghanistan à la Mauritanie, cela n'a aucun sens* », souligne l'un d'eux. En ce début de concertation, les divergences euro-américaines sur le « Grand Moyen-Orient » ne sont peut-être pas toutes insurmontables, mais elles sont réelles.

Claire Tréan et Laurent Zecchini

Les objectifs définis par George Bush

George Bush a évoqué à plusieurs reprises les objectifs d'une politique de « remodelage » de la région, notamment le 20 janvier, dans son discours sur l'état de l'Union : « *Tant que le Proche-Orient restera en proie à la tyrannie, au désespoir, à la colère, il continuera à produire des hommes et des mouvements qui menacent la sécurité de l'Amérique et de nos amis. L'Amérique poursuit donc une stratégie de liberté au Proche-Orient. Nous allons défier les ennemis de la réforme.* »

Le 26 février 2003, devant l'American Enterprise Institute, le président expliquait : « *Un Irak libéré pourra montrer comment la liberté peut transformer cette région qui revêt une importance extrême. (...) Il existe des signes encourageants d'un désir de liberté au Proche-Orient. Des chefs de file de la région parlent d'une nouvelle charte arabe qui prônerait la réforme intérieure, une plus grande participation politique, l'ouverture économique et le libre-échange.* »

Le meeting "Contre cette Turquie fait salle comble"

Deux mille personnes se sont mobilisées au Palais des Congrès le 1^{er} février dernier pour "empêcher la Turquie de rentrer par effraction dans l'Union européenne".

Sur le plateau Agnès Vahramian, animatrice de la journée, Yair Auron et Gérard Miller



Etait-ce l'effet Aznavour, dont l'appel aura été entendu en boucle sur les ondes de Ayp FM "ceux qui ne viendront pas devront avoir honte le restant de leur vie" (sic) ? Toujours est-il que les organisateurs du meeting du 1^{er} février se sont vu refuser du monde. "Que la salle salue le millier de personnes qui attend dans le hall et les couloirs" lance Harout Mardirosian (voir interview) à l'adresse de l'autre millier, arrivé plus tôt et occupant jusqu'au dernier strapontin ou marche d'escalier. Sur le plan de la qualité des débats aussi, l'initiative du CDCA - placée sous l'égide du CCAF - aura dépassé ses promesses, même si chacun des engagements formulés par les représentants politiques furent obtenus à l'arraché par les animateurs : Mikael Cazarian (délégué aux affaires européennes du CDCA) et Agnès Vahramian (grand reporter à France 2). Il faut dire que la position sur le dossier turc de chacun des partis représentés était loin d'être lisible lorsqu'elle n'était pas carrément inconfortable. André Santini (UDF) avait beau être l'ami officiel de la communauté arménienne, ouvertement sceptique face à l'entrée de la Turquie, le recordman ab-

solu à l'applaudimètre ("Santini, président !"), le seul également à maîtriser le dossier et à échapper aux sifflets, il fut d'abord gentiment tancé par Vahramian "nous ne sommes pas à un meeting de l'UDF" puis ramené à la réalité par des questions sur la cohérence de l'UDF sur le problème turc. Il conclut par un "je ferai le nécessaire auprès de Bayrou", après avoir habilement balayé l'épisode du Général Morillon et de son rapport pro-turc.

Une salle chauffée à blanc

S'abritant derrière une austérité presque jospinienne, Harlem Désir (PS), quant à lui, tenta péniblement de dénoncer les "critères cachés" imposés par les "démocrates-chrétiens" à la Turquie pour des raisons religieuses. Mais devant une salle chauffée à blanc et peu encline à supporter les leçons de tolérance, l'ex de SOS Racisme fut finalement contraint à définir clairement la position de son parti sur les quatre critères attendus : la reconnaissance du génocide arménien par la Turquie, le retrait de ses troupes à Chypre, le règlement de la question kurde, la reconnaissance du droit des mi-

norités, des droits de l'Homme et de la démocratie. Enfin, des trois personnalités politiques, c'est sans conteste Roger Karoutchi (UMP) qui avait la tâche la plus difficile. La mine boudeuse, l'air d'abord absent, le n°2 des listes UMP sur la région parisienne eut le plus grand mal à faire oublier la real politique de son gouvernement ou les récentes déclarations de Raffarin en Turquie. Se cachant derrière l'alibi Devedjian, il chercha en vain à entamer une joute politicienne qui n'eut pas lieu tant les animateurs ne lâchèrent jamais les questions essentielles. Tous trois ne s'attendaient pas à être bousculés de la sorte. Un état d'esprit amorcé dès l'ouverture, sur grand écran, par un Charles Aznavour enfin libéré : "Pendant 80 ans, nous avons fait profil bas, c'est terminé. La nation arménienne est debout. On ne sacrifie pas l'honneur d'un peuple pour des raisons commerciales. On a déjà vendu le sang des Arméniens pour des raisons d'Etat. Cette fois-ci nous ne l'acceptons pas." Salve d'applaudissements. Un thème repris par l'historien Yair Auron à la tribune, martelant à l'adresse des invités : "il ne peut y avoir de politique sans morale". Un esprit de revendication renforcé et légitimé par les remarques du psychanalyste Gérard Miller selon lesquelles on ne peut tricher avec



Henri Rouquet, maire d'Alfortville (au centre) entouré des militants de la FRA



la vérité historique : "le négationnisme n'est pas une divergence d'opinion, c'est toucher à la réalité elle-même et remettre en cause le lien social".

Finalement, pressé de répondre "concrètement" aux revendications arméniennes, chacun des responsables présents s'est engagé à agir au sein de son parti. "Peut-on leur faire confiance ?", demande, malicieuse, Agnes Vahramian au psychanalyste, en guise de mot de conclusion. Réponse de l'intéressé, drôle, subtil et lucide de bout en bout : "il faut les aider à ne pas trahir leurs engagements". Autrement

dit, ne pas relâcher la vigilance et exiger le passage à l'acte. Côté scène, c'est sous les flashes des photographes que Désir, Karoutchi et Santini sont devenus les trois premiers signataires de la pétition. Côté salle, d'intenses discussions ont déjà commencé entre responsables de la FRA Dachnagsoutioun et Jean-Paul Huchon, tête de liste pour la région parisienne du PS arrivé à 17h30 et le maire d'Alfortville, René Rouquet. A voir la mine satisfaite de certains, le désamour entre les deux partis pourrait ne pas survivre à l'hiver.

Varoujan Sarkissian

Verbatim

Gérard Miller, psychanalyste : "Il y a des peuples et des Etats qui fondent leur lien social, leur ciment social, sur le négationnisme. C'est la raison pour laquelle nous nous heurtons depuis tant d'années au négationnisme en Turquie".

André Santini : "Il faut stopper la mécanique qui va permettre à la Turquie de rentrer dans l'Union européenne par effraction".

Harlem Désir : "La reconnaissance du génocide arménien ne serait pas une défaite de la Turquie mais une victoire sur elle-même".

Roger Karoutchi : "On ne peut pas parler d'un Etat démocratique lorsqu'à l'intérieur de cet Etat, il n'y a pas de volonté de voir son passé".

Harlem Désir : "La reconnaissance du génocide arménien ne serait pas une défaite de la Turquie mais une victoire sur elle-même".

L'appel

**Contre cette Turquie dans l'Europe
Pour l'application de la résolution
du 18 juin 1987**

"Moi, citoyen européen, épris de justice, appelle la Turquie à reconnaître le génocide commis à l'encontre des populations arméniennes de l'Empire ottoman et à respecter les conditions contenues dans la résolution du Parlement européen du 18 juin 1987, avant toute ouverture des négociations d'adhésion à l'Union européenne."

"L'Europe s'est bâtie sur des valeurs communes, respectueuses des droits de l'Homme et des libertés individuelles. J'attends de la Turquie qu'elle adhère, elle aussi, à ces principes et fasse la lumière sur son histoire afin de favoriser la paix et la stabilité dans la région."

Pour signer cette pétition
consulter le site du CDCA :
<http://www.asso.fr>
ou pour l'obtenir écrire
17 rue Bleue, 75009 Paris



MOYEN-ORIENT

Pour une partition de l'Irak

L'ONU prépare son retour en Irak à la demande des Américains, afin d'évaluer la faisabilité de l'élection d'un Parlement irakien transitoire avant le 30 juin.

L'Administration américaine

PAR

AXEL PONIATOWSKI *

ressent le besoin de cette caution internationale afin de pouvoir annoncer l'été prochain son désengagement du pays. Cette phase est nécessaire à Georges W. Bush pour aborder la campagne présidentielle sous les meilleurs auspices.

Au-delà de la confirmation ainsi apportée des limites d'une politique américaine fondamentalement unilatéraliste, l'ONU serait bien inspirée d'apprécier précisément ce qu'on lui demande de cautionner, à savoir une nation une et indivisible.

Je pense que vouloir, à tout prix, maintenir l'unicité de l'Irak est une fausse bonne idée.

Les périodes d'unité que l'Irak a connues au cours de son histoire n'ont été obtenues que sous

la contrainte et par la force. On se plaît souvent à rappeler que les plaines de Mésopotamie donnèrent naissance aux plus anciennes civilisations et furent un haut lieu de culture et d'histoire. Dès 642, les empires des dynasties

des califes arabes omeyyades puis abbassides couvrirent une large partie du monde oriental et asiatique. La longue période de déclin qui s'en suivit se traduisit par le morcellement du territoire en de nombreuses principautés arabes. À partir de 1250, les Mongols dont l'empire s'étendait du Danube au Tonkin, exercèrent sur la population de Mésopotamie une singulière terreur pendant plus de deux siècles. La dynastie persane des Séfévides conquiert l'Irak au début du XVI^e siècle et contribua à la propagation du chiisme parmi les tribus frontalières et du Sud. Les sultans turcs adeptes du sunisme ne tolérèrent pas la présence de cette domination chiite et à partir de 1638 l'Irak fut annexé à l'empire ottoman.

L'État irakien, né des ruines de la Première Guerre mondiale, a été organisé autour de la cuvette alluviale de la Mésopotamie et des plateaux du croissant fertile. Les Britanniques installèrent sur le trône, en 1921, l'émir Fayçal Bin Hussein de la famille des Chérifs de la Mecque et conservèrent le contrôle du pétrole irakien jusqu'au coup d'État du général Kassem en 1959. La suite ne fut qu'une succession de régimes militaires autoritaires que le doigté incomparable de Saddam Hussein, à partir de 1979, ne fit que porter à son paroxysme.

Ainsi, l'Irak n'a jamais formé une unité, sinon sous la contrainte, ni géographique, ni ethnique, ni communautariste.

Les Kurdes sunnites au nord, les Arabes sunnites au centre et les Arabes chiites au sud se haïssent cordialement. Et à vouloir pérenniser cette situation en imposant une unité artificielle, les Américains et la communauté internationale risquent de produire un chaudron à la mesure

du conflit israëlo-palestinien ou de celui des Balkans. Ils infligeraient à des minorités une nouvelle domination, celle des chiïtes.

Longtemps l'Irak a été considéré comme une frontière nécessaire à l'expansion éventuelle des ayatollahs iraniens. Ce risque est en voie de banalisation.

L'aventure irakienne aura au moins permis des avancées dans la réduction du risque de prolifération au Moyen-Orient. L'Iran a accepté le

principe des inspections de ses sites nucléaires. La Lybie a renoncé aux armes de destruction massive en décembre

dernier. La Syrie a reçu le message cinq sur cinq et va de concessions en concessions. Le risque de prolifération est aujourd'hui bien plus présent au Pakistan d'une part, et dans la Corne de l'Afrique de l'autre.

Reste alors l'idée « dérangeante » que l'on ne désassemble pas ce qui est assemblé. Mais qui imaginerait aujourd'hui raisonnablement vouloir reconstituer la Yougoslavie d'hier ou l'Union soviétique d'avant-hier ? Personne.

La sagesse conduit à s'orienter vers trois États indépendants et souverains selon des frontières respectant les séparations ethniques. Le conformisme l'emporterait-il sur la sagesse ?

* Député UMP du Val-d'Oise.

Qui imaginerait aujourd'hui vouloir reconstituer la Yougoslavie d'hier ou l'URSS d'avant-hier ?

CHYPRE Le plan de l'ONU pour réunifier l'île

Fin de la « ligne verte » ?

Le conflit chypriote a éclaté en 1963, trois ans après l'indépendance, et la Force des Nations unies chargées du maintien de la paix y est en place depuis le 4 mars 1964 le

PAR

JOSEPH YACOB *

long de la « ligne verte ». Depuis lors, la crise est ouverte, accentuée par l'occupation du nord de l'île par l'armée turque en 1974. D'autant que,

sur le plan institutionnel, la Constitution chypriote du 16 août 1960 s'est avérée pratiquement inapplicable sur plusieurs de ses dispositions.

Aujourd'hui la donne a changé. Les pressions tant des États-Unis que de l'Europe semblent payer, après cinq ans de blocage des négociations. De plus, les Chypriotes

turcs se sont dotés d'un gouvernement proeuropéen en janvier dernier après de difficiles élections. Quant à la Turquie, sa physionomie politique a évolué. Kofi Annan a proposé en novembre 2002 un

plan, révisé le 23 février 2003, d'union de deux États chypriotes, qui fut aussitôt salué par Athènes et Ankara. A moins de trois mois de l'adhésion de Chypre à l'UE, les négociations entre les deux parties (grecque et turque) ont repris le jeudi 19 février sur la base aérienne de l'ONU à Nicosie, conformément au « plan Annan » qui prévoit un État sur un modèle belgo-suisse : un État fédéral commun (*Common State*) représentant Chypre sur le plan international, mais composé de deux entités distinctes et à

égalité de statut (*Two Equal Constituent States*).

Il est prévu une seule citoyenneté chypriote dans le cadre d'un État laïc et démilitarisé, deux langues officielles (grecque et turque), des ajustements territoriaux, le retour

des réfugiés, une réduction importante du nombre des soldats turcs stationnés à Chypre, une Cour suprême composée de neuf juges dont trois pour chaque communauté et trois non chypriotes, un drapeau et un hymne national, les compétences du gouvernement fédéral, une présidence tournante, une commission de réconciliation. Ce plan serait ensuite soumis à référendum aux deux communautés le 21 avril, ce qui permettrait l'accession

d'une Chypre réunifiée à l'UE le 1^{er} mai.

Ce plan est-il le premier du genre ? Depuis l'occupation turque du nord de l'île en 1974, illégale aux yeux de la communauté internationale, Chypre est partagé en deux entités politiques séparées et les négociations ont été longtemps gelées en dépit des efforts déployés. En novembre 1974, l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU avait demandé le respect de la souveraineté de Chypre, le retrait des forces armées étrangères et le retour des réfugiés dans

leurs foyers. En février 1977, les dirigeants des deux communautés s'entendaient sur les principes devant régir l'ouverture d'entretiens communautaires visant à mettre sur place une République de Chypre indépendante, non alignée, fédérale et bicommunautaire. Les plans de règle-

ment concernant les aspects constitutionnels et territoriaux et les négociations se succédaient sans résultat. Les deux parties étaient en désaccord total sur le règlement des principales questions liées aux réfugiés, à la sécurité, au territoire, aux garanties mutuelles...

Les Chypriotes turcs, craignant pour leur autonomie, réclamaient une présidence

tournante, un véritable partage du pouvoir gouvernemental avec les Chypriotes grecs et l'entière égalité sur le plan de la souveraineté, exigences toujours refusées par la partie grecque faisant valoir

**Les pressions
tant des États-Unis
que de l'Europe
semblent payer**

que les Turcs ne représentent que 18 % de la population de l'île. Aussi plusieurs résolutions onusiennes ont été adoptées mais sans succès réel : tantôt acceptées par une partie, aussitôt refusées

par l'autre. C'est ainsi que des négociations ont eu lieu en juillet et août 1997, organisées sous l'égide de l'ONU qui proposait la création d'un État fédéral bi-

zonal et bicommunautaire pour réunifier l'île. Chaque communauté posséderait ses propres territoires mais partagerait un certain nombre de fonctions et ministères gouvernementaux. Les pourparlers repris début décembre 2002 avaient été stoppés ini-

tialement, même l'actuel plan Annan avait été refusé par le président turc chypriote Rauf

Denktash. Mais contrairement aux tractations antérieures, cette fois le désir d'aboutir sur la question de la réunification de l'île est partagé par les deux communautés, tant elles sont lassées par la séparation et l'isolement.

De par son histoire, Chypre est l'exemple même d'une société multiculturelle qui a connu une succession de conquérants depuis les origines. Carrefour et creuset de peuples, le règlement de la question chypriote ne peut donc aboutir que par la reconnaissance de son autonomie par rapport aux pays voisins (notamment la Grèce et la Turquie), sa singularité insulaire et sa diversité ethnique rassemblée dans une unité qu'il faut deviner et réinventer. C'est le défi de demain. Mais c'est loin d'être aisé.

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Divisions over Islam delay moves towards sovereignty

Michael Howard in Baghdad

Today's deadline for finalising Iraq's interim constitution, which is to underwrite the transition to full sovereignty, will not be met, senior officials said yesterday.

The committee drafting the transitional administrative law is split over issues such as the role of Islam and the powers of the federal region proposed by the Kurds in the north. There are also differences on the representation of women in the assembly and the form and function of the presidency, officials said.

"There are many important points still to be resolved," said Mahmoud Othman, an independent Kurdish member of the governing council who sits

on the drafting committee. "I don't think we can meet the Americans' deadline. It needs more time."

Another committee member said: "The process is going, but it is going very slowly. On some issues it's the secularists versus the Islamists, on others it's the Kurds versus the Arabs."

The failure to meet the first deadline on the road to sovereignty is embarrassing for the US-led coalition. It is under strong pressure from Washington to keep the plans on

track.

The timetable for the constitution was included in the much-revised November 15 agreement between the occupation authorities and the governing council. The deal provided a road map for the

creation of a sovereign government by June 30 and national elections and a permanent constitution by the end of 2005. Paul Bremer, the US chief administrator, would retain a veto over any interim constitution.

The agreement also included provisions for agreements, by the end of next month, on the status of US and other foreign troops in the country.

That deadline will probably be missed too, said Dr Othman.

But Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the most revered Shia cleric in Iraq, ruined US plans by insisting that any interim legislature must be elected directly and not appointed through the system of caucuses proposed by the coal-

ition authorities. A UN team which visited Iraq ruled out early elections, citing the lack of preparedness and security. The team, led by the former

Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi will return next month to help Iraqis find a mechanism for creating a transitional assembly.

On Thursday, Ayatollah Sistani called for international guarantees for elections by the end of the year and said he would only accept "an unelected government" on June 30 if it had "limited authority", and if it prepared the country for free elections "without being allowed to take major decisions that could be considered as binding to the elected government".

The draft law, a copy of which has been seen by the Guardian, is far reaching but it puts off some of the big issues facing Iraq until a permanent constitution is written. Once implemented it would be difficult to undo.

This is one reason why the 25-member governing council, which reflects the country's ethnic and sectarian diversity, is battling so hard to reach a consensus.

The law includes guarantees to freedom of speech, religion and equal rights regardless of gender, sect and ethnicity, and an independent judiciary.

It sees Iraq as a "federal,

democratic, and pluralistic state based upon the principles of geography, good governance, and separation of powers, and not upon the basis of

origin, ethnicity, nationality, or confession".

Islamists on the committee want to ensure that no law can be passed that contradicts Islamic values. Many women fear that this would reverse the social and legal freedoms gained during decades of secular rule.

Yesterday, eight of the 13 Shia members of the governing council walked out in protest after a majority voted to cancel Resolution 137, passed in December, which proposed replacing civil family law with sharia, or Islamic religious law. The resolution was opposed by groups who felt it would set women's rights back decades.

The Guardian

February 28 2004

IRAK

Une administration toujours baasiste

L'épuration n'a pas éliminé les cadres de l'ancien régime. Notamment dans les ambassades à l'étranger, où les baasistes font toujours la loi, constate *An Nahar*.

AN NAHAR (extraits)

Beyrouth

Il existe de nombreuses similitudes entre la situation qui prévalait en Iran, en 1979, après l'effondrement du régime du chah, et celle de l'Irak actuel, après que les Américains ont renversé le régime de Saddam Hussein. Le plus frappant est que, dans les deux cas, l'administration ait réussi à échapper aux changements intervenus dans la direction des affaires du pays et que certains éléments de l'ancien régime [fidèles du chah en Iran ; baasistes en Irak] aient uniquement changé d'apparence, adoptant un discours neuf tout en poursuivant, dans la pratique – chaque fois qu'une faille dans les nouvelles lois le leur permet –, la politique qui régnait précédemment. Cela s'applique particulièrement à certaines ambassades irakiennes qui ont rouvert récemment leurs portes, à la grande joie des Irakiens exilés qui ont dû vite déchanter.

L'ANCIEN FONCTIONNAIRE CONSULAIRE EST RESTÉ EN POSTE

Durant le régime précédent, tous les Irakiens souffraient : à l'intérieur de l'Irak, où nul n'était à l'abri des guerres ni des sévices exercés, dans des sous-sols isolés, par les Moukhabarat (Renseignements généraux) ; comme à l'étranger, pour les centaines de milliers d'Irakiens ayant réussi à échapper à la mort quotidienne, mais qui se trouvaient sans cesse harcelés, jusque dans leur exil, par les agents d'un régime tyrannique, les privant du renouvellement ou de la légalisation de leur passeport, à moins d'accepter d'en payer le prix fort : devenir eux-mêmes des agents de renseignement pour l'ambassade irakienne. Dans ces conditions, la majorité des Irakiens à l'étranger vivait un véritable cauchemar pour obtenir une carte de séjour légal ou des documents officiels, obligés de hanter sans répit les administrations des pays où ils s'étaient exilés.

Dès le déclenchement de la guerre de 2003 en Irak et avec les premiers signes indiquant la chute du régime despotique, l'anxiété des Irakiens exilés a baissé d'un cran, confiants qu'ils étaient que leur douleur touchait à sa fin. Dure surprise, lorsque les portes des ambassades irakiennes se sont



▲ Dessin
de S. Toma
paru dans
Al Mutamar, Irak.

ouvertes à nouveau : l'ancien fonctionnaire consulaire qui avait l'habitude de faire endurer aux Irakiens les pires supplices était, la plupart du temps, resté au même poste, même s'il avait dû, vu les circonstances, changer de comportement et abandonner le langage menaçant qu'il tenait auparavant. Rien que de revoir la même personne derrière le comptoir aurait eu de quoi justifier le mécontentement des ressortissants irakiens, mais la goutte qui a fait déborder le vase, c'est qu'il ait été exigé de tous ceux qui voulaient proroger la validité de leur pas-

seport de présenter un engagement écrit certifiant n'avoir jamais été déchu de leur nationalité, pour quelque raison que ce soit ! C'est ce qui se passe aujourd'hui à l'ambassade d'Irak à Vienne, en Autriche, où il est exigé de rédiger cet engagement pour accompagner le formulaire de demande de renouvellement du passeport ; formulaire qui d'ailleurs comporte toujours presque toutes les questions contenues dans l'ancien questionnaire des renseignements irakiens du régime déchu.

Plus étonnant encore : l'ambassade d'Irak à Beyrouth, au Liban, refuse de renouveler les passeports des Irakiens ayant acquis une seconde nationalité, sous prétexte que la loi irakienne ne permet pas d'avoir une double citoyenneté. Quand les demandeurs protestent qu'un décret du Conseil de gouvernement provisoire irakien a annulé

cette ancienne disposition, ils se voient répondre par l'employé consulaire que le Conseil en question est illégitime,

parce que nommé par les Américains, et que ses décisions n'ont aucune légitimité ! Mieux : à l'ambassade irakienne de Damas, les fonctionnaires – dont plus de la moitié sont de l'ancienne équipe – refusent de proroger la validité des titres de voyage qui n'ont pas de tampon de sortie du territoire irakien. [La majorité des Irakiens exilés avait dû quitter l'Irak en cachette.]

Le plus étrange dans tous ces faits est que les responsables, au ministère des Affaires étrangères, nient avoir connaissance de ces agissements et encore moins avoir donné des directives en ce sens. L'un des amis du ministre des Affaires étrangères, Hochiar Zibari, relate l'agacement du ministre envers les comportements de ses collaborateurs ex-baasistes, qui, dit-il, ont déjà imité sa signature et falsifié les décrets officiels qu'il avait promulgués, concernant la nomination de certains consuls à l'étranger.

Salem Machkour

