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THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY TARGETED BY BLOODY BOMB ATTACKS IN BAGHDAD AND MOSSUL

ON 1st August, six Christian churches were the targets of bomb attacks in Iraq — five in Baghdad and one in Mossul. They caused 10 deaths and 50 injured. This is the first time that Christian churches have been targeted since the American military intervention, which led to the overthrow of the Saddam

Hussein regime last year.

In Baghdad, at least nine people were killed in four successive and co-ordinated bomb attacks on three churches and a seminary. The first explosion took place in front of the Armenian Church of the Karrada quarter, a very busy quarter inhabited by many Christians. The Church windows

were shattered and metal fragments were scattered for hundreds of metres around. The second explosion took place about fifteen minutes later before an Assyrian Church in the same quarter. The noise of this explosion was so great that windows in many other building nearby were blown in. Two other explosions took place near other Christian Churches of the capital. In Mossul, a car bomb exploded near a Christian Church. The attack, which took place in a very densely populated area in the North of the city, also caused

extensive damage and many wounded.

Furthermore a big explosion took place in Kirkuk, near houses belonging to Christians, but there were no casualties as most of the people were in church for the evening service.

The Chaldean Patriarch, Head of the country's biggest Christian community, called for Christians and Moslems unity, the day after the attacks. *"We Christians and Moslems must cooperate for the good of Iraq, for we are a single family"* declared Monsignor Emmanuel Delly, pointing out that this appeal would be contained in a message he was preparing for the Iraqi government.

These bomb attacks were unreservedly condemned by all the political and religious authorities of the country, as well as by Pope John-Paul II, who described them as *"Unjust aggressions against those whose only aim was to cooperated for peace and reconciliation in the country"*. The Pope expressed this condemnation in a message to the Chaldean Patriarch of Iraq, Emmanuel III, head of the country's largest Christian community. Pope John-Paul II wrote and signed in his own hand — which is fairly rare — a message to Mgr Delly, in which he asks that *"all who believe in a single clement and merciful God" unite "to deplore all forms of violence"*.

The World Council of Churches (WCC), which represents the principle Christian churches (except for the Roman Catholics) has also firmly condemned *"all forms of violence aimed at religious*

communities or any group of people and which seek to introduce hostility between religions into the conflict".

The emblematic Shiite personality, the great ayatollah Ali Sistani, for his part, called for *"government and people to work together to put an end to attacks against Iraqis"*. The Shiite radical boss, Moqtada Sadr also condemned these acts.

For its part, the Iraqi Sunni ulema accused *"foreign parties"* of being the source of these attacks, *"which aim at dividing the Iraqi people and want lasting chaos in the interest of the occupiers"* of Iraq.

On the political level, Iraqi President Ghazi Al-Yawar described these attacks as *"terrorist acts"*, also considered as *"enormous and abominable crimes"* by Prime Minister Iyad Allawi.

Mu'affack al-Rubai, the Iraqi National Security adviser, considered that the attacks bore the trademark of Abu Mussab

Zarkawi, reputedly close to the Islamist Al Qaida network. *"Zarkawi and his extremists are, in fact, trying create a breach between Moslems and Christians in Iraq"* he added. An Islamist Internet site, in a communiqué claiming the attacks, attributed them to a hitherto unknown group, the *"committee for planning and following-up in Iraq"*.

Religious minorities in Iraq, mainly Christian, represent about 3% of the population, or about 700,000 out of a total of 24 million Iraqis, mainly Sunni and Shiite Moslems. The recent series of attacks on sellers of alcoholic drinks, who are mostly Christian, had aroused fears in the community even if, unlike the mosques already hit by bomb attacks over the last couple of years, the churches has hitherto been spared. The Iraqi Christians are one of the oldest Christian communities in the Middle East, since they arrived in Iraq in the 1st Century AD, whereas Islam only appeared in the 7th Century.

THE IRAQI PRESIDENT GHAZI AL-YAWAR VISITS TURKEY

ON 16 August the Iraqi President, Ghazi al-Yawar, arrived in Turkey for a two-day visit in the course of which he mainly raised with the Turkish authorities the security problems in Iraq.

Mr. al-Yawar, accompanied by his Foreign Minister, Hoshyar Zebari, met the Turkish President, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, the Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and the Foreign Minister, Abdullah Gul.

Amongst the bi-lateral subjects

discussed was the safety of Turkish lorry drivers, several of whom are at present in the hands of armed groups in Iraq, according to Turkish diplomatic sources. On 2 August, some Islamist Internet sites had shown a video showing the execution of a Turkish hostage by an Islamist group. The hostage, Murat Yuce, was employed by a Turkish company working in Iraq for the Americans. This is the first Turkish hostage killed in Iraq.

The Turkish authorities have

already let it be known that they are considering a series of measures to make working conditions safer in Iraq, which before the 1991 Gulf War was Turkey's principal trading partner. They are, in particular, envisaging transporting goods between the towns of Zakho and Mossul, in Iraqi Kurdistan, then letting the Iraqis convey them to their final destination.

The Iraqi delegation also discussed the country's political future. Turkey is keeping a close watch on the situation, particularly that of the Kurds, fearing a contagious effect that could restart the demands of the 15 to 20 million Kurds in Turkey. The Turkish authorities also asked the Iraqis to cooperate with them by driving out the activists of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK — banned and renamed KONGRA-GEL) who have sought asylum over the border.

In October 2003, Turkey and the United States had agreed on a "plan of action", including military measures, against the PKK, considered to be a "terrorist" organisation. But Ankara, since then, has been regularly complaining of Washington's inaction.

While assuring his hearers that Iraq did want to drive out the PKK activists, Mr. al-Yawar replied that he hoped that Ankara would not interfere in the internal affairs of his country. "I told President Yawar that we were expecting that they (the Iraqi authorities) would put an end to the presence of the PKK/KONGRA-GEL in Iraq and that they would see to it that Iraq did not become a shelter for

terrorist organisations" declared the Turkish President, Ahmet Necdet Sezer during a press conference after his meeting with this opposite number. "We cannot ignore an organisation that endangers the security of our neighbours" replied Mr. al-Yawar.

But he added that Baghdad hoped to develop its links with Turkey in the context of "good neighbourly relations, without any interference in one another's internal affairs".

Furthermore, the Turkish President indirectly re-iterated Ankara's fears of seeing the Iraqi Kurds taking control of the oil producing city of Kirkuk, lying

about 220 Km North of Baghdad. "I told President Yawar that the attempts of any ethnic group living in Kirkuk — Turkoman, Arab, Kurdish, Assyrian or other — to claim control of the city would endanger the stability and order in Kirkuk and in Iraq" declared Mr. Sezer.

Kirkuk has been the scene of frequent disturbances between Kurds, Arabs and Turkomen since the end of the Saddam Hussein regime in April 2003. The Kurds claim control over it, pointing out that until the 60s the city had a Kurdish majority until the Baghdad regime embarked on its campaign of forced Arabisation.

BARHAM SALEH, IRAQI DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, VISITS TEHERAN TO EASE TENSIONS

ON 29 August, Barham Saleh, the Kurdish Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, visited Teheran to try and sooth the growing tension between the two neighbouring countries, after accusations had been made of Iran's having meddled in the Iraqi Shiite revolt. Barham Saleh arrived accompanied by his fellow Ministers of the Interior and of Transport, on the first direct Baghdad-Teheran flight for 25 years. "I come bearing a message of friendship from the Iraqi government and nation to the government and people of Iran" declared Barham Saleh, who expressed the wish to "strengthen fraternal links" between the two countries.

Mr. Saleh met, in particular, the

head of the Iranian Foreign Service, Kamal Kharrazi, for discussions largely devoted to the fate of Faridoun Jihani, the Iranian consul in Kerbala, kidnapped three weeks earlier.

The Iraqi Defence Minister, Hazem Shaalam had even gone so far as to describe Iran as Iraq's "principal enemy", Baghdad accusing Teheran of supporting the Shiite Mahdi's Army militia so as to influence its neighbour's political process — charge rejected by the Mullah's regime. Relations are also tense following the disappearance of a series of Iran citizens in Iraq, including the arrest of four journalists of the Iranian News Agency (INA), who were finally released on 27 August.

INCREASING CLASHES IN TURKISH KURDISTAN

IN the context of large-scale "search and destroy" operations in Turkish Kurdistan, clashes have been multiplying. The governor of Hakkari Province, Erdogan Gurbuz, announced that eleven Kurdish fighters and two soldiers were killed on 31 August in violent clashes in the province. On 21 August, two Turkish policemen were wounded during an attack on the police station in the town of Semdinli, according to the Turkish authorities.

Furthermore, a police commissioner was killed on 13 August during an operation of the security forces in the Hatay region. Commissioner Mehmet Kose, who was seriously wounded during a joint operation carried out by the police and the gendarmerie in a region bordering on Syria, later died of his wounds after being transported to hospital. On the same day, in Van province, a Turkish gendarme was killed and another wounded in clashes with Kurdish fighters.

At the beginning of the month, a Kurdish fighter was killed during clashes with the Turkish security forces in a heavily wooded area near the town of Karlova, in Bingol province. Three other Kurdish fighters were killed in the course of a large-scale operation carried out by the Turkish gendarmerie in the upland pastures of Mount Pulumur, in Tunceli province.

Mines are also claiming more and more victims in the region. Thus ten soldiers and a train driver

were wounded on 30 August following bomb attacks attributed to the PKK. The soldiers were wounded when the vehicle carrying them hit a mine on a road in Sirnak province, while in Bingol province a bomb exploded as a goods train passed, injuring one of the two drivers. Three soldiers and two Turkish army auxiliaries were wounded on 8 August in Bingol province, by the explosion of a remote controlled mine as their vehicle passed by. In Siirt province, two people were seriously wounded on 28 August when their truck hit a mine. The day before, two other people were killed and five were wounded, all of the same family, by a mine explosion on a road in the same region. Near Cukurca, on 9 August, two Turkish soldiers were killed and an NCO wounded in a mine explosion on a road. Moreover, two people were

wounded, including one soldier on duty, when a delayed action bomb exploded on the evening of *August, in a Turkish military complex at Yuksekova, near the Iranian and Iraqi borders. The complex included an Army recruiting office, whose windows were blown in by the explosion.

Elsewhere, a man was killed and another seriously injured by the explosion of a bomb they were attempting to lay before a police control point. The explosion took place on 7 August near Van airport. The *CNN-Turc* TV network quotes the governor of Van, Hikmet Tan, who thought that he was the target as he was due to pass that way a few hours later on his way to meet the Prime Minister, Tayyip Erdogan, in a neighbouring town. The man injured by the explosion hid himself for eight hours after the explosion and negotiated with the police in Kurdish before surrendering to the authorities. Istanbul was not spared by all this violence, since

DAMASCUS CONTINUES ITS POLICY OF REPRESSION AGAINST THE KURDS

TWO Kurdish activists and an Islamist received prison sentences from the State Security Court, a special judicial body from whose rulings there is no appeal, announced their lawyer, Anouar Bounni, on 30 August.

"The court sentenced the Kurdish activists, Farhat Ali, a member of the Yakiti Party, and Ibrahim Naasan, of the Kurdish Unity Party, to three years imprisonment for membership of a secret organisation" and for

"attempting to amputate a part of Syrian territory to annex it to a foreign State" specified Mr. Bounni, a well known Human Rights defender. Syria is fiercely opposed to the creation of an independent Kurdish State in Iraq.

The court also postponed to the end of October the trial of 15 other Kurds, arrested during the mid-March clashes between Kurds and police-backed Arab tribes, which resulted in 40 deaths, according to Kurdish

sources (25 according to an official Syrian assessment).

Furthermore, this Court sentenced Mahmoud Nabhane to 14 years jail for membership of the Moslem Brotherhood and postponed the trial of 14-year-old Massab Hariri, accused of membership of this banned brotherhood, added Mr. Bounni. *"The Syrian authorities are continuing, despite their promises, to violate Human Rights in Syria and to repress the activities of political activists"* he remarked.

Mr. Bounni called for the suppression of the State Security Court and the release of all those who had been sentenced by this court.

Furthermore, a Kurdish prisoner, arrested two weeks previously by the Damascus authorities, died in prison under torture, stated a communiqué of the Kurdish opposition party, Yakiti, dated 3 August. *"The citizen Ahmad Hussein, living in the town of Hassaké (on the Syrian-Turkish borders) was killed under torture by the military security services (...) who pretended he died of a heart attack"* stresses the communiqué, which was signed by Fouad Aaliko, member of the Central Committee of the Yakiti party. *"His body was handed over to his family in the night (of 2 August) and the authorities concerned refused any medical report on the reasons for his death and exerted pressure for his burial as soon as possible under a strong guard"* added the communiqué. According to this communiqué, Ahmad Hussein, accused of being a member of the recently created Party for Kurdish Unity, was arrested on 17 July.

The Kurdish parties in Syria, which unite eleven banned organisations including Yakiti, had announced, last April, the death of two Kurds *"tortured in a barbarous manner"*.

Syria has a population of over one and a half million, mainly in the Northern provinces along the

border with Turkish Kurdistan. Over 150,000 of them were stripped of their Syrian nationality during the 1962 census, which deprived them and their descendants (today totalling over 300,000 people) of any citizenship, making them *"stateless persons"* in their own country.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH CALLS ON THE COALITION IN IRAQ TO SETTLE THE TERRITORIAL RIGHTS OF KURDS AND ARABS

THE Human Rights defence organisation Human Rights Watch, in a 78-page report published on 2 August highlights a frustration that is increasing among the thousands of Kurds and Turcomen who are living in *"conditions of despair"* while waiting for replies regarding their rights to land.

The coalition has failed to settle conflicts regarding land rights between Kurds and Arabs in the North, leaving a potentially explosive situation, warns Human Rights Watch. *"If these conflicts for land are not treated urgently, the tensions between returning Kurds and the Arab colonists could rapidly explode into open violence"* warns Sarah Leah Whitson, Human Rights Watch general director for the Middle East and North Africa. Kurds, Turcomen and other non-Arab groups were driven away from their homes and land under the Saddam Hussein regime, as part of an Arabisation

programme, which, Human Rights Watch considers, *"was, in fact, a campaign of ethnic cleansing aimed at permanently altering the ethnic composition of Northern Iraq"*. The report describes how the *"provisional Authority has failed to take measures to remedy this, including when the situation became even more volatile"* adds the New York-based organisation.

Human Rights Watch calls on the present Iraqi government, to which the Americans transferred authority on 28 June, *"urgently"* to set up a legal system to solve the questions of land rights and provide humanitarian aid to displaced Kurds and other non-Arab populations.

After the fall of Saddam Hussein in April 2003, the Kurds and other non-Arab groups returned to the North to claim back their property, points out the report, adding that the Arab families forced to leave also needed to be helped.

AS WELL AS ...

• **OSMAN OCALAN CREATES HIS OWN PARTY.** On 14 October, the Turkish press reported that Osman Ocalan, brother of the boss of the ex-Kurdistan Workers' Party, Abdullah Ocalan, after leaving the PKK (which has renamed itself Kongra-Gel) has created his own political party. The Patriotic Democratic Party (PDP) was founded by Osman Ocalan and about forty ex-cadres of the PKK, including Yilmaz Kani, formerly the PKK's leader in Europe and now in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Last year, Osman Ocalan had quarrelled with his brother, who is serving a life sentence in Turkey since 1999, largely for marrying a young Kurdish woman, whereas marriage is "*an inadvisable practice*" in the PKK rules.

He had been Abdullah Ocalan's right hand man and, for a while, jointly directed the Kurdish fighters after his brother's arrest and condemnation by the Turkish Courts for the PKK's 15 years armed struggle for the creation of an independent Kurdish state in Turkey.

In a letter recently published on a pro-Kurdish web site, Abdullah Ocalan, alias "Apo" described him as a "*cowardly brother*" and openly displayed the divisions that have been undermining the PKK for several years.

Kongra-Gel, the latest emanation of the PKK, recently ended a unilateral truce it had declared in 1999. Since then incidents have been increasing, with ambushes or clashes with the security forces in

Turkish Kurdistan. The hard-line wing of Kongra-Gel, which is itself divided into several factions, has threatened to rekindle the conflict.

• **THE TURKISH ARMY CONTINUES ITS POLICY OF FORCED EVACUATION OF KURDISH VILLAGES.** On 24 August, the Turkish Human Rights Association accused the security forces of having forcibly evacuated a Kurdish village — a widespread practice in the past, at the height of the fighting against the PKK. In July 2004, gendarmes burst into the village of Iliack, near Beytussebap, and ordered the inhabitants to leave their homes "*for security reasons*", the Association for Human Rights (IHD) reported in a communiqué published after an enquiry the organisation had conducted on the spot.

"The soldiers had said that if the villagers continued to live in their houses they might be led to supplying food to Kurdish fighters" declared Reyhan Yalcindag, an IHD spokesman, a lawyer and member of the committee of enquiry. Ms Yalcindag explained that the security forces wanted the villagers to leave the region. She called on the local authorities to authorise the return of the expelled villagers indicating that legal proceedings would be undertaken against those responsible for this evacuation.

The 343 inhabitants of Ilicak are at the moment living under precarious conditions in tents erected near their village, according to IHD.

According to official figures, over 3,600 villages were forcibly evacuated during the 80s and 90s, and, according to Turkish Human Rights, more than 3 million people were forced to leave their village.

Moreover, on 27 August, two people were killed and five others wounded, all from the same family, by the explosion of a mine placed on a road near the Kurdish village of Pervari. The truck, in which a family was returning to its village, hit a remote controlled mine, according to the regional governor, Nuri Okutan.

• **BRUSSELS INVITES THE IRAQI PRIME MINISTER TO THE NEXT E.U. SUMMIT, DESPITE HIS TENSE RELATIONS WITH FRANCE.** The European Union invited Iyad Allawi, the interim Iraqi Prime Minister, to attend the next EU summit in November to talk of Europe's role in the reconstruction of his country. According to European leaders, this invitation was sent on 29 August, coinciding with the visit to Baghdad of the Dutch Foreign Minister, Ben Bot, whose country is presiding the E.U. this month.

The Union has not yet received any confirmation that Mr. Allawi will attend this meeting on 5 November. To date this year, the EU has promised 305 million euros in aid for humanitarian and reconstruction purposes. A commitment that is likely to be renewed next year.

On another level, the French foreign Ministry has reacted to the remarks of the head of the Iraqi government, who declared in an interview that France would

not be spared from terrorism, recalling that *"having itself been victim of terrorist attacks"* France conducted *"an unceasing and resolute activity against this plague"*.

"The French authorities have, for a long time, affirmed the necessity and urgency of mobilisation against all forms of terrorism" stressed the Foreign Office spokesman, Hervé Ladsous, in a communiqué published on 30 August. France *"has always given its support and contribution to all the initiatives of the international community in this field"*.

In an interview given to several Western journalists, including *Le Monde*, the interim Iraqi Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi, declared that *"bomb attacks will occur in Paris, Nice, Cannes or in San Francisco"*. In his view *"the French, as well as all democratic countries, cannot be satisfied with adopting a passive position"* because *"terrorism has no limits (...). Avoiding confrontation is no reply"*.

For the Quai d'Orsay (the French Foreign Office) these remarks are *"unacceptable"* as they seem *"to cast doubts on France's determination in the struggle against terrorism"*.

• **UNO VOTES UNANIMOUSLY TO EXTEND FOR ANOTHER YEAR THE MANDATE OF THE UNITED NATIONS' AID MISSION FOR IRAQ (UNAMI).** On 12 August, the UN Security Council unanimously passed a resolution extending for another year the mandate of the United Nations' Aid Mission to

Iraq (UNAMI). A mission whose operations remain limited pending an improvement in the country's security conditions.

In this resolution on UNAMI the Security Council reaffirms that the United Nations must play a major role in helping the Iraqi people and the interim government in forming institutions that can open the way to representative government.

But, in a report dated 6 August, the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, let the Security Council know that the United Nations remained a *"choice target"* in the foreseeable future *"for those who want to carry out spectacular terrorist attacks in Iraq"*. Dangers that greatly limit the staff that the UN can send to the country.

Kofi Annan's new envoy, the Pakistani Ashraf Iehangir Qazi, is due to take up his duties in Baghdad with a small team this week, which gives the UN an official presence in Iraq for the first time since last October.

Kofi Annan had then ordered the departure of all UN foreign staff after two bomb attacks against the UN offices in Baghdad and a wave of attacks on humanitarian personnel. The first attack, on 19 October 2003, had caused 22 deaths, including the UN Special Envoy to Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello.

The UNAMI offices will remain at Amman, in Jordan, until an improvement in security conditions in Iraq. The UN

humanitarian programmes will continue with local staff.

• **A MEDIA LYNCHING CAMPAIGN AND SHARP CRITICISMS FROM THE TURKISH ARMY FOLLOW THE VISIT BY THE MAYOR OF DIYARBEKIR TO THE FAMILIES OF VICTIMS KILLED DURING A CLASH WITH THE ARMY.** Osman Baydemir, Mayor of Diyarbakir, is at the centre of a controversy since he went, on 7 August, with other pro-Kurdish mayors, to the family home of an activist of the ex-Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) give his condolences to the family of a Kurdish fighter killed in a clash with the army. This has provoked a sharp reaction in Turkish politico-media circles. The mayor had also visited the family of the policeman killed in the same series of clashes — but the press deliberately ignored this fact.

The Minister of the Interior has sent inspectors to Diyarbakir in the context of an official enquiry that may eventually lead to the dismissal of Mr. Baydemir and his fellow mayors.

On 10 August, the new Commander in Chief of the Army, General Yasar Buyukanit, also took Mr. Baydemir to task, speaking of a *"very ugly and ignoble attitude"*. The next day the Armed Forces Chief of Staff, General Hilmi Ozkok, also attacked Mr. Baydemir, declaring: *"this is an inappropriate attitude. The necessary procedure has been started by the Minister"* (or the Interior).

Series of bombings targets Christians in Iraqi churches

By Somini Sengupta and Ian Fisher

BAGHDAD: Targeting Iraq's Christian minority for the first time, suicide bombers carried out an audacious and carefully coordinated series of attacks near four churches in Baghdad and another in the northern city of Mosul late Sunday afternoon.

In Baghdad, at least 11 people were killed, including 2 children, and 20 were wounded, according to reports from local hospitals. The death toll from Mosul was unclear late Sunday evening.

At least one church, in a lively Christian enclave in the capital, was struck as the priest was giving communion.

"It is a crime," the Reverend Raphael Kutemi said in front of the rectory of the Notre Dame of Deliverance, a Syrian Catholic church. "It is Sunday, and we're in prayer."

Nearby, another car bomb exploded in front of an Armenian Catholic church. Two cars loaded with explosives blew up inside a seminary compound in a south Baghdad neighborhood called Doura. A bomb in a fourth car, apparently on the way to a Catholic church across town in an enclave called New Baghdad, was involved in an accident and blew up in front of a mosque.

Across the capital, the evening sky was laced with plumes of thick black smoke. U.S. military helicopters hovered over the crime scenes. The smell of charred metal lingered in the air after darkness fell.

About the same time, in Mosul, about 350 kilometers, or 220 miles, north of Baghdad, parishioners were leaving a Mass when a car bomb was detonated, The Associated Press reported.

At no point since the U.S. military invasion began last year have Christians, who represent less than 5 percent of Iraq's 24 million citizens, come under fire in such a direct and brazen way.

Since the June 28 transfer of responsibility from the American-led occupation authority to a U.S.-supported interim government, guerrillas have directed their wrath on government representatives, law enforcement officials, foreign workers, translators and anyone else accused of collaborating with the American troops here, now

numbering about 140,000.

At the same time, the U.S. invasion has unleashed Islamist hard-liners, long suppressed by Saddam Hussein's government.

Increasingly, liquor stores and beauty salons, some of them owned by Christians, have been vandalized and forced to shut down. In Baghdad, a militia loyal to Moktada al-Sadr, the radical Shiite cleric, has been blamed for many of those attacks. At the same time, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian operative, has been accused by U.S. officials of assembling a core of Sunni Islamist extremists, some of them from outside Iraq, to foment sectarian violence.

The coordinated strikes on Sunday signaled the apex of the Islamist fundamentalist uprising. It also frightened ordinary Christians and Muslims alike.

"Never, I'm never going to church again on Sunday," said Khawla Yawo Odishah, 50.

As darkness fell, she lingered across the street from the compound of St. Peter Seminary in Doura, where two car bombs exploded, torching several other cars.

Many of her friends would have been

worshiping inside the church Sunday evening, she said. Odishah, a Christian, would have been worshipping at a church next door, but a family medical emergency had kept her away.

Meanwhile, the fate of seven foreign truck drivers taken hostage last week remained uncertain.

Agence France-Presse quoted the Kenyan foreign minister as saying that all seven, including three Kenyans, had been freed.

But neither the Kuwaiti company that employed them nor the Muslim sheik who tried to negotiate for their release could confirm it.

In fact, the sheik, Hisham al-Dulaymi, said in an interview that the hostage-takers had warned him in a letter that they were prepared to behead their captives.

Dulaymi said he would recuse himself from further negotiations.

He also said the hostages' employer, Kuwait Gulf & Link Transport, had refused to furnish what the kidnappers described as compensation money for those killed in clashes with American troops in the western insurgency hotbed of Falluja.

He refused to specify how much the kidnappers demanded, but it was a window nonetheless into the less-than-ideological imperatives driving the hostage-taking.

One of two Lebanese hostages were rescued Sunday by Iraqi soldiers on a raid, but the second remained in captivity.

The New York Times

James Glanz contributed reporting to this article.



Elizabeth Dailie/The Associated Press

A huge plume of smoke over central Baghdad on Sunday. Blasts in the capital and Mosul were directed at the country's Christian minority, and five churches were hit.

le nouvel
Observateur

du 5 au 11 août 2004

Faut-il donner la parole aux égorgeurs ? Ne risque-t-on pas, en les laissant s'expliquer, de paraître légitimer leurs dérives criminelles ? Depuis que l'horreur existe et qu'il y a des hommes pour s'en faire les acteurs, la question se pose chaque fois que surgit l'intolérable. Comme de même s'impose la réponse. L'horreur ne fait pas partie des catastrophes naturelles. Des êtres humains en sont les agents et il faut les connaître. Il faut savoir qui ils sont, ce qui les motive, ce qui les fanatise. Et rien n'est plus dangereux que le silence, qui n'a jamais empêché le venin de se répandre.

N. O.

« C'est nous qui les avons décapités »

Irak LES TUEURS D'OTAGES PARLENT

Depuis la fin du siège de Fallouja, le 29 avril, et le retrait de l'armée américaine, remplacée par la « nouvelle » armée irakienne, cette ville de l'incontrôlable triangle sunnite est devenue le quartier général de la lutte contre l'« envahisseur américain ». C'est ici que sont imaginés, organisés, coordonnés enlèvements et attentats. Ici que sont détenus certains des otages. Ici que plusieurs d'entre eux ont été égorgés. C'est aussi à Fallouja et dans ses environs que sont préparées les opérations suicides qui sèment la mort, la terreur et la destruction dans les villes irakiennes. Cet « émirat wahhabite », bastion du djihad irakien, a un maître, Abou Rachid, l'un des responsables du mouvement Unification et Guerre sainte. Cet homme, qui revendique la décapitation de plusieurs otages, a reçu notre envoyée spéciale, Sara Daniel

Che-Polara / Cadenine

« **J**e suis responsable de la décapitation de l'agent américain Nicolas Berg, du Coréen Kim Sun-il et des Irakiens espions à la solde de l'ennemi américain. » L'homme qui se tient face à moi dans sa dishdasha blanche a 30 ans, une courte barbe noire et l'air fermé. Devant ma consternation à l'évocation de ces faits d'armes, Abou Rachid se met à rire : « Regardez deux fois de suite le disque de la décapitation de Berg que je vous ai donné et vous verrez, vous allez vous habituer », conseille-t-il, avant de me proposer d'as-



sister à la prochaine...

Mon interprète et moi sommes à Fallouja, premier territoire « libéré » d'Irak, où les soldats américains n'entrent plus. Ici, une récente fatwa autorise les habitants à tuer les journalistes étrangers sans autre forme de procès. Dans le faubourg al-Jolan, présenté comme le quartier général de ces « combattants étrangers » – les Arabes non-irakiens venus participer à la lutte contre les Américains – qui mettraient aujourd'hui l'Irak à feu et à sang. Il est 5 heures du soir et, dans le petit salon de réception de cette maison épargnée

Abou Rachid, le chef de l'assemblée des moudjahidin de Fallouja (en haut) et, ci-dessus, des membres du groupe Unification et Guerre sainte. Dans quelques minutes, ils décapiteront l'otage américain Nicolas Berg.

par les bombardements américains qui ont repris depuis quelques jours, une quinzaine de chefs de la tendance la plus dure des moudjahidin écoutent avec respect leur chef revendiquer devant une étrangère les exécutions qui ont traumatisé le monde entier.

Des contacts noués depuis le siège de Fallouja en avril m'avaient laissé entrevoir cette rencontre avec Abou Rachid (1), le chef de l'assemblée des moudjahidin locaux. La traversée de la ville dit assez le pouvoir de l'émir qui va nous recevoir chez lui. Il nous a suffi d'être accompagnés par un de ses

lieutenants pour que les combattants et les militaires des barrages qui quadrillent tous les quartiers baissent les yeux sans poser de question en saluant respectueusement celui qui représente l'homme fort du nouvel « émirat wahhabite » d'Irak.

Mais Abou Rachid est beaucoup plus que le premier des moudjahidin d'une ville dont le nom glace le sang des Américains. Devant les chefs de guerre de Fallouja, celui que ses hommes ont surnommé « l'homme d'acier » se présente clairement comme un des émirs de Tawid wal Djihad (Unification et Guerre sainte), le mouvement que les Américains lient à Abou Moussab al-Zarkaoui et à la nébuleuse Al-Qaïda...

Pendant qu'Abou Rachid explique son « devoir de tuer », on se remémore les cris de bête de Nick Berg, l'otage américain, qui agonise pendant que ses bourreaux s'acharnent laborieusement sur son corps recroquevillé : « Vous savez, quand nous décapitons, nous y prenons plaisir », tient à nous faire savoir en anglais l'un des hommes assis à la droite de l'émir. Un murmure de désapprobation. L'atmosphère est glacée. Abou Rachid lui pose la main sur l'épaule et lui ordonne de se taire. Il préfère évoquer devant nous Safia Bint al-Mutailib, cette héroïne de l'islam qui, lors de la bataille de La Mecque contre les juifs, en 627, avait décapité un des hommes venus l'attaquer.

« Nous ne kidnappons pas pour effrayer ceux que nous retenons, corrige-t-il, mais pour exercer des pressions sur les pays qui aident ou s'apprennent à aider les Américains. A quoi pensent-ils, ceux qui viennent dans un pays occupé ? Ils pactisent avec les Etats-Unis au nom de leurs intérêts commerciaux. Mais leurs contrats sont tachés du sang des

Irakiens. Devons-nous nous croiser les bras pendant qu'on nous assassine ? Ce n'est pas une bonne chose que de décapiter. Mais c'est une méthode qui marche. Au cours des combats, les Américains tremblent. Et regardez la juste réaction des Philippines. Grâce à leur attitude, qui nous a permis de libérer notre otage, nous avons pu montrer au monde que nous aussi nous aimions la paix et la clémence... D'ailleurs, j'ai essayé de négocier l'échange de Nick Berg contre des prisonniers. Ce sont les Américains qui ont refusé. Ce sont eux les vrais responsables de sa mort. »

Ancien membre de la garde rapprochée de Saddam Hussein, Abou Rachid abhorre l'ancien dictateur, qui l'a jeté en prison parce qu'il appartenait à un parti islamiste. Lorsqu'il en est sorti, Abou Rachid a essayé de gagner l'Afghanistan pour se battre contre les Américains. Trop tard. La déroute des talibans l'a surpris à la frontière iranienne. Mais, de l'histoire des combattants musulmans en Afghanistan, il dit avoir tiré des leçons : « Nous avons compris que la division serait notre perte. C'est pour cela que nous avons créé ce conseil des moudjahidin. »

Au sein de ce conseil de treize chefs de combattants, on répartit les tâches entre les différents groupes. Certains s'occupent de surveiller l'ennemi, d'autres du soutien logistique.



Dans la nouvelle hiérarchie de l'émirat moudjahid, l'imam Al-Jalabi est le leader politique et religieux. Il est présenté comme le « cheikh Yassine » irakien.

Quelques-uns coupent les lignes des Américains, tirent sur les convois. D'autres encore prennent en charge les kidnappings. Au chef revient une tâche supplémentaire : exécuter les faux combattants qui se servent de leurs armes pour terroriser et détrousser la population de Fallouja. A écouter Abou Rachid, c'est la fin du siège de Fallouja, le 29 avril 2004, qui a fédéré tous les groupuscules de combattants dans ce qui est devenu la capitale de la résistance à « l'envahisseur américain ». « Depuis le siège, pour la communauté des musulmans, la haine que les Américains vouent à Fallouja est devenue le symbole de leur haine de l'islam », résume

le salafiste. Depuis, c'est ici qu'on centralise les négociations sur les kidnappings, qu'on organise des attentats dans tout le pays. Le prochain objectif, c'est d'intensifier les attaques simultanées « pour montrer notre union et notre force ».

Deux chefs de groupe de combattants, l'un de Hoseiba, à la frontière syrienne, et l'autre de Haditha, à 250 kilomètres à l'ouest de Bagdad, arrivent justement dans la salle. Ils embrassent l'émir avec respect, entrechoquent leurs épaules à la manière bedouine. Et conviennent d'un rendez-vous de « travail ».

Rien n'exaspère plus les moudjahidin irakiens salafistes que le fait de leur demander si les combattants étrangers, ceux qu'ils appellent « les Arabes », ont pris le contrôle de la lutte. « C'est un mensonge des Américains, nous répond, cinglant, Abou Rachid. C'est nous, les Irakiens, qui sommes aux commandes de notre ville et qui planifions la résistance dans le pays. Les combattants "arabes" sont venus nous aider. Pour tous les musulmans, Fallouja est devenu un symbole. Le point de départ de la reconquête. Alors, oui, nous les accueillons, pourquoi pas ? Les Américains ont bien des alliés, eux. – Pourtant, dans le DVD des opérations de Tawid wa Djihad (Unification et Guerre sainte) que vous nous avez fait parvenir à plusieurs journalistes et à moi-même il y a quelques semaines à Bagdad, la plupart des attentats suicides filmés ont été réalisés par ces "combattants étrangers"... – Oui, car devenir shahid, c'est l'acte de foi suprême. Les Irakiens n'ont pas encore atteint ce degré de ferveur. Mais, petit à petit, ils commencent à imiter leurs frères "arabes"... » L'émir est désolé de reconnaître que les supplétifs arabes ont encore des leçons de foi à donner à ses compatriotes...

« Et Abou Moussab al-Zarkaoui, le lieutenant jordanien de Ben Laden, est-ce lui qui planifie tous les attentats, comme le pensent les Américains ? – A Fallouja, il n'y a pas de Zarkaoui. Ailleurs ? Je ne veux pas vous mentir, alors je vous répondrai qu'il est peut-être quelque part en Irak. Mais le plus important, c'est qu'aujourd'hui,



Partout en Irak, les militaires américains sont en possession des portraits d'Abou Moussab al-Zarkaoui. Le lieutenant d'Al-Qaïda à qui sont attribués les dizaines d'attentats perpétrés dans le pays est désigné comme l'ennemi public n° 1.

à Fallouja, nous sommes tous des Zarkaoui. Et que les Irakiens sont tous des Ben Laden. – Et quand cesserez-vous le combat ? – Lorsque l'occupation cessera et que la loi islamique sera instaurée en Irak. Jusque-là, aucun pays musulman dans le monde ne connaîtra la paix. »

Avant de nous raccompagner, Abou Rachid tient à nous donner solennellement un message destiné à Jacques Chirac et à George Bush (voir encadré). Il nous quitte sur une mise en garde qui se veut bienveillante : « Ne faites rien dans cette ville sans venir me demander l'autorisation avant. »

Ahmed ne fait pas partie du groupe Unification et Guerre sainte. Mais il donne parfois un coup de main au groupe Zarkaoui pour la logistique. Comme ce jour de janvier 2004 où il est allé chercher le corps d'un des « martyrs » saoudiens qui venaient de se faire exploser au niveau du pont de Khaldiya (voir ci-contre). Il envie beaucoup ceux qui ont le courage de de-

« A Fallouja, nous sommes tous des Zarkaoui. Et les Irakiens sont tous des Ben Laden. »

venir des « martyrs ». « Moi aussi, lorsque je n'aurai plus d'armes, j'irai me faire sauter », affirme-t-il.

D'une extrême maigreur, le visage mangé par une longue barbe noire, Ahmed a l'air fatigué par la chaleur implacable de juillet. Pas de ventilateurs. Pas d'eau fraîche. A Fallouja, depuis le siège d'avril, il n'y a que deux ou trois heures d'électricité par jour. Il nous raconte les tours de garde contre le « diable américain », la chasse aux espions, qui à l'écouter sont nombreux dans la ville. « Quand Napoléon est arrivé en Egypte, il était accompagné d'experts comme Champollion. Pourquoi les Américains n'ont-ils pas fait la même chose ? Ils ont préféré s'en remettre à des Irakiens collabos qui peuvent nous espionner. » Comme cette fausse mendiante, qui allait de porte en porte pour « marquer » les maisons des combattants : « Nous avons dû la décapiter et la démembrer pour faire un exemple. »

Au pied du canapé, on bute sur des armes russes, des vieilles kalachnikov. « Ce sont les jouets des enfants, sourit Ahmed, condescendant. Ici dès l'enfance on sait tirer. C'est le cadeau que nous a fait Saddam sans le savoir. En nous entraînant tous dès notre plus jeune âge dans des camps d'entraînement. » Comme pour illustrer les paroles de son père, l'un de ses fils, 7 ans, arme la mitraillette avec une grande habileté. Pendant la bataille d'avril, il a bien aidé, en faisant le guet, en transportant des messages. Sa

Le parcours d'un kamikaze

Préparation d'un attentat suicide, à Khaldiya, à 70 km à l'ouest de Bagdad. Ces documents ont été remis aux journalistes par le « service média » d'Unification et Guerre sainte



1. Des moudjahidin masqués disent adieu au Saoudien Abou Arith Rahman al-Doceri, qui va conduire le véhicule chargé d'explosifs.



2. Pour encourager le futur martyr, les moudjahidi chantent une chanson nuptiale à Abou Arith.



3. « A mon père, à ma mère. A ma femme et à mes frères » : Abou Arith dédie son acte à ses proches.



4. Le camion est chargé de 3,5 tonnes d'explosifs, comme lors de l'attentat contre le siège de l'ONU à Bagdad.



5. Abou Arith a pris place au volant : « Nous ne pouvons plus continuer à vivre, parce que nos frères et nos sœurs sont assassinés à Abou Ghraïb. »



6. A côté du siège du conducteur, « un simple bout de papier » : « un simple bout de papier grâce auquel le nom de Dieu résonnera haut... ».



7. Après avoir forcé un checkpoint, le camion explose devant une base américaine.



8. Selon son compagnon de combat, le corps d'Abou Arith, « presque intact malgré l'explosion, exhalait une odeur d'encens... ».

mère, le visage couvert d'un long voile blanc, le regarde avec fierté. Depuis les révélations sur les tortures dans la prison américaine d'Abou Ghraib, elle aussi présente les décapitations d'otages comme une juste vengeance : « Un de mes oncles a passé plus d'un an à Abou Ghraib. Nous ne saurons jamais s'il a été torturé ou violé. Il préférerait mourir plutôt que de nous le dire. »

Nous nous engouffrons tous dans la voiture de Mazen, le lieutenant d'Abou Rachid. Sa radio diffuse les mélodies d'une prière chantée, seule musique désormais autorisée à Fallouja. Sculpteur, Mazen a 35 ans, et le visage rond d'un enfant. Mais son regard fermé et dur contredit la douceur de ses traits. Avec fierté, il nous guide à travers sa cité, contrôlée désormais par son groupe. Sur son passage, la révérence se lit sur les visages. Les soldats irakiens s'empressent pour répondre à ses questions. On a l'impression d'être dans la voiture du gouverneur de la ville.

Fallouja, « émirat wahhabite » d'Irak... Entre deux bombardements américains, la ville vit à l'heure islamique. Et de l'islam le plus rigoriste. Car pendant le siège les locaux du Parti islamique, jugé trop prompt à vouloir négocier un cessez-le-feu avec les Américains, ont été bombardés par ces moudjahidin qui tiennent aujourd'hui le haut du pavé à Fallouja. Sur les murs poussiéreux, les « décrets d'Allah qui a autorisé la victoire » sont placardés un peu partout : interdiction de boire de l'alcool, de se maquiller, de se couper les cheveux à l'occidentale, invitation à dénoncer les étrangers... Dans les rues, les rares femmes que l'on croise ont le visage recouvert d'un voile de crêpe noir et les mains gantées. Quelques habitants vivent encore dans des tentes devant leurs maisons détruites. D'autres, qui ont reçu des compensations des Américains, reconstruisent les leur. La vie reprend, mais sous haute surveillance. Les moudjahidin sont omniprésents. Et obéis. Même par les « soldats » du nouveau pouvoir irakien, qui devaient en principe, sous le commandement du général Mohamed Latif, assurer avec la police et la garde nationale la sé-



Ahmed donne parfois un coup de main au « groupe Zarkaoui » pour la logistique. On le voit ici en opération contre les Américains à Fallouja en mai dernier. « Moi aussi quand je n'aurai plus d'armes, j'irai me faire sauter », affirme-t-il.

curité de la ville la plus dangereuse d'Irak.

Durant notre « promenade » à travers la ville, tout montre en effet que les moudjahidin ont supplanté les généraux baassistes grâce à qui les Américains avaient pensé pouvoir contrôler l'épicentre de la résistance. A chaque carrefour, les militaires irakiens et les policiers sont flanqués de moudjahidin, qui visiblement les supervisent. « Ils doivent nous demander la

permission pour arrêter la moindre personne, confirme Mazen, qui reconnaît que les combattants attendent un moment propice pour se débarrasser de ces militaires. Mais regardez comme la ville est sûre depuis que nous sommes là. Avant, chaque commerçant dépensait par jour 2 000 dinars irakiens en gardes du corps. Aujourd'hui, nous pouvons laisser nos portes ouvertes. Certains essaient de faire passer les combattants pour des racketteurs qui effraient les habitants, mais ce n'est pas vrai. Et ceux qui se comportent mal, nous les exécutons. »

Il règne une drôle d'atmosphère dans les rues de Fallouja, où l'on compte plus d'hommes en armes, d'uniformes, d'informateurs des différents groupes de combattants que de simples citoyens sur les trottoirs. Tout le monde s'épie. A l'approche du petit pont en fer de la ville où, il y a deux mois à peine, je me rappelle avoir vu, en compagnie du photographe Stanley Greene, les corps carbonisés de gardes privés américains malmenés à coups de pied et de couteau par la foule, deux soldats irakiens de la garde nationale, leur beret rouge enfoncé sur les yeux, se tiennent pétrifiés. Ils regardent avec inquiétude deux pick-up blancs armés de mitrailleuses qui passent à toute allure. A leur bord, des moudjahidin brandissent leurs armes. « Ici, c'était le triangle des Bermudes, sourit fièrement Mazen en évoquant la dernière bataille. Les soldats américains n'étaient pas prêts à perdre leur vie pour gagner Fallouja. Et nous, nous aimons la vie autant qu'ils aiment la mort. »

Car le siège de Fallouja, en avril, est pour les

Le message à Jacques Chirac et George Bush

Au cours de son entretien avec notre envoyée spéciale, Abou Rachid lui a dicté un message destiné aux présidents français et américain ainsi qu'aux Nations unies. En voici le texte

« **R**appelez-le bien à votre président Jacques Chirac et à George Bush – et écrivez bien chaque mot : nous kidnapperons tous les ressortissants des nations alliées des Etats-Unis et du gouvernement impie d'Iyad Allawi. Nous décapiterons les ressortissants des nations qui refusent de reconsidérer leur soutien à nos ennemis. Qui aide notre ennemi devient notre ennemi à son tour. Les Vietnamiens aussi ont coupé des têtes pendant la guerre avec les Etats-Unis. Vous ne pourrez plus dire désormais que nous ne vous avions pas prévenus. Ce message s'adresse aussi à l'ONU et à toutes les nations qui envisagent d'envoyer une armée pour des opérations de maintien de la paix en Irak. »

salafistes irakiens ce que le 11 septembre a été pour Ben Laden : leur première grande victoire sur l'ennemi américain. Mazen, qui a participé aux négociations avec l'état-major de la coalition, explique avec délectation comment les Américains ont cédé sur presque tout et Fallouja sur rien. « Nous n'avons pas livré les responsables de la mort des quatre espions américains. Ni rendu nos armes. Ils ont dû retirer leurs troupes. Compenser les deux tiers des familles et quitter leur QG de l'hôpital. Ils ne nous ont demandé qu'une seule chose : les laisser gagner la bataille des médias. Alors ils ont filmé leur entrée dans la ville. Mais sur des Humvee et non pas sur des chars, comme ils nous l'avaient demandé... »

Aux portes de la mosquée, S., le lieutenant du mouvement Unification et Guerre sainte, nous conduit chez l'imam al-Janabi. En cinq minutes, il nous obtient un entretien avec le religieux le plus célèbre et le plus controversé de la ville. La personnification du *bad guy* pour les Américains. Dans la nouvelle hiérarchie de l'émirat moudjahid, l'homme qu'on nous présente comme le « cheikh Yassine » irakien est le leader politique et religieux tandis qu'Abou Rachid est le leader militaire. L'imam al-Janabi est beaucoup plus jeune que le défunt guide du Hamas palestinien, mais il a la même barbe poivre et sel, son profil d'aigle et son inquiétante sérénité. Les habitants de la ville le présentent comme le chef de ces *takfiri*, les combattants les plus extrémistes, étrangers ou irakiens liés à des organisations arabes étrangères. Il s'amuse du fait que la dernière lettre adressée par l'ex-administrateur américain Paul Bremer au Premier ministre Iyad Allaoui ait eu pour objet sa demande d'arrestation « mort ou vif ».

« Avez-vous peur des Américains ? – Dans cette vie, nous ne sommes que des locataires et j'aspire à voir ma dernière demeure », répond le docteur en charia. Certains accusent le cheikh Janabi d'être responsable de l'assassinat de six camionneurs chiites de Bagdad, dont les corps mutilés ont été rendus à leurs familles moyennant un « impôt moudjahidin ». Mais l'imam refuse d'endosser la responsabilité de ces assassinats, qui ont créé de graves tensions entre les communautés chiite et sunnite : « Nous exécutons des espions tout le temps, alors je vous le dirais si j'avais tué aussi ceux-là... »

Sous la dictature de Saddam, l'imam sulfureux a été interdit de prêcher pendant sept ans.



A Fallouja, le 31 mars 2004 des gardes privés américains sont victimes d'une embuscade. Ils sont frappés à coups de pied et de couteau par la foule avant d'être brûlés. Ces événements dramatiques seront à l'origine de l'offensive américaine sur Fallouja.

« Je disais ce que je pensais de lui. Comme je dis aujourd'hui ce que je pense du Premier ministre Allaoui : il ne vaut pas la semelle de mes chaussures. S'il avait été un "Irakien", il aurait ouvert une autre page à Fallouja. Mais non. Il incite les Américains à lancer leurs raids qui tuent nos femmes et nos enfants. »

Selon le cheikh Janabi, si les Américains ont envahi l'Irak, c'est uniquement pour pouvoir lancer leur « croisade » contre Fallouja, la ville la plus islamisée d'Irak... « Ici même, ils ont détruit la porte de la mosquée avec de la dynamite, laissé les empreintes de leurs chaussures sur le Coran et regardé nos femmes à la jumelle, ce qui, pour nous, est pire que la mort. » Et le cheikh décrit le long calvaire des habitants de sa ville, jusqu'à la

« sainte bataille de Fallouja » : « C'est alors que des anges à cheval sont descendus du ciel, tandis que les armes ont continué à tirer pendant des heures sans qu'on les recharge, et que des araignées qui dégagent une odeur nauséabonde s'attaquaient aux soldats américains, surtout à ceux qui utilisaient leurs jumelles maudites... »

Tandis que l'imam façonne l'épopée du mythe fondateur de Fallouja, première victoire du djihad en Irak, une quarantaine de combattants font irruption dans la cour de la mosquée en criant. Ils transportent quatre corps sanguinolents, atrocement mutilés, qu'ils déposent dans des draps blancs à la porte de l'imam. Bientôt, le linge est gorgé de sang. Mazen sort pour prévenir Abou Rachid. Il revient bouleversé et tremblant de colère. Selon lui, les quatre combattants ont été abattus par des Américains, qui ont ensuite égorgé les corps et découpé leurs mains. L'imam Janabi, lui, n'a pas jeté un regard dans la cour. Il rappelle, satisfait, qu'il avait annoncé dans un prêche en 1996 que le peuple d'Irak sortirait de sa léthargie lorsque les Etats-Unis envahiraient le pays.

« Ce jour est arrivé, il marque le début du déclin de l'empire américain, qui va se déchirer plus durablement encore que l'Irak d'aujourd'hui. C'est la justice d'Allah qui arrive sur la terre. Et qui terrasse les dictateurs. Saddam puis Bush et les Américains. En Irak, aux Etats-Unis et où qu'ils soient dans le monde, ils seront pourchassés et détruits. »

SARA DANIEL

Le meurtrier de Vieira de Mello

Selon le mouvement *Tawid wal Djihad*, le kamikaze qui se serait fait exploser devant le siège de l'ONU à Bagdad, le 19 août 2003, serait un Egyptien, Abou Farid al-Masri. Joueur de hockey dans une équipe italienne, al-Masri a eu « des visions » qui l'ont conduit à rentrer en Egypte pour tuer des coptes. Après quoi il a rejoint l'Irak, où il s'est suicidé en déclenchant l'explosion de 3,5 tonnes de TNT cachées à bord du camion qu'il conduisait, dans le but avoué de tuer l'envoyé spécial de l'ONU, Sergio Vieira de Mello. Vingt-deux autres personnes ont trouvé la mort dans cet attentat.



(1) Tous les noms de moudjahidin ont été changés.

La communauté chrétienne en Irak a été frappée par plusieurs attentats en l'espace d'une heure

BAGDAD

de notre envoyé spécial

Après les chiites et les Kurdes, qui ont subi de nombreuses attaques terroristes particulièrement meurtrières depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein, une vague d'attentats parfaitement coordonnés et sans précédent a frappé, dimanche 1^{er} août, la communauté chrétienne d'Irak, faisant une dizaine de morts et plus de 50 blessés, dont beaucoup sont grièvement brûlés. Une demi-douzaine de véhicules bourrés d'explosifs – quatre à Bagdad, un à Mossoul et le quatrième à Kirkouk dans le nord du pays – avaient été placés devant des églises, ou des institutions chrétiennes comme le couvent d'Al-Dora, à la périphérie sud de la capitale. Ils avaient été réglés pour exploser, en l'espace d'environ une heure, lors de l'office religieux du soir dans les trois villes.

Devant l'église syriaque du quartier commerçant huppé de Karrada, au centre de la capitale, l'explosion a laissé un cratère de près de trois mètres de profondeur sur la chaussée. Le puissant souffle de celle qui s'est produite dans la cour du couvent-séminaire d'Al-Dora a retourné une dizaine de véhicules, qui se sont enflammés. Il ne fait aucun doute que les auteurs de ces attentats voulaient faire le plus grand nombre possible de victimes. Hagar, le front trempé de sueur et le regard affolé, un jeune prêtre barbu en soutane hurlait sa douleur à Karrada dans le vacarme assourdissant des sirènes des ambulances, des voitures de pompiers et des véhicules de la police, dont les agents tiraient des coups de feu en l'air pour écarter la foule des importuns. « Pour quoi nous ? Pourquoi nous ? », hurlait le jeune prêtre en pleurs.

« SI PEU NOMBREUX »

Pourquoi, en effet ? Majoritairement opposés à la guerre américaine – comme le fut sans ambiguïté le pape Jean Paul II en 2003 –, les chrétiens d'Irak, qui bénéficiaient sous le régime précédent d'une relative sécurité et d'une totale liberté de culte – qui permettaient à la dictature de soigner son image à l'étranger – ont longtemps pensé que leur petit nombre – moins de 3 % de la population irakienne – leur assurait au moins une sorte de protection vis-à-vis des poseurs de bombes, qui cherchent visiblement à déclencher, jusqu'à présent sans succès, une véritable guerre civile entre communautés ethniques et religieuses.

« S'en prendre aux chrétiens ne leur apporterait rien, confiait ré-

cemment un haut dignitaire assyrien. *Nous sommes si peu nombreux et si faibles.* » Ce que les chrétiens craignaient et craignent encore aujourd'hui, c'est la montée du fondamentalisme musulman, voire la prise du pouvoir par certains ayatollahs de la majorité chiite, qui menacent d'imposer une version dure et rétrograde de la charia, la loi musulmane, à l'ensemble du pays. « *Auquel cas, nous devons tous partir* », ajoutait le dignitaire. Beaucoup n'ont d'ailleurs pas attendu que les choses se dégra-

dent à ce point, puisque sur les 1,4 million de « *Nazaréens* », comme les appellent les intégristes, recensés en 1987, il en resterait moins de 750 000. Les deux tiers vivent à Bagdad, près de 150 000 dans le nord du pays – Mossoul, Kirkouk et le Kurdistan autonome – et quelque 100 000 dans la grande ville chiite du sud, Bassora, épargnée par la vague d'attentats de dimanche.

Il existe toutefois une distance entre les faits et la perception qui en est faite. Sans parler du formidable écho médiatique internatio-

nal d'une attaque contre les chrétiens, les divers groupes rebelles qui posent des bombes ou enlèvent des étrangers pratiquement tous les jours veulent surtout provoquer le départ de tous les étrangers et de toutes les entreprises non irakiennes qui assurent la logistique de l'occupant et de ses supplétifs irakiens. Nul ici n'a oublié que le président George W. Bush, à la veille de l'invasion, a malencontreusement parlé d'une « *croisade contre le Mal* », et si certaines des maigres troupes étrangères qui forment « la coalition » ne sont pas chrétiennes – Mongols, Japonais, Thaïlandais, Albanais, etc. –, la plupart des 160 000 occupants en uniforme le sont. Pour ceux des islamistes purs et durs qui rêvent de transformer l'affron-

tement en cours avec l'Amérique impériale en une véritable guerre de religions, le bénéfice qui peut être tiré d'une attaque antichrétienne de grande ampleur est sans doute apparu irrésistible.

BOUTIQUES INCENDIÉES

Populairement perçus, souvent à

Devant l'une des églises de Bagdad ayant été visées, dimanche 1^{er} août lors des vêpres, par des attaques à la voiture piégée. Les attentats ont fait une dizaine de morts, plus de 50 blessés, et provoqué des scènes de panique parmi les fidèles.



ATEF HASSAN/REUTERS

Un choc pour le Vatican et les Eglises d'Orient

« C'est terrible et très préoccupant », a déclaré le Père Ciro Benedetti, porte-parole adjoint du pape, dimanche 1^{er} août, après les attaques contre des églises en Irak. « C'est la première fois que des chrétiens sont pris pour cible », a-t-il ajouté, et il faut y voir « le signe d'une volonté d'accroître la tension, alors que l'Eglise catholique a toujours été en première ligne pour la paix ». Les responsables chrétiens du Moyen-Orient, membres du Conseil œcuménique des Eglises (Genève), réunis à Kuala Lumpur (Malaisie), ont aussi condamné ces attentats. C'est le cas notamment des dirigeants des Eglises arménienne et syrienne, endeuillées dimanche en Irak. Mgr Nareg Alemizian a lancé un appel à la coopération entre musulmans et chrétiens pour la solidarité et la paix. Pour le Syrien Gregorios Ibrahim, « le nombre des chrétiens qui diminue en Irak est une chose terrible. C'est la réplique de ce qui se passe déjà en Turquie, en Iran, en Palestine. Nous perdons notre peuple ».

tort, comme une communauté prospère liée aux pays occidentaux, où la plupart de leurs coreligionnaires qui ont quitté l'Irak depuis une quinzaine d'années se sont exilés, les chrétiens d'Irak ont également le tort, aux yeux des intégristes musulmans, de posséder la plupart des magasins d'alcool du pays. Plusieurs centaines de ces échoppes, généralement situées dans les beaux quartiers commerçants des grandes villes, ont été incendiées ces quinze derniers mois et leurs propriétaires malmenés, blessés, voire, dans certains cas, assassinés. De nombreux salons de coiffure ou de soins esthétiques pour dames aisées, de même que des boutiques de dessous « branchés », anathèmes pour les obscurantistes de la « modestie islamique » obligatoire, ont subi le même sort.

Avant la vague d'attentats de ce dimanche, les institutions chrétiennes avaient recensé la mort de 102 chrétiens, dont 90 % ont été assassinés, depuis la chute du régime baasiste le 9 avril 2003. Il faudra désormais ajouter à ce bilan toutes les victimes des vêpres sanglantes de ce 1^{er} août 2004.

Patrice Claude

Le Monde

3 AOÛT 2004

Radical cleric calls for uprising in Iraq

2-month truce seems to be crumbling

By Alex Berenson

BAGHDAD: The radical Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr called Thursday for a national uprising against American and coalition forces as a two-month truce between Sadr and the United States military appeared to collapse.

As night fell, heavy fighting appeared to be confined mainly around Najaf, a Shiite holy city 160 kilometers, or 100 miles, south of Baghdad that is a stronghold for Sadr.

In Baghdad, the capital, and Basra, the largest city in southern Iraq, insurgents loyal to Sadr prepared for clashes with American and British troops. But fighting was sporadic and Baghdad was mostly quiet until 11:15 p.m., when three large explosions, probably from mortars, rocked the city's center.

One American soldier and several insurgents were killed in Najaf, according to an American military statement. At least a dozen more soldiers and dozens of insurgents were wounded in both Baghdad and Najaf, though exact casualty counts were unavailable late Thursday evening.

Sadr's call is the most serious challenge yet to the interim Iraqi government, whose head, Ayad Allawi, has struggled to assert his authority since being named prime minister in June. Unlike moderate Shiite political leaders such as Allawi, Sadr fiercely opposes the continuing American presence here and has tried twice since October to revolt against it.

Allawi is eager to show his indepen-

dence from the United States and to prove that Iraqi security forces can stop the escalating violence here. But Thursday's clashes showed again that only American troops have the firepower to contain Sadr's guerrilla fighters,

called the Mahdi Army, a well-armed militia that has fighters across the southern half of Iraq.

During the afternoon, American jets swooped over Baghdad and appeared to drop several bombs on Sadr City, a giant Shiite slum in northeast Baghdad. A military spokesman would not comment on whether bombs had been dropped.

An American Marine helicopter was shot down in Najaf on Thursday morning, although the crew was rescued, according to a military statement.

A spokesman for Allawi declined to comment on the fighting, which began at the central police station in Najaf early Thursday morning and spread after Sadr called on his followers to revolt. "Fight the blasphemous, fight the Americans," Sadr said in a statement issued from Najaf.

Each side blamed the other for the apparent breakdown of the truce, which comes less than two weeks before a national political conference that Sadr has said he will not attend. So far, it is uncertain whether Sadr's newest call for rebellion will provoke months of clashes nationwide, as it did in April, or quickly fizzle out, as it did last October.

There are no reliable estimates of the exact size of the Mahdi Army, but Sadr can unquestionably bring thousands of

armed men into the streets.

In Sadr City, masked Mahdi Army guerrillas controlled intersections and checked cars. Iraqi police officers and American soldiers remained outside the area for most of the day. Iraqi police reported several fires in Sadr City during the late afternoon, and a U.S. military spokesman told The Associated Press that seven soldiers had been wounded in two fires in the area.

The truce between Sadr and the military has been unraveling for days. It first frayed on Sunday, when the police arrested a representative of Sadr in Karbala, near Najaf. On Monday, marines and Mahdi insurgents battled near a maternity hospital in Najaf, and several rebels died.

On Tuesday, American troops approached Sadr's house in Najaf, according to Salama al-Khafaji, a spokeswoman for a government-appointed council that mediates between Sadr and American authorities. Fighting intensified Wednesday night, when troops again approached Sadr's house, Khafaji said.

"The Americans escalated the whole situation by coming back with their armored vehicles and trespassing," Khafaji said.

But the American military blamed Sadr for the breakdown in the truce.

Marines were sent to Najaf's main police station at 3 a.m., after Sadr's forces attacked the station with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades, according to a U.S. military statement. The Iraqi police and national guard troops defended the station, and the marines did not fire shots or take any casualties, according to the statement.

"The attack is an overt violation of the cease-fire agreement reached in June between coalition forces and Moktada Sadr," the statement said.

In addition, Mahdi Army insurgents have recently kidnapped six Iraqi police officers in Najaf, according to the statement. Five have been released, but one remains captive, it said.

The New York Times



Members of Moktada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army militia fighting U.S. troops Thursday in Sadr City, a predominantly Shiite slum neighborhood in northeast Baghdad.

International Herald Tribune
Friday, August 6, 2004

Dealing with Iran

Policy toward Iran, which said over the weekend it had resumed building nuclear centrifuges, will be a crucial task for the next American president. The soundest approach will avoid the extremes of forceful regime change or abject appeasement. The president will need to find pragmatic yet principled ways of dealing with a clerical regime that is despised by most Iranians but is capable of causing enormous grief before it goes the way of other aggressive dictatorships.

The Bush administration's stance toward Tehran has fluctuated, with periods of dialogue and cooperation interrupted by confrontation over Iran's nuclear program, its involvement in terrorism, and its flagrant meddling in postwar Iraq. This drift cannot go on. The stakes are too high not only for Washington and Tehran but also for the Gulf region, Central Asia and the larger Middle East.

The difficulty of dealing with the

regime in Tehran is illustrated by the recent disclosure that eight of the Sept. 11 hijackers were allowed to enter Iran from Afghanistan without an Iranian entry stamp recorded in their passports, although the acting CIA director, John McLaughlin, said, "We have no evidence that there is some sort of official sanction by the government of Iran for this activity."

Though it is unlikely Iranian officials knew what the Al Qaeda operatives were going to do, U.S. intelligence suspects that Tehran colluded with Al Qaeda in the 1996 Khobar Towers attack in Saudi Arabia and has sheltered Qaeda figures.

One answer to the question of how to deal with Iran comes from a report by an independent task force of the Council on Foreign Relations. Since the ruling mullahs are "solidly entrenched and the country is not on the brink of a revolutionary upheaval," the report argues, Washington should explore a "limited or selective

engagement" with Tehran.

The report draws upon unofficial talks between task force members and Iranians. It reflects the judgment of Iran specialists, retired diplomats and senior government officials. They propose eschewing any "grand bargain," seeking instead a "compartmentalized" dialogue that could lead to cooperation in Afghanistan and Iraq. They also would give Iran access to fuel for peaceful nuclear energy if the regime ceases its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

This view, reflecting an establishment drive to have U.S. energy companies and aircraft manufacturers do business once again in Iran, glosses over the regime's record of broken agreements on nuclear matters, interference in Iraq and support of terrorism.

Even if only limited deals are to be pursued with Tehran, they will be futile unless the regime there truly changes its ways and keeps its end of such bargains.

— The Boston Globe

U.S. unease grows as Iraqi chaos bolsters Iranian position

By Farah Stockman

WASHINGTON: Before the U.S. military marched to Baghdad to take out Saddam Hussein's regime, Iraqi and Iranian exiles warned the U.S. government of an unintended consequence the coming war in Iraq could bring: the rise of Iran.

They argued that the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan had already eliminated Iran's enemy to the east, the Taliban, whose brand of Islam was hostile to Iran's Shiite faith. A second U.S.-led war in Iraq would eliminate Iran's enemy to the west, Saddam, who previously had initiated a bitter, eight-year war against Iran.

Now, true to those predictions, Iran — a country President George W. Bush once declared a member of the "axis of evil," along with North Korea and Iraq — is exerting unprecedented influence in the Middle East, defying the international community over its nuclear program and providing funding and personnel for Shiite political parties in Iraq.

Despite the warnings, some U.S. officials involved in formulating Iraq policy now count the failure to limit Iranian influence as one of the major deficiencies of postwar planning in Iraq.

"Iran has the potential of playing a helpful role in Iraq, but we are uneasy about some of the actions that Iran has been taking," particularly in the south-

ern region, Secretary of State Colin Powell told reporters last week in Baghdad.

Concern in Washington and Baghdad is mounting as Iraq's fledgling government takes its first steps toward democracy.

"Iranian intrusion has been vast and unprecedented since the establishment of the Iraqi state," Iraq's new defense minister, Hazim al-Shalaan, told Al-Sharq al-Awsat, a London-based Arabic language newspaper. He accused Iran of sending spies to "shake up" the political landscape in Iraq.

"The Bush administration has to face the reality that Iran is now the regional superpower," said Mohammed Hadi Semati, an Iranian political scientist at

the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington.

Pressure to decide how to deal with Iran's new influence mounted last month when the report from the Sept. 11 commission said that as many as 10 hijackers had been given safe passage through Iran. And Saturday, Iran heightened tension over the nuclear issue by vowing not to give up its uranium enrichment program and confirming that it had resumed building centrifuges for that purpose.

Iran has said its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only and has denied meddling in Iraq's affairs. Recently, Iran tried to foster goodwill with Iraq's new government by offering to host eight-na-

tion talks about protecting Iraq's borders from infiltration by foreign fighters.

But Iranian opposition groups say that offer was made after thousands of mullahs, informants, agents and fighters had already crossed the 1,500-kilometer, or 900-mile, border into Iraq, sometimes under the guise of Shiite pilgrims.

"Members of the Iranian opposition warned repeatedly of the dangers of fundamentalists coming from Iran," said Ali Safavi, a former member of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, an opposition group with strong ties to militants. "In the chaos following the toppling of Saddam Hussein, the border was left unguarded, and tens of thousands entered Iraq."

U.S. officials call the possible election of an Iranian-style theocratic government in Iraq "the nightmare scenario" but say they believe the chances of it are remote. But still, Iran's ties to the new Iraq run deep, and there is little doubt that Iraq's Shiite majority will do well at the polls and maintain close links with its powerful Shiite neighbor.

Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, one of Iraq's most influential Shiite clerics, was born in Iran, although he advocates more separation between religion and politics for Iraq. Millions of Iraqis are de facto dual citizens who took refuge in Iran during Saddam's regime and are now returning to Iraq.

A popular party in Iraq, the Supreme

Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, was formed in Iran in the 1980s during Saddam's persecution of Iraqi Shiites. Abdul Aziz Hakim, head of the party, has received funding from Iran and met several times with Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Some Iran specialists in Washington say the new political realities in the re-

gion will force Iran and the United States to work toward friendlier relations based on newfound common interests, such as stability in Iraq. But Iranian exiles, longtime enemies of Tehran, say the situation can only get worse.

"It is safe to say that the No. 1 beneficiary of the Iraq war unwittingly was the fundamentalist regime in Iran," said

Safavi. "It goes without saying that if, in fact, the Iranian clerics succeed in their plan, the whole region will be in a lot of trouble because you would have not one, but two fundamentalist regimes."

The Boston Globe

Anne Barnard contributed to this report from Baghdad.

Iran envoy is seized by Iraqi rebels

From news reports

BAGHDAD: Militants in Iraq kidnapped an Iranian diplomat Sunday as Iraq's interim prime minister, Ayad Allawi, made an unannounced visit to the war-torn city of Najaf, calling on militants to lay down their weapons after days of fierce clashes with U.S. forces.

The kidnapped Iranian diplomat was identified as Faridoun Jihani, the consul to the Iraqi city of Karbala, according to video shown on the Al-Arabiya television station.

The kidnappers, who called themselves the Islamic Army in Iraq, accused Jihani of having provoked sectarian war in a country deeply divided between the resurgent Shiite Muslim majority and the traditionally dominant Sunni Muslim minority, and they warned Iran that it should not interfere in Iraq's affairs, according to Al-Arabiya.

They did not appear to threaten Jihani and made no demands, according to the report.

Meanwhile, Iraq has issued an arrest warrant for Ahmad Chalabi, a former member of the Governing Council, on counterfeiting charges, Iraq's chief investigating judge said Sunday. (Page 5)

The developments came as Iraqi security forces battled guerrillas loyal to the militant Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr and as Allawi met with Najaf's governor, Adnan al-Zurufi. At least two Iraqi national guardsmen were killed and 13 people were wounded during fighting in the holy Shiite city, witnesses and hospital officials said.

As part of its efforts to put down the 15-month-old insurgency, the government announced Sunday that it was reinstating the death penalty, which had been suspended during the U.S. occupation.

"The tough task in front of us in this country is maintaining security and stability, combating terror and organized crime," Human Rights Minister Bakhtiar Amin said.

"I assure you that none of us in the government are comfortable with reinstating capital punishment."

The Iranian Embassy in Baghdad said Sunday that Jihani, the diplomat, had dropped from sight Wednesday as he was traveling from Baghdad to take up his new post of consul in Karbala.

The video from the Islamic Army in Iraq, which was reported to have killed two Pakistani hostages last month, showed a bearded man wearing a white shirt in front of a black banner bearing the group's name.

"The group also warned Iran against flagrant interference in the affairs of Iraq," said the Dubai-based Al-Arabiya channel said Sunday. It did not mention any threats against the hostage.

Iraqi and U.S. officials are uneasy about attempts by Iran, a predominantly Shiite nation, to gain influence among neighboring Iraq's restive Shiites.

Many Sunni Iraqis are deeply worried about the rising power of the long-suppressed Shiite majority.

Allawi's one-hour visit to Najaf took place under heavy security, with 100 U.S. soldiers, foreign security contractors, Iraqi National Guard troops and Iraqi police officers protecting him and a delegation that included Interior Minister Falah al-Naqib, Defense Minister Hazem Shaalan and the national security adviser, Mowaffak al-Rubaie.

A government deadline for militants to withdraw from Najaf expired Saturday, but gunmen — masked, carrying automatic rifles and rocket launchers, and manning checkpoints in the old city — showed no signs Sunday of pulling out.

Sadr's organization, called the Mahdi Army, also controls the Imam Ali Shrine compound, one of the most revered sites in Shiite Islam, where the remains of Imam Ali, son-in-law and cousin of Islam's prophet, Muhammad, are buried.

"We think that those armed should leave the holy sites as well as leave their weapons and abide by the law," Allawi said.

Fierce fighting between U.S. forces and the Mahdi Army raged in Najaf on Thursday and Friday and sporadic fighting continued Saturday and Sunday.

Allawi denied that the government wanted to arrest Sadr and expressed optimism that the violence would end.

"The situation will be defused soon," he said, before returning to Baghdad.

Allawi's delegation did not meet with Sadr or any of his aides, who remained defiant.

"We are trying to defend our country," said an aide to Sadr in Baghdad. "We are not going to leave Najaf or any other city.

The occupiers are the ones who should leave Najaf and the rest of Iraq."

Six explosions boomed across central Baghdad on Sunday, sending plumes of smoke into the air. One blast hit a truck traveling on a city-center street, setting it ablaze and causing casualties, officials said. The blast, apparently from a rocket or mortar, collapsed part of a wall of a nearby house, and there were bloodstains on the street. Shrapnel also smashed the windows of a nearby car, the seat of which was covered in blood.

The police on the scene said there were casualties but could not say how many.

In the southern city of Amarah, Sadr's militants clashed with the police in a gun battle that killed four Iraqis and wounded 23, the Health Ministry said.

Farther south in Qurnah, 380 kilometers, or 235 miles, southeast of Baghdad, gunmen ambushed a Danish patrol, a Danish military spokesman, Jan Brink, said. The Danes, who have 496 soldiers in Iraq, returned fire and withdrew, suffering no casualties, he said.

Recent clashes have threatened to revive a Shiite uprising that broke out in April and was calmed only in early June by a series of truces. The military says hundreds of militants have been killed in the latest violence, though the militiamen put the number far lower.

Allawi signed an amnesty law for minor criminals on Saturday, intended to persuade some militants to put down their weapons. On Sunday, the government announced the new death penalty, but insisted it would not be used to punish political opponents.

"This is not an open door to execute anyone and everyone, or people whom the government dislikes," Minister of State Adnan al-Janabi said. "This is not Saddam's law."

It was unclear how the new death penalty law would effect Saddam, who is awaiting trial on war crimes charges, or whether the death penalty would apply to people who had committed crimes during its suspension. (Reuters, AP)

International Herald Tribune
Monday, August 9, 2004

IRAK

L'inquiétude des chrétiens d'Orient

Au lendemain des attentats sans précédent contre les chrétiens d'Irak, les appels à l'unité venant des dignitaires religieux comme politiques résonnaient dans tout le pays. Cette vague de violences, qui a touché dimanche cinq églises à Bagdad et à Mossoul, a fait au moins 11 morts et 55 blessés. La minorité chrétienne, qui représente environ 3 % des 24 millions d'Irakiens, n'avait jusqu'alors jamais été la cible d'attaques aussi directes et massives.

Hier, le patriarche chaldéen, Mgr Emmanuel Delly, a appelé les Irakiens « chrétiens et musulmans » à « collaborer pour le bien de l'Irak » car « nous sommes une seule famille ». Cet appel solennel a été transmis au gouvernement intérimaire irakien. De son côté, la figure emblématique des chiïtes, l'ayatollah Ali Sistani, a vivement dénoncé ces attaques qualifiées de « terribles crimes ».

Le chef radical chiïte Moqtada Sadr a, lui aussi, par l'intermédiaire d'un porte-parole, condamné ces attentats, « qui ne visent qu'à créer des dissensions au sein du peuple irakien uni ».

Le conseiller irakien à la Sécurité nationale a pour sa part estimé que les attentats « portent la marque d'Abou Moussab al-Zarqaoui », un terroriste réputé proche d'al-Qaïda. Selon lui, cela vise « à forcer les chrétiens à fuir l'Irak ». Une théorie en partie reprise par le comité des oulémas sunnites qui accuse « des parties étrangères » de chercher « à diviser le peuple irakien ». Mais le comité soupçonne que « le chaos » soit organisé, avant tout, dans « l'intérêt des occupants ». Depuis hier, la rue qui mène à l'établissement et à une église a été bar-

rée par des fils de fer et des gardes armés veillent.

Un site Internet islamiste a attribué à un groupe, jusque-là inconnu et baptisé « Comité de planification et de suivi en Irak », un communiqué revendiquant ces attentats. Il dit avoir agi en représailles contre « la guerre de croisade haineuse » et l'évangélisation pratiquées par les Américains : « Vos frères moudjahidines ont mené des frappes doulou-

reuses aux repaires des Croisés, ces repaires du mal, de la corruption, du vice et de la christianisation (...) », affirme le communiqué. Son authenticité n'a pu être vérifiée. La France, comme la plupart des pays occidentaux, a condamné, hier, « avec la plus grande fermeté » les actes antichrétiens.

Par ailleurs, pour la première fois, un Turc, chauffeur de poids lourd, enlevé en Irak par un groupe

armé, a été exécuté par ses ravisseurs, a annoncé hier le gouvernement turc. Deux autres camionneurs turcs sont toujours retenus en otages et leurs ravisseurs menacent de les exécuter si leur employeur ne se retire pas d'Irak. En conséquence, la principale association de transport routier turque a fait savoir, hier, qu'elle interrompait ses livraisons vers les unités militaires américaines stationnées en Irak.

LE FIGARO

3 AOÛT 2004

Kurds Who Were Forcibly Displaced Await Justice, Arab Settlers Also at Risk

Human Rights Watch (HRW) August 3, 2004

Press Release: (New York) -- In northern Iraq, the authorities' failure to resolve property disputes between returning Kurds and Arab settlers threatens to undermine security in the region, Human Rights Watch said today in a new report. Iraq's interim government urgently needs to implement the judicial means to resolve these disputes, which stem from decades of Arabization policies that uprooted hundreds of thousands of Kurds and other non-Arabs.

The 78-page report, "Claims in Conflict: Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq," documents the increasing frustration of thousands of displaced Kurds, as well as Turkomans and Assyrians, who are living in desperate conditions as they await a resolution of their property claims. Human Rights Watch details how the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority failed to act even as the situation grew more volatile. As well as implementing the judicial means to resolve these claims, the Iraqi interim government must take urgent measures to meet the immediate humanitarian needs of thousands of internally displaced Kurds and other non-Arabs living in dire conditions in and around the northern city of Kirkuk. It should also find durable solutions for Arab families who were in turn forced from their homes after the fall of the former Iraqi government in April 2003.

"If these property disputes are not addressed as a matter of urgency, rising tensions between returning Kurds and Arab settlers could soon explode into open violence," said Sarah Leah Whitson, executive director of Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa

division. "Justice must be done for the victims of what was effectively an ethnic cleansing campaign to permanently alter the ethnic make-up of northern Iraq." The report documents the rising anger of returning displaced Kurds and other ethnic minorities who increasingly feel the only resolution may be for them to take matters into their own hands.

Since April 2003, thousands of internally displaced Kurds, Turkomans and others have returned to Kirkuk and other Arabized regions to reclaim their homes and lands which have since been occupied by Arabs from central and southern Iraq. These returnees were forcibly expelled from their homes by the government of Saddam Hussein during the 1980s and 1990s. "Kurds are flocking back to Kirkuk, but the city has little capacity to absorb them," said Whitson. "They are living in abandoned buildings and tent camps without running water or electricity supplies, and they face precarious security conditions."

At the same time, little effort has gone into finding just and durable solutions for the so-called Arabization Arabs who, in their turn, have become the latest victims of internal displacement. Many such families fled their homes during the U.S.-led invasion or were forced to do so subsequently, particularly in rural areas, but have remained in the vicinity in makeshift shelters and without basic amenities. Others living in urban areas, notably Kirkuk, never left and are waiting for their own property claims to be resolved.

The Coalition Provisional Authority failed to address the rising tensions in northern Iraq and to implement a strategy to resolve the claims and needs of the different communities there, Human Rights Watch said. When the CPA was formally dissolved on June 28, more than a year after the fall of Saddam Hussein, it had yet to implement a mechanism to resolve competing property claims. Although legislation was formally passed in January establishing an Iraq Property Claims Commission (IPCC), neither it nor its implementing instructions were finalized until June. More than 6,000 claims have reportedly been lodged at IPCC offices in 10 of the country's 18 governorates, but the judicial mechanism put in place for the adjudication of these property disputes has still not been implemented. The commission's statute also failed to adequately address the question of where Arab settler families are to be resettled once they have vacated disputed property. Many of them have lived in Kirkuk and other Arabized areas since the 1970s and have long since severed connections with their area of origin.

"The process of seeking redress for the displaced Kurds and others must not lead to new injustices against Arab settlers," Whitson said. Human Rights Watch called on Kurdish political leaders to coordinate efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to internally displaced families who have already returned to reclaim property, and to discourage further returns to former places of residence until property claims are processed. Background Arabization first occurred on a massive scale in the second half of the 1970s as the Iraqi govern-

ment sought to alter the demographic make-up of northern Iraq in order to reduce the political power and presence of ethnic minorities and consolidate control over this oil-rich region. In northern Iraq, probably as many as 250,000 Kurds and other non-Arabs were forcibly expelled from their homes, including an estimated 120,000 among them during the 1990s.

Simultaneously, the Iraqi government brought in landless Arabs from the nearby Al-Jazeera desert and others from central and southern Iraq to settle in their place. Land titles to the rich agricultural lands seized from the Kurds and other non-Arabs were invalidated upon their expulsion, and the land was then leased on annual contracts to Arab farmers. Many of those expelled have since been living in camps for the internally displaced in the northern Kurdish-controlled governorates for over a decade.

Human Rights Watch Report, Iraq: Forcible Expulsion of Ethnic Minorities (2003) <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/iraq0303/>

claims in Conflict: Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq is available in English at: <http://hrw.org/reports/2004/iraq0804>

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Tourism thrives in Kurdish north

By Nick Birch

WASHINGTON TIMES August 8, 2004

DOKAN, Iraq - When it first leaves the bank, the raft, made of a few planks of wood slung over four truck tires, barely seems to be moving. Then the current catches it, flinging its ragtag crew into the middle of the Little Zab River.

"This is the life," Huseyin Mohsen, a technician in Kirkuk's oil fields, shouts over the screams of his four children.

The boatman ignores him, working his oar to avoid the worst of the eddies. "My wife wasn't too keen on me taking the kids for this ride - none of them can swim," Mr. Mohsen says as the boat swirls past banks thick with families roasting meat on makeshift barbecues. "I told her I'd dive in and save them if anything happened."

Like countless others from the south and the center of the country, Mr. Mohsen and his family couldn't face the prospect of yet another Friday of leaden heat. So they decided to come to the Kurdish-controlled north. Nestled under a huge dam, the picturesque town of Dokan was an obvious choice.

"Kids need water, and in Kirkuk, all we have is oil," Nejat Mahmud Safwat says with a grimace. Like his cousin, Mr. Mohsen is a member of Iraq's Turkmen minority.

Now in their 40s, they have visited Dokan for the first time since the creation of a de facto independent Kurdish territory in 1991.

"After the first Gulf war, it was almost impossible to travel to the north," Mr. Safwat says. "The Ba'athists assumed you were trying to flee the country."

With the north once again accessible, Mr. Mohsen says nothing has changed here. His cousin isn't so sure. He points to the wicker-roofed shelters that line the Little Zab's riverbank. "None of this was here before; you just drove up and set up camp," the cousin says. "Now you have to pay people even to say thank you."

After a decade of stagnation, Dokan is booming. Holiday homes and cafeterias have sprung up where once there were reed beds. In a crowded restaurant overlooking the bridge, visitors are charged hefty prices for chicken, rice and the local specialty, marinated apricots. "Tourists have been coming to Dokan for decades," says Shaho Qadir Ahmed, a former Iraqi volleyball player who runs the Daban Tourist Village overlooking Dokan dam, "but I've never seen anything like this." People come from as far away as Basra to stay in one of his 53 holiday cabins, priced at \$30 to \$40 a night.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, the party that holds sway in the southern part of Iraqi Kurdistan, owns the property, and some of the profits from the village go toward the upkeep of the local militia, or peshmerga. With the rest, Mr. Ahmed plans to build more cabins and houses for visitors wishing to stay for a month or more. The 20 visitors from Baghdad unanimously say they came here because it is safe.

An engineering student from a wealthy district of Baghdad, Mohammed Jamal, says he was kidnapped by bandits earlier this year. They released him only when his father paid a ransom of \$10,000. "The shock was too much for him," Mr. Jamal says. "He packed the whole family off and told us to spend two weeks in Dokan. He's back at home making sure the house doesn't get looted."

He says there's no shortage of tourist destinations much closer to home - Habaniyya lake, for example. The only trouble is, he says, Habaniyya is now a resort for U.S. troops and is out of bounds for ordinary Iraqis. Saddam once got all the best places in Iraq. Now, some Iraqis grumble that the Americans get their pick. Even at Dokan lake, U.S. soldiers in civilian clothes use a beach a hundred yards away from the one the Jamal family has claimed.

On the hill above them stands the Ashura, the most expensive hotel in these parts. For the past three months, the U.S. Army has taken it over. In the plush lobby filled with the music of Beyonce Knowles, a receptionist says he has no idea when the hotel manager will be free.

"He's in a meeting with a U.S. delegation," he explains. "Try another day."

Increasing numbers of Syrian Kurdish refugees in north

IRIN 9 August 2004

A refugee camp opened near the northeastern Iraqi city of Dahuk earlier this year to house Syrian Kurds is rapidly spilling out into surrounding fields as families continue to cross into northern Iraq.

The camp, 20 km north of Dahuk on the road to Zakho, was originally opened in 1999 to house 200 Iraqis seeking sanctuary from Saddam Hussein's administration in the Kurdish-controlled north.

Today, according to camp authorities, there are some 47 Syrian families and 57 single men, a total of 362 people. The refugees said they left Syria due to worsening conditions. However, aid agencies say that some have also recently returned home. With a line of buildings set up next to one of the former Baathist administration's old military forts, the camp has accommodation for 27 families. Others are living in tents.

"The flow of refugees across the border has slowed, but shows no signs of stopping", camp director and refugee, Nawzad Hamid Abdullah told IRIN in Dahuk. "All refugees smuggled themselves across the border, so statistics on their numbers are not exact. But we know of 11 families who have crossed in July."

Regardless of when they arrived, the stories told by refugees are near identical. The majority said they came from in and around the eastern Syrian city of Qamishli located in northeastern Syria, which erupted into inter-ethnic violence this March during a football match between a Syrian Kurdish team and one traditionally supported by the country's Baathists. "Inter-ethnic tensions had been on the rise since the beginning of the war against Saddam," said Mohamed Seyed Omar, a shepherd from Qamishli. "When Iraqi Kurds helped the Americans, we were branded traitors."

Khabat Derk was present at the match. "They were shouting 'Death to the Kurds, long live Saddam, long live Fallujah,'" he said, referring to the central Iraqi city at the heart of the anti-Coalition insurgency. "At least three Kurds were shot dead in the stadium." The deaths led

to Kurdish rioting and, on 12 March, a huge protest in Qamishli against the Syrian government. "That was when the crackdown really began," said Ahmed Jamil Bakir, pointing to three bullet wounds on his body he claimed to have sustained during the protest. Taken to hospital under armed guard, he said he escaped with help from a Kurdish doctor and crossed into Iraq a week later. Others had to wait longer. "They confiscated my lorry, my only means of making money," said Haval Abdullah. "We had to sell most of what we had to raise US \$300 for the smugglers." Now sharing a sweltering plastic-lined tent with his wife and three children, he arrived at the camp last week.

Local authorities insist the camp is properly supplied both with electricity and water, by tankers. All tents had fans, although a power cut had prevented them working. But refugees said they could do with more washing facilities and that sometimes they had to wait days for a shower. "Some people wash themselves in their rooms," said one. There was general agreement, though, that food - supplied by the local authorities - was in short supply. "We eat three times a day, but the portions are tiny," complained Feroz Muhamed Abdullah, who shares two three by four metre rooms with her husband and nine children. She cooks on the porch, using a double gas heater supplied, along with her pots, mattresses and blankets.

"The refugees do not yet have food ration cards," explained Nawzad Hamid Abdullah. "Families keep coming, and a decision has been made to wait for the situation to stabilise."

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is supplying non food items to camp residents and has also registered them. Two families, including Mrs Abdullah's, are in need of medical attention. At least two of her children were suffering from advanced muscular dystrophy. "We were denied care in Syria," said her husband Ahmed Mohamed Ramadan. "Here at least we can use the hospital." The camp has also been visited by local doctors and a mobile medical team from international NGOs. Some

families, like Ramadan's, are to be given help by US Army medical specialists. UNHCR is also looking at better options for healthcare. Back in Dahuk, the governorate director for internally displaced people and refugees, Musa Ali Bakir, insisted that all families had begun filing for asylum with the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). "There are interviews every

Thursday," he said. Again, though, the continued arrival of refugees, coupled with delays caused by a change of local UNHCR staff, has meant some families are still waiting. "Whatever happens, it is vital that proper accommodation be found at the very least for those families living in tents," said Ali Bakir. "Winters up here are very hard."

Osman Ocalan Forms a New Party

Reuters August 13, 2004

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey, Aug 13 (Reuters) - The brother of jailed Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan has formed a breakaway group after leaving the separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a statement on a Kurdish Web site said on Friday. Turkish commandos captured Abdullah Ocalan in Kenya in 1999.

He is the sole inmate of an island prison south of Istanbul, serving a life sentence since his death penalty was commuted. His guerrillas took up arms against the Turkish state in 1984 and more than 30,000 people have died in the conflict, but violence subsided after his capture.

The latest move appeared to cement a recent split within the group. The new grouping, including other senior former PKK members, will seek to win the freedom of Osman Ocalan's brother and does not aim to damage the PKK but to advance its cause democratically, the statement said. The Nasname Web site, believed to be linked to former PKK rebels, carried a statement calling on members of Kongra-Gel, the name recently adopted by the PKK, to join the new Patriotic Democratic Party.

"The aim is not to destroy Kongra-Gel but to overcome the impasse in the Kurdish liberation movement... and to carry the values of its struggle towards a democratic solution," it said.

The authenticity of the statement could not be verified, but observers familiar with the subject believed it was credible. It was signed by 40 members of the new party who attended a founding conference earlier this month, with Osman Ocalan heading the list.

The PKK ended a six-year unilateral ceasefire at the start of June and there has been a resurgence of violence since.

Osman Ocalan reportedly opposed ending the ceasefire and fell out with the rebels holed up in northern Iraq, seeking refuge in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul with some other senior PKK members.

Media reports say Abdullah Ocalan has condemned his brother for leaving the PKK.

Nechirvan Barzani, Letter to the Editor: No friction on oil between Kurdistan and Iraq

The Financial Times 18 August 2004

Sir, The oil contracts signed by the Kurdistan regional government are the product of Iraq's liberation struggle, and not a power play between Baghdad and Iraqi Kurdistan, as portrayed in your article "Disputed oil contracts put Kurdish autonomy to the test" (August 14). Iraq's Kurdistan region has been governed separately from the rest of Iraq since the 1991 uprising, with a democratically elected parliament and government. By necessity the Kurdistan regional government has had full responsibility for all matters related to the region, including the management of natural resources, an authority recognised in the 1998 US-brokered Washington Agreement.

The negotiations leading to the contracts in question began before the war and all contracts were concluded prior to any change in Kurdistan's status that may have occurred with the entry into force

of Iraq's Transitional Administrative Law at the time Iraq assumed sovereignty on June 2004. While the Transitional Administrative Law gives both the Kurdistan regional government and the central government a role in the administration of Iraq's oil, it also recognises the validity of prior acts of the Kurdistan regional government. For decades, successive Iraqi regimes refused to permit the exploration and development of petroleum in Kurdistan as part of a broader policy of repression against our people, a repression financed by oil revenues. In spite of this bitter legacy, the Kurdistan Region is contributing to the making of a new Iraq that is democratic, federal and free from past discrimination.

On the vital matter of oil, we have proposed that currently producing petroleum fields be managed by the central government while new fields are owned and managed by the Kurdistan Region.

Kurdistan is the one completely secure part of Iraq. Kurdistan oil not only has to travel a short distance to export but is also relatively immune from the sabotage that has shut down so much of Iraq's oil industry. Contracts signed by the Kurdistan regional government are valid and we are collaborating with the Iraqi oil ministry to ensure the

orderly development of Kurdistan's oil. Given the global demand for secure oil supplies, this is in everyone's interest. Nechirvan Barzani, Prime Minister, Kurdistan Regional Government, Irbil, Kurdistan - Iraq

Kurds build own identity

Washington Times

by Julia Duin 18 August 2004

ERBIL / Americans may be vilified in much of Iraq, but in the 15,000 square miles encompassing Iraqi Kurdistan, wedding parties pose with U.S. soldiers, American flags are posted proudly on dashboards and officials beg visiting Americans to tell Washington to establish a permanent military base here. "That would send a message to everyone not to do anything to the Kurds," said a visiting professor at the 14,000-student Salahaddin University in this sprawling north-central city.

Thirty years of political oppression, poison gas attacks and outright genocide by the Ba'athist regime in Baghdad have led northeastern Iraq's 4.5 million Kurds to rethink all their alliances.

Some even suggest contacting the Israelis for advice. Although most Kurdish Muslims instinctively distrust Jews, some say Israelis would be eager to help bolster a Kurdish democracy in the Middle East. Jews inhabited Kurdistan starting with the Babylonian exile in 597 B.C. and ending in the 1950s, when many returned to Israel.

Others say Kurds are flirting with Zoroastrianism or atheism, as Islam is seen as the religion of their Turkish and Arab oppressors. Evangelical Protestant missionaries who are quietly planting churches in the major Kurdish cities report flickers of interest. Copies of the New Testament, or at least portions of it, are available in both Kurdish dialects, and Campus Crusade's "Jesus Film" has been on Kurdish television several times. The evangelistic Dallas-based Daystar Television Network can be seen in any Kurdish home with a satellite dish.

The Amman, Jordan-based Manara Ministries, a Christian agency that conducts relief work in northern Iraq, estimates 200 Kurds have converted to Christianity in 20 years and that Erbil has at least one Christian bookstore. Other Christian agencies in the region agree numbers remain in the low hundreds, but thousands have received evangelistic literature and have had some contact with Christians.

Kurds have substituted their own red, yellow, green and white flag in place of the national Iraqi flag on flagpoles everywhere. In the few places the Iraqi flag is displayed, it is the de-Islamicized pre-1991 version before Saddam Hussein added "God is Great" in Arabic to the red, white, black and green banner.

"Some people are blaming Islam for what's happening to us," one college professor mused. "But I think the fault is with the British who

divided our land after World War I. We have tolerated this bitter reality, but we have never accepted it."

The Kurdish penchant for independent thinking begins with its "Welcome to Iraqi Kurdistan" sign at the Iraqi-Turkish border - a calculated insult to Turkey, which has denied human rights to many of its 15 million to 20 million Kurds and whose border guards lecture travelers that "Kurdistan" does not exist. Kurdistan is an unofficial nation-state encompassing at least 25 million people in the 74,000-square-mile mountainous region encompassing chunks of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. It is the world's largest ethnic group without a country of its own.

Kurds were promised a country in the Aug. 10, 1920, Treaty of Sevres that divided the former Ottoman Empire among Britain, Turkey and others, and gave independence to Armenia. However, the treaty drafted in Sevres, France, was ignored by Kemal Mustafa Ataturk, founder of modern Turkey, who did honor the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne that established Turkey's present borders but partitioned Kurdistan into four parts.

Kurds generally were oppressed in all their host countries, resulting in the establishment of exile communities in Europe and the United States. Iraqi Kurdistan blossomed after the 1991 Gulf war, when overflights by British and American fighter jets generally kept Saddam's forces at bay. Today, some Baghdad residents are moving their homes several hundred miles north to tranquil Kurdish cities such as Dohuk, where legions of peshmerga - Kurdish militia - patrol the city streets and man checkpoints on rural routes. The more American - or Western - a passenger appears to be, the more quickly one is waved on by the peshmerga. Cars sporting Baghdad license plates or holding Arab occupants are pulled over and searched.

One Assyrian Christian driver relates how, while conducting business in Mosul 40 miles south of Dohuk, he was threatened at gunpoint by insurgents. He managed to talk his way out of trouble.

Asked the reason for the AK-47 assault rifle in the front seat?

"To shoot Arabs with," he said.

Although danger remains, others are enjoying their new lives.

"I'm 37 years old, but I feel like I am only 1 year old because I feel free-

dom now," said the Rev. Mofid Toma Marcus, an Assyrian Christian monk who oversees the Monastery of the Virgin Mary in Al Qosh, a Christian village near the burial spot of the Old Testament prophet Nahum. "America has given new life to Iraqi people."

In five years, he said, "Iraq will be better. Under Saddam, we had no cell phones, no Internet, no interviews with American journalists. America took 200 years to get to where it is today."

Al Qosh is one of seven Christian villages stretching north from Mosul.

"We don't give permission for Muslim families to live in Christian villages," Mr. Marcus said, explaining that Muslims would gradually turn it into an Muslim-majority village, then institute Islamic law.

A half-mile down the road is Bozan, a village populated by Yezidi Kurds who worship a pre-Islamic peacock god linked to Zoroastrianism and Mithraism. The children play in the town square near a bombed-out school that the monastery is trying to refurbish.

They run to fetch Elias Khalaf, the headmaster, a dignified man in a Kurdish-style gray suit with baggy pants, who begs for Americans to come stay in some of the monastery's 200 rooms and help rebuild his school. Missing are all the basics: paint, windows, water, doors, blackboards, electricity, desks and toilets.

Thirty teachers toil with 1,100 students, sometimes as many as 60 per class.

"We need teachers," he begs. "We need everything."

The Yezidis were forced out of their villages 30 years ago by Arab Iraqis, gaining them back only since the overthrow of Saddam. On their way out, the Arabs cut the electric lines and poisoned the wells.

Kurdish cities are filled with unemployed men of all ages idling in cafes to escape the 111-degree heat. Despite the scorching temperature, many of the Muslim women cloak themselves in heavy, long-sleeved jackets, ankle-length skirts and head scarves. Sulaymania, a city about 80 miles west of the Iranian border surrounded by hot, rocky, barren hills, has a reputation for free thinking and slightly more liberal dress codes. It has become a center for experimental newspapers that operate on shoestring budgets. The London-based Institute for War & Peace Reporting has an office in Sulaymania, where it tries to instill journalistic standards into eager but inexperienced reporters.

One student-run paper is in a tiny third-floor office with no air conditioning. Cold sodas are brought for the guests, who are told that the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which controls the northwestern tier of Kurdistan, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which controls the southeast, exercise Mafialike control over Kurds. Any newspaper that criticizes the parties, they say, finds itself banned from local newsstands. Similar conversation the next day with an Islamic newspaper reveals how dissatisfaction with the slow pace of change is everywhere. At a quiet dinner with Kurdish businessmen in the tou-

risty suburb of Sarchinar, the topic of conversation is the failure of Kurdish political leaders to encourage Western investment and the reluctance of American companies to take a chance on the Kurds.

"If you don't move quickly here," one computer technician said, "the Chinese and the Germans will fill your place."

The Iranians already have a consulate in Sulaymania, one is told, while the Americans only have plans for a consulate in Kirkuk, leaving most of northern Iraq with no official American presence.

Meanwhile, the Kurds already have a functioning airport in Erbil and plans are to open another one soon in Sulaymania. Iraq has been on hold for too many years, they say. Gas may be 3 cents a gallon here but passports are impossible to come by, reducing many Kurds to learning their English from BBC World telecasts. There is no postal service.

Plus, any Kurdish public figure working with Westerners knows his life could be snuffed out at any time. A drive to a lunch interview with Salahaddin University President Mohammed Sadik in Erbil begins when two armed bodyguards jump into the passenger seat of his car and perch on the back bumper. Their caution stems from the Feb. 1 suicide bombings at the Erbil headquarters of the KDP and PUK during celebrations for an Islamic holiday. More than 56 Kurds, adults and children were killed. The Kurds at this lunch are distraught over U.N. Resolution 1546, which they hoped would support Kurds' semi-independent status. But the resolution was vague, not even mentioning the regional government for which Kurds have long campaigned. Furious Kurds now refer to L. Paul Bremer, who served as the United States' Iraq administrator after the fall of Saddam, as "Lawrence of Arabia" for selling them short to Arab rulers who have little experience or taste for democracy.

"We feel Americans have bargained at the expense of the Kurds," Mr. Sadik said. "The worst person they brought here was Mr. Bremer, who didn't want to take any advice from the Kurds but who was willing to bargain with everyone else."

All the lunch guests scoffed at the notion of "a new Iraq" touted by the Americans.

"We have nothing in common with the rest of Iraq," said Kirmanj Gundi, a Tennessee State professor visiting his homeland. "Why did Bremer always compromise on Kurdish interests in favor of the Shi'ites and Sunnis who shoot at them?"

"If America supports us, we'd be the most loyal friend in the region."

Every Kurd in the room wanted independence. Why, they asked, was America so quick to recognize Israel 56 years ago but today raises objection after objection about Kurdish independence.

"When America decided to recognize Israel," one said, "America didn't care about how the 22 Arab countries would react or how the 56 Islamic countries would react. So why should the Kurds care what the Iraqi government thinks?"

L'offensive de la force multinationale et de la sécurité irakienne contre les partisans du chef chiite Moqtada al-Sadr se heurte à une forte résistance.

BAGDAD: SADR CITY SE LEVE POUR L'ARMEE DU MEHDI

Irak Chaos chiite

L'autorité de Bagdad et la coalition mènent, de nuit jeudi, une offensive contre les milices de Moqtada al-Sadr, faisant des dizaines de morts.



Sadr City envoyé spécial

Sadr City, vaste faubourg populaire de Bagdad, campe sur le pied de guerre. De lourdes volutes de fumée noire s'élèvent sur les carrefours. Toute la nuit de jeudi à vendredi, face aux blindés américains, les combattants de l'armée du Mehdi ont monté une garde vigilante, dormant par quarts, à même le sol, au coin d'une rue, sous l'auvent d'une échoppe. Dès l'aube, vendredi, les traits tirés par le sommeil, ils reprenaient le guet, serrés autour de leur émir, ravivant les brasiers, enflammant de vieux pneus, dérisoires barricades jetées en travers des avenues.

Dans le dédale des venelles jouxtant les axes principaux, les volontaires se pressent. Troupe de circonstance : as-

semblée à la hâte. Chômeurs, manœuvres, journaliers en guenilles, souvent nu-pieds, le visage ceint de leur keffieh, adolescents et vieillards ont répondu à l'exhortation des muezzins, prêts à faire barrage de leur corps aux forces de la coalition. Certains ne portent qu'un simple pistolet. Tous ont la volonté d'en découdre. Les partisans du jeune imam rebelle Moqtada al-Sadr montrent plus de courage que d'érudition militaire.

«**Équipes d'assassins.**». «*Les Américains ont une armée très puissante*», reconnaît Abou

Mountather, le chef d'une petite phalange embusquée non loin du carrefour 56, face aux chars qui protègent les bâtiments du conseil municipal. Ses hommes disposent, pour tout armement lourd, d'une poignée de roquettes. «*Mais*

nous combattons avec notre cœur. Dieu est avec nous. Notre avenir est dans l'au-delà. Les Américains se battent avec le Diable et sont attachés à cette vie.» Stratégie que résume le bilan des affrontements de la veille : 19 tués et 111 blessés dans les rangs des insurgés, selon le ministère irakien de la Santé. Abou Mountather n'en a cure et ne veut relever que les succès de sa milice. «*Si les Américains entrent plus avant*

dans notre quartier, ils le payeront de leur sang. Mais nous voulons les contenir sur ces avenues, même si cela nous coûte cher, car le rôle de notre armée c'est de protéger la population de Sadr City, de défendre les civils, nos familles. Nous n'avons pas décidé de rompre la trêve signée au mois de juin par Moqtada al-Sadr. C'est l'occupant qui a déclenché les hostilités. Le quartier était calme. Nous avons établi une bonne coopération avec la police et les soldats de la garde nationale.» Une opération des Forces spéciales américaines, menée jeu-

di en fin d'après-midi, semble avoir mis le feu aux poudres. Selon plusieurs témoignages, une colonne de blindés, survolée par des hélicoptères, a fait irruption dans le souk d'Al-Djamila. Derrière les soldats réguliers, deux véhicules tout-terrain Hyundai et Toyota sans plaque minéralogique, bourrés d'hommes armés, en pantalon de treillis, gilet pare-balles, et casquette sur le crâne. Le commando se serait attaqué à la voiture d'un haut responsable de la milice chiite, le sayed Hussein, dit «Abou Ali», bras droit du chef militaire de l'armée du Mehdi. Il a été abattu avec trois de ses gardes du corps au cours d'un bref échange de tirs. Sa fille, touchée par une balle en pleine tête, a été transportée à l'hôpital dans un état critique. «*Les*

Américains comme les Israéliens en Palestine utilisent des équipes d'assassins pour liquider nos dirigeants», accusent les combattants, que l'incident a rendus extrêmement nerveux.

Depuis, des patrouilles d'hommes masqués sillonnent Sadr City à bord de Mercedes et de BMW, interceptant sans ménagement tout étranger au quartier avant de l'emmener manu militari devant un ayatollah, seul habilité à décider de son sort. «*Nous devons prendre des précautions car les Américains nous recherchent pour nous assassiner et ils utilisent des espions*», s'excuse le sayed Abou Moustapha, qui préfère ne pas utiliser son vrai nom. Cet ayatollah, très proche de Moqtada al-Sadr, est pourtant un des représentants officiels du chef rebelle à Bagdad. Il a renoncé à mener la grande prière du vendredi dans sa mosquée et se cache

dans les bureaux d'une entreprise de transport. «*Cette offensive est une décision coordonnée entre l'occupant et le gouvernement illégitime d'Iyad Allaoui. Ils disent vouloir en finir avec les milices, mais arment celles des partis kurdes et du mouvement d'Ahmed Chalabi, les brigades Al-Badr du Conseil suprême pour la révolution islamique et tous ceux qui acceptent d'être les valets de l'occupant*», affirme-t-il.

«**Insurrection.**». Le sayed Abou Moustapha poursuit : «*Ils veulent détruire l'armée du Mehdi parce que nous défendons les pauvres, l'Irak et l'islam. Nous refusons de nous agenouiller pour les dollars des Américains. Nous*

exigeons la tenue d'élections libres. Mais nous n'avons pas rompu la trêve, n'avons pas encore appelé à l'insurrection générale. Les prochains jours seront déterminants. Si les

Américains ne nous laissent le choix qu'entre l'honneur et la servitude, nous choisissons l'honneur. Et ils apprendront

ce que veut dire pour nous le sens du sacrifice.» ◆

DIDIER FRANÇOIS

Des affrontements éclatent dans toutes les villes chiites

Ce sont les combats les plus violents depuis la trêve en juin.

Une vaste offensive de la force multinationale et de la sécurité irakienne contre les miliciens du chef chiite radical Moqtada al-Sadr a fait depuis jeudi au moins 59 morts, selon les hôpitaux. L'armée américaine affirme pour sa part que «trois cents éléments des forces anti-irakiennes» ont été tués en trois jours dans la ville sainte de Najaf alors que les forces de la coalition auraient perdu trois hommes.

Ultimatum. Vendredi, l'US Air Force est entrée en action, tirant des roquettes sur le centre-ville et le cimetière où

étaient retranchés les miliciens de l'armée du Mehdi, la milice de Moqtada al-Sadr. «Les opérations militaires vont se poursuivre à moins que l'armée du Mehdi quitte la province, et je lui donne vingt-quatre heures pour le faire à partir de la diffusion de cette déclaration», a déclaré à la presse le gouverneur de la province de Najaf, Adnan al-Zorfi, affirmant qu'il n'y aura pas de compromis sur une nouvelle trêve.

Ces combats sont les plus violents depuis la trêve déclarée en juin entre les forces de la

coalition et les dirigeants de la communauté chiite après deux mois d'insurrection. Le Conseil suprême de la révolution islamique en Irak (Asrii, parti chiite représenté au gouvernement) a annoncé une réunion avec des représentants de Moqtada pour tenter de «trouver une solution pacifique à la crise».

Des affrontements sporadiques entre forces de la coalition et miliciens d'Al-Sadr ont également éclaté dans la plupart des villes chiites. A Bassora (sud), au moins cinq personnes ont été tuées et trois blessées lors de heurts avec les

soldats britanniques. Les combats s'intensifiaient vendredi soir. A Nassiriya (sud), sept civils ont été tués et treize blessés pendant la nuit dans des combats entre miliciens et soldats italiens. A Amara, au moins huit civils ont été blessés lors de heurts entre miliciens chiites et soldats britanniques. L'envoyé spécial de l'ONU, Jamal Benomar, a estimé vendredi que le fait que les violences continuent en Irak risquait de remettre en cause la Conférence nationale irakienne, prévue pour le 31 juillet et reportée à la mi-août à la demande des Nations unies.

Emblème. Le grand ayatollah Ali Sistani, 73 ans, figure emblématique des chiites d'Irak, est pour sa part arrivé vendredi à Londres, où il doit se faire soigner pour «un petit problème cardiaque», selon son porte-parole. ◆

D'après AFP et Reuters

8 AOÛT 2004

Allaoui tente le passage en force

Installé au pouvoir depuis six semaines, Iyad Allaoui se veut l'homme fort du nouvel Irak. Il a déjà sa légende noire, qui court dans le petit peuple de la capitale. On raconte que le chef du gouvernement intérimaire aurait assisté en personne à l'exécution de sang-froid de deux «terroristes» arrêtés les armes à la main. D'autres histoires, tout aussi invérifiables, parlent de sept membres de gangs politico-mafieux abattus sous ses yeux dans une prison. Les autorités nient farouchement et qualifient ces histoires de «légendes urbaines», sans pour autant sembler en être embarrassées. Comme dans toute situation de guerre et de chaos, celles-ci traduisent aussi les aspirations d'une population qui rêve d'un homme à poigne après quinze mois de chaos.

«La loi et l'ordre». Allaoui s'est ainsi gagné une certaine popularité. Le gouvernement clame maintenant vouloir briser «les milices illégales qui sont comme des terroristes». Déclaration qui peut apparaître comme une rodomontade alors que l'insécurité règne toujours sur une bonne partie du territoire, plusieurs régions, notamment dans le pays sunnite, échappant au contrôle de Bagdad.

Le rétablissement de «la loi et l'ordre» reste la grande priorité d'Allaoui, chiite laïc, jadis militant du Baas puis opposant

résolu de Saddam Hussein, qui tenta de le faire assassiner à Londres. Après 1991, il travailla étroitement avec les services américains et britanniques. L'administration Bush l'a imposé comme Premier ministre du gouvernement intérimaire d'un Irak qui a recouvré le 28 juin une souveraineté au moins théorique. Si la nouvelle autorité irakienne contrôle la police et des forces armées encore embryonnaires, l'essentiel de la sécurité

ANALYSE

reste assurée par les 141 000 hommes, en écrasante majorité américains, de la force multinationale, sur laquelle il n'a aucun pouvoir.

Cette autorité intérimaire non élue pourrait sembler «fantôme». Elle reflète néanmoins assez fidèlement la mosaïque politique, religieuse et ethnique du pays, et ses représentants ont pour la plupart une légitimité personnelle forte, comme le président de la République, le sunnite Ghazi al-Yaouar, chef d'une puissante tribu. Le véritable pouvoir n'en reste pas moins aux mains de l'ambassadeur américain John Negroponte, qui a 2 000 personnes sous ses ordres, des conseillers dans tous les ministères, et la haute main sur la gestion des

18,4 milliards de dollars de l'aide américaine pour la reconstruction.

Autoritarisme rampant. Le gouvernement Allaoui a déjà proclamé plusieurs fois la loi martiale dans certains districts. Le Premier ministre lui-même évoque un possible report des élections prévues pour janvier. Certains s'inquiètent de l'autoritarisme rampant du nouvel homme fort du pays. «Il veut donner une image double: celle d'un démocrate vis-à-vis des Occidentaux, mais, vis-à-vis des Irakiens, d'abord celle d'un dur, prêt à faire le sale boulot», expliquait un diplomate cité par *Newsweek*. Le grand enjeu est la Conférence nationale irakienne qui doit réunir un millier de délégués choisis dans tout le pays et parmi tous les courants. Prévue pour le 31 juillet, elle avait été repoussée in extremis à la mi-août sur demande de l'ONU, préoccupée par des questions d'organisation.

Minoritaires au sein de leur communauté (la première du pays), les chiites radicaux de Moqtada al-Sadr dénoncent «cette conférence des Américains». La nouvelle épreuve de force inquiète l'envoyé onusien Jamal Benomar, qui soulignait qu'une telle conférence vise justement à montrer que «les problèmes doivent être résolus par le dialogue et non par les armes». ◆

MARC SEMO





Deux militaires tués, un blessé par une mine dans le sud-est de la Turquie

ANKARA, 9 août (AFP) - 20h50 - Deux soldats turcs ont été tués et un sous-officier a été blessé dans l'explosion lundi d'une mine posée par des rebelles kurdes sur une route près de Cukurca, dans l'extrême sud-est de la Turquie, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie.

La mine, activée à distance au passage d'un véhicule militaire qui patrouillait dans la zone, à une cinquantaine de kilomètres de la frontière irakienne, a été placée par des militants de l'ex-parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), rebaptisé Kongra-Gel, selon l'agence, qui cite des sources militaires.

Le PKK a mis fin le 1er juin au cessez-le-feu unilatéral qu'il avait décrété cinq ans plus tôt après l'arrestation de son chef, Abdullah Ocalan, qui purge une peine de prison à vie.

Depuis, les accrochages se sont multipliés avec des incidents quasi-quotidiens.

Les rebelles kurdes menacent de rallumer le conflit avec Ankara



ANKARA, 13 août (AFP) - 15h06 - La police a attribué vendredi aux rebelles kurdes la responsabilité de récents attentats à Istanbul alors même que l'aile dure de la rébellion menace de rallumer le conflit à l'approche du 20ème anniversaire du début de la lutte armée pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie.

L'anniversaire tombe le 15 août alors qu'un groupe jusqu'alors inconnu, les Faucons de la liberté du Kurdistan, a revendiqué les attentats à la bombe qui ont visé, dans la nuit de lundi à mardi, deux hôtels du centre d'Istanbul et un complexe gazier en périphérie de la ville.

Ces attentats ont fait deux morts et 11 blessés, des touristes pour la plupart.

"Les incidents dans les hôtels d'Istanbul sont assurément l'œuvre du PKK/Kongra-Gel", a affirmé vendredi le porte-parole de la police, Ramazan Er, pour qui les Faucons de la liberté sont une émanation de l'ex-Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), rebaptisé Kongra-Gel.

Les rebelles kurdes ont mis fin, début juin, au cessez-le-feu unilatéral qu'ils avaient observé, bon gré mal gré, depuis l'arrestation il y a cinq ans de leur dirigeant historique, Abdullah Ocalan.

Les Faucons de la liberté, dans un communiqué, ont appelé les touristes étrangers à quitter le pays.

Le tourisme, en pleine expansion, constitue la première source de revenus de la Turquie.

"Le 15 août marquera le début d'une nouvelle action (...) La guerre légitime d'auto-défense doit être poursuivie", a affirmé un dirigeant dur des rebelles, Cemil Bayik, dans un article publié dans l'édition électronique du quotidien pro-kurde Ozgur Politika.

Un autre haut dirigeant de l'organisation, Duran Kalkan, s'exprimant dans le même journal, s'est également félicité de la fin du cessez-le-feu, estimant "qu'une nouvelle grande offensive peut être montée dans les cinq à six prochains mois".

Selon les autorités, les rebelles kurdes ont monté une cinquantaine d'embuscades et autres attaques contre les forces de l'ordre dans le sud-est du pays depuis juin.

Vendredi matin, par exemple, un gendarme a été tué et un autre blessé lors d'affrontements avec des rebelles dans la province de Van, près de la frontière iranienne, selon des sources locales de sécurité.

Le conflit, qui avait éclaté en 1984, a fait plus de 37.000 morts.

Selon la presse, quatre activistes kurdes formés au maniement des explosifs et susceptibles d'avoir participé aux attentats d'Istanbul sont actuellement recherchés par la police.

Ces poseurs de bombe seraient commandités par un des dirigeants les plus radicaux de l'ex-PKK Murat Karayilan, actuellement réfugié dans le nord de l'Irak avec plusieurs milliers de militants, et qui aurait appelé à la multiplication d'attentats dans les grandes villes de Turquie.

Pour leur part, les services secrets turcs auraient récemment averti qu'un groupe baptisé "Initiative du 15 août" préparait des attentats urbains, rapporte la presse.

La reprise de la violence intervient sur fond de divisions au sein de l'ex-PKK, inquiet pour l'avenir de ses bases arrières, dans les montagnes du nord irakien, et du refus d'Ankara d'envisager une amnistie générale.

Certains membres de l'organisation souhaitent que le PKK renonce à la lutte armée et la nouvelle appellation, Kongra-Gel, visait à privilégier l'aspect politique plutôt que militaire de la lutte.

Le refus des autorités turques de négocier avec les rebelles semble toutefois avoir renforcé l'aile dure du mouvement, ce qui expliquerait la décision d'abandonner le cessez-le-feu.

Abdullah Ocalan, depuis sa prison, se serait prononcé, par l'intermédiaire de ses avocats, contre la suspension du cessez-le-feu, tout du moins pour quelques mois, selon la presse kurde.

L'armée critique un maire qui a présenté ses condoléances pour un rebelle kurde



ANKARA, 11 août (AFP) - 11h48 - Le chef de l'armée turque s'en est publiquement pris mercredi à un maire kurde qui a présenté ses condoléances à la famille d'un rebelle kurde tué dans un accrochage avec l'armée et qui a provoqué la vive réaction de l'opinion publique et de la presse.

"Il s'agit d'une attitude inappropriée. La procédure nécessaire a été lancée par le ministère (de l'Intérieur)", a dit le général Hilmi Ozkok, cité par l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Osman Baydemir, le maire de Diyarbakir, principale ville du sud-est anatolien à majorité kurde, est au centre d'une controverse depuis qu'il s'est rendu samedi, accompagné d'autres maires pro-kurdes, au domicile familial d'un militant de l'ex-Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, séparatiste), abattu deux jours auparavant dans une opération de l'armée.

Le ministère de l'Intérieur a envoyé des inspecteurs à Diyarbakir dans le cadre d'une enquête officielle qui pourrait éventuellement aboutir à la révocation de M. Baydemir et des autres élus.

Mardi, le nouveau commandant de l'armée de terre, le général Yasar Buyukanit, avait également fustigé M. Baydemir, parlant d'une "attitude très laide et ignoble".

Un gendarme tué et un autre blessé lors de combats avec des rebelles kurdes



DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 13 août (AFP) - 9h44 - Un gendarme turc a été tué et un autre blessé vendredi lors d'affrontements avec des rebelles kurdes dans la province de Van, à proximité de la frontière iranienne, ont rapporté des sources locales de sécurité.

Les rebelles, désignés par ces sources comme des membres de l'ex-Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, rebaptisé Kongra-Gel), ont ouvert le feu sur une patrouille de gendarmes dans la nuit alors qu'ils venaient de franchir la frontière à la hauteur du village de Gecitvermez, a-t-on précisé.

Des opérations de ratissage de grande envergure se poursuivaient dans la région vendredi, ont ajouté ces sources.

Les séparatistes kurdes de l'ex-PKK ont mis fin, début juin, à un cessez-le-feu unilatéral qu'ils observaient, bon gré mal gré, depuis l'arrestation il y a cinq ans de leur dirigeant historique Abdullah Ocalan.

Depuis lors, les incidents se sont multipliés avec plus de 50 embuscades ou accrochages avec les forces de sécurité dans le sud-est du pays.

Mardi, un groupe kurde jusqu'à présent inconnu, les Faucons de la liberté du Kurdistan, a revendiqué des attentats commis le même jour contre deux hôtels et un dépôt de gaz liquide à Istanbul, qui ont tué deux personnes et en ont blessées 11 autres.

La rébellion du PKK et sa répression par les forces de sécurité ont fait près de 37.000 morts entre 1984 et 1999, date de la capture d'Ocalan et de sa condamnation à la prison à vie.

Osman Ocalan, frère du chef des rebelles kurdes de Turquie, fonde son parti



ANKARA, 14 août (AFP) - 17h19 - Osman, frère du chef emprisonné des rebelles kurdes de Turquie, Abdullah Ocalan, a récemment créé son propre parti politique, après s'être séparé de l'ex-Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (séparatistes kurdes), rebaptisé Kongra-Gel, rapporte samedi la presse turque.

Le parti démocratique patriotique (PDP) a été fondé par Osman Ocalan et une quarantaine de ses hommes qui seraient actuellement à Mossoul (nord de l'Irak), précise le journal Hurriyet.

Osman Ocalan s'était brouillé l'an dernier avec son frère qui purge une peine de prison à vie en solitaire en Turquie depuis 1999, notamment après s'être marié à une jeune kurde, selon les médias.

Il était l'homme de confiance du chef du PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, alias "Apo", et avait pendant un temps co-dirigé les rebelles kurdes après l'arrestation et la condamnation de son frère par la justice turque pour les 15 ans de lutte armée du PKK pour la création d'un Etat kurde indépendant dans le sud-est de la Turquie.

Dans une lettre publiée récemment sur un site pro-kurde, Abdullah Ocalan l'avait qualifié de "frère lâche".

Des divisions sapent les rebelles kurdes depuis plusieurs années.

Le Kongra-Gel, dernière émanation du PKK, a mis fin en juin à une trêve unilatérale déclarée en 1999. Les combats qui avaient pratiquement cessé dans le sud-est anatolien ont depuis repris.

L'aile dure du Kongra-Gel, divisé en plusieurs factions, a menacé de rallumer le conflit.

En Irak, Moqtada Al-Sadr refuse de baisser les armes et jure de défendre Nadjaf

Le premier ministre intérimaire irakien autorise les Américains à investir le saint des saints chiite

BAGDAD

de notre envoyé spécial

Moqtada Al-Sadr ne se rendra pas. Retranché avec plusieurs centaines de ses miliciens de l'Armée du Mahdi dans les ruelles de la vieille ville de Nadjaf, dans et autour du sanctuaire le plus révérend de l'islam chiite, celui de l'imam Ali, le jeune clerc rebelle a juré, lundi 9 août, de « défendre la ville sainte jusqu'à [sa] dernière goutte de sang », tandis que des centaines de ses fidèles en armes multipliaient les attaques contre les forces américaines à Bagdad, et britanniques à Bassora et Amara. Une sorte de scénario du désastre est peut-être en train de se jouer en Irak.

Lundi après-midi, impressionné par les « soldats » de l'Armée du Mahdi qui menacent de faire sauter des puits, la direction de la Compagnie nationale des pétroles du Sud a annoncé qu'elle arrêterait, jusqu'à nouvel ordre, tout pompage de brut. Aux prises avec des attaques et des sabotages quasi quotidiens, son homologue du Nord n'exporte quasiment plus de pétrole depuis des semaines. Si la sécurité devait encore se dégrader, le gouvernement intérimaire, dont le budget dépend à 90 % des ventes de brut, se retrouverait dans une situation impossible.

Tandis qu'une partie de la majorité chiite du pays se révolte, les organisations de la résistance sunnite – nationalistes, islamistes, irakiennes, étrangères... – continuent, elles aussi, de commettre attentats, sabotages et enlèvements. Lundi, près de Bakouba, au nord-est de Bagdad, une voiture piégée a explosé au passage du vice-gouverneur de la région, tuant 6 Irakiens et en blessant 16, parmi lesquels le responsable visé.

A Bassora, la grande métropole du Sud, un convoi britannique a été attaqué par l'Armée du Mahdi : plusieurs véhicules ont été incendiés et un soldat a été tué. A Amara, quelques dizaines de kilomètres au nord, d'autres miliciens en armes ont incendié la permanence du parti du premier ministre intérimaire, Iyad Allaoui. D'autres avaient fait la même chose, 48 heures plus tôt, à la permanence de Nassiriya, ville défendue par le contingent italien.

A la Cité Sadr, l'immense et misé-



Plus déterminé que jamais, le jeune chef radical, Moqtada Al-Sadr, a juré, lundi 9 août, de défendre « jusqu'à [sa] dernière goutte de sang » la ville sainte de Nadjaf, où les combats font rage depuis plusieurs jours.

nable faubourg chiite de Bagdad, l'atmosphère est plus que jamais au combat. Une quinzaine d'obus de mortier ont été tirés par des « soldats » de Moqtada Al-Sadr en direction de la « zone verte », le quartier hyperfortifié où sont retranchés le commandement américain, l'ambassade des Etats-Unis et le siège du gouvernement. Le bâtiment de la municipalité de la Cité Sadr a également été visé par plusieurs attaques, repoussées par les chars américains. Quatre policiers irakiens ont été tués et trois Américains blessés dans ces affrontements. Un général de la police de Bagdad a par ailleurs été pris en otage par des insurgés qui ont annoncé qu'ils ne le libèreraient qu'en échange de l'élargissement des prisonniers de l'Armée du Mahdi.

Devant l'aggravation de la situation, et pour permettre à ses maigres troupes et à leurs puissants alliés étrangers d'avoir les coudées plus franches, Iyad Allaoui a décidé d'imposer, lundi, « jusqu'à nouvel ordre », un couvre-feu de 16 heures à 8 heures, aux quelque 2 millions d'habitants du faubourg. Lundi soir, nul ne semblait respecter cette décision et des milliers de civils vauquaient à leurs occupations, tandis que des miliciens « sadristes », masqués, armés de lance-grenades et de kalachnikov, se plaçaient en embuscade un peu partout sur les toits et continuaient de contrôler les carrefours et la circulation. « Une nouvelle bataille se prépare pour la nuit, mais nous les attendons », confiait l'un de leurs chefs au téléphone.

Cinq otages relâchés par leurs ravisseurs

Cinq otages – deux Libanais, deux Jordaniens et un Syrien – ont été libérés par leurs ravisseurs, lundi 9 août, en Irak. Nada Sayyour a déclaré que son mari, le Libanais Kassim Mourkbaoui, lui avait téléphoné d'Irak pour lui dire qu'il avait été relâché, ainsi que son compatriote Nassir Al-Djoundi, et qu'ils étaient tous les deux en bonne santé. Les deux hommes avaient été enlevés jeudi, ainsi que deux autres personnes, entre Bagdad et Ramadi. Au moins trois autres Libanais sont toujours retenus en otage en Irak, dont un homme d'affaires, Antoine Antoun. Lundi, le chauffeur de celui-ci, le Syrien Issa Al-Cheikh Ouad, a été libéré, ont annoncé des membres de sa famille.

A Amman, les familles de deux camionneurs jordaniens qui avaient été enlevés par un groupe se faisant appeler les « Moudjahidins du peuple » ont précisé qu'ils rentreraient mardi en Jordanie. Ils avaient été capturés après avoir quitté une base américaine des environs de Kaïm, non loin de la frontière irako-syrienne. Leurs ravisseurs exigeaient le retrait d'Irak de la société qui les emploie. – (Reuters.)

A 160 km au sud, après cinq jours de combats à Nadjaf, le jeune chef de ce mouvement politico-religieux formé après l'invasion d'avril 2003, est apparu plus défiant que jamais. Rejetant l'invitation à entrer en politique lancée par M. Allaoui, « car il est impossible d'avoir une vie politique et démocratique normale sous occupation étrangère », l'imam des déshérités, qui recrute surtout dans les classes chiites les plus pauvres, a déclaré que ce n'est pas à lui et à ses hommes de quitter Nadjaf, mais « aux forces d'occupation. Qu'elles s'en aillent, et le processus démocratique pourra s'engager », a-t-il dit.

OCÉAN DE MENSONGES

Tenant conférence dans une salle du complexe sacré de l'imam Ali, Moqtada Al-Sadr a nié que sa milice soit composée « de criminels et de gangsters », comme Iyad Allaoui le disait la veille. Appelant les forces de l'ordre irakiennes à ne pas « combattre leurs frères », il a qualifié ses partisans de « bons musulmans qui défendent l'islam et la sainte cité de Nadjaf contre l'infidèle ». Les marines, qui ont repris aux Polonais le contrôle de la région, continuaient, lundi, d'affirmer avoir tué « environ 360 combattants ennemis », alors que l'Armée du Mahdi n'admettait en avoir perdu que moins d'une trentaine.

Dans l'océan de mensonges déversé de part et d'autre, il est difficile de voir clair. Sur les « 1200 combattants-criminels » prétendument arrêtés samedi, selon le gouverneur local, sans parler de la « victoire complète » à Nadjaf annoncée le même jour par le ministre de l'intérieur, le chef de la police de la ville n'a pu montrer, lundi, à la presse que 280 jeunes hommes, pour la plupart arrêtés aux barrages militaires autour de la ville et soupçonnés de vouloir rejoindre les miliciens. Lundi soir, une seule chose, confirmée de toutes parts, était sûre et lourde de périls : le gouverneur de Nadjaf, avec le feu vert de M. Allaoui, a autorisé les forces américaines à pénétrer dans le saint des saints chiite pour en déloger par la force les « soldats » de l'Armée du Mahdi.

Patrice Claude

Un modèle irakien ?

UNE des premières décisions américaines après la chute de Saddam Hussein avait été d'abolir la peine de mort dont le dictateur irakien avait fait usage de manière abominable. Moins de six semaines après avoir été installé au pouvoir par Washington, le gouvernement intérimaire de Bagdad vient de la rétablir. Cette décision du nouveau premier ministre, l'ex-baasiste Iyad Allaoui, pourtant formulée en termes d'un flou inquiétant – puisqu'elle s'appliquera aux « meurtriers et aux individus menaçant le pays » – a reçu l'aval de l'ambassadeur américain.

Le ministre des droits de l'homme a approuvé cette mesure, comme le directeur de

l'Institut irakien pour la démocratie, même s'il juge que cette « formulation très vague peut laisser place à bien des interprétations ». L'objectif évident est de rétablir un ordre de plus en plus menacé par la résistance sunnite, le terrorisme islamiste et les milices chiites. Mais aussi de fournir un cadre légal qui permettra de condamner à mort Saddam Hussein.

Cette volonté répressive d'un pouvoir soutenu à bout de bras par l'armée américaine a pour objectif avoué de placer M. Allaoui, qui se présente comme le nouvel homme à poigne du pays, dans une position de force. Il en a bien besoin pour affronter les problèmes – sécuritaires, politiques, communau-

taires ou économiques – qui assaillent le pays depuis la chute du régime baasiste.

Mais on peut aussi y voir un signe de faiblesse d'un pouvoir qui ne contrôle pas grand-chose. Tout comme d'une administration Bush en pleine campagne électorale et qui cherche à se décharger au maximum de ses responsabilités sur M. Allaoui.

On ne saurait certes attendre de cet homme qu'il transforme du jour au lendemain son pays en un havre de démocratie. Après tout, la peine de mort est appliquée partout au Proche-Orient, à commencer par les alliés de Washington. Mais les promesses faites par le président Bush pendant la guerre d'établir en Irak un régime qui serait un exemple de paix, de liberté et de démocratie dans la région ont fait long feu.

Les Etats-Unis se retrouvent donc face à un impossible dilemme : comment rétablir la sécurité dans un pays qui leur

échappe, et qui les hait, sans déraiper dans une sanglante répression ? Comment donner le pouvoir à des gens qui n'ont aucune expérience de la démocratie, et dont certains ont servi Saddam, tout en espérant qu'ils se conduisent en gentlemen, alors même que leur vie est constamment menacée ?

Loin d'apparaître comme un modèle, le nouvel Irak semble déjà sombrer dans l'ordinaire des régimes autoritaires de la région confrontés à la dissidence d'une partie de leur population. Une situation que la Maison Blanche et le Pentagone auraient pourtant pu prévoir.

Pour que l'Irak puisse espérer repartir sur de nouvelles bases et sortir de cette culture de la répression qui l'a plombé depuis un demi-siècle, former les Irakiens à la démocratie ne suffira pas. Il faudra d'abord que leurs dirigeants en fassent, eux aussi, l'apprentissage.

Le cœur touristique d'Istanbul touché par des attentats

Deux bombes dans des hôtels ont fait 2 morts et au moins 14 blessés.

Istanbul de notre correspondant

Deux personnes ont été tuées et une quinzaine blessées lors d'explosions simultanées de bombes visant deux hôtels dans les quartiers touristiques de Laleli et Sultanahmet dans la nuit de lundi à mardi à Istanbul. Deux autres bombes ont explosé sans faire de victime dans une raffinerie de gaz de pétrole liquéfié, dans la banlieue, non loin de l'aéroport. Le réceptionniste de l'hôtel Pars a affirmé qu'il avait reçu un appel anonyme dix minutes avant l'explosion précisant « qu'une bombe avait été placée dans la chambre 305 ». Le personnel n'a pas eu le temps d'avertir la police ni d'évacuer les 37 clients. La deuxième bombe a explosé au deuxième étage de l'hôtel Star Holiday où dormaient 20 clients. Un Turc et un Iranien ont trouvé la mort, deux Hollandais, quatre Espagnols, deux Chinois, deux

Marocains, un Ukrainien, un Polonais, un ressortissant du Turkménistan et un Turc ont été blessés.

Rassurer. Le ministre turc de l'Intérieur, Abdulkadir Aksu, s'est rendu sur les lieux des attentats et a dénoncé « ceux qui

«Istanbul est une ville sûre et la Turquie un pays sûr...»

Abdulkadir Aksu, ministre de l'Intérieur

veulent déstabiliser la Turquie et lutter contre la paix, la stabilité et la prospérité ». Il a implicitement accusé « les terroristes séparatistes » – les rebelles kurdes du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), dans le jargon officiel – tout en affirmant qu'aucune piste n'était exclue. Il a surtout tenu à rassurer pour éviter les répercussions sur le tourisme, affirmant « qu'Istanbul est une ville sûre et la Turquie un pays sûr ».

Une organisation se réclamant d'Al-Qaeda, « les moudjahidin des brigades Abou

Hafs (al-Masri) », qui avait revendiqué les attentats de Madrid (191 morts en mars), a affirmé hier sur un site Internet être responsable des attentats. Les spécialistes restent sceptiques car ni les cibles ni le modus operandi ne correspondent à ceux de groupes qui ont frappé la métropole du Bosphore en novembre, faisant

60 morts dans des attentats contre des synagogues et des objectifs britanniques.

Fin du cessez-le-feu. Un groupe kurde inconnu, « Faucons pour la liberté du Kurdistan », s'est d'ailleurs attribué ces attentats par un message à l'agence MHA basée en Allemagne et souvent utilisée par le PKK. L'implication de cette organisation dont le leader, Abdullah Ocalan, arrêté en 1999, purge une peine de prison à vie, serait plausible. Le PKK, appelé désormais Kongra-Gel, avait annoncé le 1^{er} juin la fin du cessez-le-feu

unilatéral décrété après l'arrestation d'Ocalan. Depuis, il a repris, dans le sud-est anatolien peuplé en majorité de Kurdes, des attaques contre des objectifs militaires et policiers. Le PKK s'était déjà attaqué, en 1993 et 1994, à des cibles touristiques à Istanbul et dans des stations balnéaires, tuant 4 personnes.

Une autre piste est celle du terrorisme d'extrême gauche qui avait revendiqué plusieurs attentats à la bombe, dont l'une, « accidentelle », dans un bus d'Istanbul, qui a fait 4 morts fin juin, peu avant l'arrivée de George Bush venu participer à un sommet de l'Otan. Enfin, des commerçants de ces quartiers touristiques, surtout fréquentés par des commerçants en provenance des pays d'Europe de l'Est et du Caucase, pensent que les attentats peuvent être le fruit de la concurrence sanglante dans le racket entre bandes mafieuses. ♦

RAGIP DURAN

Le dirigeant chiïte reste minoritaire parmi les chiïtes malgré la combativité de son Armée du Mahdi

Al-Sadr, le symbole de la résistance à l'occupation

Isabelle Lasserre

Il y a un an, personne ne connaissait son nom à l'extérieur des frontières irakiennes. Moqtada al-Sadr, 30 ans et un visage poupin, a surgi sur la scène politique en quelques semaines, après l'arrivée des forces américaines en Irak. Depuis la trêve qui mit fin à la rébellion de son Armée du Mahdi en juin dernier, on pensait que le jeune radical chiïte qui défie les troupes de la coalition s'était assagi.

Les affrontements qui opposent ses combattants aux troupes de la coalition depuis plusieurs jours à Nadjaf et à Sadr City, la banlieue chiïte de Bagdad, prouvent qu'il n'en est rien. Au cours d'une conférence de presse, Moqtada al-Sadr s'est dit déterminé à « combattre l'occupation à Nadjaf jusqu'à sa dernière goutte de sang ».

Est-ce un hasard ? La trêve a été rompue au moment où le grand ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, partisan d'un compromis avec la coalition et dirigeant de la Hawza, la plus haute autorité chiïte, a dû se rendre à Londres pour se soigner. Les deux hommes se livrent une

lutte pour le contrôle de la majorité chiïte. Et pour la première fois, l'absence du modéré al-Sistani permet à Moqtada al-Sadr de tester sa force et sa popularité sur le terrain.

Fils cadet d'un leader chiïte très respecté, assassiné en 1999, probablement par des sbires de Saddam, Moqtada al-Sadr est avant tout apprécié dans les milieux chiïtes défavorisés. Après la chute de Saddam et du parti Baas, il a utilisé les institutions de charité créées par son père pour faire distribuer de la nourriture dans les quartiers pauvres de Bagdad.

La « pensée » du jeune imam de Nadjaf emprunte à la fois au nationalisme irakien et au radicalisme chiïte. Pourfendeur de l'occupation de l'Irak par les forces de la coalition, il réclame le départ immédiat des troupes américaines et la création d'un Etat islamique à Bagdad. « Je suis un ennemi de l'Amérique et l'Amérique est mon ennemie jusqu'au jour du jugement dernier », a-t-il affirmé lundi.

Ses détracteurs lui reprochent son inexpérience – il n'est même pas ayatollah puisqu'il a interrompu ses études religieuses – son impatience et son radicalisme. Mais même si les respon-

sables américains et britanniques ne l'admettent que du bout des lèvres, sa popularité ne faiblit pas dans les villes du Sud et à Sadr City, la périphérie chiïte de Bagdad, où il est devenu un symbole de la résistance à l'occupation étrangère. Et où patrouillent les combattants de son Armée du Mahdi, milice créée en juin 2003 pour défier les troupes de la coalition et « protéger » les autorités reli-

gieuses installées à Nadjaf, ville sainte du chiïsme.

Après l'avoir longtemps ignoré ou sous-estimé, les Américains ont ouvert les hostilités au printemps dernier. Soupçonné d'avoir fait assassiner le leader chiïte modéré al-Khoeï en avril 2003, al-Sadr s'est vu fermer son journal, *al-Hawza*. Certains de ses lieutenants ont été arrêtés. Les troupes de la coalition ont ensuite affronté les partisans d'al-Sadr, chassant l'Armée du Mahdi de Karbala en mai dernier. Aujourd'hui, c'est l'administration irakienne qui a pris le relais. Mais elle est confrontée au même dilemme : l'utilisation de la force consolide al-Sadr et attise la violence. Mais ne rien faire paraît aussi risqué.

Alors que la situation sécuritaire ne s'est pas améliorée depuis le transfert de souverai-

neté aux Irakiens en juin, al-Sadr a prouvé sa capacité à canaliser les frustrations des pauvres et des chômeurs, dont la vie ne s'est pas améliorée avec la chute de Saddam. Depuis la trêve, al-Sadr a créé une police religieuse, la « Force pour la promotion de la vertu », qui patrouille dans les rues de Bagdad pour faire respecter la morale islamique. L'imam radical a assuré qu'il ne se mêlerait pas de politique tant que les militaires américains seront en Irak. Mais beaucoup le soupçonnent de préparer la création d'un mouvement politique en vue des élections en janvier. Il reste cependant encore très minoritaire parmi les chiïtes, qui n'approuvent ni son opposition systématique à la coalition ni ses tentatives de diviser la communauté.



Au cours d'une conférence de presse, Moqtada al-Sadr s'est dit déterminé à « combattre l'occupation à Nadjaf jusqu'à sa dernière goutte de sang ». (Photo Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP.)

LE FIGARO MERCREDI 11 AOÛT 2004

La production irakienne paralysée

Les attaques à répétition contre les installations pétrolières irakiennes ont un coût sans cesse croissant qui prive le pays de sa principale source de devises. Rien que dans le sud de l'Irak, la fermeture d'un oléoduc a divisé par deux les exportations de pétrole depuis cette zone.

Financièrement, cela représente « des pertes quotidiennes de 30 millions de dollars à l'Etat », a estimé, hier, le Conseil de la sécurité nationale. Un manque à gagner considérable pour l'Irak, lorsque l'on établit le bilan des 130 attaques dont ont été la cible tous les oléoducs du pays. « L'Irak a perdu plus de 200 millions de dollars durant les sept derniers mois à cause de l'ensemble des actes de sabotage », estimait déjà le 10 juin dernier, le premier ministre, Iyad Allaoui. « Une somme qui aurait autrement servi à nourrir la population, à verser les salaires, à reconstruire le pays », déplorait à nouveau, hier, le gouvernement irakien.

L'arrêt du pompage dans les terminaux sud de l'Irak a été décidé lundi dernier par la Compagnie pétrolière (South Oil Com-

pagny, SOC) pour des raisons de sécurité. En effet, les insurgés chiites ont menacé de s'attaquer aux installations pétrolières de cette zone pour protester contre les attaques américaines de la ville sainte de Najaf. L'annonce de l'arrêt du pompage de cette région, principal endroit d'où partent les exportations de brut irakien, a eu un impact immédiat sur les cours du pétrole. Ils ont atteint des niveaux records au-delà des 45 dollars le baril.

Pourtant le pompage de brut dans le sud de l'Irak avait été rétabli depuis le 26 juin dernier après la réparation des deux plus importants oléoducs mis à mal par des actes de malveillance, soit 44 jours sans incident. Un record pour ce pays en guerre. A titre de comparaison, l'oléoduc allant des champs du nord de l'Irak (Kirkouk) à Ceyhan, en Turquie, la seconde zone d'exportation, demeure inutilisé à cause de sabotages à répétition. L'Irak, dont le niveau de production s'est amélioré cette année exportait jusqu'à maintenant environ 1,8 million de barils par jour par ses terminaux du sud sur le Golfe.

E. L. C.



Les actes de sabotage contre les installations pétrolières ont coûté à l'Irak « plus de 200 millions de dollars durant les sept derniers mois ». (Photo Ramzi Haidar /AFP.)

Attentats d'Istanbul : revendications contradictoires

ISTANBUL

de notre correspondante

Quelques heures seulement après qu'une organisation liée à Al-Qaïda eut revendiqué les attentats contre deux hôtels à Istanbul qui ont tué 2 personnes et blessé 11 autres, mardi 10 août avant l'aube, un groupe kurde jusqu'ici inconnu mais apparemment proche du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), les Faucons de la liberté du Kurdistan, s'est également déclaré responsable. Un téléphone anonyme à l'hôtel Pars, 10 minutes avant la détonation qui avait dévasté le troisième étage de cet établissement modeste situé dans le quartier de Laleli où s'installent surtout des touristes en provenance du Moyen-Orient et de l'ancien bloc soviétique, avait averti qu'un engin explosif avait été placé dans l'une des chambres. L'explosion a tué un Turc et un Iranien.

Une déflagration simultanée au Star Holiday, un hôtel situé à proximité de Sainte-Sophie et de la Mosquée bleue, a blessé plusieurs touristes étrangers mais la plupart d'entre eux ont pu quitter l'hôpital après avoir été traités. L'explosion, peu après, de deux bombes placées sous des citernes dans un dépôt de gaz liquide aux limites de la ville n'avait causé que des dégâts matériels.

Dans un message posté sur un site Internet islamiste, les brigades Abou Hafs Al-Masri avaient déclaré que ces attentats marquaient le début d'une « vague d'opérations » contre des pays européens. « Istanbul voit l'ouverture de la guerre sanglante que nous avons promise aux Européens », a indiqué leur communiqué. Le même groupe avait revendiqué les attentats kamikazes qui avaient fait 62 victimes à Istanbul en novembre 2003, mais sa crédibilité a été mise en doute à plusieurs reprises. 69 personnes, apparemment membres d'une cellule liée à Al-Qaïda, avaient par la suite été inculpées en Turquie.

AFFRONTEMENTS

Les Faucons de la liberté du Kurdistan, pour leur part, ont déclaré par le biais de l'Agence de presse

mésopotamienne, basée en Allemagne, que les attentats étaient commis en représailles contre les opérations militaires de l'armée turque et l'« exécution » de militants.

L'enquête continue à Istanbul, et les autorités n'excluent pour l'instant aucune éventualité : groupuscules d'extrême gauche, organisations radicales islamistes, militants kurdes... Ces derniers sont cependant les premiers suspects. Des débris récoltés sur les lieux des attentats semblent indiquer que les explosifs sont similaires à ceux utilisés lors d'une tentative d'assassinat contre le gouverneur de la province de Van en juillet. Les militants kurdes avaient nié être impliqués dans cette attaque.

Le PKK, rebaptisé Kongra-Gel, avait annoncé, en mai, qu'il mettait fin à la trêve unilatérale déclarée en 1999 après l'arrestation de son dirigeant Abdullah Ocalan, puisqu'elle était restée sans contrepartie de la part des autorités turques. Bien que le PKK soit désormais divisé et qu'il ait perdu de son influence, de nouveaux affrontements ont été signalés dans le Sud-Est anatolien, causant des victimes aussi bien parmi les militants kurdes que parmi les soldats turcs, au cours des deux mois écoulés. Lundi 9 août, deux soldats ont été tués par l'explosion d'une mine télécommandée dans la province de Hakkari. Le ministre de l'intérieur, Abdulkadir Aksu, a signalé que 4 militants kurdes ont été arrêtés ces jours derniers à Istanbul. « Des engins explosifs et des armes ont été saisis avec ces 4 personnes. Nous examinons tous les liens. Il pourrait s'agir du même groupe », a-t-il déclaré.

Tout en poursuivant ses opérations militaires contre les combattants kurdes, le gouvernement turc a évité de réagir publiquement à la montée de la violence dans le Sud-Est. Ankara veut à tout prix éviter d'être entraîné dans un nouveau conflit à l'approche de la décision sur sa candidature à l'Union européenne, qui doit être prise en décembre.

Nicole Pope

U.S. forces put off Najaf offensive

Reversal follows a day of ultimatums to Sadr's militiamen

By Alex Berenson

NAJAF, Iraq: After spending Wednesday preparing for a major attack against insurgents loyal to the rebel Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr, U.S. forces called off the assault, at least for now.

Officers said the delay sprang from a need to extend planning, and added the attack could still be carried out at any time. The abrupt reversal came after a day of hawkish announcements by U.S. officers here.

U.S. forces have been close to capturing or killing Sadr before but have repeatedly backed off. This time the U.S. commanders had vowed to crush his guerrillas, the Mahdi Army.

The delay came after a day of intense preparation for the attack, with a convoy of tanks and armored vehicles leaving a base. Officers declined to discuss why they did not go ahead with the attack.

"Preparations to do the offensive are taking longer than initially anticipated," said Major David Holahan, second in command of the Marine battalion in Najaf. "We never said what time we would do it."

But a known concern of the U.S. military is that fighting in Najaf's old city, where many of Sadr's guerrillas are hiding, could damage the Imam Ali Shrine, one of the holiest sites in Shiite Islam.

Damage to the mosque by either side could provoke immense anger among Iraq's 15 million Shiites, and troops have been told that the consequences could be catastrophic.

Any attack must still be approved by Ayad Allawi, Iraq's prime minister. Officers said they could not disclose whether Allawi had delayed the attack. Until now, the old city has been off-limits to U.S. troops. Since Tuesday, U.S. patrols have urged most residents of Najaf to evacuate and have warned Sadr's guerrillas to leave the city or be killed.

The congestion of the old city reduces U.S. advantages in firepower, air support and technology. Much of the fighting would need to be conducted on foot.

Before the delay, Colonel Anthony Haslam, commanding officer of the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit in Najaf, said in a statement: "Iraqi and U.S. forces are making final preparations as we get ready to finish this fight that the

Moktada militia started.

"The desired end state is one of stability and security, where the citizens of Najaf do not live in fear of violence or kidnappings, and where the city of Najaf can once again return to peace and prosperity."

The U.S. military suspended most of its patrols and operations as it prepared for the broader assault, and senior officers planned the details of the attack in a series of meetings. U.S. forces have

roughly 5,000 troops in the area, including 2,000 whose primary duties are support and logistics.

There was light fighting here Wednesday morning, but the city then became essentially quiet.

Violence continued elsewhere in Iraq when a bomb exploded in a market just north of Baghdad, killing at least six Iraqis and wounding 10, according to news reports.

The blast occurred in the village of Khan Bani Saad, hospital workers told Reuters. Officials had no further details on the explosion.

Sadr's guerrillas have battled the Iraqi police and U.S. forces for more than a year, and last year an Iraqi judge issued a secret warrant for Sadr's arrest on charges of murdering a moderate Shiite cleric.

After the warrant was disclosed in April, Sadr's forces fought the U.S. military for two months in a nationwide uprising before the two sides reached a truce when the United States agreed not to try to capture or kill Sadr.

U.S. commanders have worried that any direct move against Sadr might increase his strength among Iraq's Shiites, who make up the majority of Iraqis.

But over the last week, most Shiites in Najaf have remained on the sidelines as American and British troops have fought Sadr's militia.

In a statement Wednesday, Sadr urged his militia to keep fighting even if he is killed.

In weighing an attack, Allawi and U.S. commanders must consider the risks of damage to the Shiite shrine against the opportunity to break the Mahdi Army without provoking a wider rebellion.

Since becoming prime minister in June, Allawi has taken several steps to strengthen his control over Iraq, including reinstating the death penalty last week.

Meanwhile, U.S. commanders are anxious to win a high-profile victory after their efforts this spring to oust Sadr from Najaf's old city and take control of Falluja ended in truces that did not achieve U.S. goals.

At their base this afternoon, marines said they were ready for an attack.

"With the amount of firepower and amount of marines and army we have going in there, I think it's going to be overwhelming," Gunnery Sergeant Jeffrey Godfredson said. "I think they're going to break."

The New York Times



American soldiers on Wednesday fired on followers of Moktada al-Sadr in the cemetery near the Imam Ali Shrine in Najaf, Iraq.

International Herald Tribune
Thursday, August 12, 2004

PROCHE-ORIENT Téhéran a testé un missile balistique capable s'atteindre l'Etat hébreu

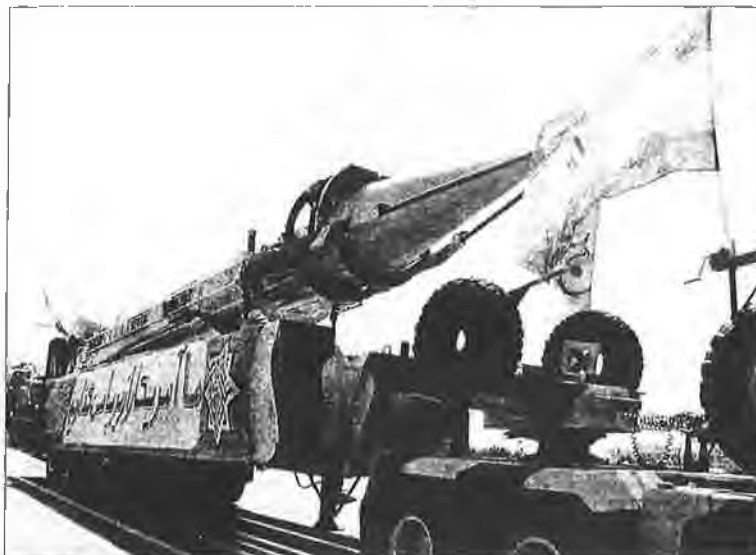
Israël craint les ambitions nucléaires iraniennes

LE FIGARO VENDREDI 13 AOÛT 2004

L'Iran, dont les ambitions nucléaires inspirent la méfiance aux pays occidentaux, a testé un missile balistique pour renforcer sa capacité de défense en réponse à des menaces d'Israël, a expliqué hier un haut responsable de la sécurité iranienne. En visite en Australie, le secrétaire du Conseil suprême de la sécurité nationale iranienne, Hassan Rowhani, a assuré pour sa part que le programme nucléaire iranien était voué exclusivement à la production d'électricité, et non à la fabrication d'armes nucléaires. « Les cibles préétablies ont été atteintes lors de l'expérimentation », a précisé le ministère de la Défense dans un communiqué laconique diffusé par l'agence de presse officielle Irna. La semaine dernière, le ministre iranien de la Défense, Ali Shamkhani, avait annoncé que son pays s'efforçait d'améliorer la portée et la précision du Chahab 3 afin de contrer les efforts d'Israël pour renforcer les capacités de ses missiles antimissiles. L'Iran a repris en outre le mois dernier la production de pièces de centrifugeuses destinées à enrichir de l'uranium, un processus permettant de fabriquer des armes nucléaires.

Jérusalem :
Marc Henry

Israël et l'Iran se livrent, à leur échelle, à une « guerre des étoiles ». Téhéran, accusé par les Américains et les Européens de développer au pas de charge des armes nucléaires, vient d'annoncer avoir testé avec « succès » une version améliorée de son missile Chahab 3 (« Etoile filante » en persan) capable d'atteindre le territoire israélien. Aussitôt, les responsables israéliens ont laissé entendre qu'ils allaient procéder prochainement à un essai d'un modèle plus sophistiqué du Hetz (« Flèche » en hébreu). Ce missile antimissile a réussi le mois dernier à intercepter pour



Un missile Chahab 3 (« Etoile filante » en persan) est exposé lors d'une parade militaire à Téhéran en 2001. Selon l'Iran, la version améliorée de cette arme vise à dissuader l'Etat hébreu d'attaquer ses installations nucléaires. (Photo Atta Kenare/AFP)

la première fois un missile Scud récupéré par l'armée américaine en Irak et qui avait été tiré au large des côtes californiennes.

Selon le ministre iranien de la Défense, Ali Chamkhani, les Chahab 3 ont un caractère « défensif ». Ils visent à dissuader Israël d'attaquer les installations nucléaires iraniennes sur le modèle du raid effectué par l'Etat hébreu contre la centrale nucléaire irakienne d'Osirak près de Bagdad en juin 1981. Un scénario qui n'a rien d'absurde. Des députés israéliens, aussi bien de l'opposition que de la majorité de droite, prônent des attaques préventives.

« Il faut détruire leurs installations atomiques comme nous l'avons fait pour les Irakiens », affirme Ehud Yatom, député du Likoud, le parti d'Ariel Sharon. Un parlementaire de l'opposition travailliste, Ephraïm Sneh, proclame lui aussi qu'Israël « ne peut accepter que le régime islamiste iranien dispose

de l'arme atomique en raison de l'impuissance de la communauté internationale à contrer cette menace ». Le général Yossi Kuperwasser, haut responsable des renseignements militaires, cité par la presse, es-

time pour sa part que l'Iran a décidé « de ne plus tenir aucun compte de ses engagements pris vis-à-vis des Européens à propos de son programme nucléaire ». Les responsables militaires israéliens jugent que l'Iran devrait disposer d'armes nucléaires d'ici à trois ans.

Sur le plan militaire, Israël a les moyens de frapper avec les nouveaux modèles de chasseurs F 15 qui ont commencé à être livrés par les Etats-Unis. Ces appareils à long rayon d'action pourraient viser des installations dispersées par précaution sur tout le territoire iranien sans avoir à être ravitaillés en vol. L'Etat hébreu dispose en outre d'un satellite espion Ofek 5 capable de guider un éventuel raid, de missiles à longue portée de type Jéricho et, selon des experts militaires étrangers, d'un impressionnant arsenal nucléaire comprenant plus d'une centaine de bombes atomiques.

Cette option « offensive » n'est toutefois pas celle qui est privilégiée pour le moment par les responsables politiques et militaires qui misent sur de possibles sanctions anti-iraniennes que pourrait voter le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU sous l'impulsion américaine sur la base

d'un rapport que l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA) basée à Vienne doit présenter en septembre.

« Les missiles et les bombes atomiques de l'Iran ne menacent pas seulement Israël mais aussi l'Arabie saoudite et les pays du Golfe, autrement dit les

principales réserves pétrolières dans le monde, ce que ni les Etats-Unis ni les Européens ne peuvent se permettre d'ignorer pour des raisons stratégiques », souligne un officier israélien.

De plus, les Israéliens ne manquent jamais l'occasion de rappeler à leurs interlocuteurs européens, que l'Iran a commencé à développer des missiles à longue portée capables à l'avenir d'atteindre le flanc sud de l'Europe. Sur le « front » américain, les responsables israéliens ont accueilli avec la plus grande satisfaction les déclarations faites dimanche dernier par Condoleezza Rice. « Les Etats-Unis examineront tous les outils disponibles pour tenter de perturber » le programme nucléaire iranien, a lancé sous forme d'une mise en garde la conseillère pour la sécurité nationale de George W. Bush.

La population refuse de se ranger derrière les miliciens chiites, accusés de pratiquer l'extorsion et le racket, et dont le meilleur atout demeure la connaissance du terrain

Les partisans de Moqtada al-Sadr restent minoritaires

Nadjaf :
Georges Malbrunot

« Qu'on en finisse avec la pègre de Sadr. » Au dernier barrage, à l'entrée de Nadjaf sur la route en provenance de Bagdad, un groupe de policiers irakiens empêche les véhicules de pénétrer dans la ville sainte assiégée par les forces américaines. Le colonel Mohammed Dia est nerveux. Un minibus s'approche du check point. Au premier tir de sommation, le car rebrousse chemin. Le doigt sur la détente, les policiers redoutent une embuscade tendue par des miliciens de l'Armée du Mahdi qui viendraient renforcer les assiégés de Nadjaf.

Mohammed Dia est en contact permanent via son talkie-walkie avec ses supérieurs irakiens dans la ville sainte. « Les gens de Sadr viennent encore d'attaquer un de nos commissariats de police », soupire-t-il, en buvant une gorgée d'eau pour lutter contre la chaleur. « Ce sont des terroristes. Pourquoi ne s'attaquent-ils pas aux Américains. Sadr prétend qu'il lutte contre les occupants. Suis-je un occupant ? Je ne fais que protéger la population. Ce qui m'a révolté, ce sont les assassinats par des miliciens du Mahdi d'une vingtaine de nos hommes depuis le début de la révolte. Ils réglaient les problèmes de circulation et surveillaient des écoles. Est-ce cela suivre les Américains ? Nous n'aimons ni George Bush ni les Américains. »

Et le colonel de joindre le geste à la parole : il jette les rations de bœuf que les marines lui ont apportées ce matin. « On ne garde que les chewing-gums », sourit-il devant ses hommes. Seuls les blindés américains et les rares véhicules dûment fouillés entrent dans Nadjaf. Sous une chaleur



Un soldat américain surveille des habitants de Nadjaf poussés à fuir devant l'intensification des combats. (Photo Hadi Mizban/AP.)

blanche, des colonnes de fumée noire s'élèvent régulièrement dans le ciel. Dans l'autre sens, des habitants continuent de fuir les combats. Taleb, un ouvrier, sort à la recherche d'essence. Il habite non loin du centre-ville, l'épicentre des affrontements, déserté depuis plusieurs jours. « Il n'y a plus du tout d'essence dans Nadjaf. Ce matin, j'ai voulu aller faire soigner mon fils à l'hôpital. On m'a répondu qu'il n'y avait plus de médicaments. Je suis donc reparti. » Depuis une semaine, Taleb abrite quatre familles qui ont dû abandonner

leur toit, près du mausolée d'Ali. Lui aussi n'a pas de mots assez durs contre les miliciens d'al-Sadr. « Ils ont volé des voitures. Ils ont dévalisé des bijouteries et des bureaux de change. Ils rackettent la population. Ce sont des terroristes. » Taleb ignore s'il pourra retourner chez lui le soir. « Dès qu'on s'approche, des sadristes nous tirent dessus. »

Bientôt une semaine que le centre historique de Nadjaf, où se sont retranchés les rebelles chiites, est sans eau ni électricité, et les blessés ont beau-

coup de mal à être évacués. Selon le colonel Dia, 10 000 miliciens y affrontent les troupes américaines dans un combat inégal. « Mais ils ont reçu le soutien de Fedayins de Saddam, et des wahhabites (branche rigoriste de l'islam sunnite, NDLR) que Saddam avait libérés avant la guerre », assure-t-il. Il a reconnu les pratiques utilisées par les responsables des sales besoins du dictateur : les mains coupées et les yeux crevés. Pour lui, la mise en déroute des rebelles chiites ne fait aucun doute, mais al-Sadr

contrôle-t-il d'ailleurs toujours ses troupes, se demande le colonel Dia ? « Certains de ses hommes lui désobéiront, ils continueront le combat, s'il leur ordonne d'arrêter le massacre. Ce sont justement les gens infiltrés par les anciens partisans de Saddam. » « Nous n'acceptons pas une

attaque américaine sur les lieux saints de Nadjaf, ajoute de son côté Taleb, mais il n'y a pas d'autre choix. » « On veut se débarrasser d'al-Sadr et de sa pègre », renchérit Mohammed Dia, qui avoue ne pas avoir pour autant de contacts opérationnels avec les troupes américaines engagées

dans l'assaut.

Selon lui, les deux tiers des habitants de Nadjaf se réjouiraient si l'imam des gueux était défait, mais il y a les autres, note-t-il, cette minorité qui le respecte, et qui honore en particulier la mémoire de son père, un grand ayatollah, assassiné avec trois de ses

frères au printemps 1999 par les sbires du régime déchu. Les Américains ont certainement cet état des lieux de l'opinion locale en tête : ils sont prêts à pousser leur avantage militaire, jusqu'au bout, quels que soient les risques politiques d'un assaut sur Nadjaf, la sainte.

L'Armée du Mahdi à la recherche d'alliés politiques

LE FIGARO VENDREDI 13 AOÛT 2004

L'Armée du Mahdi, des vau-pieds en quête de soutien. Portée sur les fonts baptismaux le 18 juillet 2003 par Moqtada al-Sadr au cours d'un prêche incendiaire appelant à « la mobilisation générale » contre les forces américaines en Irak, l'Armée du Mahdi est composée de milliers de jeunes combattants inexpérimentés, issus des quartiers chiites déshérités, souvent illettrés, aisément manipulables, mais résolus à se sacrifier pour mourir en martyr, perpétuant ainsi le mythe fondateur pour les chiites.

Les miliciens d'al-Sadr ne peuvent compter que sur un armement léger : des mitraillettes Kalachnikov, des lance-roquettes RPG, des grenades à main et des obus de mortier. Ils opèrent en petits groupes mobiles. A Nadjaf, leur connaissance du terrain est leur principal atout. Chose peu connue : ils peuvent se cacher en se déplaçant dans un mystérieux réseau de tunnels et de caves sous la vieille ville et sous son antique nécropole ; des galeries souterraines très anciennes pour se protéger contre la chaleur étouffante des longs mois d'été.

Contrairement aux anciens militaires et membres des services de renseignements de Saddam Hussein, qui conduisent la guérilla antiaméricaine plus au nord dans les régions sunnites, leur inexpérience militaire est rapidement apparue à leur mentor, qui utilisa ses appuis dans le monde chiite pour tenter d'y remédier. Dès l'été 2003, quelques mois seulement après la guerre qui chassa Saddam du pouvoir à Bagdad pour le plus grand plaisir de la majorité chiite du pays, les services de renseignements américains

repéraient une centaine de cadres du Hezbollah libanais, en Irak. « Sadr envoya des émissaires au Liban juste après la guerre, explique un spécialiste de la mouvance intégriste qui souhaite rester anonyme. Les instructeurs du Hezbollah ont effectivement travaillé auprès de l'Armée du Mahdi. Mais dans le même temps, l'Iran, qui soutient le Hezbollah, est resté prudent. Téhéran n'a pas voulu s'aliéner les autres partis chiites, que le régime des mollahs soutient également. » Sur une scène politique extrêmement volatile, l'Iran, où Moqtada al-Sadr s'était rendu dès le 4 juin 2003, a longtemps hésité à jouer la carte des rebelles chiites.

Pour Téhéran, la flexibilité est requise, et il s'agit avant tout de tester le meilleur « cheval » chez son voisin irakien. Au cours de sa semaine passée à Téhéran, à l'occasion des commémorations du 14^e anniversaire de la mort de l'ayatollah Khomeyni, Moqtada al-Sadr rencontra le gratin de la République islamique, lui qui est pourtant un farouche défenseur d'un chiisme purement irakien. Il eut des entretiens avec le numéro un du régime, l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei, le responsable du secteur de la Justice, Hashemi Sharoudi, ainsi, semble-t-il, et dans le plus grand secret, avec Qasem Souleimani, commandant de la Brigade al-Qods, une section spéciale des services de renseignements des gardiens de la révolution.

Le voyage ne tarda pas à porter ses fruits. Al-Sadr autorisa ensuite que des portraits de Khomeyni soient placardés sur les murs de son bastion de Sadr City à Bagdad, immense bidonville à la périphérie de la capi-

tale. Parallèlement, des figures pro-iraniennes acquièrent des responsabilités autour de lui. Ce fut le cas notamment d'Ali al-Baydani, qui devint l'un des

Des milliers de jeunes combattants inexpérimentés, issus des quartiers déshérités, souvent illettrés

principaux commandants de l'Armée du Mahdi, après avoir passé plusieurs années au séminaire religieux chiite de Qom, en Iran, où al-Sadr peut compter sur son mentor l'ayatollah Haeri, un proche d'Ali Khamenei. Cette lente montée en puissance de l'Armée du Mahdi s'est faite avec l'assentiment des Américains, occupés alors à traquer Saddam Hussein et à juguler la résistance sur le front sunnite. Ignorant un jeune prédicateur - il n'a même pas 30 ans - qui de plus est loisé avec dédain par ses aînés de Nadjaf, les responsables de la coalition laisseront ses hommes imposer leur loi à Sadr City notamment, mais ils l'excluront du jeu politique.

Al-Sadr ne sera pas invité à participer au Conseil intérimaire de gouvernement, formé par Washington en juillet 2003. Les hommes d'al-Sadr sauront

également puiser dans un autre réservoir de compétences, plus inattendu, celui-là : leurs coreligionnaires chiites des fedayins de Saddam, l'une des milices du dictateur réputée pour sa férocité dans la répression. Certains de ses cadres, qui ont trop de sang sur les mains pour espérer une quelconque clémence, structureront alors l'Armée du Mahdi, notamment à

Nadjaf. Union sacrée anti-américaine oblige : pendant le siège de Faludja en avril dernier par l'US Army, des contacts seront noués entre rebelles chiites et sunnites. Les deux camps ont un lourd passé de haine, mais foin des divergences idéologiques, un seul objectif les rassemble : chasser les Américains d'Irak. Des deux côtés, certains rêvent même d'un axe al-Sadr-islamistes et nationalistes sunnites, qui récupérerait le pouvoir une fois que l'expérience Alloué aura échoué.

C'est à ce moment-là également que Moqtada al-Sadr décide de passer la vitesse supérieure

dans son opposition face aux troupes d'occupation. Après la liquidation par Israël de Cheikh Yacine, le leader du Hamas à Gaza, le 22 mars, il déclare publiquement que les Mahdi seront « le bras armé » du Hamas et du Hezbollah en Irak. Ces paroles sont de trop aux yeux des Américains, qui tirent parti de la semonce de leur ennemi pour arrêter un proche de Sadr et fermer une publication qui lui est proche. Sa première intifada est lancée dans le pays chiite. Elle lui permettra d'accroître sa popularité hors de ses bastions traditionnels. « On a sous-estimé le clivage entre chiites arabes et chiites d'origine iranienne, estime un analyste. Al-Sadr incarne la ligne arabe. Il s'oppose aux autres leaders chiites irakiens, comme Sistani et Hakim, dont les familles sont originaires d'Iran. » Contrairement à ces derniers, qui jouent la carte de la coopération pacifique avec la puissance occupante, al-Sadr campe à la fois sur les deux tableaux de l'islamisme et du nationalisme arabe. Trop sans doute, pour les stratèges américains bien décidés à le faire rentrer dans le rang.

G. M. (à Nadjaf)

Saddam's oil-food fraud: 'UN let him do it'

August 13, 2004

By Susan Sachs and Judith Miller

Toward the end of 2000, when Saddam Hussein's skimming from the oil-for-food program for Iraq kicked into high gear, reports spread quickly to the program's supervisors at the United Nations.

Oil industry experts told Security Council members and Secretary General Kofi Annan's staff that Iraq was demanding under-the-table payoffs from its oil buyers. The British mission distributed a background paper to Council members outlining what it called "the systematic abuse of the program" and described how Iraq was shaking down its oil customers and suppliers of goods for kickbacks.

When the report landed in the UN's Iraq sanctions committee, the clearinghouse for all contracts with Iraq, it caused only a few ripples of consternation. There was no action, diplomats said, not even a formal meeting on the allegations.

Since Saddam's fall, the oil-for-food program has received far more scrutiny than it ever did during its six years of operation. In Washington, the General Accountability Office has estimated that Saddam siphoned at least \$10 billion from the program by illicitly trading in oil and collecting kickbacks from companies that had UN approval to do business with Iraq.

Multiple investigations now under way in Washington and Iraq and at the UN all center on one question: How did Saddam amass so much money while under international sanctions?

An examination of the program, the largest in the UN's history, suggests a straightforward answer: The United Nations let him do it.

"Everybody said it was a terrible shame and against international law, but there was really no enthusiasm to tackle it," said Peter van Walsum, a Dutch diplomat who headed the Iraq sanctions committee in 1999 and 2000, recalling the discussions of illegal oil surcharges. "We never had clear decisions on anything. So we just in effect condoned things."

Former officials and diplomats who dealt directly with the program now say that the bribery and kickback racket was an open secret for years.

The program, created in 1996, was an ambitious attempt to keep up international pressure on Iraq to disarm while helping the Iraqi people survive the sanctions imposed on Saddam's government after its invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

The effort was financed by the sale of Iraqi oil. A political compromise allowed Iraq to decide to whom it would sell its oil and from whom it would buy relief supplies. It was up to the UN to make sure that the price Iraq

set for the oil was fair and that the proceeds were buying relief goods, and not being funneled to Saddam's coffers or being used for illicit arms.

As the flow of money ballooned, the UN, with an annual budget of just \$1.5 billion, was responsible for collecting and disbursing as much as \$10 billion a year in Iraqi oil revenues. Despite an elaborate system for overseeing oil-for-food contracts, corruption never seemed to be the chief concern of anyone involved. The United States and Britain were focused on keeping material related to illicit weapons out of Iraq. For the UN bureaucracy, the priority was keeping goods flowing to the Iraqi people.

In the halls of the UN, the program became a battleground for the competing commercial interests and political agendas of the 15 individual nations that made up the Security Council, diplomats said. Those same nations made up the Iraq sanctions committee, which took action only by a consensus that could be blocked by any member.

The result was a paralysis that translated into acquiescence toward matters like oil smuggling and kickbacks.

When the committee learned from a press report in late 2001 of allegations that an Indian company was helping Iraq purchase embargoed materials for a

Herald Tribune



João Silva for The New York Times

Goods donated for Iraqis under the UN oil-for-food program turned up in February on sale at a black market in Baghdad.

nuclear fuel plant, the United States and Britain pressed for an investigation.

Two committee members said the panel debated for months whether to urge India to investigate. "Discussions on the matter remain inconclusive," the committee said. While the diplomats were deadlocked over how to address violations of the sanctions, money and contracts continued to flow through the Office of the Iraq Program, the administrator of the oil-for-food program.

The work of that office, and its former director, Benon Sevan, are the focus of a UN investigation of mismanagement and corruption in the program, an inquiry headed by Paul Volcker, the former Federal Reserve chairman. Volcker has announced that his panel will need at least \$30 million and probably a year more to determine whether United Nations officials took bribes or engaged in other corruption while administering the program.

Sevan, a Cypriot, has declined to comment, but has said in a statement that his office was not responsible for ferreting out corruption.

Evidence of fraud passed from office to office in a round robin ending nowhere. A former State Department official who was part of a committee that reviewed trade contracts with Iraq said the group detected "abnormalities in pricing that suggested fees and kickbacks."

The former official said the committee "asked why Iraq needed to import gilded tiles for palaces, or liposuction equipment."

Peter Burleigh, who was the deputy American representative to the UN in the late 1990s, said those concerns had been relayed to Sevan's office. Sevan's office said it had passed information regarding suspicious contracts to the sanctions committee, on which the United States held a permanent seat.

Even after the committee received reports that suppliers were padding their contracts to hide payoffs, the committee never rejected a contract to sell goods to Iraq because of cost, according to recent congressional reports and former UN officials.

Sevan's chief interest was to avoid deadlocks over relief supplies, said Michel Tellings, one of the three overseers who monitored Iraq's oil sales for the United Nations.

"Benon saw that he had a divided Security Council in front of him and was more concerned about getting the food in and the oil out," Tellings said. "So he took a middle way and didn't investigate problems. He'd say, 'If you've got clear evidence, I've got to go to the Security Council. If it's a rumor, don't bother.'"

The lack of coordination in the program was evident in the fact that while UN auditors produced 55 reports on the program, several diplomats on the sanctions committee said in interviews that they never even saw them.

In the end, a complicated set of political and financial pressures kept the program ripe for corruption. Van Walsum, the retired Dutch diplomat, said he sometimes suspected that his fellow diplomats were disinclined to

hear about potential fraud because they were concerned about protecting the interests of friendly companies and foreign allies eager to trade with Iraq. "Everyone," he said, "was living in the same glass house."

On one level, the program worked well. According to the General Accountability Office, which is an arm of the U.S. Congress, the program provided food, medicine and services to 24 million Iraqis. Malnutrition rates for children fell, and the decline in living conditions was arrested, UN data show.

But along the way, the Security Council approved provisions that opened the program to corruption. Saddam agreed to the program in 1996 only after winning a major concession: While the UN would control Iraq's oil revenues, Iraq could negotiate its own contracts for the sale of oil and for the purchase of supplies. That arrangement, according to the General Accountability Office, "may have been one important factor in allowing Iraq to levy illegal surcharges and commissions."

Then in 1999, the Security Council removed all restrictions on the amount of oil Iraq could sell.

The United States and Britain, meanwhile, were delaying the approval of contracts that they feared would provide Iraq with material or equipment that could be used for the development of weapons of mass destruction. This deeply concerned the UN officials trying to improve Iraqi living conditions and drew objections from members of the Security Council that favored a freer flow of commerce with Iraq.

Van Walsum said that even for those countries that supported sanctions, oil for food meant oil, not for weapons of mass destruction. Facing pressure from other nations, the United States and Britain agreed to further compromises in the sanctions system.

Different Council members had different levels of tolerance for the abuse, said Tellings, the former oil overseer.

When the United States and others wanted the sanctions committee to confront Syria on oil sales, they were blocked by Russia and France, which argued that Syria should not be singled out when the Americans refused to investigate Iraq's equally lucrative oil trade with their allies, Jordan and Turkey.

Congressional investigators have estimated that Iraq collected \$5.7 billion from selling oil outside UN supervision, while the oil-for-food program was short of money for relief supplies.

John Negroponte, then the U.S. ambassador to the UN and now to Iraq, defended the special treatment given to Jordan and Turkey that let them pay Iraq directly for oil. Both countries were suffering economically from the sanctions, he told a Senate committee.

He demurred when Senator Christopher Dodd, one of the committee members, asked who benefited from the unsupervised oil sales. But Dodd said he had few doubts.

"Wouldn't it be a pretty good guess," he asked, "that they probably ended up

in the pockets of Saddam Hussein and his cronies?" Dodd asked.

Negroponte replied, "I just don't know, sir."

Saddam's government demanded kickbacks on almost every contract it negotiated, beginning in 2000, according to documents from Iraqi ministries obtained by The New York Times. Iraqi leaders ordered ministries to notify companies that they had to pay an amount equal to 10 percent of the contract value into secret foreign bank accounts, a violation of the UN sanctions. To do so, Iraqi officials said, suppliers would inflate the prices of their goods.

A shakedown plan of such magnitude — \$33 billion worth of goods were ordered by Iraq from mid-2000 until the American-led invasion last year — did not go unnoticed.

"When the 10 percent came in, companies came and asked us what to do," recalled Jacques Sarnelli, who served as the commercial counselor of the French Embassy in Baghdad at the time. "We said it's illegal. You do it at your own risk. We don't want to know about it, and we are against it."

At UN headquarters in New York, the officials administering the program were more concerned about relief supplies. Sevan, who headed the Office of the Iraq Program, repeatedly appealed to the sanctions committee to speed up the processing of contracts for equipment, food and other goods.

Sevan's office was supposed to examine the contracts to ensure price and quality. But it was unclear how it fulfilled that responsibility, according to the General Accountability Office.

At one point, the sanctions committee outmaneuvered Saddam on the illegal surcharges.

In late 2000, the oil overseers relayed complaints by oil companies that were buying from Iraq.

After the sanctions committee debated for months about what to do, the United States and Britain pushed through a change in the way Iraq's oil was priced, bringing it more in line with world prices and reducing the margin for fraud. But no attempt was made to recover the surcharge payment or to investigate which companies paid.

"You couldn't ask the committee for guidance because you'd never get an answer," Tellings said. "It was nobody's responsibility."

The New York Times

Baghdad slum fuels power of radical cleric

By Sabrina Tavernise

BAGHDAD: Moktada al-Sadr's challenge since his first uprising against the Americans in the spring has been based on two trump cards: his control of the shrine in Najaf in the Shiite heartland, and his unchallenged primacy in Sadr City, the immense and destitute Shiite neighborhood that is home to two million of Baghdad's 5.5 million people.

Even if the twists of negotiations or the resumption of the American and Iraqi military operation shake Sadr's grip on the Imam Ali shrine, his principal power base in Sadr City, which is named for his father, will remain, poised like an arrow at the capital's heart.

To deprive him of that would require a full-scale American assault on Sadr City's heavily populated neighborhoods and attacks on the mosques used as armories and strongholds. Neither United States military commanders nor Ayad Allawi, prime minister of Iraq's interim government, seems likely to hazard moves like that.

Last week, Sadr's militia, known as the Mahdi Army, gave a foretaste of the destabilizing potential their control of Sadr City gives. After American commanders imposed a 16-hour-a-day curfew on Sadr City, Sadr responded

with a curfew order of his own — over all Baghdad. Streets in the capital emptied after the 1 p.m. deadline the cleric's aides had set for businesses to close and workers to go home.

The Sadr fighters seemed to thumb their noses at the U.S. curfew.

Even in daylight, they drive deep into the center of Baghdad in groups of two or three vehicles, firing rockets at the huge international compound along the Tigris River's west bank where the U.S. Embassy, the U.S. military command and Allawi are hunkered down.

It is becoming routine for Mahdi fighters to stage attacks in other neighborhoods. In Baghdad's Shaab area last week, militiamen drove to a police station, surrounded it and began shooting, killing one officer and wounding two, an officer from the station said. When Mahdi fighters demanded that a market in Shaab close the next day, vendors immediately complied.

Nighttime is particularly hazardous. Mortar fire torments the U.S. post, Forward Operating Base Eagle, at the eastern edge of Sadr City. Soldiers there are required to wear body armor when venturing outside. The violence in Sadr City takes its toll. For the week ending on Friday, an average of nine people a day were killed in the district, according to Iraq's Health Ministry.

Many middle-class Iraqis emphasize that the Mahdi militia is a volatile mix of religious fighters, Iraqis showing solidarity with Sadr and criminals released from jail under Saddam Hussein's amnesty shortly before the war.

"The constitution of this army is a mix of many groups," said Thaier al-Sudani, a Sadr City resident who works as an English translator for Baghdad University. "Many of them are dealing with alcohol. It is hard to find a graduated man among them."

Fighters brush off those accusations, saying the army is better organized and more focused than people think. Uday Hashem, a 22-year-old former car mechanic who is now with the militia, said fighters communicated with other groups by mobile telephone.

The militia has divided Sadr City into 79 sections, with each Mahdi commander controlling four of them, said Ali Abdul-Hussein, 22, who commands a checkpoint of about 10 men.

Even medical care and food are coordinated. Local men and women cook for the units that keep watch at the checkpoints, and when fighters are wounded in attacks outside the district they sometimes take them to private hospitals with doctors friendly to their cause.

Unraveling the Mahdi Army has proved particularly difficult, in part be-

cause of the elaborate web of patronage and tribal systems that crisscrosses the closely knit neighborhoods of Sadr City. Police officers are relatives and friends of the fighters, and for the most part do not interfere with their activities, even though it is their job to do so.

The officers' consideration for fellow Shiites in Sadr City was evident at a demonstration on Friday in which thousands of Shiites gathered in a central square in Baghdad to protest the U.S. siege of Najaf. Two police stations near the area allowed posters of Sadr to be propped up on rooftop watchtowers. The afternoon prayer was broadcast from speakers hooked up to a police vehicle.

Abdul Rakhman, a 42-year-old furniture maker, described the army fighters as Robin Hoods who helped people pay for cooking gas and directed traffic.

"I swear to you, the Mahdi Army is for the people," he said.

But their attacks have cost American occupiers and the new Iraqi authorities dearly, as the violence and unpredictability slowly erodes Iraqis' patience.

"We're living without our dignity," said Haidar Abd, a 19-year-old who was standing at Al Karkh Hospital with a friend wounded in a firefight between the Mahdi Army and U.S. troops. "How long will we have to live like this?"

The New York Times



Karim Sahib/Associated Press

Fighters of Moktada al-Sadr's fighters in Najaf on Sunday, beside a picture of his leader.

Irak Dans le sanctuaire des rebelles chiïtes

Frénésie à Najaf, dans l'attente de l'offensive annoncée par le gouvernement contre les milices. Reportage de notre envoyé spécial avant l'évacuation des journalistes ordonnée hier par Bagdad.

16 AOUT 2004



Najaf envoyé spécial

Ils embrassent les rebelles qui, à leur tour, brandissent leurs kalachnikovs ou font le V de la victoire. Ils battent le bitume en cadence comme lorsqu'ils célèbrent le martyre de Hussein. Ce sont des hommes exclusivement, venus par milliers des quatre coins du pays chiïte «briser le siège» de leur ville sainte et soutenir Moqtada al-Sadr et son armée du Mehdi. «Voilà tes soldats», crient-ils à l'intention du dirigeant radical, qui continue de défier les troupes américaines et le gouvernement de Bagdad. Tout autour d'eux, jusqu'en haut d'immeubles éventrés, les miliciens, un bandana vert sur le front, leur lance-roquettes à l'épaule, arborent le sourire des vainqueurs.

Courte trêve. «Nous sommes partis après la prière du ven-

dredi sur ordre de notre imam» explique un habitant de Bagdad. Il a marché avec ses compagnons jusqu'à la sortie de la capitale, puis effectué le reste du voyage en bus. «Ceux qui ne luttent pas n'ont qu'à porter le voile!», lance-t-il. Il y a même un convoi de vivres envoyé par Fallouja, le bastion sunnite. Une soixantaine de camions apportent de la nourriture et des médicaments, cadeaux d'un symbole de la résistance à un autre. «Najaf est encerclée comme Fallouja. Ses habitants nous ont aidés. C'est maintenant notre tour de leur rendre la pareille», explique un des chauffeurs.

Ils profitent de la courte trêve décrétée vendredi soir et qui a pris fin dimanche matin. Passé le pont étroit qui enjambe l'Euphrate, aucun marine ni garde national irakien ne montre le bout de son arme.

Après huit jours de combats, Najaf est une ville ouverte, mais aux seuls partisans de Moqtada al-Sadr. Ils règnent en maîtres des Koufa, la cité voisine. Des miliciens souvent très jeunes fouillent passants et voitures, gèrent la circulation ou organisent le nettoyage des rues, jonchées de débris. Ils contrôlent tous les accès au mausolée de l'imam Ali, le lieu le plus sacré du chiïsme, dont le dôme étincelant d'or aurait été éraflé par des tirs.

«Bien sûr que c'est une victoire», affirme Ahmed al-Chaibani. Assis sur une couverture, le jeune représentant de Moqtada al-Sadr a pris ses quartiers dans la madrasa Al-Kawama,

un des nombreux séminaires de la ville sainte. Ses hommes se reposent dans les cours ombragées aux murs couverts de faïences. Toutes les grandes figures du clergé chiïte ont dé-

serté la ville avec leurs étudiants dès le début des hostilités. Vidée de ses membres, la *hawza* – l'ensemble des centres d'enseignement de la religion – a cédé la place à ces guérilleros issus des quartiers déshérités et emmenés par des imams souvent inconnus.

Blessé. Le grand ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, qui incarne le courant quiétiste du chiïsme, se trouve à Londres, officiellement pour raison de santé. «Pourquoi choisir l'Angleterre, pays de la coalition? Il aurait dû se rendre en France ou en Allemagne, s'indigne le cheikh al-Chaibani. Tous les marja' [hautes autorités religieuses, source d'imitation pour les croyants, ndlr] sont partis. C'est une honte! Il ne reste plus que Moqtada al-Sadr! Il a des qualités que les autres n'ont pas.» Il confirme que son chef a été blessé «à la main et à la

jambe» par un tir de char vendredi pendant qu'il «inspectait» la toute nouvelle «unité des martyres» chargée de mener des opérations suicides. Les «sadristes» se disent prêts à quitter Najaf si les forces de la coalition et la police ira-

«C'est très bizarre. Les Américains n'ont pas bougé. Ils parlent de grande offensive et ne font rien.»

Cheik al-Chaibani, représentant de Moqtada al-Sadr

kienne en font autant et à confier le contrôle de la ville aux marja'. «Nous ne sortirons plus nos armes sauf si nous sommes attaqués.» Conditions qui ont été rejetées dès samedi soir par le gouvernement irakien. Durant la première phase des combats, cheikh al-Chaibani reconnaissait que l'armée du Mehdi avait perdu 30 combattants alors que les marines affirmaient avoir tué près de 400 insurgés. Il admet que les affrontements n'ont pas été, jusqu'à présent, très virulents. «C'est très bizarre. Les Américains n'ont pas bougé de leurs anciennes positions. Ils parlent de grande offensive mais ne font rien, comme Saddam, qui avait annoncé [lors de la guerre du Golfe de 1991, ndlr] la «mère de toutes les batailles».

Bombardements. Les trous béants sur les façades, les cre-

vasses dans la vaste nécropole où tout chiite rêve d'être enterré, témoignent cependant de l'intensité des bombardements. Le grand marché n'est plus qu'une bouillie de métal et de cendres. Un attroupe-ment s'est formé devant une des échoppes calcinées. Le vendeur de poulets dit avoir tout perdu, «2,4 millions de dinars». «Tant pis, Dieu m'indemniserait Ça, au moins, ça n'a pas brûlé», s'écrie-t-il, montrant les portraits intacts de Moqtada al-Sadr accrochés au mur noirci. Preuve supplémentaire, selon lui, que «l'armée du Mehdi va gagner». A la faveur du cessez-le-feu, la population qui avait fui en masse a commencé à revenir. Fantôme pendant une semai-

ne, la cité a repris vie samedi soir, alors que les combats s'apprêtaient à reprendre. Un habitant ne comprend pas l'attitude du commandement américain, qui pêche selon lui à la fois par un excès de force et de timidité. Il milite à l'Assemblée suprême de la révolution islamique en Irak (Asrii), mouvement qui siège dans le gouvernement intérimaire, et qui est très hostile à Moqtada al-Sadr et ses trublions. «Pourquoi cette attaque? Quel en est le résultat? Ils n'ont réussi qu'à renforcer l'armée du Mehdi. Les Etats-Unis doivent être sérieux. S'ils ne parviennent pas à calmer la situation et à rétablir la sécurité, ils doivent admettre leur échec et partir.»

CHRISTOPHE BOLTANSKI

Répartition ethnique

- ☐ Arabes chiites 60 %
- ☐ Arabes sunnites 20 à 25 %
- ☐ Kurdes sunnites 15 à 20 %



La ville sainte, un enjeu sensible

Que représente Najaf pour les chiites?

Najaf est la ville la plus sainte du monde chiite. C'est là qu'est enterré l'imam Ali, gendre du prophète Mahomet. Le mausolée, construit en 977, a été détruit ou endommagé et reconstruit à plusieurs reprises, notamment en 1991, lors du soulèvement chiite contre Saddam Hussein. Ce dernier restaura l'édifice avec faste et recouvrit la coupole de 7777 briquettes d'or pur. Les habitants de Najaf vivent grâce aux millions de pèlerins qui, chaque année, viennent visiter le mausolée. Tout chiite rêve d'être enterré dans le cimetière, à l'entrée de la ville, qui compte plus de 2 millions de tombes. Depuis la chute du régime baasiste, qui avait mené une répression féroce contre le clergé chiite, Najaf a retrouvé une partie de son lustre d'antan mais il est loin d'avoir rattrapé le prestige de Qom, en Iran, troisième ville sainte du chiisme mais premier centre théologique.

La Hawza, qui désigne les principales écoles théologiques et regroupe le clergé selon une hiérarchie très stricte, a retrouvé un rôle prépondérant dans la vie politique irakienne. Elle est dominée par Ali Sistani, marja (source d'imitation) d'origine iranienne et l'un des cinq grands ayatollahs d'Irak. Sistani, majoritaire dans le peuple chiite, milite pour une séparation entre pouvoir religieux et politique. Il est violemment contesté par le jeune Moqtada al-Sadr, partisan du *velayat al-fakih*, c'est-à-dire du pouvoir aux religieux, théorisé par le défunt ayatollah Khomeiny lors de son exil irakien.

Que veut le gouvernement?

Homme fort du gouvernement intérimaire de l'Irak, à nouveau souverain au moins sur le papier depuis le 28 juin, Iyad Allaoui, chiite mais laïque, a fait du retour à la loi et l'ordre sa priorité. Le rétablissement de la peine de mort et la proclamation de l'état d'urgence dans certains districts lui assurent une réelle popularité dans une population lasse de quinze mois de chaos. «De son lointain passé baasiste, il a gardé un certain autoritarisme qu'il double d'une réelle habileté politique pour diviser le camp adverse, par exemple en intégrant certains cadres du défunt régime dans le nouveau pouvoir», souligne le chercheur Hosham Dawod. Le Premier ministre clame vouloir en finir «avec les milices illégales

«Allaoui a gardé un certain autoritarisme qu'il double d'une réelle habileté politique.»

Hosham Dawod, chercheur

qui sont comme les terroristes». Il tente le passage en force en brisant l'Armée du Mehdi, de Moqtada al-Sadr. Celui-ci a toujours refusé de transformer sa milice en un mouvement politique, comme de participer à la Conférence nationale, prévue fin juillet puis reportée, qui doit jeter les bases de la transition démocratique. Les grands partis chiites n'apprécient guère ce trublion. Le pari d'Allaoui n'en est pas moins hasardeux. La nouvelle autorité irakienne, qui reflète assez fidèlement la mosaïque politique, religieuse et ethnique du pays, risque en effet de passer pour «fantoche» des Américains, et d'aureoler Moqtada du rôle de «résistant». Le gouvernement contrôle la police et des forces

armées encore embryonnaires, mais l'essentiel de la sécurité reste entre les mains des 141 000 hommes, en écrasante majorité américains, de la force multinationale, sur laquelle Bagdad n'a aucun pouvoir.

Quels sont les risques en Irak et dans le monde musulman?

«Si Iyad Allaoui ne gagne pas rapidement, il risque de n'être bientôt rien de plus qu'une espèce de maire de Bagdad», expliquait à la BBC Toby Dodge, de l'Institut international d'études stratégiques (IISS), soulignant le danger d'un embrasement du pays chiite alors que la situation est déjà hors de contrôle dans les zones sunnites du nord-ouest. Certes, Moqtada al-Sadr, qui attire à lui les déshérités et aussi d'ex-baasistes désireux de se refaire un passé, reste minoritaire dans la communauté chiite, où sa propension à la violence et ses provocations choquent. Mais, malgré le désir d'en finir avec lui, les chiites – et tous les Irakiens – seraient révoltés par un assaut contre le sanctuaire d'Ali. Les partisans de Moqtada al-Sadr ont prévenu qu'ils commettraient des attentats contre les installations pétrolières dans le Sud, ce qui relancerait à la hausse le prix du baril. «La nation musulmane et le peuple d'Irak ne pardonneront pas ces atrocités et la nation irakienne va réagir avec virulence», a mis en garde le Guide de la révolution iranienne, Ali Khamenei. Allusion à peine voilée à la capacité de nuisance en Irak de l'Iran, qui ne cache plus son irritation envers les partis chiites et l'ayatollah Sistani, jugés trop «proaméricains».

CHRISTOPHE AYAD ET MARC SEMO

Disputed oil contracts put Kurdish autonomy to the test

Officials in Baghdad claim a series of promising drilling deals struck by Kurds in Iraq's north are invalid. Turkey and Iran are following developments with interest, reports **Nicolas Pelham**

Until recently, just about the only visitors to the Tactac depression in Iraqi Kurdistan were monogamous men heading to the local spring, whose waters were reputed to have the power to grant second wives.

Now oil men in four-wheel-drive vehicles are racing over its stony grazing grounds, conducting seismic surveys. A Turkish company, General Energy, has brought in 70 workers, including 10 Turks, to drill wells, striking oil in all three.

"The potential of the field looks good," says Mehmet Sepil, the company's chairman, who says he obtained drilling rights in the 350 sq km concession in a production-sharing deal with the Kurdish regional government, based in Suleimaniya, three months before the war. "I think in northern Iraq there are very good fields, but there is not yet enough production."

The prospect is exciting the Kurds, hopeful at last of acquiring their own source of oil wealth and reducing their dependence on Baghdad. In addition to the Tactac field, 20 miles north-east of Kirkuk, Suleimaniya has signed a similar deal with a second Turkish company, Petoil, to drill at Chya Surkh, on the Iranian border, and entered into negotiations with an Australian company survey-

ing gas fields in Chanchamal.

These contracts have sparked a dispute with the central government in Baghdad, however, which claims the exclusive right to sign oil deals. Baghdad's oil ministry says the contracts signed with the Kurdish government are invalid.

"It is illegal for any party to conduct negotiations with any party outside the Ministry of Oil. We don't recognise them," says Ameer Abdillillah, a senior oil ministry official. "We choose the companies."

Companies found negotiating with Kurdish leaders, he warns, will be barred from bidding for the greater prize of projects elsewhere in Iraq, the first three of which the ministry expects to award this month. The dispute over control of minerals is a big test of the Kurdish region's future within a united Iraq, say industry analysts. Turkey and Iran, which have restive Kurdish minorities of their own, are anxiously waiting to see who wins in the battle between the centre and the provinces.

"It plays into the broader Kurdish efforts to have as much independence as possible. Kurds will try to create a *fait accompli* and this is their moment," says an industry analyst familiar with the negotiations.

In the midst of the

intrigue, Suleimaniya's hotels buzz with oil consultants who, free of the security constraints of Baghdad, are seeking to advance negotiations and hobnob with officials from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Suleimaniya's ruling party.

The Suleimaniya-based government only controls the eastern half of Kurdistan - territory under the control of the PUK. Their sometimes-rival, the Kurdistan Democratic party, controls the west, and has a separate government based in Arbil. Not to be outdone,

Arbil also opened its doors to prospectors. On June 29, a day after the US ended its formal occupation of Iraq, a small Norwegian oil company, DNO ASA, said it had signed an oil agreement with the Kurdistan regional government "to explore for and develop oil and gas in Northern Iraq".

Barham Saleh, Iraq's Kurdish deputy prime minister, is the man with the uncomfortable job of bridging the divide between the central government and the Kurdish regional governments. Before his appointment, he was prime minister of the Kurdistan regional government based in Suleimaniya. He signed deals with both Turkish companies and led negotiations with the Australian firm, Global Petroleum Ltd, in November last year.

He now chairs the Supreme Committee on Oil, which determines the oil ministry's policy. While "the federal government needs to ratify any agreement to be legally binding", he says, regional governorates must be consulted on Baghdad's plans and have the right to conduct negotiations. Mr Saleh's position appears to contradict flatly that of oil minister Thamir Ghadhban, who told the Financial Times last month he would establish a single national oil company covering all of Iraq.

The two camps claim legitimacy for their positions in Iraq's interim constitution, the Transitional Administrative Law. Article 25 reads: "The Iraqi Transitional Government shall have exclusive competence in managing the natural resources of Iraq." But it also stipulates that decisions should be taken "in consultation with the governments of the regions and the administrations of the governorates".

The oil ministry shows no sign of bowing to the Kurdish position. One of its three tenders is for the \$100m (£81m, £54m) development of the Khormala field, the northern-most finger of the giant Kirkuk field, which juts into the Kurdish-controlled region.

It remains unclear how far Kurdish leaders wish to push the issue. Tactac has ceased production, says Busheyr Noori, its operations manager. Global Petroleum says it is also seeking Baghdad's approval before proceeding.

Underlying Baghdad's position, says Mine Cevik, editor of the Turkish Daily News, is the fear that if the Kurds go their own way, a future regional government in the southern oil producing zone might follow suit. "Then the Shia too will say why don't we operate our own oil fields in the south," he says.



A worker in northern Iraq, which is attracting oil men's attention AFP

Engaging Iran ■ By Dilip Hiro

Washington won't get far by threatening Tehran

TEHRAN The United States has reached a dead end in Iraq, like a trapped wolf," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei recently said at a gathering of Shiite clerics. "It is trying to frighten people by roaring and clawing. But the people of Iraq will not allow the United States to swallow their country."

Such comments are unsurprising, perhaps, coming from the Middle East's most powerful Shiite leader, especially at a time when U.S. forces are engaged in a pitched battle in the Shiite holy city of Najaf. But whatever the political motives for the remarks of Khamenei, who is the supreme leader of Iran, they raise deeper questions about the complicated relationship between the United States and the two largest Shiite-majority countries in the world.

It is hard to judge what most Iranians think of Khamenei's views on Iraq and the U.S. military presence there. On a recent journey through Iran, I found public opinion about America and its invasion of Iraq to be diverse and nuanced. Yet the U.S. position on Iran remains unyielding and focused on Iran's nuclear weapons programs at the expense of almost all else.

"Iran will either be isolated or it will submit to the will of the international community," Condoleezza Rice, President George W. Bush's national security adviser, said last week. Regardless of the merits of her position, her tone surely struck most Iranians as threatening — exactly the opposite of the attitude America needs to convey.

While discussing contemporary Iraq, many Iranians refer directly or implicitly to the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, which consumed at least half a million Iranian lives and caused untold misery. The nearer the Iraqi border, the more painful the memories of the conflict and the greater the dislike and distrust of Iraqis and Iraq — with or without Saddam Hussein as their leader.

Iran's oil-rich Khuzestan province, bordering Iraq and the northern tip of the Gulf, suffered heavily in the war with Iraq. The city of Andimeshk, in the northern part of the province, was among the many urban centers that were hit repeatedly by Iraqi surface-to-surface missiles. A large billboard at one of the entrances to the city displays the gaudily painted portraits of the war dead, routinely described as martyrs. Bronze sculptures of soldiers and airmen grace a busy square. Taeb Haideri, 55, a receptionist at the city's Grand Hotel, said that the Americans

should stay in Iraq for "10 to 20 years." If they leave before then, he said, Iraq may once again create problems for Iran.

Along the Gulf coast is the port city of Khorramshahr, with about 140,000 residents. It was the site of fierce battles in the Iran-Iraq war. Here I found Sayyid Mahmoud, a small, dark, bespectacled man, fishing along the esplanade on the Karun River near its confluence with the Shatt al Arab (Arvand Rud, to Iranians). It was a dispute over this waterway between the two countries that set off the war.

Describing himself as a retired shepherd, Mahmoud pointed to the many damaged or destroyed houses across the road, including his own. He, too, was glad that the Americans deposed Saddam Hussein, he said, and thought they should stay in Iraq and follow through on their plan with little international help.

Iranians have diverse and nuanced opinions about America and its invasion of Iraq.

A few hundred kilometers south on the Gulf coast is the port city of Bushehr, which like Khorramshahr suffered heavy damage in the war. There I met Khosrow Warrast, the middle-aged head waiter at Malvan Hotel and Restaurant. America is doing to Iraq what Iraq did to Iran during the war, he said approvingly. But now, he said, the longer the U.S. troops stay, the more the Iraqi people will turn against them. He advised the United States to withdraw its troops as soon as possible.

Farther from the Iraqi border, memories of the war are less raw — and a sense of kinship with the Iraqi Shiites is stronger. This is especially true in Qum, in central Iran just south of Tehran, the country's religious capital and the site of its largest theological college. "Iranians and Iraqis are the same people — Shiites," said Muhammad Javad Islami, 60, a caretaker. (He was apparently unaware that 40 percent of Iraqis are not Shiites.)

Qum is also the base of Grand Ayatollah Kadhém al-Husseini al-Haeri, an elderly Iraqi-born cleric who came to the holy city for religious studies in 1973 and never returned home. A protégé of Ayatollah Muhammad Bakr al-Sadr,

who was executed by Saddam's government in 1980, Haeri belongs to the interventionist school of Shiite Islam, which advocates clerical participation in politics. He is vehemently opposed to the U.S. military presence in Iraq.

On April 7, 2003, Haeri declared that Moktada al-Sadr, a relative of the man Saddam killed in 1980 and the radical cleric whose so-called Mahdi Army is battling U.S. forces in Najaf, "is our deputy and representative in all fatwa affairs," or religious matters. "His position is my position," he said.

Overnight, Haeri's declaration strengthened the religious standing of Sadr, who is not an ayatollah and thus does not have the authority to issue religious edicts, or fatwas. This enabled him to set up a network that covered the Shiite community throughout Iraq and laid the foundation for his army. Yet there is little doubt that it is Haeri who decides what position Sadr should take regarding the U.S. troops and the interim Iraqi government they are supporting.

Haeri's followers in Iran include both Iraqi exiles and Iranians. They stress their common Shiite affiliation rather than their different languages and histories. Abdul Karim Assadi, a middle-aged Iranian cleric at Haeri's headquarters in Qum, said that since the Iraqi and Iranian people are the same, their governments will have to work together. It was up to him and other Shiites, he said, to pressure their governments to cooperate.

Elsewhere, especially among the young, opinion was more upbeat. One 22-year-old merchant who sold imported watches in Tehran's grand bazaar said that if the Americans stayed in Iraq and enacted democratic reforms, then it might also affect Iranian politics, benefiting both countries. Azim Habibi, the young owner of a new pizza and coffee shop that plays Iranian pop music, said that he hoped U.S. investment in the region would help create jobs.

Habibi's view, of course, is not universal — but then, neither is Assadi's. What is striking about this nation of nearly 70 million people is how its opinion of America remains open. One way Washington might turn Iranian minds more toward America is to stop constantly threatening Tehran and start engaging Iran in meaningful dialogue.

Dilip Hiro is the author of "Secrets and Lies: Operation Iraqi Freedom and After" and "Neighbors, Not Friends: Iraq and Iran After the Gulf Wars."

Al-Sadr hante les débats de la Conférence nationale

Bagdad :
Georges Malbrunot

Grand absent de la Conférence nationale, Moqtada al-Sadr a continué hier à s'imposer au centre des débats censés lancer le processus de démocratisation en Irak. « *Comment peut-on discuter de démocratie, alors qu'un bain de sang se prépare à Nadjaf ?* » s'indignait un participant à la réunion, qui doit s'achever aujourd'hui par la désignation de cent membres d'une Assemblée consultative, en attendant la tenue d'élections générales, prévues pour l'an prochain.

Alors que le gouvernement irakien annonçait dimanche le déclenchement « imminent » d'une opération pour déloger le trublion et ses hommes de la ville sainte de Nadjaf, le millier de participants au forum a voté à main levée l'envoi d'une délégation d'une cinquantaine de ses membres auprès d'al-Sadr pour tenter de trouver une issue pacifique à la crise. « *Nous demandons à Moqtada al-Sadr de se retirer du lieu saint, car il n'est la propriété de personne* », a lancé Cheikh Hussein al-Sadr, un de ses lointains cousins,

présent à la conférence. « *Nous devons travailler ensemble pour convaincre Moqtada al-Sadr et nos chers frères de l'Armée du Mahdi qu'ils acceptent de transformer leur milice en parti politique* », a-t-il ajouté.

Hussein al-Sadr a proposé un plan en trois points que la délégation devait soumettre dans la soirée au chef des rebelles reclus à Nadjaf. « *D'abord, que l'Armée du Mahdi se retire du mausolée de l'imam Ali, ensuite qu'ils renoncent à leurs armes, et enfin qu'ils se transforment en parti politique.* » Dans une première réaction, un porte-parole d'al-Sadr ne semblait pas fermer la porte à la discussion, même si Cheikh Ahmed Chaibani estimait que les questions du désarmement des miliciens et leur transformation en parti politique ne pouvaient être résolues que « *par des négociations et non par une décision unilatérale* ».

« *Nous sommes prêts à un accord via des discussions. Nous sommes prêts à nous défendre, comme nous sommes prêts à la paix* », expliquait Cheikh Chaibani, aux côtés de Moqtada al-Sadr dans le mausolée. Et pressentant que ces

positions sont partagées par de nombreux Irakiens, il appelait les leaders tribaux du pays à converger vers Nadjaf pour former une chaîne humaine autour des lieux saints où sont retranchés les combattants chiites, qui tiennent tête depuis plus de dix jours aux marines et à leurs suppléants irakiens. En fin d'après-midi, répondant à l'appel, plusieurs centaines de manifestants scandaient des slogans favorables à al-Sadr autour du mausolée, et dénonçaient les « *forces d'occupation américaines* » et leur allié à la tête du gouvernement irakien, Iyad Allaoui.

Hier, Nadjaf a cependant connu un calme relatif, troublé seulement par quelques explosions en fin de matinée près du cimetière, et par d'autres affrontements sporadiques, lorsque la nouvelle de la mort de trois soldats américains tués dimanche par des rebelles a été rendue publique. « *Nous continuons d'avancer, nous avons pris certaines positions à l'intérieur de la vieille ville par le sud, pendant la nuit et aux premières heures de la matinée* », déclarait le brigadier Ghalib al-Jazaari, un des chefs de la police locale. L'offensive « *majeure* » promise dimanche par le gouvernement d'Iyad Allaoui se fait donc attendre. Et pendant ce temps, chaque camp se livre à une guerre psychologique. Le premier ministre intérimaire exigeait avant-hier « *le désarmement inconditionnel* » de

l'Armée du Mahdi, son départ de Nadjaf, et sa participation au processus politique, comme conditions sine qua non à une solution pacifique. Des proches d'al-Sadr l'avaient alors accusé d'avoir fait capoter un accord sur le point d'être signé par son représentant à Nadjaf.

Depuis, chaque jour qui passe mine un peu plus la crédibilité d'un premier ministre qui s'était juré d'anéantir les milices pour restaurer la souveraineté de l'Etat. Mais pour Allaoui, l'équation de Nadjaf recèle plus d'inconnues que de solutions. Peut-il se permettre de lancer un assaut contre des « *frères* » irakiens, au moment où son gouvernement tente de mettre sur les rails le processus démocratique ? Ses protecteurs américains lui répètent qu'il n'est pas question pour eux de participer à un raid sur un lieu saint de l'importance de Nadjaf. Le « *sale boulot* » devrait donc être confié à la Garde nationale irakienne, qui a théoriquement été formée pour cela ces dernières semaines. Mais ses hommes sont-ils prêts à en découdre dans un assaut qui risque de se solder par un bain de sang ? Certains policiers seraient déjà passés du côté des miliciens, et d'autres ont des états d'âme.

Moqtada al-Sadr n'ignore pas qu'adossé au mausolée sacré, il bénéficie d'une sorte d'assurance-vie. Mais son filet de sécurité n'est pas éternel. C'est sans doute la raison pour laquelle il donne l'impression de vouloir négocier sa sortie du sanctuaire, même si, maladroitement, il mêle ses offres de rododromades sur le thème « *Allaoui doit démissionner* ».

Le jeune trublion veut survivre politiquement. Certains de ses partisans ont d'ailleurs participé à titre personnel à la Conférence nationale. Un rassemblement qui a offert à l'invité absent une tribune de premier plan.



Plusieurs centaines de manifestants ont défilé hier près du mausolée de l'imam Ali, à Nadjaf, scandant des slogans favorables au chef chiite radical Moqtada al-Sadr et dénonçant « *les forces d'occupation américaines* ». (Photo Karim Sahib/AFP)

The prospect of anarchy ■ By Edward N. Luttwak

America should threaten to pull out of Iraq

WASHINGTON

Many Americans now believe that the United States is depleting its military strength, diplomatic leverage and treasury to pursue unrealistic aims in Iraq. They are right. Democracy seems to interest few Iraqis, given the widespread Shiite proclivity to follow unelected clerics, the Sunni rejection of the principle of majority rule and the preference of many Kurds for tribe and clan over elected governments.

Reconstruction was supposed to advance rapidly with surging oil export revenues, but is hardly gaining on the continuing destruction inflicted by sabotage and thievery. And in any case, it is unlikely that the new Iraqi interim government will be able to oversee meaningful elections in a country where its authority is more widely denied than recognized.

Yet few Americans are prepared to simply abandon Iraq. For one, they are rightly concerned that to do so would be a mortal blow to America's global credibility and would encourage violent Islamists everywhere. An outright withdrawal would leave the interim government to face the attacks of emboldened Baath regime loyalists, Sunni revanchists, local and foreign Islamist extremists and the numerous Shiite militias.

The likely result would be the defection of the government's army, police and national guard members, followed by a collapse and then civil war. Worse might follow in the Middle East — it usually does — even to the point of invasions by Iran, Turkey and possibly others, initiating new cycles of repression and violence.

Thus the likely consequences of an American abandonment are so bleak that few Americans are even willing to contemplate it. This is a mistake: It is precisely because unpredictable mayhem is so predictable that the United States might be able to disengage from Iraq at little cost, or even perhaps advantageously.

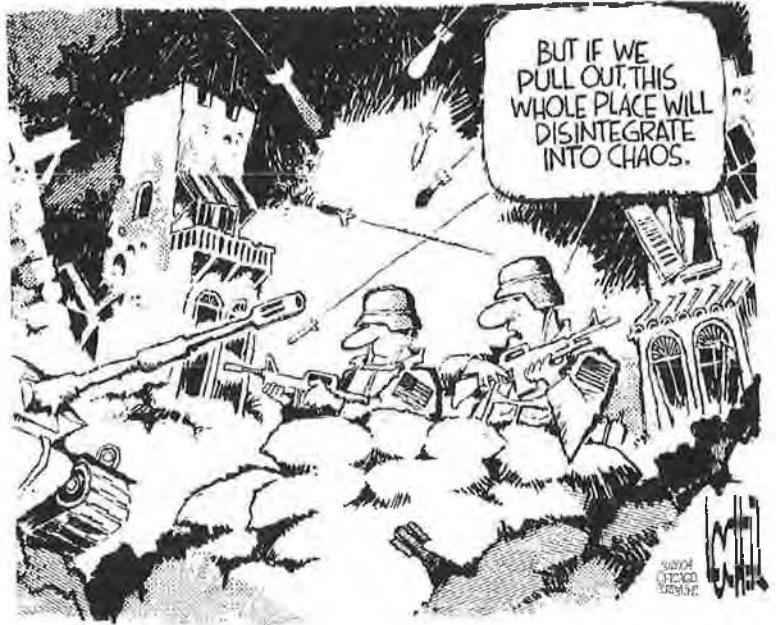
Here's why: In Iraq America faces several different enemies, as well as some unhelpful nominal allies. As things stand, their intense mutual hostility now brings no advantage to the United States. But all could be unbalanced by a well-devised policy of disengagement, and forced to stop harming American interests and possibly even serve them in some degree.

At present, because the United States is fully committed in Iraq, the Shiite followers of the renegade cleric Moktada al-Sadr feel free to attack the same American forces that elsewhere are fighting Sunnis bent on restoring their ancestral supremacy. Many Shiite clerics and the population at large — the very people the Sunnis are hoping to oppress once again — either applaud Sadr or do nothing to stop him.

But if the Shiites were persuaded that America might truly abandon them to face Saddam Hussein's loyalists alone, it seems certain that they would quickly revert to the attitude of collaboration with the occupation forces they showed in the aftermath of the invasion.

Likewise, while some say that Iran and Turkey would see an anarchical Iraq as an opportunity to expand their influence, that seems unlikely. Rather, a divided Iraq would be a base from which those countries' enemies — especially dissident Kurds — would be able to operate.

For now, with the United States viewed as determined to stay the course, the hard-liners in Iran can pursue their anti-American vendetta by encouraging



the Shiite opposition, supplying Sadr's militia and encouraging Syria to help Islamist terrorists sneak into Iraq. But an American withdrawal would mean the end of any hopes for a unified, Shiite-led Iraq, which is Iran's long-term goal, and likely a restored Sunni supremacy, which is Iran's greatest fear.

As for Turkey, America's ever-more nominal ally, it now seems focused on uniting the Turkmen minority in Iraq under its leadership, while dividing the Kurds. It has done nothing to help the United States — and Turkey could do much, most obviously sharing intelligence information. But if the alternative is an imminent American withdrawal — and a de facto independent Iraqi Kurdistan — Turkey would soon come to heel.

The threat of disengagement would affect the lesser players as well. Kuwait, whose existence depends on U.S. power, has done little to help. At a time of exploding oil revenues, and with Kuwaiti subcontractors collect-

ing huge sums from Pentagon contracts, the Kuwait Red Crescent is sending only odd truckloads of food into Iraq. As for the Saudis, their attitude is exemplified by their recent offer of an Islamic contingent to help garrison Iraq: It sounded courageous, but turned out to be a promise of troops other than their own, and was hedged by conditions that made it worse than useless.

Yet Kuwait and Saudi Arabia would be greatly endangered by an anarchical Iraq, which might even allow Iran to invade its southern regions on the pretext of protecting fellow Shiites. Again, the threat of American withdrawal would be apt to concentrate minds wonderfully. The goal would be to get Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to replace the American taxpayer in aiding Iraq; the two could also jointly sponsor peace-

**Because unpredictable
mayhem is so predictable,
the U.S. may be able to
disengage from Iraq.**

keeping troops, in earnest this time, financially rewarding poorer Muslim countries with troops to spare. While deploying such soldiers across Iraq would be a very bad idea — they would be Sunnis of course, and most unwelcome to Iraq's Shiites — they would be fine for the recalcitrant Sunni towns.

This is no diplomatic parlor game. The threat of an American withdrawal would have to be made credible by physical preparations for a military evacuation, just as real nuclear weapons were needed for deterrence during the cold war. More fundamentally, it would have to be meant in earnest: the United States is only likely to obtain important concessions if it is truly willing to withdraw if they are denied. If Iraq's neighbors are too short-sighted to start cooperating in their own best interests, America would indeed have to withdraw.

That is a real constraint. Then again, the situation in Iraq is not improving, the United States will assuredly leave one day in any case, and it is usually wise to

abandon failed ventures sooner rather than later.

Yes, withdrawal would be a blow to American credibility, but less so if it were deliberate and abrupt rather than a retreat under fire imposed by surging antiwar sentiments at home. (See Vietnam.)

So long as the United States is tied down in Iraq by over-ambitious policies of the past, it can only persist in wasteful, futile aid projects and tragically futile combat. A strategy of disengagement would require risk-taking statecraft of a high order, and much competence at the negotiating table. But it would be based on the most fundamental of realities: For geographic reasons, many other countries have more to lose from an American debacle in Iraq than does the United States itself.

It's time to take advantage of that difference.

Edward N. Luttwak is a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the author of "Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace."

After noise and deals, Iraq gets a Parliament Assembly to govern until January vote

By Sabrina Tavernise

BAGHDAD: A political conference has selected a National Assembly, putting Iraq on the road to becoming a constitutional democracy in a jumbled process that never included a formal vote.

The political jockeying grew intense in its final hours on Wednesday, with some delegates climbing on a stage to protest what they said was a process monopolized by large political parties. In a final dramatic moment, some of the delegates withdrew their candidacies in protest. But they ultimately remained in the conference, giving the assembly legitimacy.

The result was a list of names to fill a 100-seat assembly that will act as a parliament, overseeing the interim government of Prime Minister Ayad Allawi until elections that are scheduled for January. The body as chosen will present a cross section of Iraqi society, taking in sheiks and social workers, bureaucrats and religious leaders.

One delegate, Hamid al-Kifaey, said the seat distribution had ended up relatively proportional to the religious and ethnic demographics of this country of 25 million, including Sunni and Shiite Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen.

"Today the interim national congress has been formed," said a tired-looking Fuad Masum, the Iraqi official who is organizing the conference. "It was legal."

While the result was hopeful, the process was messy. The conference took place in a giant, two-tiered auditorium inside the heavily fortified international zone in central Baghdad. It was the first public debate on a national scale since Saddam Hussein came to power in the 1960s, and every delegate was offered the chance to talk. Representatives of minorities yelled at the

majorities. Women dressed in black cloth covering everything but their eyes talked into microphones. Someone read poetry. Delegates grilled moderators.

But most of the actual decision-making took place far from the cameras — in several rooms around the building, including one large one on the ground floor, delegates said. In those rooms, delegates from the major political and religious groups haggled over lists of names, trying to fulfill the assembly's task of putting forward 81 assembly members. (The final 19 spots had already been reserved for members of the former Governing Council set up by the U.S. occupation.)

It was that deal-making — which included the major Shiite parties Dawa and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq; the Sunni Islamic

Party; two Kurdish parties; the former exile group Iraqi National Congress; and Allawi's Iraqi National Accord — that infuriated smaller parties, whose members said they had been shut out.

The names were kept under wraps until the final, chaotic hours on Wednesday night when delegates tried to vote. "I cannot vote for names that I don't know," Aziz al-Yasseri, one of the protesters, said. "This is an unfair way, it is not a democratic way of doing things."

The deal-making produced strange bedfellows. Two Kurdish parties — for the most part secular with nationalist

agendas — formed a loose alliance with religious Shiite groups.

Delegates did not begin to talk about voting until Wednesday afternoon. At one point, judges said neither of the two lists of candidates had met the 25 percent quota for female candidates. Some tribal leaders had refused to have women represent them, delegates said, which sent the parties back into negotiations.

The final revolt came less than an hour before the conference concluded at 9 p.m., when a delegate from a small party, Ismail Zayer, took the stage to say that his group had not had time to prepare and in protest was withdrawing the 81 names it had proposed. He accused the larger groups of sending about three dozen people to infiltrate his list and then withdraw at the last minute, so that he would not have time to redraw a proposal.

"They had no shame," he said in an exasperated voice. Still, his group did not quit the conference, and the assembly — chosen by the large parties — was legitimate, according to the four judges who presided over the conference's end. And because there was only one set of 81 names left to choose from, judges agreed that a show of hands would be enough for approval. The ballot boxes on the stage remained empty.

Masum, the conference organizer, said the smaller, independent parties had not been organized enough to form an effective coalition against the larger parties.

Samir Sumaitey, Iraq's former interior minister and a delegate, put it more succinctly. "It's democracy in action à la Iraq," he said. "Messy."

The New York Times

While the result was hopeful for democracy, the process was messy.

International Herald Tribune
Friday, August 20, 2004

Sistani le diplomate contre Sadr l'agitateur

L'un est hospitalisé à Londres et veut composer avec les Américains, l'autre se bat contre eux. A Najaf se joue l'avenir de la communauté chiite.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH
Londres

La semaine dernière, depuis son lit de l'hôpital Cromwell de Londres, un fragile septuagénaire fut glacé d'horreur en voyant à la télévision une pluie d'obus tomber sur le cimetière le plus extraordinaire du monde, à Najaf. En tant que principal dignitaire religieux de la ville, l'ayatollah Ali Sistani est le gardien de ce lieu saint ; mais ce jour-là, au moment où les marines américains prenaient le contrôle de la vaste nécropole, tombe par tombe, il était venu à Londres se faire opérer pour une sténose artérielle. Entre-temps, Najaf résonnait de l'incessant tonnerre des bombes et du crépitement continu des pistolets-mitrailleurs. La nouvelle équipe au pouvoir en Irak avait opté pour attaque en règle contre les miliciens d'un jeune imam retranché dans le saint des saints de la ville pour affirmer l'autorité du tout nouvel Etat. Après la prise du cimetière, l'épreuve de force semblait devoir se jouer à l'intérieur du mausolée de l'imam Ali, que les musulmans chiites considèrent comme l'un des lieux les plus sacrés de l'islam. Dans tout le sud de l'Irak, des villes comme Amara, Bassorah et Nasiriyah ont été envahies par des bataillons d'Irakiens en armes répondant à l'appel au soulèvement de l'imam radical chiite Moqtada as-Sadr. Mais en fin de compte, elles sont restées sous le contrôle des troupes américaines et britanniques.

DEPUIS LA CHUTE DE SADDAM, JAMAIS L'IRAK N'A ÉTÉ AUSSI PRÈS DU GOUFFRE

Les blindés et les chars américains, dirigés pour la première fois par les forces de sécurité irakiennes, sont entrés dans Najaf quelques heures à peine après que l'ayatollah Sistani fut parti. Pendant que le convoi du vieux chef religieux – qui quittait pour la première fois Najaf en près de cinquante ans – négociait son chemin sur une route peu fréquentée vers Bagdad, le Premier ministre irakien, Iyad Allaoui, lançait une offensive à haut risque contre une milice qui se refusait à reconnaître son autorité. Depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein, jamais l'Irak n'avait paru si près de basculer dans le gouffre. Des centaines de partisans de Sadr ont été tués dans ces affrontements. Pendant une bonne partie de la semaine, l'armée avait veillé à ménager les

► Dessin de Mix & Remix paru dans L'Hebdo, Lausanne.

■ Onde de choc

"As Sadr n'est pas seulement une tête brûlée, il a acquis une légitimité. La distinction simpliste que font les Américains entre les 'bons' disciples de Sistani et les 'méchants' d'As Sadr est une erreur tragique", écrivait *The New York Times* des jours derniers. "De plus, la notion de martyr est un élément puissant de l'imaginaire chiite. Essayer de l'éliminer créerait une onde de choc se propageant des minorités chiites du Pakistan et du Golfe, en passant par l'Iran, jusqu'au Liban du Hezbollah."

IRAK : VIOLENTS COMBATS À NAJAF



miliciens de Sadr, s'efforçant simplement de les contenir et s'abstenant de faire parler les armes. Les soldats américains gagnaient lentement la bataille la plus étrange, mais pas la moins meurtrière, qu'ils livraient dans le vaste cimetière de Najaf – où tous ceux qui sont enterrés sont assurés d'une place au paradis. Le sol brunâtre et poussiéreux des tombes s'effondrait sous les semelles des rangs.

Militairement, cette bataille comportait de nombreux risques symboliques. Car après avoir maîtrisé le cimetière, les Américains devaient encore affronter des milliers de combattants retranchés sous le dôme doré à l'or fin du mausolée de Najaf. Le moindre dommage infligé au lieu saint serait un acte sacrilège envers l'islam. Le dénouement était proche. "Il ne peut rien en sortir de bon, confia un officier américain sur le terrain au *Washington Post*. Si nous perdons, nous perdons, et si nous gagnons, nous perdons aussi."

L'armée du Mahdi ne cesse de renforcer ses effectifs et de gagner en assurance depuis les accrochages du printemps dernier. Les milliers de combattants qui sont venus grossir ses rangs disposent d'une formation militaire rudimentaire et sont disséminés dans tout le pays. De Bagdad à Bassorah, ils ont pris le contrôle de régions entières. En refusant d'entrer dans le jeu politique tant que l'Irak reste occupé par les Américains, Sadr a mis en fureur la nouvelle équipe dirigeante. Pourtant les opposants au jeune imam affirment que son appel à un soulèvement général n'a pas été entendu : ni les classes moyennes, ni les plus de 40 ans n'ont bronché.

Loin de la fureur des combats, les puissances occidentales évaluaient calmement l'is-

sue probable de cette lutte dont l'enjeu n'était autre que l'âme de l'Irak. Un diplomate allemand a demandé à son homologue britannique comment il fallait interpréter l'absence des quatre grands ayatollahs de Najaf au moment de l'assaut. Il ne restait en effet dans la ville aucun dignitaire religieux susceptible de calmer le jeu en appelant à la négociation. "C'est une pure coïncidence," assurait un émissaire occidental. Fidèle à sa ligne de conduite depuis le renversement de Saddam, l'ayatollah Sistani a prudemment opté pour la voie diplomatique. Il a exigé que ses partisans ne soient pas écrasés par la force militaire mais il n'est pas allé jusqu'à soutenir Sadr. L'ayatollah Sistani semblerait craindre que l'impétueux chef religieux ne soit un extrémiste dictatorial, prêt à imposer à l'Irak une théocratie à l'iranienne.

Dans sa déclaration, il appelait les parties à mettre un terme au bain de sang et à la violation des sanctuaires religieux. Presque aussitôt,

plusieurs signes indiquaient que des négociations visant à trouver une issue au conflit avaient été sérieusement amorcées. Bagdad a envoyé des émissaires à Najaf et le Premier ministre Allaoui et ses commandants américains ont appelé à une trêve.

POUR LES AMÉRICAINS, C'EST LA BATAILLE LA PLUS DÉLICATE

Vendredi matin, Sadr, qui la veille au soir avait été légèrement blessé dans des escarmouches, se déclarait également disposé à négocier. Il a manifesté sa bonne foi dans le cadre de l'incroyable enlèvement de James Brandon, le journaliste du *Sunday Telegraph*. Dès que ses lieutenants ont appris l'incident, ils ont fait diffuser des messages, jusque dans les prières de midi, exhortant les ravisseurs à libérer le correspondant britannique. Par la suite, les assistants de Sadr ont publié une liste en dix points, posant leurs conditions pour un cessez-le-feu ; le ton était certes sans concession,

mais du moins ce document indiquait-il qu'un compromis était possible. La plupart des exigences des chiites ne pouvaient être satisfaites : ils demandaient, entre autres choses, que Najaf soit restituée à ses chefs religieux et exigeaient le retrait de toutes les forces irakiennes. A la tombée de la nuit filtrait l'indication, confirmée depuis, que les pourparlers étaient en mauvaise passe.

Bien qu'il ait choisi de prendre part à ces négociations, Sadr, une main bandée, a fait une brève apparition en fin de soirée vendredi à Najaf, pour réitérer sa volonté de se battre jusqu'à la mort. Au même moment, à Londres, Ali Sistani se remettait de son opération cardiaque. Deux dignitaires religieux, l'un jeune, l'autre vieux. D'un côté, un agitateur, de l'autre, un habile homme d'Etat. Pour des raisons très différentes, le spectre de la mort plane sur les deux hommes. L'avenir de l'Irak, ses espoirs de démocratie et de paix, seront intimement liés à leur sort.

Con Coughlin & Neil Barnett à Najaf

Continent
INTERNATIONAL

DU 19 AU 25 AOÛT 2004

Une guerre par procuration avec Téhéran

AL RAÏ AL-AAM
Koweït

Les hésitations du Premier ministre irakien, Iyad Allaoui, à se rendre en visite d'Etat à Téhéran montraient déjà que les relations entre l'Irak et l'Iran n'étaient pas bonnes. Les récentes déclarations du ministre de la Défense irakien, Hazem Chalane, qualifiant l'Iran d'"ennemi principal", sont venues confirmer cette impression. Elles reflètent le sentiment dominant dans les milieux du nouveau gouvernement intérimaire, qui n'a pas accordé le moindre poste ministériel aux proches d'Ahmed Chalabi, ancien membre du Conseil intérimaire de gouvernement et protégé de Washington. Ce dernier a en effet joué, ces deux dernières années, un rôle essentiel dans le rapprochement entre Washington et Téhéran, rassurant les Américains et incitant l'Iran à rester neutre.

Contrairement à ce que l'on aurait pu penser, l'Iran a facilité dans un premier temps l'arrivée et la progression des forces américaines et a contribué au renversement de Saddam Hussein parce qu'il était conscient que seule une intervention militaire américaine pouvait changer de fond en comble la situation et empêcher l'Irak de jouer un rôle de puissance régionale capable de s'opposer à l'influence iranienne. Bien plus, la chute du régime irakien devait créer un vide qu'aucune force locale, même soutenue par les Américains, ne pourrait remplir. L'Irak étant une mosaïque d'éléments religieux, confessionnels

et nationalistes, l'Iran comptait y exercer une influence, notamment à travers l'élément chiite.

Ce sont ces subtilités iraniennes que les Américains n'avaient pas saisies. Mais, aujourd'hui, ils se sont rendus à l'évidence que Téhéran ne restera pas les bras croisés devant ce qui se passe en Irak. Ce qui veut dire que la lune de miel entre les deux capitales est bel et bien terminée, et que désormais se joue sur le terrain irakien une confrontation sérieuse. Les combats qui se déroulent actuellement entre les milices de Moqtada as-Sadr et les forces américaines en sont la preuve évidente. On se demande d'ailleurs pourquoi les Américains ont mis tant de temps à percevoir les arrière-pensées iraniennes, puisque celles-ci se sont manifestées dès l'assassinat d'Abdel Majid al-Khoï [en avril 2003]. Al Khoï, membre d'une importante famille chiite qui avait fait alliance avec des forces régionales arabes, était enclin à composer avec les Américains dans la construction d'un nouvel Irak et s'opposait aux visées iraniennes. Son assassinat avait porté un coup fatal à tout projet impliquant les forces chiites pro-américaines, tournées vers les voisins arabes plutôt que vers Téhéran.

Par la suite, quand Saddam Hussein a été arrêté, les Iraniens se sont précipités pour élaborer un dossier à l'intention du tribunal qui jugera l'ex-dictateur, afin de réclamer des dommages pour les préjudices subis durant la guerre Iran-Irak (1980-1988), montrant ainsi une détermination sans faille à aller jusqu'au bout de leur désir de vengeance. Pourtant, la responsabilité de cette guerre était le fait des deux pays belligérants. C'est en raison de ce passé belliqueux que tout pouvoir irakien ne peut qu'adopter une attitude de prudence vis-à-vis de l'Iran. Car, si ce dernier s'avisait de demander des indemnités

de guerre, les responsables irakiens s'empres- seraient de présenter la même requête, comme l'a fait récemment le ministre de la Défense irakien, qui a rappelé l'affaire des avions irakiens transférés en 1990 par dizaines vers l'Iran, afin de les mettre à l'abri des bombardements américains, et que Téhéran refuse toujours de restituer à Bagdad.

Ce qui est en jeu actuellement, ce n'est pas que l'Iran obtienne de l'Irak des réparations de guerre, ni que Téhéran apporte sa contribution aux accusations portées contre Saddam Hussein auprès du tribunal qui doit le juger. Non, c'est avant tout de savoir quel sera à l'avenir la nature des relations irano-irakiennes. Jusqu'ici, l'Iran avait fait preuve de patience envers les Américains parce que leur plan pour se débarrasser du tyran de Bagdad faisait aussi partie du projet iranien. Maintenant que cela est fait, il n'y a plus aucun point d'accord entre Téhéran et les Etats-Unis. Mais, étant donné la dégradation de la situation en Irak, les Américains seront-ils capables de s'opposer aux visées iraniennes ? Ce qui est sûr, c'est que nous n'en sommes qu'au tout début de la crise et que les déclarations violentes du ministre de la Défense irakien à l'encontre de l'Iran finiront par se traduire sur le terrain, d'autant plus que Washington ne peut se permettre de reculer. En effet, si les Américains venaient à se retirer du sol irakien, à qui abandonneraient-ils le pétrole et les ressources de la région ? Laisseraient-ils l'Iran contrôler ces richesses ? Abandonneraient-ils l'Irak à la merci de Téhéran, sachant que, dans ce cas, l'Arabie Saoudite subirait tôt ou tard le même sort ?

Kheirallah Kheirallah

In Iraq, Showdown Looms Over Self-Rule for Kurds Regional Leaders Say They Will Not Give up Quasi-Independence

By Edward Cody

Washington Post July 11, 2004

IRBIL, Iraq -- Karzan Kanabi, whose clothing shop attracts young men with its cheap bell-bottom pants, never went to Baghdad, never learned Arabic and never felt the desire to go anywhere he would have to mix with Iraq's Arab population.

"We want Kurdistan to be an independent country," said Kanabi, 18, who had his Washington-brand jeans trucked in from Turkey, just to the north. He does no business with the rest of Iraq. "We only need Kurdistan."

The nationalist sentiments voiced by Kanabi and many others in this prosperous Kurdish city 200 miles north of Baghdad have become the leading edge of a storm looming over Iraq. After 13 years of quasi-independence -- the only regime Kanabi and his peers have known -- the 4 million Kurds living under their own government here in the grassy plains and jagged mountains of historical Kurdistan have resolved never to relinquish the self-rule bestowed on them by the United States after the Persian Gulf War in 1991.

"Iraq is made up of two nationalities, Kurds and Arabs," Massoud Barzani, one of the region's two legendary leaders, said in an interview Thursday in nearby Salahuddin. "Kurds have no less a place than Arabs in Iraq."

Kurdish determination, however, has run up against a resolve widely shared by Iraq's new leadership and its backers, including the United States, to preserve a unified country even without the iron fist of former president Saddam Hussein's Baath Party. Iraq, they have pledged, is to be organized as a majority-rule democracy, which would redistribute power among its 25 million inhabitants -- roughly 60 percent Shiite Arabs, 20 percent Sunni Arabs and 20 percent Kurds.

So far, with a bloody anti-U.S. insurgency their primary concern, the new leaders in Baghdad and their sponsors in the Bush administration have postponed the showdown over the Kurdish issue, hoping a crisis can be avoided. But with elections scheduled for January, Kurds here said, the time has drawn near to deal with some of the most explosive issues, particularly the status of the city of Kirkuk. In addition, plans to write a permanent new constitution after the January elections, Kurdish leaders warned, are likely to bring the country face to face with the question of Kurdistan's long-term legal relationship with the central government in Baghdad. "We have been patient for over a year," said Falah Mustafa Bakir, Barzani's foreign relations adviser. "Now is the time to address it."

Kirkuk, about 150 miles north of Baghdad, lies just outside the Kurdish region as defined over the last decade. The Kurdish leadership, citing historical ties, has demanded that the city and its surrounding oil fields be incorporated into the autonomous Kurdish zone and its special rule. The demand is opposed by leaders of the

Arab majority and has been under discussion ever since U.S. troops overthrew Hussein and occupied Iraq 15 months ago.

With the organization of elections about to begin, the Kurdish demand has gained new urgency. Who lives and votes in Kirkuk, they point out, is a question that will help determine the outcome of the vote -- and who is at the controls -- in a region they regard as theirs.

"This issue is a time bomb," Barzani said, speaking softly and wearing a brown uniform with the Kurds' traditional baggy pants and red-and-white headress.

Kirkuk has been part of Kurdish folklore from time immemorial, with songs and poems heralding its place in the Kurds' tortured history. But others have long lived there too, including Arabs and Turks. More Arabs were brought in by Hussein's government to help smother Kurdish separatism, which had led to three secessionist uprisings in 20 years. The Kurdish leadership has insisted that Iraqis who were brought in to Arabize the area must be returned to their homes, many of them in southern Iraq. Those leaving should be treated humanely and compensation should be paid, they said in interviews, but the newcomers must leave. At that point, they added, a referendum could be held allowing the city, its Kurdish majority restored, to vote whether to stay in the Arab part of Iraq or join the Kurdish autonomous region.

"We can't make any concessions on Kirkuk," Bakir said. "For us, it's very important."

But the new leaders in Baghdad have made it clear they too regard Kirkuk as very important. Its oil fields have contributed to Iraq's national prosperity for 80 years. Moreover, they have said, readjusting the ethnic composition of cities or regions is not the way Iraq should begin its new political life.

Vice President Ibrahim Jafari, a Shiite Muslim of the Dawa party, said in a recent interview that the rights of Kurds must be respected in the new Iraq. The history of their oppression must be taken into account in whatever arrangement is worked out, he added. But he also emphasized that Iraq must remain a unitary nation, true to its history and traditions, and said the rules of democracy must be followed.

Behind his comment lay a tension that has run throughout the debate over what to do about the Kurds and the north. For Iraq's Shiites, long overshadowed by the Sunnis who dominated the Baath Party, representative democracy is a way to gain a measure of power proportionate to their majority share of the population. There is no reason, in their view, for the country's Kurdish minority to oppose majority rule now that Hussein's tyranny has been eliminated. Quasi-Independence For more than a decade, U.S. warplanes flew

regular patrols to prevent Hussein's forces from venturing north of the 36th parallel and into the 17,000-square-mile Kurdish-controlled zone of northeastern Iraq. Left alone for the first time in generations, Kurds constructed a flourishing quasi-state, with democratic elections and institutions to underpin the traditional leadership of Barzani and his Kurdistan Democratic Party, and his rival to the east, Jalal Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

Along the road north from Baghdad, what they built is readily apparent. Northward from Kirkuk, the Iraqi flag has disappeared, replaced by the green, white and red colors of Kurdistan, with a blazing yellow sun in the center. The Arabic language has withered away, replaced by the Kurds' own tongue.

Security checkpoints to control traffic have been erected by Kurdish fighters, called pesh merga, only a few of whom wear uniforms of the U.S.-trained Iraqi National Guard. Barzani's headquarters, atop a steep bluff just outside Salahuddin, is guarded by his party's militia. "We will not agree to having the Iraqi army here," said Mohammed Sharif Ahmad, dean of the law and political science department at Salahuddin University. "We have our pesh merga. They are organized like an army."

Together, Barzani and Talabani field more than 70,000 armed men, twice the planned strength of the Iraqi national army and several times its current roster, according to a U.S. tally. Each of the two Kurdish leaders has built his own military academy to turn out officers in two-year courses.

A decree issued by Iraq's interim government in Baghdad banning militias has had no noticeable effect here. For Kurds, making the pesh merga illegal would be like trying to reverse generations of history and undo the emergence of a new national entity over the last dozen years. "This is my land," said Goran Nuri, who runs a bookstore in the shadow of a fortress built by Salahuddin, a Kurd, after his conquest of Jerusalem. Nuri has laid in stocks of dictionaries, English language courses and science texts, scattered haphazardly around his narrow little shop. But what his customers really want and buy, Nuri said, are Kurdish-language modern novels, literature of their own.

The only Arabic-language tome that attracts buyers, he said, is the Koran, the Muslim holy book. Fearing the Future

The word that has come to dominate the debate over Kurdistan is federalism. Kurds and Arabs alike have suggested that reorganizing Iraq in an association of states could give Kurdistan room to retain self-rule while staying within a unified Iraq. The Kurdish parliament has voted to forgo total independence in return for loose federalism.

But there is little agreement on how Kurdistan should be defined in the new constitution. Ahmad, the jurist, said putting off the debate is the best idea, to give the new Iraq time to jell. Meanwhile, he suggested, Kurdistan would retain its semi-independence.

But Barzani said the Kurds can wait only so long and that writing the new constitution will force a decision. "My approach is to put all these issues on the table and solve them as much as possible," he said. Much will depend on how the United States comes down when the crunch arrives, probably next year, he said. Two recent decisions by the Bush administration have inspired doubts.

The first was rejection of a Kurdish demand for the post of either president or prime minister in the interim government, reflecting the Kurdish contention that Iraqi society is divided into Arabs and Kurds. The second was refusal to put into the Security Council resolution underpinning the new Iraqi government a condition that any important decision must be agreed on by consensus among Iraq's political and ethnic factions.

At the Kurds' insistence, U.S. occupation authorities included such a proviso in the Temporary Administrative Law governing Iraq pending its new constitution. But Shiite leaders, including Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, objected that this amounted to a Kurdish veto, frustrating majority rule. Eager for votes at the United Nations, the Bush administration dropped the language from the resolution. Kurdish leaders repeatedly said they would never forget U.S. help in setting up the quasi-independent Kurdistan they have had since 1991. But they also have not forgotten what happened in 1975, when the United States, along with Iran and Israel, withdrew support for an earlier secessionist revolt and stood by while Iraqi troops crushed the pesh merga, who were then commanded by Barzani's late father, Mustafa Barzani.

"We have every right to have fears about the future," Barzani said.

Iraqi Kurds Demonstrate For Independent Kurdistan

AFP July 24, 2004

SULEIMANIYA - Around 500 intellectuals and students marched through the city of Suleimaniya on Saturday to demand an independent Kurdistan, incorporating Iraq's main northern oil centre of Kirkuk. Holding aloft banners saying "Independence for Kurdistan," and "Kirkuk: Kurdish City," the protest flouted a ban issued by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, which controls the northeastern Iraqi province of Suleimaniya.

Delegates submitted a memorandum to the PUK's provincial administration.

The document, a copy of which was obtained by AFP, called for Kurdistan's independence from Iraq and for former strongman Saddam Hussein to be tried by an international court in which Kurds have a voice. It also rejected the former regime's policy of "arabisation," in which Kurds say thousands of their people were forced to flee the country's oil-rich areas to make way for a Saddam-inspired Arab resettlement policy.

Demonstrations calling for an independent Kurdistan are rare in

Iraq, where neither of the two mainstream Kurdish parties, the PUK, nor its rival Kurdistan Democratic Party, include independence as an aim in party literature.

Both organisations have subscribed to the country's interim constitution, which was signed into law under the former US-led occupation authority and enshrines the principal of a federal Iraq.

Kurds Wonder Where They Fit In New Iraq

Los Angeles Times

By JOHN DANISZEWSKI July 27, 2004

SULAYMANIYA, Iraq Sitting on the top of Azmar Mountain, looking down on the twinkling lights of this Kurdish city with a whiskey in his plastic cup and a skewer of roasted lamb on his plate, Bahdai Ahmad Hassan could be forgiven for thinking that Iraq, with all its problems, might as well be another country.

Here in Iraqi Kurdistan, government buildings are barely barricaded, an effective police force and a proud army provide security, and the hundreds of families who drive up to these heights to picnic on a balmy weekend evening can sit without fear of gunfire or mortars. As for the terrorized Iraq to the south, in Hassan's view, who needs it?

Since the hand-over of power to a new Iraqi government, many Kurds are asking themselves whether the bargain made by their political leaders to rejoin the rest of Iraq after 13 years of semi-independence is really worth it. At the very least, Hassan said, Kurds must demand more equality and autonomy than is on offer. To him, independence would be better.

But many political leaders here say their Arab compatriots aren't taking their concerns seriously. When Iraqi leaders signed a temporary constitution in March guaranteeing Kurds veto power, some Shiite Muslim politicians refused to attend the ceremony. After pressure from Shiite religious leaders, the U.N. resolution ratifying the hand-over did not even mention the temporary constitution. Incensed Kurds see many Arabs as ungrateful for the Kurds' efforts alongside the Americans to overthrow Saddam Hussein.

"Immediately after the liberation of Iraq, the people here were very happy and proud of their achievements and the gaining an important place in the governing bodies of Iraq," said Hassan, a sports official in the Kurdistan government.

"But after the incident with the U.N. resolution, they became impatient because their concerns were not answered.... Kurds and the peshmerga [fighters] took part effectively in the liberation war, but what we got back was not as much as we put in."

At the heart of the discontent, he said, is that Arabs treat the Kurds who are ethnically and linguistically different as "little brothers." For instance, although Kurds were awarded eight posts in the new interim government of Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, including a deputy premiership, there was a consensus that the top two positions, the prime ministership and the presidency, would go only to Arabs. Kurds make up about 20% of Iraq's 25 million people. Also, Kurds' wishes to absorb the city and province of

Kirkuk into their regional administration have been deferred indefinitely. The strategic, oil-rich city was predominantly Kurdish and Turkmen until Hussein's government resettled large numbers of Arabs there.

"They are all the time going on about their rights. Why are they not ready to recognize the rights of others?" Hassan said of the Arabs.

Allawi, whose government took over from the U.S.-led coalition June 28, visited Kurdistan on July 11, meeting with the two most prominent Kurdish politicians, Jalal Talabani and Massoud Barzani. He came away with a promise of security help from the formidable peshmerga forces 55,000 fighters strong who officially are being distributed among the new national Iraqi army, police and border guard. But the peshmerga whose name means "those who face death" are likely to remain an army within the army. No one doubts that they could be quickly recalled to fight for Kurdistan if summoned.

In fact, they still wear a patch of the Kurdish flag, not the official Iraqi flag, on their uniforms.

Similarly, the Kurdish flag flies over all government buildings here. On the highway just north of Kirkuk one day this month, a man dressed in Kurdish costume and holding a pole flying the Kurdish flag stood by the highway. At the peshmerga's headquarters outside Sulaymaniya, the deputy commander of the general staff, Mustafa Sayed Qadir, said his troops were ready to help stabilize all Iraq and would even venture into Arab areas if given the orders. "Give us Fallouja and we will put it in order in only one month," he joked about the Sunni Muslim stronghold of the insurgency.

But he grew more serious when discussing Kurdish demands. "Kurds insist on their rights, and if Kurdish rights are not recognized and respected, Iraq will never know stability," Qadir warned.

Regional Interior Minister Osman Hajy Mahmod said Kurdistan could offer the central government the benefits of its "strong and well-formed security apparatus." But more important than that, he said, Iraq should benefit from Kurdistan's experience of democracy for the last 13 years. The region has governed itself since the Persian Gulf War in 1991, when the U.S. and Britain established a "no-fly zone" to protect it from Hussein's forces.

"A real push should be given to democracy in the region,"

Mahmod said. "Kurdistan can be held up as a good example. If this were done, people in the rest of Iraq and the Middle East would be able to see that the U.S. is not just here for its purposes, but to help them."

Iraqi Kurdistan's leading poet, Sherko Bekas, is skeptical of Arab aspirations to democracy. "From where will that democracy emerge?" he said. "Do you think it can be built from Ramadi or Fallouja? Do you think the Sunni man will embrace democracy when he does not even allow his women to go outside without a veil?"

Bekas led a petition drive this spring that gathered 1.8 million signatures favoring a referendum to determine whether Kurdistan should be part of Iraq or become independent. Many people signed with their blood, he said. He recalled Hussein's genocidal Anfal campaign of 1988 against the Kurds, including a chemical attack that killed 5,000 of them. After having suffered so much at the hands of Iraq's Arabs, he said, Kurds would be better off going their own way.

"Eighty-three years ago, Kurds were wronged, annexed to this Iraq against their will after the first World War," he said. After decades of oppression, he said, "there is nothing inside us that makes us feel connected to Iraq."

Their attitude toward the Americans is one way Kurds differ from many Arab Iraqis, said Omar Fatah, the acting prime minister of the Kurdish regional administration in Sulaymaniya. "When the coalition forces came, we welcomed them because they came to free Iraq and free the Iraqi people," he said, "and we still keep them in our hearts as liberators, not occupiers."

Nevertheless, there is growing concern in some quarters that the United States is willing to abandon the Kurds in order to mollify the more restive Arabs. "Some people say, 'Let's start killing Americans then they will respect us,'" Hassan said.

Although overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim, Kurds are much less strict in their interpretation of their faith than Arab Iraqis. Many women do not veil themselves; the sale and consumption of alcohol is widely tolerated; Israel is not considered an enemy as it is in much of Arab Iraq. Kurds fear being forced into a straitjacket if religious forces gain the upper hand in Baghdad. Women now fight in the peshmerga as officers and ordinary soldiers. On a recent morning, about 50 female recruits were being shown how to march and handle Kalashnikov rifles. Others were on duty at checkpoints at the general staff headquarters.

Kurdish pride is on display in the rapid development of the land. Work on a commercial international airport started outside Sulaymaniya in January and is scheduled to be finished in a year.

It will be handy for landlocked Kurdistan if it ever seeks independence. For the time being, however, political leaders say that is not possible because of pressure from Iraq's neighbors—particularly Turkey—which have Kurdish minorities, abhor the idea of an independent Kurdish state and have threatened to crush it if it emerges.

But on the streets here, it is obvious that the official position is chafing against the will of many, if not most, ordinary Kurds.

Fatah, speaking in his living room, said Kurdish leaders were aware of the frustration and doubts among their followers.

"We would like to be part of a democratic, federal and united Iraq," he said. "But our people have presented two conditions that are absolute: full democracy and full federalism."

Kurds could always reassess, he suggested.

"From the beginning, we have expressed our desire to make Iraq a country of two equal peoples, and we hope that Allawi's government will succeed on this basis."

Kurdish Refugees Left Homeless on Return

The Australian

By NICOLAS ROTHWELL July 26, 2004

The running track at Kirkuk's Olympic Stadium is pitted and bullet-holed and the concrete grandstand seats are crumbling away. Yet here in Iraq's oil-rich, violence-torn central city, a quiet crowd of men, women and children sits and waits.

The only homes are rough tents and lean-to corrugated iron sheds, or makeshift mud-brick sleeping rooms the people have built beneath the stadium stands, where the dust storms blow and the sun beats down in a 45-degree blaze each day.

These are the Kurdish refugees of Kirkuk: about 7000 families are camped here, in the stadium itself or in the bleak camps nearby, without sewerage or basic facilities. They are among the last victims of Saddam Hussein; it is their bizarre fate to be homeless on return to the city where they were born, and once lived.

Jaffar Mohammed Rashid, like many others, was dispossessed by the former dictator in 1988, after a fierce Kurdish uprising was put down. Scores of thousands of Kurds were driven out, and either killed or scattered round the rest of Iraq. Their homes were given to Arab migrants from elsewhere in the country. The demographic balance of Kirkuk, always intricate, was abruptly changed. Historically, the city, which has 880,000 people, was two-thirds Kurdish, with large Arab and Turkmen minorities.

Now it is 43 per cent Kurdish and 20 per cent Turkmen, with the remainder Arab, according to local authorities. The Kurdish refugees like Rashid and his family were drifting for the past 15 years.

He lived in Kurdish northwest Iran, and in the Iraqi Kurdish cities of Arbil and Suleimaniyah.

"I'm really happy at heart to be back in Kirkuk now," he says, "even though I can't go back to the area where we used to live. When we left, we had nothing but the clothes on our backs - and that's still all we have, but at least with Saddam gone we have some hope."

Kirkuk's refugee crisis is intractable. This is potentially one of the richest cities in the world. It sits in the middle of vast oil fields, whose flares burn on the horizon. But its future is unclear. Who should control it in the looming federal Iraq?

At present, it is a simmering armed camp, with the Kurdish military policing the lion's share of town, while other ethnic groups maintain their own enclaves. Roadblocks are everywhere, while at the heart of Kirkuk lies a large US air base. The city is shelled and mortared every night. Explosions light up the sky - but no one knows precisely who's behind the violence. Islamic groups are reported to be strong here. Reconstruction has ground to a halt. Western contractors are, understandably, absent.

The top Kurdish official in the city, Abdu Rahman Mustafa, lays out the problems in a world-worn, thorough way. Attempts to control Kirkuk through ethnic cleansing and dividing the town have been constant in recent years. The city's different districts were even attached to separate regional authorities, in a bid to dilute the town's political weight. Many of the Arab "transmigrants" shifted into Kirkuk 15 years ago were themselves victims of Saddam's regime, Shia Muslims from the south of Iraq.

Kurdish authorities in Suleimaniyah are planning a census to gauge Kirkuk's precise ethnic balance, but they are apparently unwilling

to include the "transmigrants" in the count. "Kirkuk was a distinctive place," Mustafa says, "always somewhat multi-ethnic. We have original Arabs who were always living here and who naturally belong here -- and then we have people who were brought here and artificially planted here. Those people are themselves feeling guilty and ill at ease now."

The plight of the Kurdish refugees is also complex. The great majority come from Kirkuk itself, and still have the keys to their own houses, which now lie in Arab-held no-go areas. But there are large refugee populations living in large camps to the west of Kirkuk, built by the old regime. Many of them come from the 4500 Kurdish villages razed in 1988 by Saddam. Only two-thirds of those population centres have been rebuilt. A total of 30,000 other Kurdish families are refugees within the borders of Kurdistan, making a total displaced population of 150,000.

The situation worsens daily. The new educational year looms, and there are no coherent arrangements in place to school the refugees, who are still trickling back to Kirkuk from the refuges where they had lived until last year's US-led invasion. There are no homes for these incomers, while the hospitals and public services are almost all concentrated in the Arab-held quarters of the town.

Can there be a future for a city so traversed by tensions from past, present and future? "Kirkuk already is a multi-ethnic city," says Mustafa from within his fortress-like compound, defended by platoon of armed guards. "Of course it will continue to be one. But we need a degree of peace and tranquility before we can do anything here at all."

Despite The Tension, Iraqi Kurds and Turkey Must Collaborate

Daily Star

By HIWA OSMAN July 26, 2004

For the past decade, the relationship between the Kurds of Iraq and the Turkish government has been characterized by mistrust on the Kurdish side and paranoia on the Turkish side. Now that could change, especially with a new interim government in Baghdad.

Since 1992, Turkey has had a Kurdish self-governing enclave on its border that it can neither live with nor live without. On the surface, the political situation today does not seem to have changed. But there are indications that the ebb and flow of Turkey's relationship with the Kurds could settle into a more livable, stable relationship with increased economic interdependence. There are, however, a few hurdles that could hamper the opening of a new chapter in relations between the two sides. The average Iraqi Kurd feels that Turkey's "Kurdophobia" blocks any step that could create a strong and stable Kurdish element in Iraq. Popular Kurdish resentment toward Turkey today is mainly caused by Turkey's deplorable treatment of its own 20 million-strong Kurdish population, and its stance on Kirkuk and the Turkmen who live there. But the Iraqi Kurdish leadership is convinced that the only way forward is to have a stable relationship with Ankara, based on a solid foundation of

mutual trust and economic interests. Turkey's large Kurdish minority, which has been stripped of all cultural and political rights, is a cause of great concern for Ankara. Iraqi Kurds have carved out an autonomous place for themselves in Iraq, and Turkey fears "its" Kurds will demand the same for themselves. Over the past 12 years, the ruling Iraqi Kurdish political parties - the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan - have been mindful of these concerns and have even gone to the extreme of fighting their fellow Kurds from Turkey to prevent them from using Iraqi territory to launch attacks against the Turkish Army. On the other hand, the condition of Iraq's Turkmen, mainly located in Kurdish-governed Irbil and Kirkuk, has been described as the "golden age of the Turkmen." They have Turkmen-language schools, newspapers, magazines, televisions and radio, as well as cultural and political associations and a minister in the Irbil-based Cabinet.

The Kurds, who juxtapose the situation of the Kurds in Turkey with that of the Turkmen under Iraqi Kurdish rule, say that Turkey has no right to complain about the rights of the Turkmen in Iraq. Iraqi Kurds often say that only once the Kurds of Turkey enjoy a fraction

of the freedoms and rights enjoyed by the Turkmen of Iraq will the Turkish government entitled to voice concern over the latter's fate.

Turkey has been expressing its opposition to "changing the demographic structure" of Kirkuk with the return of thousands of ethnically cleansed Kurds. Many expelled Kurds - and Turkmen - point out that when the Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein was changing the demographic composition of Kirkuk through the expulsion of both ethnic groups, Turkey was silent. But now when Kurds and Turkmen are trying to return to their homes, Turkey considers it a change in the city's demography.

Kirkuk's Kurds and Turkmen also feel that Turkey is not really concerned about Iraq's Turkmen population, but rather about the Turkmen Front, a political party referred to by many in Iraq as the "Turkish Front." Former members of the Turkmen Front, who resigned from it in protest, and Iraqi Turkmen parties and associations without ties to the Turkish government, say Ankara has pressured them into accepting its policies. Turkey's history of military interventions in Iraqi Kurdistan has created strong resentment on the Kurdish street.

Many Kurds, however, believe that the new era in Iraq should be

signaled by a change in Turkey's policy toward the Kurds - and they say they are seeing hints of it. Abdullah Gul, the Turkish foreign minister, was among the first to congratulate the new deputy prime minister of Iraq, Barham Salih, when he was named the prime minister of the Suleimaniyya-based Kurdistan Regional Government. Many Turkish companies and businesses have set up shop in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurds welcome them and see their presence as a catalyst for more stable and sustainable ties with Turkey. While hints of Turkish soldiers on Iraqi Kurdish streets sent shockwaves through the Kurdish population last year, the sight of Turkish businessmen in the same cities today is welcomed. Turkey needs to treat the Iraqi Kurds as partners, not adversaries. The Iraqi Kurds' attempts to keep good neighborly relations with Turkey should be acknowledged, and their efforts to build a secular democracy should be supported, not hampered. Turkey should not meddle in Kirkuk, which is a purely Iraqi internal affair. It could be very explosive, and the outcome might not be what Turkey wants. However, Turkey is much better off with a secular, prosperous and stable neighbor than with a Fallujah-type situation on its border.

Hiwa Osman is an editor and trainer at the Institute for War and Peace Reporting in Iraq. This commentary is taken from bitterlemons-international, an online newsletter

IRAK Les officiels et la coalition sont toujours dans la ligne de mire

Multiplication des prises d'otages et poursuite des attentats

Cécile de Corbière

Les prises d'otages se multiplient en Irak, où cinq nouveaux enlèvements viennent s'ajouter aux huit autres perpétrés la semaine dernière. Un groupe se faisant appeler l'Armée islamique en Irak a revendiqué hier l'enlèvement d'un Irakien et de deux Pakistanaï portés disparus dimanche, dans un communiqué diffusé sur la chaîne al-Jezira.

Les deux otages pakistanais menacés d'exécution sont accusés d'avoir collaboré avec les forces américaines en Irak. Le Pakistan a appelé hier les ravisseurs à les libérer, arguant de leur innocence et de l'absence de lien avec toute

activité de politique internationale. Deux chauffeurs jordaniens employés par une compagnie jordanienne qui travaille avec l'armée américaine ont également été enlevés.

Cinq nouveaux enlèvements se sont ajoutés aux huit perpétrés la semaine dernière

Un autre groupe, les Drapeaux noirs, auteur de l'enlèvement de sept chauffeurs de camion employés par une entreprise koweïtienne - un Égyptien, trois Indiens et trois Kenyans -, a annoncé hier une prolongation de l'ultima-

tum fixé à l'employeur koweïtien dans un communiqué, faisant dépendre la libération des otages du retrait de son entreprise du pays.

En revanche, le diplomate égyptien Mohammad Mamed Kotb, enlevé vendredi dans la capitale par un groupe s'appelant les Lions d'Allah, a été libéré « en raison des qualités morales

dont il jouit », selon l'un de ses ravisseurs cité par al-Jezira.

La sécurité en Irak est mise à mal par la poursuite des attentats à Bagdad, où un colonel du ministère de l'Intérieur, Moussab al-Aouadi, en charge

des relations avec les tribus, a été abattu hier par des inconnus, alors qu'il se trouvait dans un restaurant.

Un double attentat à la voiture piégée a également été commis hier à l'entrée principale de l'aéroport de Mossoul, dans le nord de l'Irak, où les Américains ont établi l'une de leurs bases. Quatre Irakiens sont morts, dont le kamikaze. Cet attentat a blessé trois soldats américains ainsi que deux Irakiens.

L'aéroport de Bassora, dans le sud du pays, utilisé comme base par l'armée britannique, a lui aussi fait l'objet d'une attaque armée. Deux Irakiennes qui y sont employées ont été tuées, et deux autres blessées par les tirs d'inconnus qui ont ouvert le feu sur leur véhicule.

(Avec AFP.)

Politics of exclusion in Iraq

Last week's national political conference in Baghdad was all but eclipsed by the armed standoff outside the Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf. But the Baghdad politicking was just as important for the future prospects of a unified Iraq, and the outcome was mostly discouraging.

Although it brought together what was probably the most diverse collection of Iraqis ever to sit in a single hall and produced some glimmers of democratic debate, the conference largely failed to achieve the crucial purpose assigned to it in the planning for a transition to a workable democracy. It was supposed to provide a broader base for governance and constitutional compromise than Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's narrow, exile-dominated cabinet. That did not really happen. Instead, the gathering was controlled from beginning to end by a familiar cast of characters, drawn from the same narrow sources as the first U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council. As a result, the Allawi government largely squandered its best single opportunity to draw disaffected Iraqis into peaceful politics in advance of next year's elections.

The conference's main task was to choose a 100-person interim assembly with the power to oversee the cabinet, veto legislation and approve the

budget. The United Nations and foreign diplomats had been concerned that the interim government was not doing enough to draw in political independents and regional leaders. Even more ominously, the Allawi government had not sufficiently reached out to include radical Sunni nationalists and Shiite religious factions now torn between entering the political process and persisting in armed resistance. Leaving large numbers of them outside the tent makes more of the kind of revolts seen in Falluja, Najaf and the Sadr City neighborhood of Baghdad almost inevitable.

In the end, many who should have attended were not present and the independents who did show up were deprived of real power in choosing the assembly members.

Iraq is supposed to conduct three elections next year, starting with the selection of a transitional assembly with constitution-writing powers in January and culminating in the election of a fully constitutional government by the end of the year. No one is under any illusions that the process will produce a perfect democracy. But it must create an Iraq that is united and a government that is deemed legitimate by the Iraqi people. Bitter historic conflicts and contemporary tensions dividing the majority Shiite Arabs, minority Sunni Arabs and Kurds must be worked out.

The Kurds, who had the main responsibility for organizing this conference, were well represented through their two traditional clan-based parties. But protecting Kurdish interests inside a new Iraq requires bargaining with all the important forces in the Sunni and Shiite Arab communities.

Sunni Arabs, the dominant group under Saddam Hussein — as well as under the monarchy, the British and the Ottoman Empire — need to feel that they are not now going to be victimized by the groups their former leaders trampled on. The new Iraq must find room for nationalist Sunnis, including those who worked with the former Baathist government, not just politicians who spent the Saddam years in foreign exile. If too many of these people feel excluded, they can cause serious trouble in Sunni nationalist strongholds like Falluja and Mosul. Shiite religious radicals are also insufficiently represented by the exile-oriented Shiite parties allied with the Allawi government.

The temptation to exclude radicals, like those now following Moktada al-Sadr, is natural. But the events of the last few months have made it obvious that groups that feel they have no say in the new government will find an outlet through other, more destructive means. The national conference was a rare opportunity to bring in excluded groups and make the elections meaningful. Regrettably, it fell well short of achieving those goals.

La situation s'enlise à Nadjaf

De violents affrontements ont éclaté hier à Nadjaf autour du mausolée de l'imam Ali après des bombardements américains sur les positions des miliciens chiites. Les miliciens du chef radical Moktada al-Sadr attaquaient au mortier les chars américains, postés à environ 300 mètres du mausolée, alors que ces derniers ripostaient à coups de canon.

Dans la nuit de samedi à dimanche, l'aviation américaine a mené au moins trois raids sur des positions rebelles près du mausolée. Ces confrontations sont intervenues peu après qu'un porte-parole de Moktada al-Sadr, Ahmed Chaibani, eut annoncé la suspension du transfert du mausolée, que les miliciens occupent depuis cinq mois, au grand ayatollah Ali Sistani pour des raisons de procédure. Les négociations sur ce transfert butent sur la question de l'estimation des biens du mauso-

lée, qui sont d'une très grande valeur.

Le gouvernement intérimaire exige depuis plusieurs jours que les miliciens quittent ce lieu saint chiite et désarment, les menaçant dans le cas contraire d'une vaste opération militaire. Deux miliciens ont été tués au combat depuis samedi, selon la clinique installée dans l'enceinte du mausolée et chargée de soigner les combattants.

L'ayatollah Sistani, la figure religieuse emblématique des chiites irakiens, a accepté en principe de reprendre les clés du mausolée comme le lui propose le chef radical chiite Moktada al-Sadr mais il veut d'abord s'assurer que les miliciens de l'Armée du Mahdi n'ont pas pillé le site sacré durant les cinq mois d'occupation.

Par ailleurs, le sort de deux journalistes français, Georges Malbrunot du *Figaro* et Christian Chesnot

de Radio France internationale (RFI), ainsi que celui de l'Italien Enzo Baldoni, suscitaient la plus vive inquiétude.

Près de Baqubah (au nord de Bagdad), un vice-gouverneur de la province à majorité sunnite de Diyala, Gharsan Abbas al-Khadran, a échappé à un attentat suicide à la voiture piégée qui a fait deux morts, outre le kamikaze, et huit blessés, selon des sources policières et médicales. Il s'agissait de

la deuxième tentative d'attentat contre un vice-gouverneur de cette province depuis le début du mois.

A Kirkouk, des centaines de Turcomans chiites ont manifesté dans les rues de la métropole pétrolière du nord du pays où les rivalités ethniques sont fortes. Ils protestaient contre les tentatives des Kurdes de la ville d'accaparer, selon eux, des terrains leur appartenant.

Enfin, les exportations de pétrole par le sud de l'Irak ont retrouvé

leur niveau normal depuis samedi soir, soit 85 000 barils par heure, après une réduction de moitié durant treize jours, a affirmé hier un responsable de la Compagnie du pétrole du sud. La décision de fermer un oléoduc avait été prise à la suite de menaces de miliciens chiites de le faire sauter, en raison des combats qui font rage à Nadjaf. Cette baisse causait un manque à gagner de 30 millions de dollars par jour, selon le gouvernement.

LE FIGARO

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John F. Burns

Letter from Baghdad

Two power brokers collide over Iraq's fate

International Herald Tribune
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BAGHDAD

In Iraq, of late, it has been a tale of two cities, and of two men of vaulting ambition, each seeking a path to power in the Iraq that will emerge, some day, from the turmoil that has followed the downfall of Saddam Hussein.

In Najaf, Moktada al-Sadr has shown how a portly cleric with a dedicated militia and an artful grasp of Shiite street politics can confront American power. In Baghdad, Ayad Allawi, also portly and Shiite, but secular and backed by American tanks, has used his place as Iraq's interim prime minister to warn Sadr that the time for his insurrection is running out. Adding to the drama, the two men have joined in conflict over Najaf's Imam Ali Mosque, the holiest shrine in the 1,300 years since the Shiite breakaway that followed the Prophet Muhammad's death.

As the week ended, the confrontation had neither exploded nor subsided. There were signs that Sadr was seeking a way to back out, sparing himself and his fighters annihilation,

and saving what he had sought all along — an enhancement of his claim to have defended his fellow Shiites' faith and pride.



Moktada al-Sadr

Allawi, committed to ousting Sadr and disarming his Mahdi Army but aware that storming the shrine would be a heinous blot on the reputation of any Shiite politician, seemed also to be reaching for a mediated solution, an outcome sure to be favored by Allawi's patrons in Washington, for whom a bloody showdown in Najaf was likely to be still more unpalatable.

Messy times favor messy solutions. Even Iraqis who sigh for the brute simplicities of life under Saddam Hussein, as many now do, have not forgotten what he did when he, too, was confronted by an armed occupation of the Imam Ali shrine, during the Shiite uprising that followed the Gulf war in 1991.

Tyrannical as he was, Saddam understood that compromise served him better than soldiers blasting through the shrine's massive gates and walls. After firing rockets, he whispered that

chemical weapons might be next, and the rebels fled the mosque. Later, many were carried off to be executed and buried in mass graves.

But while his is hardly the profile of a man with an instinctive feel for the give and take of democracy, Allawi is wedded to a political blueprint for Iraq that was drawn up under U.S. guidance in the period of formal occupation.

This required, first, the appointment of the provisional government that Allawi now heads; second, the convening of a national conference to appoint a 100-member council to oversee the government, review its decrees and call its ministers to account until a National Assembly can be elected. The Assembly is to draw up a permanent constitution, ratify it and lead the country to a fully elected government by January 2006.

While events were moving to a climax in Najaf, the conference met in Baghdad, offering a glimpse of the kind of country this might be if democratic ideals prevail. The proceedings were chaotic, disrupted by tensions over the battles in Najaf, and were compromised by backroom deals that saw organized blocs, religious and secular, securing representation on the new council to the exclusion of smaller, independent groups.

Still, it was the most representative gathering held here for at least 40 years, its members elected in caucuses from every corner of the country. Its very clamor proved how eager Iraqis are, after decades of repression, to have a voice in remaking their country.

Just getting 1,100 delegates to Baghdad for the conference, and keeping them safe for the four days of the gathering, was a triumph of sorts for Allawi's government and its American patrons, considering the shooting gallery that much of the country —

and Baghdad itself — have become in recent months. But throwing a cordon of concrete and steel around a conference hall is a far cry, logistically and politically, from the next steps in the constitutional blueprint, the three rounds of national elections scheduled for next year.

The first, by Jan. 31, will choose the assembly that will appoint a new transitional government, and draw up the new constitution. In all this, Allawi and Sadr, and the poles they represent in the march to a new Iraq, seem likely to find themselves opponents

once again, whatever the outcome of the immediate confrontation in Najaf.

One U.S. official took the optimistic view: that the debate in Baghdad and the battle in Najaf were two sides of the same coin, Iraqis struggling to make their weight felt. The task for those who want a democratic Iraq, he said, was to draw the men with guns — Sadr's and the insurgents who have turned the Sunni heartland into a war zone — into the political arena. He cited approvingly a conference delegate who had said that all Iraqis, insurgents included, were seeking the same end.

It was this perception that seemed to have inspired the peace proposal put to Sadr's representatives by the political and religious figures who flew to Najaf on behalf of the conference. In return for disbanding the Mahdi Army and vacating the shrine, they offered an amnesty for his fighters, and an opening for Sadr to participate in the political process "in any way he may choose."

Allawi, too hard-headed to have thought it likely, put the same proposition in his ultimatum to Sadr, telling him that his choice was to be forced from the shrine in battle, or to disarm his militia and contest elections.

Najaf represents as crucial a juncture as the U.S. has faced in Iraq.

In the end, this seemed to have been more an American than an Iraqi idea. Indeed, most Iraqis seemed to think it chimerical that any of the men who have cast Iraq into the convulsions of war, in the name of Islam or of Saddam Hussein or of wounded Iraqi pride, could be persuaded, by force of argument or arms, to abandon their arms now and take to the hustings.

If there has been one message written in all that the insurgents have done, whether Sunnis or Shiites, these Iraqis say, it is a rejection of the very idea that Iraq's future can be chosen under a U.S. military umbrella — more broadly, of the idea that America and its notions should have any place in reshaping Iraq at all.

When they were done with their spinning, senior Western officials who briefed reporters on the developments in Najaf seemed to agree. Najaf, an official said bluntly, represented as crucial a juncture as America has faced in Iraq, one from which Iraq could proceed, with the emasculation of Sadr's rebellion, to a new period in which Iraqi politicians, not gunmen, could begin to set the country's agenda; or, conversely, if the government became resigned to leaving Sadr's militia still rooted in the city, to a further slide into chaos.

In that case, he said, what would be left would not be a country with an ac-

cepted constitution and elections, but a "Lebanonization," a fracturing into separate, warlord-ruled fiefs, with the gun supplanting the rule of law. This was hardly what America intended when it came here promising

Iraqis something far better than Saddam. "With different militias controlling different cities, that obviously doesn't promise the political stability Iraq needs," he said.

John F. Burns can be reached at burns@nyt.com. John Vinocur is on vacation.



Joao Silva for The New York Times

A young Iraqi in front of a burning building Tuesday in Najaf, where U.S. forces battled Shiite rebel militiamen.

2 Iraqi ministers escape bombings

By Erik Eckholm

BAGHDAD: Within a single hour in two Baghdad neighborhoods Tuesday morning, two ministers in the interim Iraqi government were the targets of bomb explosions that killed at least five bodyguards and injured several bystanders.

The two, ministers of environment and education, were unscathed in the closely sequenced attacks, one involving an apparent suicide bomber in a car and the other a roadside explosive. The blasts reverberated across the capital, and together the attacks were a blunt reminder of the dangers facing officials of the U.S.-backed government, which is under siege from multiple insurgent forces.

It was not clear if the attacks had any link to the violent standoff that continued in Najaf, to the south, where U.S. forces were battling the militia of the Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr.

In a statement posted on an Islamic Web site, a group linked to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian linked to Al Qaeda who is believed to be hiding in Iraq, took credit for the car bomb attack on the environment minister, The Associated Press reported. The authenticity of the claim could not be confirmed.

As U.S. troops, newly aided by Iraqi forces, tightened their stranglehold on militia members in and around Najaf's

revered Imam Ali Shrine, Iraq's foreign minister, Hoshyar Zebari, held a news conference Tuesday to warn neighboring countries against pushing for international mediation or negotiations.

"We regard this as an internal affair," he said. "We will not welcome any effort to internationalize or regionalize it."

The statement was apparently prompted by Iran's recent call for regional discussions on the crisis in Najaf, as well as concerns about the bloodshed being voiced in international Islamic forums.

Iran has a mainly Shiite Muslim population with close ties to the Shiites of southern Iraq, and officials here have accused the Iranian government of supporting militant Islam in Iraq.

Journalists have reported seeing what appeared to be Iranian-made weapons and Iranian men among the ranks of Sadr's militia, the Mahdi Army.

While drawing a line against outside mediation or interference, Zebari sought to convey a conciliatory message to the government of Iran.

"We are reaching out to Iran, trying to engage them positively," he said. The government has decided to send a delegation to Iran "soon," he said, "to explain our position and to encourage them to play a constructive role."

Zebari stressed the government's commitment to crushing the militia in Najaf, saying, "We are determined to end this with the minimum of blood-

shed, but we will not waver." He added that the credibility of the government was at stake.

At the same time, Zebari repeated the recent promise by the interim prime minister, Ayad Allawi, that if Sadr will disarm and disband his militia, he can join in the country's fledgling electoral politics.

Implicit in these statements is the suggestion that criminal charges pending against the cleric could be set aside as he seeks office.

Iraq's defense minister, Hazim al-Shalaan, told Al Arabiya television Tuesday that the Mahdi Army members remaining in the old city of Najaf and its shrine have only hours to surrender. He said the government believed that Sadr himself was still in Najaf, though not in the shrine.

Meanwhile, an Italian journalist, Enzo Baldoni, who has been missing in Iraq since last week, has been kidnapped by militants, the AP reported, citing a video broadcast Tuesday on the pan-Arab Al Jazeera television station. The group, calling itself "The Islamic Army in Iraq," said in a statement it could not guarantee Baldoni's safety unless Italy announces within 48 hours that it would withdraw its 3,000 troops from Iraq, the AP said. In response, Italy's government insisted that it would keep its troops in Iraq.

The New York Times

A Marine's tale ■ By Glen G. Butler

Over Najaf, fighting for my hometown

August 24, 2004

Herald Tribune

NAJAF, Iraq
I'm an average American who grew up watching "Brady Bunch" reruns, playing dodge ball and listening to Van Halen. Now, I'm a Marine helicopter pilot who has spent the last two weeks heavily engaged with enemy forces here. I'm writing this between missions, without much time or care to polish, so please look to the heart of these thoughts and not their structure.

I got in the country a little more than a month ago, eager to do my part here for the global war on terror and still get home in one piece. I'm a mid-grade officer, so I probably have a better-than-average understanding of the complexity of the situation, but I make no claims to see the bigger picture or offer any strategic solutions. Two years of my military training were spent in classrooms in Quantico, Virginia. I've read Sun Tzu several times; I've flipped through Mao's Little Red Book and debated over Thucydides; I've analyzed Henry Kissinger's "Diplomacy" and Clausewitz's "On War"; and I've walked the battlefields of Antietam, Belleau Wood, Majuba and Isandlwana.

I've also studied a little about the culture I'm deep in the middle of, know a bit about the caliph, about the five pillars and about Allah, but know I don't know enough. I am also a believer in our cause — I put that up front just so there isn't any question of my motivation.

We Marines are proudly apolitical, yet stereotypically right-wing conservative. I'm both. And I'd be here with my fellow devildogs, fighting just as hard, whether John Kerry or George W. Bush or Ralph Nader were our commander-in-chief, until we're told to go home.

On Aug. 5, after a few days of building intensity, war erupted in Najaf (again). When we had first come to Iraq, we were told our mission would be to conduct so-called SASO, or Security and Stability Operations, and to train the Iraqi military and police to do their jobs so we could go home. Obviously, the security part of SASO is still the emphasis, but our unit's area of operations had been very quiet for months, so most of us weren't expecting a fight so soon.

That changed rapidly when Marines responded to requests for assistance from the Iraqi forces in Najaf battling Moktada al-Sadr's militia, who had attacked local police stations. Our helicopters were called on the scene to provide close air support, and soon one of them was shot down. That was when this war became real for me.

Since then my squadron has been providing continuous support for our engaged Marine brothers on the ground, by this point slugging it out hand-to-hand in the city's ancient Muslim cemetery. The Imam Ali shrine in Najaf is the burial



place of the prophet Muhammad's son-in-law, and is one of the most revered sites in Shiite Islam. The cemetery to its north is gigantic, filled with crypts and mausoleums. We had been warned it was an "exclusion zone" when we got here, that the local authorities had asked us to not go in there or fly overhead, even though we knew the bad guys were using this area to hide weapons, make improvised explosive devices, and plan against us. Being the culturally sensitive force we are, we agreed — until Aug. 5. Suddenly, I was conducting support missions over the Marines' heads in the graveyard, dodging anti-aircraft artillery and rocket-propelled grenades and preparing to be shot down, too. My perspective broadened rapidly.

At first there were no news media in Najaf; now, I assume, it's getting crowded, although the authorities have restricted access after a group of journalists "embedded" with the Mahdi Militia muddled the problem and jeopardized others' safety. I haven't had time to catch much CNN or Fox News, and although I've seen a few headlines forwarded to me by friends, I don't think the world is seeing the complete picture.

I want to emphasize that our military is using every means possible to minimize damage to historical, religious and civilian structures, and is going out of its way to protect the innocent. I have not shot one round without good cause, whether it be in response to machine gun fire aimed at me or mortars shot at soldiers and Marines on the ground.

The battle has been surreal, focused largely in the cemetery, where families continue burying their dead even as I swoop in low overhead to make sure they aren't sneaking in behind our forces' flanks, or pulling a surface-to-air missile out of the coffin. Children continue playing soccer in the dirt fields next door, and locals wave to us as

Journalists are crowding into Najaf, but I don't think the world is seeing the complete picture.

we fly over their rooftops in preparation for gun runs into the enemy's positions.

Sure, some of those people might be waving just to make sure we don't shoot them, but I think the majority are on our side. I've learned that this enemy is not just a mass of angry Iraqis who want us to leave their country, as some would have you believe. The forces we're fighting around Iraq are a conglomeration of renegade Shiites, former Baathists, Iranians, Syrians, terrorists with ties to Ansar al-Islam and Al Qaeda, petty criminals, destitute citizens looking for excitement or money, and yes, even a few frustrated Iraqis who worry about Wal-Mart culture infringing on their neighborhood.

But I see the others who are on our side, appreciate us risking our lives, and know we're in the right. The Iraqi soldiers who are fighting alongside us are

motivated to take their country back. I've not been deluded into thinking that we came here to free the Iraqis. That is indeed the icing on the cake, but I came here to prevent the still active "grave and gathering threat" from congealing into something we wouldn't be able to stop.

Weapons of mass destruction or no, I'm glad that we ended the dictatorship

of Saddam Hussein. His attempt to assassinate George H.W. Bush, his use of chemical weapons on his own people and his invasion of a neighboring country are just a few of the other reasons I believe we should have acted sooner. He eventually would have had the means to cause America great harm — no doubt in my mind.

The pre-emptive doctrine of the current administration will continue to be debated long after I'm gone, but one fact stands for itself: America has not been hit with another catastrophic attack since Sept. 11, 2001. I firmly believe that our actions in Afghanistan and Iraq are major reasons that we've had it so good at home. Building a "fortress America" is not only impractical, it's impossible. Prudent homeland security measures are vital, to be sure, but attacking the source of the threat remains essential.

Now we are on the verge of victory or defeat in Iraq. Success depends not only on battlefield superiority, but also on the trust and confidence of the American people. I've read some articles recently that call for cutting back our military presence in Iraq and moving our troops to the peripheries of most cities. Such advice is well-intentioned but wrong — it would soon lead to a total withdrawal. Our goal needs to be a safe Iraq, free of militias and terrorists; if we simply pull back and run, then the region will pose an even greater threat than it did before the invasion. I also fear if we do not win this battle here and now, my 7-year-old son might find himself here in 10 or 11 years, fighting the same enemies and their sons.

When critics of the war say their advocacy is on behalf of those of us risking our lives here, it's a type of false patriotism. I believe that when Americans say they "support our troops," it should include supporting our mission, not just sending us care packages. They don't have to believe in the cause as I do; but they should not denigrate it. That only aids the enemy in defeating us strategically.

The filmmaker Michael Moore recently asked the Fox News commentator Bill O'Reilly if he would sacrifice his son for Falluja. A clever rhetorical

device, but it's the wrong question: This war is about Des Moines, Iowa, not Fal-

luja. Iraq is breeding and attracting militants who are all eager to grab box cutters, dirty bombs, suicide vests or biological weapons, and then come fight us in Chicago, Santa Monica or Long Island. Falluja, in fact, was very close to becoming a city our forces could have controlled, and then given new schools and sewers and hospitals, before we pulled back in the spring. Now, essentially ignored, it has become a Taliban-like state of Islamic extremism, a terrorist safe haven. We must not let the same fate befall Najaf or Ramadi or the rest of Iraq.

No, I would not sacrifice myself, my parents would not sacrifice me, and President George W. Bush would not sacrifice a single Marine or soldier simply for Falluja. Rather, that symbolic city is but one step toward a free and democratic Iraq, which is one step closer to a more safe and secure America.

I miss my family, my friends and my country, but right now there is nowhere else I'd rather be. I am a U.S. Marine.

Glen G. Butler is a major in the Marines.

Marines and militia clash at shrine

From news reports

NAJAF, Iraq: U.S. marines and Shiite militiamen loyal to the rebel cleric Moktada al-Sadr fought fierce battles around the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf on Monday in some of the heaviest fighting since the 20-day-old rebellion erupted.

Late in the day, a U.S. military aircraft and ground artillery made several strikes on suspected Shiite militant positions in the city, witnesses said. At least 12 blasts were heard as an AC-130 plane was heard circling above.

Most of the strikes appeared concentrated on rebel positions in the heart of Najaf and on an ancient cemetery where militants are dug in.

Earlier, explosions rocked the area near the shrine, where the Mahdi Army fighters have holed up in defiance of the U.S.-backed interim government. Gunfire echoed through the alleyways near the shrine while U.S. tanks kept up their encirclement around the city's heart.

A U.S. marine major, Jay Antonelli, said militants in a parking garage 400 meters, or 1,300 feet, from the shrine's outer wall fired rocket-propelled grenades and sniper rifles at U.S. troops, who responded with artillery and mortars.

Speaking in Baghdad, Antonelli said U.S. troops were trying to secure the city, but were being fired at from the

U.S. aircraft strike at rebel cleric's forces

shrine compound and other areas. "We're not doing any offensive operations," he said. "This is all in response to them."

Shrapnel fell in the courtyard of the gold-domed mosque, whose outer walls have already been slightly damaged in fighting that has killed hundreds and helped drive oil prices to record highs.

Sadr's whereabouts are unknown. The police in Najaf said they had information that the cleric had fled to Sulaimaniya, in Kurdish northern Iraq. But Sadr's aides and local government officials in Sulaimaniya denied the report.

The fighting resumed overnight after a weekend of fruitless talks between Sadr's aides and religious authorities over a plan to hand over the keys of the shrine to Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's most respected Shiite cleric.

In an apparent relaxation of Sadr's demand that the Mahdi Army guard the mosque even after it is handed over, a top aide to Sadr said Shiite authorities would be responsible.

"The religious establishment will be in charge of security and they should have their own security force," said Sheikh Ahmed al-Sheibani, also a Mahdi

militia commander.

Speaking to reporters in the mosque, Sheibani said the cleric's fighters would become "normal citizens" if U.S. forces returned to their bases and Najaf became stable.

Interior Minister Falah al-Naqib told Al Arabiya television on Monday: "The government's stand has been clear from the beginning: withdrawal from Najaf or from the holy shrine, disbanding of militias, and there is a chance to participate in Iraqi political life."

Asked how long the government would wait, he said: "There are limits, and I believe time is running out. It could be days or hours; these decisions are taken according to developments."

Sistani, who lives in Najaf, is in London recovering from surgery. An aide said he stood by his offer to mediate the crisis by receiving the keys to the shrine.

The rebellion has triggered violence in seven other southern and central cities, including Baghdad. Hospital officials said four Iraqis were killed in fighting in Baghdad's Shiite slum district of Sadr City on Monday.

A United Nations spokesman, Stephane Dujarric, said Secretary General Kofi Annan's special representative for Iraq, Ashraf Qazi, met with the interim prime minister, Ayad Allawi, on Monday to discuss the situation in Najaf. (Reuters, AP)

IRAK Un accord est intervenu hier soir entre le grand ayatollah et le chef radical chiite en vue du désarmement de la ville sainte

A Nadjaf, Sistani fait plier al-Sadr

LE FIGARO VENDREDI 27 AOÛT 2004

Le gouvernement irakien a accepté cette nuit l'initiative de paix proposée par l'ayatollah Ali Sistani pour mettre fin à trois semaines de combats à Nadjaf. Un porte-parole de l'ayatollah avait déclaré dans la soirée d'hier que le chef rebelle Moqtada al-Sadr avait accepté ce plan de paix. Le gouvernement irakien a « accepté d'ouvrir un passage pour les visiteurs civils qui veulent entrer dans le mausolée d'Ali et visiter le prophète, et repartir avant 10 h 00 demain ». Les miliciens de l'Armée du Mahdi devront également quitter Nadjaf ce matin. L'initiative du dignitaire chiite prévoit en outre le « départ des éléments armés de Nadjaf et Koufa » et la prise en charge par « la police irakienne de la sécurité et du maintien de l'ordre à Nadjaf et à Koufa et le départ des forces américaines de ces deux villes », selon un porte-parole de l'ayatollah. Les autorités irakiennes ont annoncé la « création d'un conseil pour la reconstruction de la ville », à la demande d'Ali Sistani.

Figure de l'islam chiite (lire ci-dessous), Ali Sistani était arrivé dans la matinée à Nadjaf, où un cessez-le-feu a été décrété après un bain de sang à l'entrée de la ville sainte et dans la localité voisine de Koufa, qui a fait 74 morts et 376 blessés.

Parti de Bassorah, un convoi

de plusieurs dizaines de milliers de personnes dans des voitures, camions, autobus et fourgonnettes, avec à sa tête, dans un véhicule tout-terrain blanc aux vitres teintées, l'ayatollah Sistani, s'est dirigé lentement vers Nadjaf, à environ 400 kilomètres plus au nord. Le convoi a che-

miné vers la ville sainte sous forte escorte de la police et de la Garde nationale irakiennes. Deux hélicoptères britanniques ont accompagné les véhicules jusqu'à Nassiriyah avant que l'armée italienne, en charge de cette province, ne prenne le relais.

Jamais dans l'histoire contemporaine de l'Irak une personnalité n'avait reçu un tel accueil. Dans toutes les localités et villes, des dizaines de milliers de chiites, brandissant le portrait de l'ayatollah, sont descendus dans les rues pour voir et acclamer leur figure emblématique.

A Nadjaf, depuis le 5 août, les milices chiites de Moqtada al-Sadr, retranchées dans la vieille ville, affrontaient les forces irakiennes et américaines. Ces dernières avaient resserré leur étau depuis quarante-huit heures autour du mausolée de l'imam Ali, le lieu saint le plus vénéré des

chiites. Hier, les milliers de musulmans qui avaient accompagné le grand ayatollah de Bassorah à Nadjaf ont profité du cessez-le-feu pour pénétrer en pleurs dans le mausolée, où ils



ont été accueillis comme des héros par quelque 300 miliciens de Moqtada al-Sadr. Dès l'arrivée à

Nadjaf d'Ali Sistani, ses représentants ont pris contact avec ceux de Moqtada al-Sadr.

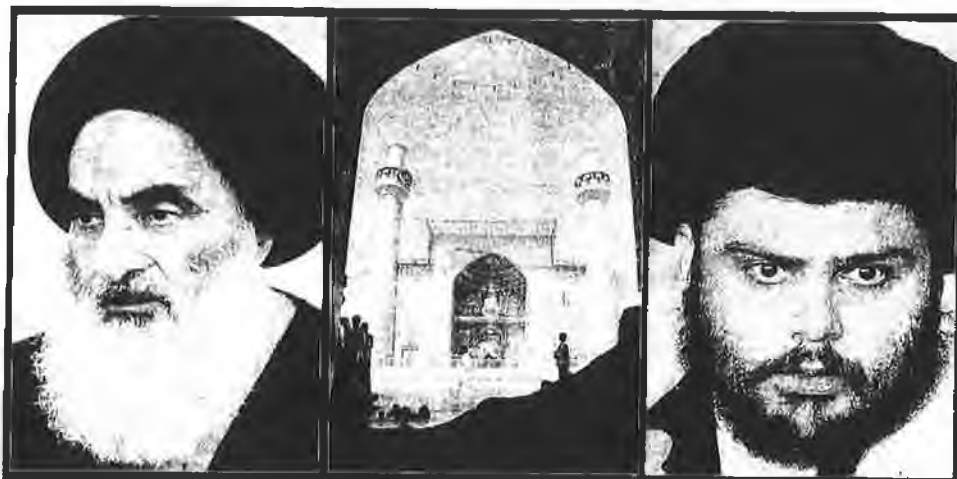
Au même moment, un cessez-le-feu est entré en vigueur. Le premier ministre irakien, Iyad Allaoui, a « ordonné l'arrêt de toutes les opérations militaires pour 24 heures dans la ville sainte de Nadjaf à partir de 15 heures » (11 heures GMT), et l'armée américaine a confirmé

avoir suspendu son offensive en vue de pourparlers de paix.

Le premier ministre irakien a également proposé une amnistie à « tous les miliciens qui veulent la paix » ainsi qu'un « passage

protégé » à Moqtada al-Sadr « s'il décide d'abandonner le combat armé ». Mais il a menacé d'opter pour une solution militaire si l'Armée du Mahdi n'obtempérait pas.

Dans la matinée, une grave effusion de sang a de nouveau endeuillé la ville. Des gardes nationaux ont ouvert le feu sur des manifestants partisans de Moqtada al-Sadr en provenance de Diwaniya et de Koufa qui voulaient entrer dans Nadjaf. Au total, 74 personnes ont été tuées et 376 blessées, a annoncé un responsable du ministère irakien de la Santé. (AFP.)



Le calme était revenu hier soir à Nadjaf où Moqtada al-Sadr (à droite) a fait savoir qu'il acceptait les conditions posées par Ali Sistani. Plus tôt, la ville sainte était encore endeuillée par plusieurs dizaines de morts et des centaines de blessés. (Photo AFP.)

Clerics forge plan for peace in Najaf

Dozens killed before accord is reached

By Dexter Filkins

NAJAF, Iraq: Iraq's most powerful Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, and the rebel cleric Moktada al-Sadr met Thursday and forged an agreement aimed at ending the fighting that has engulfed this city for the past three weeks, aides to the clerics said.

The aides, while describing the talks as successful, did not provide details of the agreement. But they indicated that the thousands of followers who journeyed here Thursday to join Sistani would be allowed to demonstrate on Friday as a prelude to some form of final resolution.

The agreement still requires approval from the Iraqi government, the aides said, and they were waiting for that. But at least twice, agreements with Sadr have fallen apart, leading to a resumption of fighting.

The aides, who called a news conference at 11 p.m. here to discuss the talks, hinted at good news to come later in the night and indicated that Sadr might go on television to speak.

Sistani, the senior Shiite cleric, had called for a mass demonstration to end the fighting when he returned to the country on Wednesday from a hospital stay in London.

On Thursday, thousands of his supporters trailed his convoy and flowed in from other parts of Iraq to mark his entrance into the holy city, where

American forces have battled almost to the gate of the shrine where Shiite insurgents are based.

But the occasion of his return was marred by widespread violence. At least 45 people were killed and hundreds were wounded by gunfire and in a mortar attack.

U.S. forces have been battling Sadr's militia for three weeks here.

Sistani, who commands the loyalty of millions of Shiite Muslims, had urged his followers Wednesday not to enter the city's gates until he arrived in Najaf from Basra, in southern Iraq. His return to the holy city has been seen by Iraqi and American officials as offering a way out of the fighting.

But early Thursday, Najaf and neighboring Kufa erupted into mayhem and bloodshed. A mortar barrage slammed into a mosque in Kufa filled with Iraqis preparing to march on Najaf, killing at least 27 people and wounding 63, and at least 3 people were killed when Shiite marchers were fired on there.

It was not immediately clear who was responsible for the attacks.

At least 15 people were killed, according to Najaf hospital officials, when Iraqi forces opened fire over the heads of people, trying to prevent them from making their way to Najaf's Old City, where the Imam Ali shrine is located.

The crowd stampeded, with some people helping the wounded away from the violence.

Casualty numbers climbed through the day. Reuters and Agence France-Presse reported that, according to the Health Ministry, 74 people were killed on Thursday.

Altogether, the ministry said in a statement, about 95 people had been killed in Kufa and Najaf within 24 hours, The Associated Press reported.

A supporter of Sistani from Baghdad, Hazim Kareem, said he was among marchers trying to get through an Iraqi police blockade set up to stop vehicles and people.

"You know how religious we are; we kept trying," said Kareem. "Some armed men appeared and entered our crowd. I don't know who they were. They fired at the police."

"Then the police went crazy and just started shooting everywhere," he said. "I saw two dead policemen."

After arriving in Najaf, Sistani went to a private house, surrounded by the police, to rest after the long journey by road from Basra.

Three hospital workers said they had tried to enter the shrine area to pick up casualties but were halted by sniper fire. Bleeding bodies were piled up on stretchers.

"Go look at the morgue," one worker said. "It's full."

The sound of mortar fire and explosions reverberated in the city early Thursday, but then tapered off.

The New York Times

Alex Berenson contributed reporting from Najaf for this article and Christine Hauser contributed reporting from New York.

■ Oil pipelines sabotaged

A sabotage attack on a cluster of about 20 oil pipelines in southern Iraq has cut exports from the major oil producing region by half, an oil official told The Associated Press in Basra.

It was the latest insurgent attack to set back Iraq's oil sector, a crucial source of funds for the country's reconstruction.

The pipelines were attacked late Wednesday in Berjasiya, southwest of Basra, an official with the state-run South Oil said on condition of anonymity.

Oil exports out of southern Iraq average about 1.85 million barrels a day. The oil official said Wednesday's sabotage cut exports to 900,000 barrels.



Cheering Shiite faithful following the convoy of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani on Thursday as he made his way to the holy city of Najaf, Iraq, to broker a peace agreement.

Kurd relations require deft touch

Taipei Times By Fang Tien-sze 28 August 2004

Taiwan should carefully assess both international and internal Kurdish factors before offering unequivocal support for a Kurdish state.

During his recent visit to Taiwan, Prime Minister Nechervan Idris Barzani of the Kurdistan Regional Government was received by high government officials. Because they were the first officials from Iraq to visit Taiwan since the establishment of the Iraqi interim government, the delegation was the focus of much attention. Minister of Foreign Affairs Mark Chen revealed that Barzani during his visit exchanged ideas with Taiwanese officials regarding the founding of a state belonging to the Kurdish people, and he also wanted to exchange representative offices. Based on the principle of creating a wide range of friendly relationships, we should seize on this opportunity for exchange and further strengthen the relationship between Taiwan and Kurdistan. Due to the complexity of the question of independence for the Kurdish people, however, Taiwan should carefully assess both international and internal Kurdish factors before offering unequivocal support for a Kurdish state and deciding whether or not to exchange representative offices.

The Kurdish people have long hoped to be able to establish their own state, but opposition from various countries together with Kurdish disunity have made the road toward nationhood an arduous one. Armed intervention by the US and UK was the main reason why Iraqi Kurds could enjoy autonomy following the 1991 Gulf War.

In order to protect the Kurds and weaken the power of Saddam Hussein, the US, UK and France in April 1991 created a no-fly zone in Iraq above the 36th parallel, forbidding Iraqi aircraft to enter the zone.

A US-led multinational force patrolled the area and enforced the regulations so Saddam could not take military action against Kurds in the northern part of the country. Thus they could establish an autonomous regional government, of which Barzani is the incumbent prime minister. It should be noticed that the Kurdish area in Iraq remains split. The Kurd Democratic Party led by Massoud Barzani and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Jalal Talabani are the two main forces among Iraq's Kurds. The two parties formed a joint government in 1992, but the power distribution issue gradually led to a dispute that exploded into a full-blown civil war in 1994. In an attempt to defeat the PUK, the Kurd Democratic Party requested the help of Saddam's troops in 1996. The two parties set up separate governments, both claiming control over the whole Kurdish area in northern Iraq. British and US mediation resulted in the two parties signing a cease-fire agreement, but to this day the two parts of the Kurdish area remain separately ruled.

The internal Kurdish split has always been one of the factors impeding the formation of a Kurdish state. Kurds in different areas often rule themselves, and some of the leaders of important organizations do not get along with each other. Some countries are using these

weak points to further weaken the Kurdish people. During the Iran-Iraq war, both countries made use of Kurds in the opponent's country, and Turkey has used Iraqi Kurds to fight Kurds in Turkey. The Iraqi general elections planned for March next year will be key to answering the question of whether a peaceful solution to the split in the Kurdish area will be possible. Nechervan Idris Barzani, the prime minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, is a member of the Kurd Democratic Party. But because the Kurd Democratic Party and the PUK are equally strong, it is difficult to predict the outcome of the elections. When expressing its support for the Kurdish people, Taiwan should avoid giving the impression that we as outsiders are choosing sides. In addition to the unpredictability of internal factors, we must also consider the attitudes of other countries concerning the Kurdish issue. Apart from Iraq, the Kurdish people

are distributed over Turkey, Iran, Syria and Armenia. None of these countries want independence for Iraq's Kurds lest Kurds in their own country emulate them, creating an independence domino effect. During the war between the US and Iraq, Turkey was concerned that the Kurds in Iraq would declare independence, and therefore threatened military intervention. Unless these countries change their policies, they will continue to block the formation of an independent Kurdish state in Iraq.

Although the US has assisted the Kurds in obtaining autonomy, its main goal has been to restrain Saddam, not to support the formation of an independent Kurdish state. The CIA has intervened in the Kurdish civil war by supporting attacks by the PUK on the Kurd Democratic Party. With Saddam now gone, the Kurdish people's strategic importance to the US is dwindling, and the US is unwilling to offend main Iraqi ethnic groups or Turkey over the Kurdistan issue. These internal and international factors make it unlikely that Iraq's Kurds will be able to establish an independent state in the short term. Iraq's Kurdish leaders also recognize these limitations. If Iraq establishes a federal system of government offering the Kurds some autonomous powers, the Kurds would be willing to compromise and refrain from seeking independence from Iraq.

Given this situation, there is no need for Taiwan to take a position on the question of an independent Kurdish state. The Kurdistan Regional Government's suggestion that Taiwan and Kurdistan exchange permanent representative offices would strengthen mutual exchanges between Kurdistan and Taiwan. Taiwan must, however, give cautious consideration to the reaction of Turkey and other concerned states. If such an exchange does not win the understanding of these states, Taiwan's losses would outweigh its gains. The visit by the delegation from the Kurdistan Regional Government is encouraging from a diplomatic perspective, but we shouldn't be too eager, and should instead cautiously assess the situation in order to maximize gains.

Kani Yilmaz condemns Kongra-Gel's orders to execute break-away-members

KurdishMedia August 30, 2004

London: Kani Yilmaz, a prominent participant in the formative Patriotic Democracy Party responded to the execution order pronounced against him and the dissenting break-away group by the PKK/KADEK/Kongra-Gel.

In a candid exchange by telephone with *KurdishMedia.com*, Kani Yilmaz stated that even as Kongra-Gel is publicly calling for the creation of a so-called "Turkish Democratic Republic" simultaneously it has this week issued an order to execute their own people who have given 20-30 years of their lives to the organisation in seeking positive changes in Kurdistan and equal relations between Kurds and the democratic world.

Yilmaz said that before breaking away from Kongra Gel, he and others in the group had exhausted every avenue struggling to transform the party into a contemporary and civilised democratic organisation.

"Finally, it was impossible. We were left with no option other than to break away in order to seek to resolve the Kurdish issue in north Kurdistan without accepting savagery and war. Yilmaz reiterated that, "a number of issues arose in recent years that needed to be addressed and that we struggled to overcome the difficulties and obstacles posed but incalcitrant elements in the organisation allowed for no resolution in practice."

Yilmaz addressed the most important issues the break-away group had disputed with Kongra-Gel. Concerning the nature of the organisation, Yilmaz said, "We insisted on transforming the organisation into a patriotic one that should build positive relationships with other Kurdistan forces and intellectuals, in particular the PUK and KDP, for the mutual benefit of the Kurdish issue.

"The 'New Line' which was every day forcing Kemalism down our throats, was forcing us to take the wrong path and left the organisation without vision and true objectives. It also deprived the Kurds of their just political aims."

As for the human rights violations committed against individuals in the organisation, Yilmaz said they had insisted on fundamental and stringent reforms in the organisation:

"Human rights violations were a fact of life in the disciplinary procedure of the organisation. Just before we broke away, we demanded a formal investigation into several cases. For example, why 'Nasir' was arrested by the PKK and who gave the orders for his arrest, for a report into "Gulan's" murder by the investigatory committee to be produced and acted upon and for an end to be put to the practice of torture such as in the death of 'Faik' from little south Kurdistan (Syrian Kurdistan). We demanded an end to torture inside the organisation and for the culture of fear and reprisals to be saying that individuals should have the right to leave or join the organisation

without fear of persecution and choose to do so of their own free will and for the lawful safeguard of their security of life."

"In a single word, it is savagery," he said. Yilmaz elaborated on the process by which members of the organisation were systematically destroyed through so-called "self-criticism" and being hauled up before a platform and publicly robbed of their individuality and humanity.

The dissenting group had insisted that this be changed " Yilmaz, a long time Kurdish political figure, is personally keen to build a constructive relationship with the democratic world and said that an isolated organisation cannot be successful in today's globalisation. As to the execution order pronounced against them by Kongra-Gel, Yilmaz said:

"At his meeting with his lawyers on 25 August 2004, Ocalan demonised us as traitors and destroyers. This is the standard way in which the organisation provides the foundations for individuals to be eliminated. During a broadcast by Roj TV that same Wednesday evening, a statement was made in which we were called traitors and destroyers and our execution order effectively given.

Roj TV and Ozgur Politika newspaper must remember that media organisations broadcasting from and publishing in democratic countries [including Denmark and Germany] cannot incite bloodshed and violence."

"In the so-called 'meeting notes' between Abdullah Ocalan and his lawyers, the execution orders against us are effectively ratified. Those who have so lightly taken this decision to execute us have done so without any serious concern for the consequences and this is not being accountable to the Kurdish issue." Yilmaz challenged the leading members of Kongra-Gel responsible for the culture of war and the brutality exhibited inside the organisation.

He called upon civil and democratic international forces and organisations to safeguard human rights and take note of Kongra-Gel's threat to have them executed. He also noted that he and his fellow in the break-away group had obtained the news of the death warrant against them "via Zübeyir Aydar's European showpiece, from those in the mountains and from those assigned the task of carrying out the killings."

"I invite Zübeyir Aydar, Murat Karayilan, Cemil Bayik, Duran Kalkan, Ali Haydar Kaytan and Mustafa Karasu to think again about their decision and review the consequences."

On the issue of Kurdistan, Kani Yilmaz invited the Kurdistan-wide democratic and civil forces to form a united platform: "Democratic Kurdish forces should form a unified platform via constructive debate, such as has already been encouraged by the debate around our

having broken away from the organisation. I believe that it has helped establish the grounds for a national platform of unity and that the time for it is now ripe."

Yilmaz stated that he believes in openness and in sharing his vision with the people of Kurdistan, trying to help them to see and understand the necessity felt by those fleeing and breaking away from Kongra Gel. "We want to share our vision with the people of Kurdistan and if the order to execute us should be accomplished,

(given that we are in a hostile environment which makes it all too easy), then I hope that our murders should be taken in the sense of promoting unity, democracy and openness in the Kurdish struggle."

"Finally, those who take the decision to execute us so lightly, and with such utter disregard for the consequences, cannot bring life to the Kurdish people's freedom struggle, cannot defend it nor take it forward."

Dix soldats et un conducteur de train blessés par des engins explosifs



DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 29 août (AFP) - 23h34 - Dix soldats et un conducteur de train ont été blessés dimanche dans le sud-est de la Turquie à la suite d'attentats à l'explosif imputés à des rebelles kurdes, ont annoncé les médias turcs.

Ces incidents constituent le dernier épisode d'une série d'attentats perpétrés par des militants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistaninterdit rebaptisé KONGRA-GEL, qui a mis fin à un cessez-le-feu unilatéral de cinq ans avec Ankara.

Les soldats ont été blessés lorsque le véhicule militaire qui les transportait a sauté sur une mine sur une route de la province de Sirnak, a rapporté la chaîne d'informations télévisées CNN-Turk.

Dimanche matin, une bombe a explosé au passage d'un train de marchandises dans la province de Bingol, blessant l'un des deux conducteurs.

Les premières informations indiquent "qu'une bombe déposée sur les rails a explosé. L'un des conducteurs a été blessé", a déclaré à l'AFP un porte-parole de la régie turque des chemins de fer, Mehmet Ayci.

Des sources des services de sécurité de la région ont pour leur part déclaré que l'explosion avait été causée par une mine.

Les forces de sécurité de la région, qui soupçonnent des militants séparatistes kurdes, ont lancé une opération pour retrouver les auteurs de cet attentat, a-t-on précisé de même source.

Plusieurs explosions de mines posées sur des routes de la région au cours des derniers jours dans le sud-est de la Turquie ont été attribuées aux rebelles kurdes. Deux personnes ont été grièvement blessées samedi lorsque leur camion a heurté une mine dans la province de Siirt. Vendredi, deux personnes avaient été tuées et cinq autres, d'une même famille, blessées dans l'explosion d'une mine sur une route dans la même région.

Depuis la fin du cessez-le-feu le 1er juin dernier, le PKK est accusé d'être à l'origine de plusieurs attentats mortels dans le sud-est ainsi que d'attentats à la bombe dans deux hôtels d'Istanbul début août, qui ont fait deux morts et onze blessés, principalement des touristes étrangers.

Les rebelles menacent de perpétrer de nouveaux attentats.

Quelque 37.000 personnes ont été tuées depuis le début de la lutte armée dans le sud-est de la Turquie à majorité kurde en 1984.

Violents accrochages dans le sud-est turc: 11 rebelles et deux soldats tués



DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 31 août (AFP) - 14h39 - Onze rebelles kurdes et deux soldats ont été tués mardi dans de violents accrochages près d'Hakkari, dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a annoncé le gouverneur de la province, Erdogan Gurbuz.

Les combats, qui ont débuté il y a trois jours, se poursuivent dans la zone de Ferasin, proche de la frontière iranienne, a déclaré le gouverneur, cité par l'agence Anatolie.

Des armes, des munitions, des vivres et des couvertures ont été saisis dans des caches de "terroristes", dénomination officielle des rebelles kurdes, a ajouté le responsable.

Les combats entre les forces de sécurité et les rebelles kurdes de l'ex-Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, rebaptisé Kongra-Gel) ont repris depuis que ces derniers, en juin, ont mis fin à une trêve unilatérale déclarée cinq ans plus tôt.

En quinze ans (1984-1999), la rébellion du PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie et nombre de pays occidentaux, dont les Etats-Unis, a fait plus de 37.000 victimes.

Le chef de l'ex-PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, purge depuis 1999 une peine de prison à vie dans une île du nord-ouest du pays, où il est le seul détenu.

Bras de fer au sein du chiïsme irakien

Al-Sadr prône l'instauration d'une république islamiste, Sistani incarne un courant détaché du politique.

SAMEDI 28 ET DIMANCHE 29 AOUT 2004

Libération

Bagdad envoyé spécial

En marge des combats entre rebelles irakiens et forces américaines, un autre duel, beaucoup plus feutré mais tout aussi acharné, s'est livré à Najaf, dans l'ombre du mausolée d'Ali. Depuis des mois, deux hommes s'affrontent pour le contrôle du tombeau et, au-delà, des millions de fidèles qu'il draine chaque année. Vendredi, le grand ayatollah Ali Sistani a remporté une indéniable victoire sur son jeune adversaire Moqtada al-Sadr. Sous la menace des blindés américains, le jeune imam radical a dû accepter les conditions fixées par le vieil ayatollah et quitter le sanctuaire qu'il occupait avec ses miliciens.

L'un et l'autre sont des «sayed», des descendants du Prophète, reconnaissables à leur turban noir. Mais à part leur tenue, tout, ou presque, les différencie. A 31 ans, Moqtada al-Sadr a un visage encore poupin. Ses détracteurs se gaussent de son «immaturité» qu'ils opposent à la «sagesse» d'Ali Sistani, deux fois et demie plus âgé. Le jeune imam bénéficie certes de la renommée attachée à son nom. Les Al-Sadr ont fourni plusieurs grands ayatollahs, dont son père, Mohammed Sadeq al-Sadr, assassiné par Saddam Hussein.

Mort. En dépit de sa glorieuse ascendance, il lui manque la légitimité religieuse. Il n'est pas ayatollah, mais hodjatoleislam, titre d'un rang inférieur. Depuis la mort en 1992 du grand ayatollah Aboul-Qasem al-Khoï, Ali Sistani est, lui, considéré comme le principal *marja*, source d'imitation pour les croyants. Comme son prédécesseur, il incarne un courant quietiste du chiïsme, détaché du politique et très éloigné des positions radicales de Sadr. Alors que le jeune leader prône l'instauration d'une républi-



que islamique, les dignitaires vénérés pour leur talent d'exégètes qui entourent Sistani estiment que dans l'attente d'un retour du Mehdi, l'imam caché, aucun pouvoir temporel ne peut prétendre à la justice divine. Sistani appelle à la tenue d'élections et à la poursuite d'un processus politique que son rival récuse au nom de la lutte contre l'occupation étrangère.

Exclu de l'élite savante, Moq-

tada al-Sadr recrute parmi les déshérités. Il s'est engouffré dans le vide créé par l'effondrement du régime baasiste. Il a rebaptisé Saddam City, grand faubourg chiite de Bagdad, du nom de Sadr, en hommage à son défunt père. Ses bandes armées ont imposé dans le quartier leur ordre islamique, rendant le port du voile obligatoire et interdisant l'alcool, la musique ou la danse. Contrairement aux princi-

paux autres leaders chiites, il n'est jamais parti en exil et exploite les sentiments anti-américains de la population. Mais son Armée du Mehdi, qui mêle bandes de quartiers et jeunes religieux, manque d'expérience.

Santé. Dès le début, il s'est heurté à la direction religieuse de Najaf. Ses partisans ont assassiné Abdel Majid al-Khoï, fils d'Aboul-Qasem al-Khoï, revenu en Irak dans les fourgons de la coalition. Chassé de Kerbela, il s'est emparé de Najaf. Devenu quasiment son prisonnier, Sistani a gagné Londres dès le déclenchement des hostilités par le nouveau pouvoir irakien, officiellement pour raison de santé. En réalité, pour ne pas servir d'otage et laisser le champ libre aux GI. Mais s'il a retrouvé son pouvoir et sa ville, sa popularité a souffert de son absence, perçue par de nombreux fidèles comme un abandon. ◀

C.B.

Bush et sa «mauvaise évaluation»

George W. Bush a admis vendredi, dans une interview au *New York Times*, avoir sous-estimé les difficultés de l'après-guerre en Irak. Il a reconnu «une mauvaise évaluation des conditions» après une «victoire rapide» remportée sur les soldats de Saddam Hussein. C'est la première fois qu'il avoue clairement avoir sous-évalué les difficultés d'une intervention que l'administration américaine avait promise courte, peu coûteuse en hommes et en argent, et couronnée par une démocratisation rapide de l'Irak. Bush a néanmoins réaffirmé que sa «décision de partir en guerre était une bonne décision» et que sa politique en Irak était «suffisamment souple» pour pouvoir contrer l'insurrection, en citant notamment la situation à Najaf.

AFP

Sadr's insurgent troops cede control of holy site

By Dexter Filkins

NAJAF, Iraq: An uneasy peace settled over this city Friday as guerrillas loyal to the insurgent cleric Moktada al-Sadr streamed out of the Imam Ali shrine before a cordon of American troops, ceding control of the Shiite holy site to the mainstream religious leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, and appearing to end a grisly three-week standoff.

The surrender of the shrine, carried out under the terms of a peace deal struck by the two men the night before, unfolded dramatically at 8:30 a.m., after an appeal by Sadr.

Thousands of civilians poured into the shrine from all over Iraq, some of them weeping and kissing the walls of the damaged mosque. The insurgents who had commandeered the holy site for nearly a month joined the departing pilgrims and headed out through its vaulting gates.

"In the name of Allah, my brothers in the Mahdi Army, I beg you, if civilians are in the shrine, leave with them, and leave your guns behind," intoned a voice from the shrine's loudspeaker, reading a message from Sadr. "This is an order that you must obey."

With that, some fighters, many of them hollow-eyed and hunted-looking after days under fire, walked into the streets, moving along what appeared to be an agreed-upon exit route that led out of the city. Others lingered, boasting of what they told themselves had been an epic stand against the U.S. Army.

As the Mahdi Army fighters did not surrender themselves, neither did they give up their guns. Instead, they took the assault rifles and rocket launchers they had used to commandeer the shrine and loaded them onto donkey carts, covering them with blankets and grain sacks and television sets and sending them away.

As the fighters streamed from the city, the U.S. soldiers who had fought their way to within 70 meters, or 225 feet, of the shrine in ferocious battles kept their distance, neither shooting the Mahdi fighters nor arresting them. U.S. commanders said they were under orders to arrest no one.

Aides to Sistani, who brokered the peace agreement upon returning to the city, moved into the shrine early Friday and told Sadr's men that Sistani's people were in charge. "We are taking over the shrine," one of Sistani's senior clerics said. "We will not be making another comment." By early evening, the aides to Sistani were fully in control of the shrine itself.

The reassertion of Iraqi government control, symbolized by the entry of the police, had been one of the major demands made of Sadr by Sistani.

Some of the Mahdi fighters seemed visibly reduced by the siege; after three weeks of U.S. assaults, the number of fighters in the old city had fallen from several thousand to just a few hundred. But for most of those still standing, morale seemed undiminished.

In their days of battling the Americans, they had constructed their own mythic tale about themselves, as the stalwart defenders of the holy shrine against a foreign army and its local satraps.

"Today is a victory," said Arkan Rahim, a 30-year-old Mahdi Army fighter, standing amid the wreckage near the shrine. "We didn't surrender the shrine to the Americans, the biggest army in the world. We didn't surrender it to the Iraqi police. We protected it for our religious leaders."

While the Mahdi Army fighters began heading home, the larger mystery seemed to be the commitment of Sadr to the peace deal he had signed, which seemed shaky at best. After his meeting with Sistani on Thursday

night, Sadr dropped from view, making neither public appearances nor statements of support.

On Friday, senior clerics around Sistani seemed determined to hold Sadr to his word, sharing with a reporter a copy of the peace deal he had signed the night before. "This agreement is by the order of the religious leadership," said a note signed by Sadr on the bottom of the agreement, "and I am ready to obey all orders with all my respect."

Under the agreement, Sadr's fighters were obliged to leave Najaf and the neighboring city of Kufa and promise not to come back.

Sadr also agreed to cooperate in preparing for the country's first nationwide elections, to be held by Jan. 31.

The New York Times



Iraqis survey the damage to the old city in Najaf on Friday near the Imam Ali Shrine after three weeks of fierce fighting.

UNION EUROPÉENNE *Bruxelles se prononcera le 6 octobre sur l'ouverture de négociations d'adhésion avec Ankara*

La Turquie, priorité de la Commission

Bruxelles :
de notre correspondant
Pierre Avril

L'équipe de Romano Prodi, qui fait sa rentrée cette semaine à Bruxelles, n'a désormais plus qu'un seul horizon politique en tête : le verdict, très probablement positif, que le collège s'apprête à prononcer sur l'ouverture de négociations d'adhésion avec la Turquie.

C'est le 6 octobre que le commissaire à l'élargissement, Günter Verheugen, rendra public son rapport destiné à faire le point sur la capacité d'Ankara à remplir les fameux « critères politiques », les seuls qui importent aux yeux de la Commission : garantie des libertés individuelles et respect des droits de l'homme. Et, dès vendredi, le responsable allemand, chaud partisan du oui à la Turquie, s'envolera vers Ankara pour un voyage de cinq jours. Il rencontrera notamment le premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, et son ministre des

Affaires étrangères, Abdullah Gül. L'entourage de Verheugen insiste surtout sur les escalas d'Istanbul, d'Izmir ou de Diyarbakir, dans le Sud-Est anatolien, consacrées à des contacts avec des membres de la société civile (ONG) et des dignitaires religieux. « *Le commissaire souhaite se faire une idée plus précise de la situation politique* », explique son porte-parole, Jean-Christophe Filori.

En dépit de l'hostilité de certains commissaires, comme le Néerlandais Frits Bolkenstein ou l'Espagnole Loyola de Palacio, l'exécutif européen devrait donner un avis favorable, dans la perspective du Conseil de la fin décembre, et sans conditions. « *Il est impensable pour la Commission, qui délivre ici son dernier testament politique, de donner l'impression d'hésiter. Son avis sera tranché* », pronostique un fonctionnaire en charge du dossier. Le seul débat, ajoute ce dernier, porte sur l'habillage politique de la décision et de la méthodologie à adopter pour conduire les négociations d'adhésion.

Outre le traditionnel rapport annuel d'évaluation ainsi que la recommandation au Conseil, la Commission publiera une « *étude d'impact* » destinée à prévoir comment l'Union, dans environ dix ans, pourra « digérer » la Turquie et ses quelque 70 millions d'habitants. Mais, en l'absence d'indications budgétaires, économiques ou démographiques fiables, cette étude restera très générale, avec « *très peu de chiffres* », font valoir plusieurs sources.

La position stratégique du pays, tant pour la sécurité des approvisionnements en énergie

que pour des questions de stabilité géopolitique, y sera notamment vantée. Plus épineux devrait se révéler le pilotage des négociations avec Ankara, qui débiteront probablement courant 2005 pour durer plusieurs années, le temps que le gouvernement turc assimile l'imposant arsenal législatif communautaire. Dans un avis remis mercredi au gouvernement des Pays-Bas – pays qui préside l'Union durant ce semestre –, un

« think tank » néerlandais vient de préconiser le report de deux ans de l'ouverture des pourparlers. Mais cette suggestion ne devrait pas être du goût de Verheugen, qui la jugerait difficilement vendable à Ankara.

Autre problème qui fait débat : l'évaluation des progrès attendus de la Turquie sur le chemin de l'accession. « *Nous voulons éviter de répéter les erreurs commises lors du précédent élargissement, lorsque dans plusieurs pays des chapitres du processus d'adhésion ont été clos sur la base de simples engagements et d'un calendrier, et avant même que*

l'acquis communautaire soit entièrement transposé, simplement parce que, derrière, la machine administrative n'avait pas suivi », explique une source communautaire.

Certains, par exemple, veulent éviter de rééditer l'exemple polonais, lorsqu'en novembre 2003 Bruxelles avait dû, quelques mois seulement avant l'élargissement, adresser plusieurs avertissements à Varsovie. Ainsi, selon cette même source, un consensus se dessine aujourd'hui au sein de la Commission afin que les chapitres qui seront négociés avec la Turquie (libre circulation, droits sociaux...) soient, plus tard, clos sur la base d'engagements « *effectifs* » d'Ankara. « *La procédure doit rester dynamique* », ajoute cette source. Dans cette hypothèse, il restera alors à la Commission d'expliquer au gouvernement turc, toujours très sourcilieux, qu'il ne s'agit pas là d'un régime spécial ou d'un signe de défiance à l'égard d'Ankara, mais d'une simple volonté de tirer les leçons des négociations conduites avec l'UE.



Le commissaire européen à l'élargissement, Günter Verheugen (ici, à droite, avec le ministre turc des Affaires étrangères, Abdullah Gül), est chargé d'évaluer si la Turquie remplit les conditions préalables aux négociations pour son entrée dans l'UE. (Photo A. A./Sipa.)

LE FIGARO

30 AOÛT 2004

IRAK *L'enlèvement des deux reporters a été revendiqué samedi par l'Armée islamique en Irak, qui a donné quarante-huit heures à Paris pour abroger la loi sur le voile.*

La France se mobilise pour ses otages

LE FIGARO LUNDI 30 AOÛT 2004

Alors que l'ultimatum lancé par l'Armée islamique en Irak, qui détient deux journalistes français, expire ce soir, la République se mobilise pour dénoncer les exigences des ravisseurs. Ceux-ci ont donné 48 heures à Paris pour abroger la loi sur le voile islamique.

Le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Michel Barnier, est parti dès hier pour la région.

► **Deux séquences vidéo** montrant Christian Chesnot de RFI et Georges Malbrunot du Figaro, annonçant être les otages de l'Armée islamique en Irak ont été diffusées sur la chaîne al-Jezira samedi vers 18 h 30 GMT. Les ravisseurs, qui détiennent aussi leur interprète, Mohammed al-Joundi, estiment que la loi française sur la laïcité concernant le port du voile dans les écoles publiques est une « injustice et une agression contre l'islam et la liberté personnelle dans le pays de la liberté présumée ». Le groupe a donné « un délai

de 48 heures » à la France « pour répondre ».

► **Les autorités françaises se sont mobilisées** hier pour obtenir la libération des deux journalistes. Le premier ministre français, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, a annoncé que la France avait renforcé et renforcera encore « (sa) capacité d'initiative dans la région ».

► **Jacques Chirac retarde son départ pour la Russie** prévu aujourd'hui. Il devait se rendre à Sotchi pour une rencontre de deux jours avec Vladimir Poutine et le chancelier allemand Gerhard Schröder.

► **Les représentants des musulmans de France** ont unanimement condamné la prise d'otages, jugeant que la revendication nuisait à la communauté musulmane en France. Le président du Comité français du culte musulman (CFCM), Dalil Boubakeur, a déclaré que « la communauté musulmane devait se démarquer de ces agissements condamnables par l'islam et ne donner aucune réaction qui

indiquerait que ces gens agissent dans son intérêt ».

► **Le comité des oulémas musulmans** (sunnites) a demandé hier aux ravisseurs de libérer les deux otages français. « Nous sommes contre ces enlèvements, surtout quand il s'agit de journalistes parce qu'ils sont notre voix en Irak. La France a défendu la cause de l'Irak avant la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein et après sa chute. Et nous ne voulons pas perdre une amie », a déclaré un membre de ce comité.

► **Yasser Arafat a appelé** à la « libération immédiate » des deux journalistes français.

► **Un groupe salafiste irakien**, le comité Irchad wal-Fatwa, a également appelé hier les ravisseurs des deux journalistes français à les libérer « en reconnaissance de la position de la France », opposée à l'intervention américaine dans ce pays. Ce groupe demande cependant au gouvernement français « de revoir sa décision sur le voile ».

► **Les ravisseurs, l'Armée islamique en Irak**, ont déjà revendiqué l'assassinat de plusieurs otages, notamment celui de deux ouvriers pakistanais et celui du journaliste italien Enzo Baldoni, annoncé par al-Jezira jeudi dernier. Implantée dans toutes les régions sunnites, et notamment à Faludja, cette organisation, qui se dit proche d'al-Qaida, s'est fait connaître en juillet dernier, en obtenant des Philippines le retrait anticipé de ses troupes d'Irak, en échange de la libération d'un camionneur retenu en otage.

► **Deux otages turcs ont été libérés** hier à Bagdad après que leur entreprise eut décidé, comme le lui demandaient les ravisseurs, de quitter l'Irak.

► **L'ensemble du groupe Figaro**, son président Serge Dassault, la direction générale, la rédaction, sont en relation avec les autorités françaises pour aider à la libération des deux journalistes.

► **Un rassemblement de soutien** aux otages français aura lieu aujourd'hui à 18 heures à l'esplanade des Droits-de-l'Homme, au Trocadéro, à Paris, à l'initiative des présidents du Sénat et de l'Assemblée nationale.

► **A Bagdad**, le premier ministre irakien a affirmé sa détermination à débarrasser le pays de tous les groupes armés.



Georges Malbrunot, envoyé spécial du Figaro, et Christian Chesnot, pigiste à Radio France Internationale, sont apparus samedi sur la chaîne al-Jezira. Ils annonçaient être aux mains de l'Armée islamique en Irak. (Photos AFP/Al-Jezira.)

Le communiqué de l'Armée islamique en Irak

Voici le verbatim du communiqué de l'Armée islamique en Irak qui a revendiqué l'enlèvement des journalistes français, Christian Chesnot et Georges Malbrunot. Ce texte, qui réclame l'annulation dans les 48 heures par Paris de la loi sur le voile islamique, a été diffusé samedi par la télévision satellitaire qatarienne Al-Jezira. *« L'Armée islamique en Irak Au nom de Dieu le Clément, le Miséricordieux Sujet : les deux otages français »*

L'Armée islamique en Irak annonce détenir deux otages français enlevés par l'une des brigades de l'Armée et demande à la France d'annuler la loi sur le voile, en raison de ce qu'elle comporte comme injustice et agression contre l'islam et la liberté personnelle dans le pays de la liberté présumée. Nous donnons à la France un délai de 48 heures, à partir de la publication du communiqué, pour répondre à ce communiqué. Allah est le plus Grand, Gloire à Dieu. »

les ravisseurs se sont eux-mêmes placés. Samedi dernier, ils avaient fait diffuser sur al-Jezira une première cassette vidéo où Georges Malbrunot et Christian Chesnot annonçaient être les otages d'un groupe nommé Armée islamique en Irak.

Puis hier soir, de nouveau, en diffusant en deuxième message des journalistes français. Après le président Jacques Chirac la veille, Michel Barnier a lancé un appel solennel aux terroristes pour

réclamer la libération des deux journalistes « au nom des principes d'humanité et du respect de l'être humain qui sont au cœur même du message de l'islam et de la pratique religieuse des musulmans ».

Au bout du compte, les diplomates français ont réussi à faire intervenir plusieurs personnalités arabes et dignitaires musulmans. La France s'estime bien placée pour obtenir de tels appuis. Elle a fait jouer la politique d'amitié avec le monde arabe qu'elle observe de longue date, son refus de participer à la guerre en Irak, mais aussi la politique de tolérance qu'elle dit appliquer, malgré l'interdiction du foulard islamique dans les écoles publiques, à l'égard de

sa minorité musulmane. « *L'islam est aujourd'hui la deuxième religion de France et 5 millions de musulmans y pratiquent librement, pleinement leur religion* », a expliqué Michel

Barnier au Caire. « *La France a toujours refusé la vision d'un choc entre l'Occident et l'islam, a-t-il dit. Elle défend en Irak, en Palestine, au*

Diplomatie tous azimuts

Luc de Barochez

La France a activé hier tous ses réseaux au Proche-Orient pour essayer d'obtenir la libération des deux otages français en Irak. En quelques jours, les autorités françaises sont passées de l'action confidentielle à la diplomatie publique et médiatique. L'objectif poursuivi hier était de montrer aux ravisseurs l'inanité de leur forfait, en suscitant dans l'opinion publique arabo-musulmane la réprobation à leur encontre. Du Caire où il était arrivé dans la nuit, le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Michel Barnier, a orchestré les opérations, avant de poursuivre sa mission hier soir à Amman. Sur le terrain, le principal diplomate du Quai d'Orsay, le secrétaire général du ministère Hubert Colin de Verdière, est arrivé à Bagdad pour activer les contacts en Irak même. Ce n'est pas la partie la plus facile, car les autorités intérieures irakiennes accusent Paris de tiédeur à leur égard.

Lors de ses interventions publiques et devant ses interlocuteurs arabes, Michel Barnier a voulu faire comprendre que l'islam et le monde arabe étaient du côté de la France et non dans le camp des ravisseurs. Que les preneurs d'otages s'étaient trompés de cible en s'en prenant à des Français. Et que les journalistes enlevés n'ont fait que leur métier en Irak. « *Nos interlocuteurs sont très réceptifs et très désireux de nous venir en aide* », constatait-on dans l'entourage du ministre des Affaires étrangères. Parallèlement, le chef de la diplomatie a expliqué la politique de laïcité française et affirmé le refus de la France de céder au chantage terroriste.

La liste des personnalités rencontrées par Barnier au Caire a révélé les trois axes de

Confrontés à un groupe extrémiste déterminé et divisé, les diplomates français n'ont aucune certitude

l'action entreprise : les voies diplomatiques officielles, les canaux des services secrets et l'influence de l'opinion publique. Le ministre a ainsi discuté avec le secrétaire général de la Ligue arabe, Amr Moussa, et le chef de la diplomatie égyptienne, Ahmed Aboul Gheit. Il a vu le chef des renseignements égyptiens, le général Omar Souleimane, crédité par les spécialistes d'un bon réseau en Irak. Et il s'est entretenu avec le dignitaire musulman sunnite Cheikh Youssef Qardaoui. Ce dernier tient sur la chaîne de télévision al-Jezira une chronique religieuse très suivie dans le monde arabe. Qardaoui, qui fit campagne l'hiver dernier contre la loi française sur les signes religieux ostentatoires, a pris l'initiative de lancer un appel à la libération des otages. Les diplomates français ont vu là une intervention de poids.

Michel Barnier a rencontré à plusieurs reprises dans la journée des représentants de la presse arabe, afin d'occuper le terrain médiatique, où



Le secrétaire général du Quai d'Orsay, Hubert Colin de Verdière (à gauche), arrivé hier matin à Bagdad, bénéficie d'une journée supplémentaire pour tenter d'établir un contact avec les ravisseurs. (Photo AFP)

Proche et au Moyen-Orient et partout dans le monde la justice et la dignité des peuples. »

L'exercice d'influence indirecte sur les preneurs d'otage

connaît cependant ses limites. Dans quelle mesure les personnalités arabes et musulmanes sollicitées sont-elles écoutées des ravisseurs ? Peuvent-elles vraiment faire pres-

sion sur eux ? Confrontés à un groupe extrémiste très déterminé et de surcroît, semble-t-il, divisé, les diplomates français n'avaient hier aucune certitude. Mais ils voulaient

exploiter toutes les pistes et tous les canaux possibles pour sauver les otages.

French unite to ask for hostages' release

Foreign minister heads to Middle East

By Nicola Clark

PARIS: President Jacques Chirac sent his foreign minister to the Middle East late Sunday to try to secure the release of two French journalists kidnapped by Iraqi militants who are demanding that Paris abandon plans to implement a ban on Islamic headscarves in public schools.

A group calling itself the Islamic Army in Iraq released a videotape of the journalists, Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot, late Saturday and threatened to execute them within 48 hours if France did not rescind a law banning conspicuous religious attire in classrooms. The law is due to take effect when students return from summer break this week.

The demand was a departure from a dozen previous kidnappings in Iraq, in which the kidnappers have generally called on members of the U.S.-led coalition to withdraw their troops in exchange for the release of their nationals.

[Two Turkish hostages were freed by Iraqi militants Sunday, a Turkish Foreign Ministry official said, less than a week after the men's employers announced they were pulling out of Iraq to save the men's lives, The Associated Press reported from Istanbul.]

The Pan-Arab satellite-television channel Al Jazeera reported Sunday that the militants claiming to be holding the hostages had called France's headscarf ban "an aggression on the Islamic religion and personal freedoms."

In a televised address late Sunday, Chirac said that the government was doing "everything" to secure the men's release and that more was at stake than the lives of the two hostages.

"It is the defense of freedom of expression" that is in play, Chirac said. "So also are the values of our republic."

Chirac said Foreign Minister Michel Barnier "is leaving immediately for the region to develop the necessary contacts there and coordinate our representatives' efforts."

Chirac spoke as Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin held an emergency meeting of his cabinet. Those discussions were expected to continue late into the night.

Earlier in the day, Dominique de Vil-



lepin, the interior minister, met with leaders of the country's top Muslim organizations to discuss the situation. Both sides vigorously condemned the actions of the hostage-takers.

"French people of all origins and all religions are united in support of our compatriots Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot," Villepin, who was flanked by Muslim leaders, said, according to Agence France-Presse. "Together, we ask for their release."

Chesnot of Radio France International and Malbrunot of the newspaper Le Figaro disappeared on Aug. 20 while driving from Baghdad to the Shiite holy center of Najaf.

In a statement, the Union of French Islamic Organizations said that it would "resist with the strongest conviction any foreign force seeking to interfere in the relations between French Islam and the Republic." The group, known by its French initials UOIF, has strongly opposed the headscarf ban.

Religious leaders in Iraq also urged the kidnappers to release the hostages immediately.

"We are against these kidnappings, particularly of journalists because they

are our voice in Iraq," said Sheikh Abdul Sattar Abdul al-Jabbar, a member of Iraq's Committee of Ulemas, according to Agence France-Presse.

"The veil is a domestic affair for France. But perhaps we can ask it to pay attention to Muslims and modify its policy," he added.

The revival of the politically charged debate over Muslim headscarves comes just days before the law, which was passed in February, is due to take effect. The prohibition, which does not apply to private schools or to French schools abroad, also applies to Jewish yarmulkes and large Christian crosses.

Students of any faith who refuse to remove their religious symbols in class face temporary suspension or expulsion.

France's staunchly secular government has gone to great lengths to portray the ban on religious symbols in elementary and secondary schools as nondenominational. Nonetheless, it has been widely perceived among French Muslims as targeting Islam. Opponents of the ban took to the streets repeatedly this spring but won only a small concession: Muslim girls would be allowed to wear small bandannas.

Iraqi and Western intelligence services said Sunday that they were struggling to learn more about the group claiming responsibility for the kidnapping, which appeared on the scene last spring. The Islamic Army in Iraq also held an Italian journalist, Enzo Baldoni, who was reportedly killed after the Italian government refused to comply

with the group's demand that it withdraw its 3,000-member military contingent from Iraq.

Baldoni disappeared on the same day the French reporters did and on the same stretch of road between Baghdad and Najaf.

In Brussels, a spokeswoman for Javier Solana, the head of foreign policy and security affairs for the European Union, said in a telephone interview that the Union fully supported France in its response to the kidnappers' demands.

"The reaction of the European institutions is going to be one of total sup-

Religious leaders in Iraq urged the kidnappers to release the hostages.

port of the French government," Christina Gallach said, referring to the extremists' call to overturn the ban.

Gallach said the issue of separation of

religion and state has been discussed "very clearly" during debates over an EU constitution. She said that some member states had talked about adding references to religion to a constitution and that the EU had always been against such a move.

Gallach said that she did not envision the EU doing anything on a European

level to ban headscarves in schools.

"This belongs to the national government of France," she said. "On the EU level, one should not try to unify every member that is feeling pressure on immigration. This will remain in the domain of national responsibility." Gallach said she did not believe that any other EU countries have such a require-

ment banning the display of religious items in public schools.

International Herald Tribune

Erik Eckholm of the New York Times contributed reporting for this article from Baghdad and Chris Knight reported from Paris.

Militant Sunnis hold on 2 key Iraq cities still outside U.S. control

By John F. Burns and Erik Eckholm

BAGHDAD: While U.S. troops have been battling Islamic militants to an uncertain outcome in Najaf, the Shiite holy city, events in two Sunni Muslim cities that stand astride the crucial western approaches to Baghdad have moved significantly against American plans to build a secular democracy in Iraq.

Both of the cities, Falluja and Ramadi, and much of Anbar Province, are now controlled by fundamentalist militias, with U.S. troops confined mainly to heavily protected forts on the desert's edge. What little influence the Americans have is asserted through wary forays in armored vehicles, and by laser-guided bombs that obliterate enemy refuges identified by scouts who penetrate militant ranks. Even bombing raids appear to strengthen the fundamentalists, who blame the Americans for scores of civilian deaths.

American efforts to build a government structure around former Baath Party stalwarts — officials of Saddam Hussein's army, police force and bureaucracy who were willing to work with the United States — have collapsed. Instead, the former Saddam loyalists, under threat of beheadings, kidnappings and humiliation, have mostly resigned or defected to the fundamentalists, or been killed. Enforcers for the old government, including former Republican Guard officers, have put themselves in the service of fundamentalist clerics they once tortured at Abu Ghraib prison.

In the past three weeks, three former Saddam loyalists appointed to important posts in Falluja and Ramadi have been eliminated by the militants and their Baathist allies. The chief of a battalion of the U.S.-trained Iraqi National Guard in Falluja was beheaded by the militants, prompting the disintegration of guard forces in the city. The governor of Anbar resigned after his three sons were kidnapped. The third official, the provincial police chief in Ramadi, was lured to his arrest by U.S. marines after three assassination attempts led him to defect to the rebel cause.

The national guard commander and the governor were both forced into humiliating confessions, denouncing themselves as "traitors" on videos that

sell in Falluja for 50 cents. The tapes show masked men ending the commander's halting monologue, toppling him to the ground, and sawing off his head, to the accompaniment of recorded Koranic chants ordaining death for those who "make war upon Allah."

The governor is shown with a photograph of himself with a U.S. officer, sobbing as he repents working with the "infidel Americans," then being rewarded with a weeping reunion with his sons.

In another taped sequence available in the Falluja market, a man identifying himself as an Egyptian is shown kneeling in a flowered shirt, confessing that he "worked as a spy for the Americans," planting electronic "chips" used for setting targets in American bombing raids.

The man says he was paid \$150 for each chip laid; then he, too, is tackled to the ground by masked guards while a third masked man, who proclaims himself a dispenser of Islamic justice, pulls a knife from a scabbard on his chest, grabs the Egyptian by the scalp, and severs his head.

The situation across Anbar represents the latest reversal for the marines' 1st Expeditionary Force, which sought to assert control last spring with an offensive in Falluja and Ramadi that incurred some of the heaviest American casualties of the war.

The offensive ended, mortifyingly for the marines, in a decision to pull back from both cities and entrust American hopes to the former Baathists. The rationale was that military victory would come only by flattening the two cities, and that the better course lay in handing important government positions to former loyalists of the ousted government.

The culmination of this approach came with the recruitment of the so-called Falluja Brigade, led by a former army general under Saddam, a motley assembly of former Iraqi soldiers and insurgents who marched into the city in early May, wearing old Iraqi military uniforms and backed with U.S.-supplied weapons and money.

But the Falluja Brigade is in tatters now, reduced to sharing tented checkpoints on roads into the city with the militants, its headquarters in Falluja abandoned, like the buildings assigned

to the National Guard. Men assigned to the brigade, and to the two guard battalions, have mostly fled, Iraqis in Falluja say, taking their families and handing their weapons to the militants.

The militants' principal power center is a mosque in Falluja led by an Iraqi cleric, Abdullah al-Janabi, who has instituted a Taliban-like rule in the city, rounding up people suspected of theft and rape and sentencing them to publicly administered lashes and, in some cases, beheading.

Janabi appears to be allied with an Islamic militant group, Unity and Holy War, that U.S. intelligence has identified as the vehicle of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian-born terrorist with links to Al Qaeda whom the Americans have blamed for suicide bombings in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities.

American officials say a rapid buildup of the new Iraqi Army, the National Guard and police, coupled with gathering momentum on thousands of reconstruction projects funded by \$18 billion in U.S. financing, should eventually improve security across Iraq.

But the Americans acknowledge that a full, nationwide election in January may not be possible. For now, they have identified 15 cities across the Arab parts of Iraq that they contend can be stabilized to make voting in January possible. Falluja and Ramadi are not among them.

The New York Times

Reporting for this article was contributed by Iraqi staff members of The New York Times in Baghdad.

Herald Tribune

AUGUST 30, 2004

La France unie face au chantage de l'Armée islamique en Irak

Le Monde
31 AOÛT 2004

► **L'Armée islamique en Irak**, qui détient deux journalistes français, Christian Chesnot et Georges Malbrunot, a fixé un ultimatum à la France, qui expire lundi 30 août à 21 heures. Le groupe de ravisseurs « demande à la France d'annuler la loi sur le voile, en raison de ce qu'elle comporte comme injustice et agression contre l'islam et la liberté personnelle dans le pays de la liberté présumée », indique le texte de l'Armée islamique, concluant : « Nous donnons à la France un délai de 48 heures, à partir de la publication de ce communiqué. Allah est le plus grand, gloire à Dieu. »

L'organisation, qui a assassiné, jeudi 26 août, un journaliste italien pris en otage, Enzo Baldoni, serait composée d'activistes sunnites d'obédience dite « wahhabite », le courant le plus obscurantiste de l'islamisme. Les services de renseignements français relèvent toutefois que le message diffusé par le groupe, pour revendiquer le rapt des journalistes français ne

lie pas explicitement le sort des deux otages à la satisfaction de sa revendication.

► **Les deux journalistes français** sont des spécialistes du monde arabe, basés au Proche-Orient et auteurs de plusieurs ouvrages sur la région. Christian Chesnot, 37 ans, d'abord en poste au Caire puis à Amman, travaille pour RFI et Radio France. Georges Malbrunot, 41 ans, collabore au Figaro et assure également des correspondances pour Ouest-France, RTL et l'Est Républicain.

► **Le premier ministre irakien**, Iyad Allaw, dans une interview au Monde, estime que la France « ne peut pas rester sur la défensive », face à la menace terroriste qui se serait choisie l'Irak comme « théâtre principal » de son combat contre « la civilisation ». Il met en garde la France contre le risque d'attentats sur son sol. Au lendemain d'un accord avec les partisans armés de l'imam Moqtada Al-Sadr à Najaf, il somme toutes les milices en Irak de désarmer et d'intégrer le champ politique pour

bâtir une future démocratie.

► **A Paris, Jacques Chirac** a réclamé « solennellement », dans une déclaration radio-télévisée diffusée dimanche soir, la libération des deux journalistes, indiquant toutefois qu'il n'avait « pas d'informations supplémentaires » sur leur sort actuel. Durant toute la journée de dimanche, le chef de l'Etat et le gouvernement ont multiplié les réunions. Jean-Pierre Raffarin, a lancé un appel à « l'unité nationale ». Le ministre des affaires étrangères, Michel Barnier, a été dépêché au Caire, première étape d'un périple qui doit lui permettre de rencontrer plusieurs responsables politiques et religieux. Comptant sur les effets de l'hostilité française à la guerre d'Irak, qui lui ont attiré la sympathie de nombreux pays arabes, le chef de l'Etat a invoqué, dans sa déclaration, les « valeurs de respect et de tolérance qui inspirent » l'action de la France « dans le monde comme sur notre territoire national ». Jacques Chirac a reporté d'une journée son départ pour la Russie, où il

devait rencontrer lundi soir MM. Poutine et Schröder.

► **L'interdiction du voile** à l'école ne sera pas abrogée, a affirmé, lundi matin 30 août, le porte-parole du gouvernement, Jean-François Copé. La loi du 15 mars 2004, qui proscriit le port de signes manifestant ostensiblement une appartenance religieuse dans les établissements scolaires entrera normalement en vigueur jeudi 2 septembre, date de la rentrée scolaire. Ce texte avait été adopté à la suite de longs débats qui ont divisé la société et le monde politique. Il avait été présenté par M. Chirac comme l'expression d'un « sursaut laïque » en France.

► **Les représentants de la religion musulmane en France** ont publiquement réprouvé l'enlèvement des deux journalistes en Irak. Reçus dimanche par le ministre de l'intérieur, Dominique de Villepin, les membres du bureau du Conseil français du culte musulman (CFCM) ont accepté de jouer un rôle d'apaisement auprès de leur communauté.

A Bagdad, sous la perplexité, perce la rancœur à l'égard des journalistes

BAGDAD

de notre envoyée spéciale

« Pourquoi des Français ? » La question laisse perplexe plus d'un Irakien. Les rapt et les assassinats de journalistes en Irak ont toujours soulevé l'indignation. Même chez les groupes sunnites salafistes, considérés comme les plus radicaux, les voix s'élèvent pour condamner des pratiques qui « n'ont rien à voir avec notre religion ».

Le cheikh Farkhi Al-Qaïssi, qui représente l'un de ces mouvements, estime ainsi que ce sont là des « actes commis par des éléments criminels et incontrôlables, parfois infiltrés dans nos rangs, qui ruinent l'image de la résistance en Irak et salissent le nom de l'islam ». Le Conseil islamique sunnite irakien a appelé, par deux fois, à la libération des Français – un appel dont n'a pas bénéficié le journaliste italien enlevé par le même groupe, et qui a été assassiné.

Au-delà de la réprobation que suscitent les enlèvements et les menaces de mort, chacun souligne la spécificité du cas des journalistes français. Jusqu'à présent, les otages étaient des ressortissants de pays participant à la coalition armée en Irak et leur libération était soumise à la condition du retrait de leurs troupes. La règle semblait si bien établie qu'un journaliste américain raconte qu'il se faisait souvent passer pour un Français auprès de ses interlocuteurs irakiens, « par précaution ».

Il est désormais clair que personne n'est à

l'abri. A moins, comme le croit Mohammed, un chiite d'une trentaine d'années, qu'il y ait eu « une erreur », une « terrible malchance à l'origine du drame » : les deux Français auraient été capturés par des bandits dont les motivations se limitent à la taille des portefeuilles de leurs victimes. Ceux-ci les auraient ensuite « vendus » au groupe islamiste, qui n'aurait rien trouvé d'autre à revendiquer que l'annulation de la loi française sur le voile islamique.

Cette revendication suscite l'incompréhension. « Je trouve cette loi mauvaise, explique Adel, sunnite. Elle est humiliante pour les musulmans. Mais cela regarde les Français, pas les Irakiens. » Pour Oum Abdallah, chiite et mère de famille, « cette affaire de hidjab, c'est typiquement chiite. Seuls les gens de Moqtada Al-Sadr s'étaient mobilisés quand cette loi est passée en France, assure-t-elle. Ce sont eux qui, à l'époque, avaient manifesté ».

« LES OCCIDENTAUX SONT TOUS LES MÊMES »

Un combattant de l'Armée du Mahdi à la Cité Sadr commente, sarcastique : « Il y a au moins une chose positive, les journalistes français viennent maintenant nous interviewer avec un voile sur la tête ! » L'homme est toutefois obligé d'admettre que la revendication des ravisseurs des journalistes « est bizarre et ne règle aucun problème en Irak ».

D'autres évoquent Latifiya, Mahmoudiya, Youssoufiya, ces villes de la banlieue sud-ouest

de Bagdad où l'on suppose que l'enlèvement a eu lieu. Ce sont des fiefs de la puissante tribu Al-Janabi, qui fournissait à Saddam Hussein le gros des membres de ses services de renseignement. « Les Al-Janabi contrôlent toute la région. Certains de leurs membres sont chiites, d'autres sunnites. Pour s'assurer une place dans le nouveau régime, ils n'ont jamais cessé leurs activités. Ils sont partout et connaissent tout, sur tout le monde, affirme Omar, un sunnite qui reconnaît avoir été baasiste il n'y a pas si longtemps. Les journalistes qui venaient à l'époque de Saddam étaient tous fichés, contrôlés, suivis. Les deux Français étaient en Irak avant la guerre, ils ont écrit des livres sur Saddam. Ils détenaient peut-être des informations sensibles. A mon avis, c'est de ce côté qu'il faut chercher. »

Enfin, il y a ce reproche, perçu par des journalistes à l'occasion de remarques agressives qui leur ont été faites et qu'un religieux exprime ainsi : « Nous avons cru en vous, nous pensions que vos journaux parleraient des problèmes et des souffrances du peuple irakien. Un an et demi a passé depuis la chute de Bagdad, et rien n'a changé. Au contraire, le chaos est pire chaque jour. Les Français ne sont peut-être pas venus avec leurs soldats, mais ils n'ont rien fait pour nous aider. Les Occidentaux sont tous les mêmes, ils ne songent qu'à leurs intérêts. Un jour, il faudra qu'ils paient. »

C. Hn

Iyad Allaoui, premier ministre irakien

« La France ne sera pas épargnée. Il y aura des attentats à Paris, à Nice, à Cannes... »

BAGDAD

de notre envoyée spéciale

Cet entretien a été accordé, dimanche 29 août, outre à l'envoyée spéciale du Monde, aux correspondants du Washington Post, du Sunday Times, du Los Angeles Times, de Knight Readers et du Corriere della sera.

Après l'assassinat d'un journaliste italien, deux journalistes français sont menacés du même sort. Quelle est votre réaction ?

J'ai transmis au premier ministre italien mes condoléances. Nous avons toujours dit que la guerre en Irak opposait les forces du mal au peuple irakien et aux nations civilisées. C'est une guerre rude. Vous ne pouvez pas vous contenter de demi-mesures. La France ne sera pas épargnée, pas plus que l'Italie, l'Espagne ou l'Égypte. Les peuples doivent se donner la main pour combattre le terrorisme, quel que soit l'endroit où il se manifeste. L'Irak est devenu le théâtre majeur de confrontation du terrorisme. C'est en Irak qu'il faut s'unir pour le défaire, une fois pour toutes.

Ce qui est arrivé au journaliste italien, ce qui arrive en ce moment aux Français, ainsi qu'à ceux qui, comme la France, se sont opposés à la « guerre contre le terrorisme », montre que personne ne sera épargné. Le terrorisme ne connaît aucune limite. Éviter la confrontation n'est pas une réponse.

Enzo Baldoni était un pacifiste qui militait pour le retrait des troupes italiennes...

Oui, mais ça, ils s'en fichent ! Les terroristes ne cherchent pas à savoir si vous êtes ou non un avocat de la paix. Leur but est de semer la confusion et de détruire la civilisation.

Pensez-vous que l'affaire des otages français provoquera un changement de la politique de la France en Irak ?

Les Français, ainsi que tous les pays démocratiques, ne peuvent pas se contenter d'adopter une position passive. Les Américains, les Britanniques et les autres nations qui se battent en Irak ne se battent pas seulement pour protéger les Irakiens, ils se battent aussi pour protéger leur propre pays.

Les gouvernements qui décident de rester sur la défensive seront les prochaines cibles des terroristes. Les attentats se produiront à Paris, à Nice, à Cannes ou à San Francisco. Le temps est venu d'agir contre le terrorisme, de la même façon que, jadis, l'Europe a combattu Hitler. Tous les jours, des dizaines de personnes sont tuées en Irak. Elles ne meurent pas parce que nous traversons une crise nationale majeure, mais parce que nous avons décidé de combattre le mal. C'est pourquoi toute la communauté internationale doit nous aider, au plus vite, pour améliorer la sécurité de notre pays.

Un jour, les États-Unis ont décidé de débarquer en Normandie, pour éliminer Hitler. Ils ont essuyé de lourdes pertes pour accomplir cet objectif. Il se produit la même chose aujourd'hui. Les peuples doivent prendre leurs responsabilités. La décision d'aider l'Irak était courageuse. Laissez-moi vous dire que les Français, malgré tout le bruit qu'ils font – « Nous ne voulons pas la guerre ! » –, auront bientôt à combattre les terroristes.

Vous venez de conclure un accord pour ramener la paix à Najaf. Ne permet-il pas à l'imam Moqtada Al-Sadr de réorganiser son armée ?

Depuis le début, notre position était claire : démantèlement des factions armées à Najaf, Koufa et dans tout l'Irak. En même temps, nous avons dit que les hommes de Moqtada Al-Sadr pouvaient, s'ils le voulaient, participer au processus politique. Nous avons voulu donner, jusqu'au bout, une chance à la paix. Nous savions que ces milices voulaient nous piéger en nous forçant à attaquer le mausolée [de l'imam Ali]. Si celui-ci avait été abîmé, il y aurait eu de graves complications. J'ai donc décidé que nous n'utiliserions la force qu'en dernier ressort. Quand j'ai posé un ultimatum de 24 heures, nos forces étaient prêtes pour l'assaut.

Aucune milice ne sera tolérée. Les miliciens peuvent accepter l'amnistie et vivre comme des citoyens ordinaires. Sinon, nous les pour-



SUNGU CHO/DEADLINE

chasserons. Il n'y a aucune voie intermédiaire.

Êtes-vous prêt à intégrer au gouvernement les mouvements de résistance ?

Notre problème est de comprendre ce qu'ils veulent vraiment. S'ils souhaitent gouverner, alors il n'y a pas de problème : les élections approchent et tous les postes leur sont ouverts, si les Irakiens votent pour eux. S'ils veulent mettre dehors les forces multinationales, ils n'ont qu'à gagner les élections, aller aux Nations unies et leur dire qu'ils n'en veulent plus : elles partiront. En attendant, rien ne justifie qu'on tue des gens, occupe des mosquées et perturbe toute la vie de ce pays.

Nous essayons de les rassurer : nous n'allons pas rester éternellement au pouvoir, comme Saddam. Nous sommes ici dans le but de reconstruire le pays. Le gouvernement a voté une loi qui me donne le pouvoir d'imposer l'état d'urgence pour restaurer la sécurité. Je ne l'ai pas encore utilisée, parce que la démocratie doit prévaloir.

Pourquoi la résistance armée

a-t-elle pris une telle ampleur en Irak ?

C'est une situation complexe. Environ 30 000 criminels ont été libérés par Saddam juste avant la guerre. Il y a les gens déçus, sans travail et sans ressources, des centaines de milliers. Il y a les éléments de l'ancien régime qui savent que, s'ils sont attrapés, ils devront rendre des comptes à la justice et qui veulent donc ruiner le processus politique. Il y a les combattants étrangers venus d'Égypte, de Jordanie, de Syrie, d'Iran. Enfin, il y a des groupes salafistes qui s'attaquent à tout ce qui touche à la civilisation et qui croient mener une croisade contre le christianisme. Ce n'est pas une résistance, car ces gens n'ont pas de programme, aucune idée politique. Les Américains ont commis beaucoup d'erreurs ici, pendant et après la guerre. Il n'y a aucun doute à ce sujet. Mais ce n'est pas une raison pour tuer. Le processus politique est en cours. Dans six mois, s'ils le veulent, Allaoui, c'est fini ! C'est ça la démocratie. Ils voteront pour Moqtada Al-Sadr, Ben Laden ou qui ils veulent.

Pensez-vous avoir une chance aux prochaines élections ?

Si je suis encore vivant ! Tous les jours, je reçois des menaces, je fais l'objet de tentatives d'assassinat. Alors, ai-je une chance aux élections ?... Je n'en sais rien.

Pensez-vous que les élections pourront avoir lieu à la date prévue ?

Absolument. Le gouvernement a pris toutes les mesures nécessaires pour qu'elles aient lieu. Et elles auront lieu, si Dieu le veut.

Propos recueillis par Cécile Hennion

Le Monde

31 AOUT 2004

INTERNATIONAL PEN Writers in Prison Committee

Caselist January to June 2004

TURKEY

Main cases

***Hakan ALBAYRAK**: Journalist for *Milli Gazete* reported have been sentenced on 21 April 2004 to 15 months imprisonment on charges of "insult to Atatürk" in an article published July 2000 under Article 312 of the Penal Code. The article is said to criticised the fact that prayers were given during the funeral of an atheist writer, Mina Urgan, comparing it to the state funeral of Atatürk where no prayers were said and about which "neither the state nor society seemed concerned at the time". Sentence to serve is said to be six months. He is detained in Kalecik Prison, Ankara.

Emine SENLİKOĞLU (f): writer. Sentence: 20 months in prison. Expires: free pending appeal. Details of trial: Sentenced to 20 months in prison under Article 312 of the Criminal Code (incitement to enmity) for her book *Whose Victim Am I?* published in 2000. The book challenges a ban on Muslim women wearing headscarves. She and her husband, **Recep Ozkan**, publisher of the book, made their first appearance before the court in December 2000. After a series of hearings and postpone-

ments, Senlikoglu was sentenced to 20 months in prison by the Izmir State Security Court on 14 May 2003. An appeal is being considered. Background: Ms Senlikoglu is well known for her outspoken objections to strict laws passed in 1997 forbidding women to wear headscarves in public places, part of an "anti-Islamisation" campaign. She is the author of over 40 books, many on Islamic issues, some challenging Western feminist's interpretation of Islam. She was also among the authors on trial in the Fox for All campaign - see Sanar Yurdapan et al above.

Main case - free on bail

Leyla Zana (f):

Profession: politician, Kurdish rights activist and former journalist. DoB: 1961 Imprisoned: 8 December 1994 Sentence: 15-years for pro-Kurdish rights activism. Additional two years for an article written in prison. Free pending re-trial. Trial Details: 1) At her inauguration as an MP in 1991, Zana reportedly identified herself as a Kurd. She is also reported to have worn a headband with the traditional Kurdish colours of yellow, green and red. These actions, and many of her public statements and actions of solidarity with the Kurds might well have led to charges being pressed against her, but she was for a time protected by her parliamentary immunity. However, in 1994, after she and three other Kurdish MPS joined the newly formed Democracy Party, which was quickly banned by the authorities, her immunity was lifted, and she and the other three were arrested. They were accused of treason and promptly jailed. Originally charged with treason, the charge was soon dropped, but she was instead charged with membership of the illegal armed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Prosecutors at her trial relied on statements by witnesses who were themselves facing prosecution, and who later retracted their statements, claiming that they had been extracted under torture. Zana was found guilty and sentenced to a 15-year term. 2) Sentenced in 1998 to an additional 2 years for an article published in prison. The article, which does not advocate violence or racial hatred, was about Nevruz, a Kurdish holiday. Appeal Process: Appeal process opened in late 2003 and several hearings held until 21 April 2004 when the sentences were confirmed. However, on 9 June 2004, all four defendants were freed on bail following a decision that as there have been changes to the penal system since the sentence was upheld in April. Next hearing set for 8 July. Journalism and writing: worked in the 1990s for the now defunct *Yeni Ülke* (New Country) at its Diyarbakir office, and specialising in feminism, democracy and Kurdish issues. During her time in prison, her writings have been collected and published in English by Blue Crane Books, Massachusetts, USA, under the title *Writings from Prison*. Other details: first Kurdish woman elected to the Turkish parliament. In 1995, Zana won the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. In July 2001 the European Court of Human Rights ruled that her trial had been unfair. Turkey has recently adopted a law which states that any trial found unfair by the European Court should be subject to judicial review; however, Zana's trial is not eligible as the law is not retroactive. Amnesty International Prisoner of Conscience. Honorary Member: PEN USA West, San Miguel De Allende, Belgian Flemish, Scottish, Writers in Exile and English PEN Centres

Investigation cases

Selahattin AYDAR: journalist for *Milli Gazete*. PEN learned in late 2003 that Aydar was sentenced on appeal to a term of imprisonment (not specified) for an article published 11 September 2001 entitled "Let's Claim Our Children". Charged under Article 312 of the TPC. PEN seeking details.

Hasan ÇAKKALKURT, **Eren GÜENER**, **Sinan KARA**, **Necdet TATLICAN**: editor-in-chief of *Posta*, editor-in-chief of *Milliyet*, owner of *Datça Haber* and editor-in-chief of *Hurriyet*. On trial in January 2003 at the Datça Penal Court on charges of insult to the Datça Governor in an article on his ban on dogs entering the sea. (For other reference to Guvener and Çakkalkurt, see elsewhere) **Kara** has charges against him totalling 8 years and nine months. On 27 October 2003, Kara was sentenced to one year in prison for allegedly threatening the son of the former Prime Minister, Tansu Ciller. The incident occurred in June 2000 when Kara attempted to take photos of Mert Ciller on holiday at a seaside resort. He was apparently attacked by Ciller's bodyguards, causing him injury and damage to his camera. Bodyguards maintain that Kara was the aggressor. PEN considers this charge to be outside of its remit. However it concurs with RSF that the sentence is overly harsh for the offence. Kara was currently serving a 144 day prison term and was expected to be released in mid-March 2004.

Ali Ekber COSKUN: editor-in-chief *Dersim*. Trial under way for articles published April 2003 deemed to be "incitement to hatred and enmity" - article 312 of the Penal Code. The articles are entitled: "*Dersim'de Milat*" (Turning Point in Dersim), "*Özgürlüğüne Düşkün Bir Diyar: Dersim*" (Dersim: A Land Devoted to Its Freedom), "*Osmanlı'dan Sonra Cumhuriyetle Süren Alevi İhlalleri*" (Violation Against Alevites resumed by the Republic after the Ottomans), "*Festivalin Onur Ödülü*" (Festival Honour Reward) and "*Kurumlarımıza ve Aydınlarımıza Çağrı*" (A Call to Our Institutions and Intelligencia). A fourth hearing was scheduled for 11 November 2003. Also on trial was **Kemal Mutlu**, Chairman of the Tunceli Culture and Solidarity Association. PEN seeking update.

***Abdurrahman DİLİPAK**: editor-in-chief of *Türkiye'de Cuma* (Friday in Turkey) (now closed). On 15 June 2004, the trial against him continued at the Military Court in Istanbul. Charges had been instigated by three retired military officers for an article entitled "If the Generals do not Listen to advice" published on 29 August 2003, under Article 95/4 of the Military Penal Code. Dilipak did not attend the hearing, stating that the trial was in contravention of the European Convention on Human Rights.

***Sevda ERGİN**: journalist and editor in chief of *Demokrasi ve Sosyalizm Yolunda Fabrika* (Factory on the Way to Democracy and Socialism). Trial opened at the Istanbul State Security Court on 6 June. Charged with "propaganda for an illegal organisation" under article 7/2 of the Anti-Terror Law. Accused of issuing propaganda for Kongra-Gel (Kurdish People's Congress - the successor to the PKK) in an article entitled "The Recent Situation on the Kurdish Question" published in April 2004.

Omer FARUK, **Funda Uncu İRKLI (F)**: owner of the Ayrıntı publishing house and translator respectively. Trial to commence in April 2004 against **Omer Faruk** and **Funda Uncu İrkli (f)**, translator of Chuck Palahniuk's book "*Tikanma*" (Choke). Both will be charged under Article 426 of the Penal Code (insult to the morals of the people) and the book is already confiscated.

***Ubdeyullah HAKAN**: journalist for the Dicle News Agency. Hearing held on 21 January 2004 at the Van Penal Court of First Instance on charges of "resisting security forces and damaging public property". Related to a 26 April 2003 incident. Hakan claims that police assaulted him and seized his camera. Several hearings held in early 2004. Latest adjourned to 28 April.

***Sabri KALIÇ**, **Kıvanç GÜNEY**, **Fuat SESEN** and **Levent ERSEVER**: three translators and Stüdyo Imge Publishing House publisher respectively. On trial on 24 March 2004 before the Beyoğlu

Court of First Instance. Charged under Article 426 of the Penal Code that penalises works deemed to be "offensive". The trial is for the translation into Turkish of the books *Show* (a collection of writings by Turkish authors on the US rap artist, Eminem, *Angry Blond*, Eminem's autobiography, and Irvine Welsh's *Ecstasy: Three Chemical Romances*. Next hearing due in June 2004. The same books are subject to a second trial on similar charges, due to open 5 May 2004.

Ersen KORKMAZ: editor-in-chief of *Demokrat Iskenderun* Case launched (TKP) against him and Necmettin Salaz, Executive Member of the Turkish Communist Party following a TKP panel discussion during which Salaz is said to have insulted the security forces. Korkmaz is being tried in connection with his reporting on the discussion. Both are charged under Article 159 of the Penal Code. First hearing held 11 March 2004, with the next scheduled for 3 June. Previously on trial in late 2002 for reports of alleged rape in detention of two women.

***Ruhat MENGİ**: journalist reported by BIA Net to be on trial in early

2004 for an article published in *Vatan* that criticised plans to reduce the sentences that can be served against rapists. The article referred to those who support the changes as having a "sick mentality". Two MPs who had drafted the bill subsequently took out charges of defamation. PEN seeking further information.

Mehmet NAS: owner and editor-in-chief of *Özgür Siirt*. Trial opened on 10 October 2003 before the Siirt Penal Court. Charged for not publishing a letter from the Siirt Governor responding to an article in the newspaper accusing the Siirt Governor of not reacting appropriately to the May 2003 earthquake. The letter was published, but three days after a court deadline ordering the paper to do so. Prosecution seeks no imprisonment but heavy fine against Nas. Trial adjourned to 11 December 2003. PEN seeking further information.

Ahmet ÖNAL: owner of the Peri Publishing House. 1) On trial in June 2001 for publishing a collection of interviews with people in exile compiled by human rights activist Ms **Evin Aydar Cicek** entitled *Tutuklular ve Tutsaklar* (The Passions and the Prisoners). Seen as "insult to Atatürk". Sentenced to 15 months in prison in December 2003. Presumed to be appealing the sentence. 2) On trial in August 2002 for book by **M. Erol Coskun** *Acinin Dili Kadın* (Women: Voice of the Pain) under article 312 of the Penal Code. Önal heavily fined and Coskun sentenced to 15 months in prison in August 2003. They appealed against both convictions. Many other books published by Peri Publishing House are banned. PEN seeking further details

Suat ÖZALP: editor-in-chief and owner of *Azadiya Welat*. Charged with "support for an illegal organisation" under article 169 of the Turkish Penal Code and Article 5 of the Anti Terror Law. Linked to the publication on 17 May 2003 of a photograph of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan with the caption "Serok (President) Apo". Also article accompanying that is said to contain "propaganda for an illegal organisation". Trial was to commence in June 2003. PEN seeking further details.

***Aziz ÖZER:** editor-in-chief of *Yeni Dünya İçin Çağrı* (Call for a New World). Sentenced to six months in prison on 9 April 2004 by the Beyoğlu Penal Court of First Instance. The charges are in connection with an article entitled "Don't Be Silent, Claim the Demands of the Prisoners".

Erol ÖZKORAY, Nur DOLAY: Owner and editor-in-chief of the magazine *İdea Politika* and journalist respectively. On trial in November 2002 at the Istanbul State Security Court for an article entitled "Kurdish Wound". Both are resident in France. By 30 December 2003, Özkoray was still facing 4 further trials with prosecution calling for up to 30 years of imprisonment.

Mustafa BENLİ, Kemal EVCİMEN, Nurettin SIRIN: all described on 27 March 2002, by the Turkish Press Council, as journalists detained as of 1 January 2002 on conviction of membership of an illegal organisation and recommended retrials for them. The Paris based Info-Türk claimed in February 2004 that Sirin remains in Kandira prison serving a 15-year sentence and that Evcimen is also still detained in Sincan prison.

Nevin BERKTAS (f): political prisoner detained since 1994 on charges of membership of a terrorist organisation. Berktaş wrote a book on her prison experiences called *Hücrem (My Cell)* which was prosecuted under Article 169 of the Penal Code for "supporting terrorists". Thought to be for comments in the book supporting prison protests denouncing the F-Type Prisons. Berktaş and Elif Camyar, publisher of the book, appeared at the State Security Court Istanbul on 7 November 2001. Berktaş was subsequently given an additional 45 months in prison. Camyar received a fine. **Background:** was first arrested in 1978, and was imprisoned on a number of other occasions for her radical political activities from then until she was amnestied in 1991. However she was re-arrested on 16 December 1994 and convicted for membership of an illegal organisation accused of extremist activities. Prior to the trial for her book, she was serving a twelve and a half year sentence, to which the 45 month sentence for the book was added. **Place of detention:** Istanbul-Gebze Prison. Berktaş is not due to be freed until early 2011.

Memik HORUZ: Editor-in-chief of *Özgür Gelecek (Free Future)* and *İsci-Köylü (Workers & Peasants)*. Arrested in 6 June 2001 and held on charges of membership of an "illegal" organisation. Trial started at Istanbul State Security Court on 3 September 2001. Charges linked to an interview that appeared in *Özgür Gelecek*. Horuz is accused of membership of the Turkish Communist Party/Marxist Leninist - Workers' and Peasants' Liberation Army of Turkey (TKP/ML - TIKKO) for his interview with two members of the organisation. Videos produced on 23 January 2002 suggest that he did meet with TIKKO members, although Horuz maintained his innocence. According to the International Federation of Journalists, on 20 February 2002, the charges against Horuz were dropped but new charges were levied of belonging to an illegal organisation. On 13 June 2002, he was sentenced by the Ankara State Security Court to 15 years in prison under Article 168(2) of the Criminal Code for writing an article based on interviews with TKP/ML TIKKO members and publishing it in November 2000. He was also

accused of taking part in training sessions with this group and being a member. However his defence reportedly provided alibis proving that he was elsewhere on the dates of his alleged training sessions. Supporters believe that he was convicted for his journalistic activities. Sentence confirmed on appeal on 23 January 2003. Ali Kemal Kahraman, editor of *Ozgür Gelecek*, was also on trial for "publishing the interview by Horuz and therefore supporting an illegal organisation". WIPC seeking further details.

On Trial/Charged (not detained)

***Harun AKSOY, Asim YENİHABER (Mehmet DOĞAN):** editor in chief and journalist respectively for *Vakit*. Case launched against them in May 2004 for an article by Yenihaber published in August 2003 deemed to be insulting to the Turkish armed forces. Some days earlier 312 generals had successfully sued the newspaper's owner Nuri Akyon, Aksoy and Dogan, who received a fine of TL 64 billion.

***Uğur BALIK, Baris GÜLLÜ:** Chair of the Executive Board of the Dicle News Agency and owner of *Özgür Halk* journal respectively. Arrested on charges of membership of an illegal organisation on 14 June 2004 following raids on 8 June on a number of journals and other Istanbul

based organisations by anti-terror police in advance of the NATO summit to be held 28-29 June 2004. Believed to be held briefly prior to charges. Güllü had previously been briefly arrested by the anti-terror branch of the Istanbul State Security Directorate in November 2003.

Dr Fikret BASKAYA, Özden BAYRAM, İsmet ERDOĞAN: Professor and writer, and publishing managers of the *Ozgür (Free)* University Library. In May 2003 due to stand trial on charges under Article 159/1 of the Penal Code – insult to the state, state institutions and the military – for articles published in a collection entitled *Articles Against the Tide*, most of which were written and previously published in the early to mid-1990s. Among the contentious phrases in the articles are a statement suggesting government approval of an arson attack against a meeting of writers and artists in the town of Sivas in 1993 in which around 40 people died. Also denying that "there is such a thing as a secular republic" going on to state that Turkey is a "torture republic". The three reportedly face maximum terms of three years in prison if convicted. Trial continued before the Ankara Penal Court on 6 November 2003. Hearing held on 17 February 2004 was postponed to 9 June 2004 to allow for another expert witness. **Baskaya is an Honorary Member:** English and Swiss German PEN.

***Hasan BAYAR:** editor in chief of *Özgür Gündem*. Case launched against him in early 2004 and the owner of the newspaper Ali Gürbüz for articles on the confessions of a PKK member. Indictment being sought under articles 6 and 7 of the Anti Terror Law on the grounds that the article revealed the names of certain officials working for the anti terror security network.

Bedri BAYKAM: owner of the *Piramit* publishing house. On trial in June 2004 on charges of obscenity for the book *Aum* by author **Murat Hıçılmaz**, also standing trial. The book had been confiscated and the trial arises from the defendants' refusal to pay a fine..

***Fikret BİLA, Ümit GÜRTÜNA:** author and owner of the Ümit Publishing House respectively. Trial launched on 10 June 2004 in Ankara on charges of insult to the MIT (National Intelligence Service) and revealing state secrets. Charges relate to Bila's book *Sivil Darbe Birisimi ve Ankara'da Irak Savaşları (An Attempted Civilian Coup and the Iraq War in Ankara)*, published in November 2003. On 18 November 2003, quotations from the book were published in *Milliyet*. Bila is also the Ankara representative of the newspaper *Milliyet*. The book contains reference to transcripts of a phone call between the British Ambassador in Ankara and Michael Leigh, Deputy Director of External Relations to the European Union. MIT claim that the information contained in the document is confidential and relates to national security issues, and that by releasing the document, state security was put at risk. The trial was postponed to a later date to allow for consideration of new legislation governing State Security Courts.

Mehmet BÖLÜK: Chair of the Istanbul branch of the Republican Peoples' Party (CHP). On trial in July 2003 for his book entitled *El Tayyip Nasıl Umut Oldu? (How did Al-Tayyip Become the Hope of the People?)* before the Kadıköy Penal Court. Book seen to "insult to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan". 9 July trial hearing adjourned to allow time for preparation of the final defence statement to be based on an expert report suggesting that the book falls within the remit of legitimate criticism. PEN seeking update.

***Sükrü BULUT, Mustafa DÖLÜKER:** journalists. Hearing held before the Istanbul State Security Court on 10 February 2004 for article entitled "Zelzeleler Denktir Felaketler" (Earthquakes are Catastrophes). Originally acquitted by the SSC, the prosecution appealed and a retrial started.

Mehmet Emin SERT, Emin KARACA, Dogan ÖZGÜDEN: editor of the journal *Writing in Europe and in Turkey*, and writers respectively. On trial regarding an article "Reminiscences on the 30th Anniversary" by Karaca published April 2002, and "30 Years later" by Dogan Ozguden in the same issue. The articles refer to the execution of three leaders of the revolutionary left youth movement Progressive Youth in the 1970s. Charged with insult to the armed forces under article 159 of the Penal Code. First hearing set before the Istanbul Penal Court No2 on 26 November 2002. Özgüden has been living in exile since the 1970s in Belgium where he is now editor of *Info-Türk*. Next hearing set for 18 February 2004 postponed to 17 May 2004. Ozguden sent a notarised letter from Belgium to the court, saying that he claimed the full legal responsibility regarding his article in question, and that he won't be attending the hearing as he found out that an *in absentia* arrest warrant against him was posted to all Turkish airports and national border gates. Özgüden and Karaca apparently face six year sentences, and Sert a heavy fine.

Arif SIRIN: nationalist poet and singer (stage name "Ozan Arif"). On trial in September 2003 alongside singer **Ismail Türüt** and director **Nursel Tozkoparan** (f) for a song performed on television on 15 April 2003 by Sirin said to have "insulted the leader of the 12 September coup Kenan Evren" under article 159 of the Turkish Penal Code. Hearing in December 2003 adjourned to a later date. PEN seeking further details.

Gülççek Günel TEKİN (f): writer. Indicted 23 December 2002 for her book "*Dilimiz Varlığımız, Dilimiz Kültürümüz*" (Our Language is Our Entity, Our Language is Our Culture) at Izmir State Security Court. Trial resumed at Istanbul State Security Court and ended on 4 April 2003. The prosecutor called for acquittal on the grounds that "the prosecuted sections of the book in fact fell within the remits of the freedom of thought". However, she was sentenced to 1 year 8 months imprisonment and her publisher Fatih Tas (see above) was heavily fined. PEN seeking further details. Presumed not detained.

Ahmet TELLI and Abdullah VARLI: well known poet and writer respectively. 1) Case launched against Telli in early April 2003 on charges of "propaganda for an illegal organisation". Telli states that his arrest is for unfurling a banner and reading a poem at a meeting of the Democratic People's Party (DEHAP) of which he is a representative. (DEHAP is a legal pro-Kurdish party comprising members of three parties. They failed to obtain the 10% of votes needed to gain parliamentary representation during the November 2002 elections.) The event occurred in November 2002 in Izmir where Telli was standing as a DEHAP candidate. 2) Case launched against Telli and Varli, together with university students **Aysen Keysan** (f) and **Seyhan Erkek** on June 2003 on charges of "propaganda in a public sector building during electoral [propaganda restrictions] period". Charges related to a meeting on 15 October 2002, prior to the parliamentary elections on 3 November 2002. PEN seeking further details.

Mehmet Ali VARIS: publisher/owner of Tohum Publishing House. Indicted in August 2003 for the book by **A. Dursun Yıldız** "*Özgürleşmeye Pedagojik Bakış*" (A Pedagogical Approach to Liberation). A phrase leading to the indictment includes "Kurdish society has been assimilated and the education system is used as a means to oppress the Alevites and Kurds." Under Article 312 of the Turkish Penal Code. PEN seeking further details.

Asim YENİHABER: journalist for *Vakit*. 312 generals have filed a lawsuit against Yenihaber and his newspaper for "insult" following an article published 25 August 2003 where the writer questioned the abilities of the generals to carry out their tasks. PEN seeking further details.

***Mehmet YÜREK:** editor in chief of the Marmaris newspaper *Degişim*. Trial instigated against him under Article 482 of the Penal Code for "insult to the honour of state president Kenan Evren". Charges relate to an article published on 16 April 2004 entitled "Decentralization, Governance, and Ten Suggestions for Marmaris' New Mayor". Trial to start at the Marmaris Court of First Instance on 6 July 2004. Yürek has reportedly previously been sentenced to one year and three month suspended prison term on 6 March 2004 for an article entitled "4 Mustafa or 4 Worship".

Ragıp ZARAKOLU: publisher, Belge Publishing House. Zarakolu is a recipient of the NOVIB/PEN Free Expression Award 2003. On 3 December 2003, further charges were initiated under article 312 against Zarakolu for an article published in *Özgür Politika* on 8 March 2003 entitled *Sana Ne (Of No Interest)* that criticised Turkey's policy towards the Kurds in Iraq. Trial opened 26 May 2004 and adjourned to 10 September 2004. Also accused are **Ali Çelik Kasımoğulları** and **Mehmet Çolak**, owner and editor in chief of *Özgür Gündem* (since closed) respectively. Zarakolu has been subject to many years of harassment, trials and periods of imprisonment since the 1970s for publishing

books on such issues including minority and human rights. His publishing house was bombed by right wing extremists in 1995, forcing his publishing house underground. **Honorary Member:** American, English, Quebec and Swedish PEN

Sentenced: non-custodial

***Aziz AYKAÇ:** owner and editor-in-chief of *Van Sehrivan*. Sentenced to a TL 58 billion fine for not publishing a letter disclaiming an article on the Van Association of the Victims of Armenian Genocide by writer **Muhittin Çelebi** published in 2003. Aykaç claimed that the disclaimer that was demanded had no relevance to the article.

Celal BESİKTEPE, Mehmet ÇOLAK: columnist for and editor-in-chief of *Özgür Gündem* (Free Agenda). On trial at Istanbul Beyoğlu Court on 17 September 2003 for an article entitled "*Savaş Tanrıları*" (Gods of War) under article 312 of the Penal Code. Trial adjourned for the preparation of the defence statements. On 1 March 2004 the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey reported that Çolak was sentenced to a fine.

***Sami BUDAK:** owner of the newspaper *Güney* published in Siirt. Sentenced to three months in prison and a fine for an article published in September 2003 seen to be insulting to a former MP. The sentence was commuted to a fine of TL 1 billion, 156 million.

Brief Detention

***Deniz BAKIR:** reporter for *Dayanışma*, reported on 17 January 2004 that he had been "kidnapped" by police. He claimed he had been drugged and dumped on the Bursa high road.

***Yusuf BASTUG:** journalist for *Evrensel*. Reportedly briefly detained on 13 June 2004 in Adana alongside Halil Emrek, a local MP. Followed their objections to a police search warrant.

***Ulviye KILIÇ** (f): editor in chief of *Yeşil Göle*. Arrested on 23 April 2004 in Göle. She was freed shortly afterwards following discussions with the Governor of Göle.

***Metin KÜLEKÇİ, Selver ORMAN:** journalist and representative of *Atilim* newspaper respectively. Reported to have been detained, presumed briefly, during a raid on their office in Ankara around 25 March 2004.

***Mehmet YÜCEDAG, Medine TUNÇ, Sadik SÜRER, Fahri KILINÇ, Sevinç TUNCELİ, İbrahim AÇIKYER:** all journalists detained at the *Özgür Gündem* offices in Izmir and held briefly on 21 January 2004.

Attacked

***Gamze MIMAROĞLU** (f): editor-in-chief of *Tavir*. Reported that she had been beaten while being held following searches of her newspaper in Istanbul by the Istanbul Security Directorate on 1 April 2004.

***Mazlum ÖZDEMİR and others:** journalist for the Dicle News Agency. Among over 33 people briefly detained and allegedly beaten during police raids of several newspaper, cultural organisation and other association offices in Istanbul on 8 June 2004. The raids are part of anti-terrorist police actions prior to a NATO summit in Istanbul 28-29 June 2004. Özdemir claims to have been beaten by police when he refused to hand over his mobile phone.

***Uğras VATANDAS:** journalist for *Evrensel* claimed to have been beaten by police as he attempted to report on demonstrations against the NATO summit in Istanbul on 29 June 2004.

Sentenced: free pending appeal

Asiye Güzel ZEYBEK (f) arrested 22 February 1997 during a demonstration protesting alleged links between Mafia and government. Zeybek, (born 1970) editor-in-chief of *Atilim*, is specifically accused under Article 168 of the Penal Code with connections with the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (MLKP). The indictment dated from 21 June 1994 accused her of running and distributing the MLKP journal *İşçinin Yolu* (Worker's Path), as well as being an organiser of the movement's activities. Formally charged on 7 March 1997. Trial proceedings began in late 1997. It was still under way on 5 June 2002 when she was freed pending a final court hearing. On 16 October 2002, Zeybek was sentenced to 12½ years in prison. By then she had left Turkey for Sweden where she was a recipient of the Tchukolsky Award. A further appeal is being made. **Torture claims:** During a trial hearing on 8 October 1997, Zeybek claimed to have been raped while under interrogation at the Istanbul Security Directorate Political Department. On 24 October 1997 her complaint against 8 policemen was accepted following a report confirming the attack from the Psycho-Social Traumatology Centre in Istanbul. The officers were brought to trial in November 1998 in Istanbul. In a hearing of the case on 1 December 1999, all those charged alongside Zeybek were reported to be remanded in custody. On 1 November 2000, it was decided not to proceed with the prosecution of

the eight policemen. Zeybek was reportedly hit by bullets in her back and leg during a police raid on her prison in December 2000. She suffered temporary paralysis and retains injuries. **Zeybek is an Honorary Member of:** Swedish PEN, English PEN, Netherlands, San Miguel Allende, Ghanaian, American, Swiss Romande, and Canadian PEN.

Released/Acquitted

Ismet BAYRAK, Ali Recai SEYHOGLU: editor-in-chief and columnist for *Kuzey Ege* indicted under Article 312 of the Penal Code for an article by Seyhoglu published between 27-29 October 2003 deemed to be insulting to the Minister of Education. Case held at the Bergama Penal Court of First Instance. Both were acquitted on 10 June 2004.

L. Filiz BINGOLCE (f), Semih SOKMEN: writer and publisher for Metis Publishing House respectively. Trial started in October 2002 for "immoral publications" for a dictionary of women's slang which includes terms of abuse used by both women and men to insult women. Several hearings between then and 16 June 2004 when both women were acquitted.

Zeynel Abidin KIZILYAPRAK: journalist sentenced to 1 year and

four months in prison in December 2000, and upheld on 14 May 2001 on charges under Article 8 of the Anti-terror Law for an article published in the now defunct *Özgür Bakis* entitled "1900'den 2000'e Kronolojik Album: Kurtler (Chronological Album of Kurds from 1900 to 2000)" Published February 2000. On 1 April 2003, Kizilyaprak was granted a visa to Germany to take up a Heinrich Böll Haus placement. The charges against him were dropped in late 2003 and he returned to Turkey in early 2004.

Hasan ÖZGÜN: a reporter with the pro-Kurdish daily "Özgür Gündem", was released on 21 April 2003 after more than nine years' imprisonment. He later faced a further 12-year jail term for "insulting state institutions" for comments made in his appeal for a retrial. Özgün, who was the *Özgür Gündem* correspondent in the south-eastern town of Diyarbakir, was accused of "insulting state institutions" (under Article 159 of the Criminal Code) in his 1998 petition for a new trial. In the petition, he accused security forces of brutality in south-eastern Anatolia under the state of emergency and of murdering journalists from pro-Kurdish newspapers. The case was heard on 9 October 2003 but an *in absentia* arrest warrant was issued against him and the case was adjourned to 18 February 2004. On 20 April 2004 the Diyarbakir Penal Court of First Instance acquitted him of the charges. Özgün was originally arrested in December 1993. On 17 January 1996, he was handed a 12-year and six-month prison sentence for "belonging to the Kurdistan Workers' Party" (PKK). Several of Özgün's colleagues were allegedly tortured and forced to make statements implicating the journalist while in police custody in 1993.

Case closed

Kemal AYDENİZ: editor-in-chief of *Odak (Focus)*. Trial ended at the Istanbul State Security Court on 28 January 2003. He was reportedly sentenced to three years and 9 months in prison for supporting an illegal organisation. Presumed free.

Sami CEBEÇİ, Saban DÖĞEN, Abdi YILDIRIM: writers for *Yeni Asya*. Convicted to 20 months in prison each on 30 May 2001 by the Istanbul State Security Court for an article stated "the earthquake on 17 August 1999 was a warning from Allah [God]". Believed to be free.

Ayhan DOĞRU: editor in chief of *Özgür Halk*. On trial in May 2002 before the Istanbul State Security Court on Charges of disseminating propaganda for an article by Freedom of Democracy Congress of Kurdistan (KADEK) on Abdullah Öcalan, formerly leader of the PKK. Trial adjourned to 16 August 2002 to allow time for Öcalan to be interviewed in his prison cell about the article. Case closed due to lack of further information.

Bülent FALAKOĞLU: editor in chief of *Evrensel*. Has had several trials against him since 2000 for articles in his newspaper. Most recently on 19 February 2002, court hearing held at the Bakirkoy Criminal Court for several articles in *Evrensel* deemed to insult the army published in April 2001. Next hearing was due 25 March 2003. Presumed no longer on trial.

Serdar GELİR: journalist for *Mücadele (Struggle)*. Arrested on 6 April 1994 when covering a demonstration in Ankara. Accused of membership of Dev Sol (Revolutionary Left). Although released due to lack of evidence, the case was reopened under article 168/2 of the Penal Code and the Anti Terror Law under which he was convicted to 15 years in prison. Gelir denies membership of the organisation. Said to be among many prisoners forcibly transferred to solitary confinement cells by police in December 2000. Also said to have taken part in hunger-strike protests against prison conditions in January 2001. In June 2002 the

Press Council confirmed he was still in prison. No news since. Case closed.

Ahmet KAHRAMAN: journalist living in Germany, on trial in March 2003 for an article published on 13 October 2002 in *Özgür Gündem* deemed under Article 159 of the Penal Code to insult Turkish identity. Case closed due to lack of information.

Kadriye KANAT (f): editor-in-chief of *Özgür Kadının Sesi (Voice of Free Women)*. Arrested on 27 December 2002 imprisoned until 23 January 2003 when her trial was due to start for articles "The Legendary Hero of the Kurdish People", "8 March and a New Feast for Peace" and "Newroz Celebrations from Imrali". Imprisoned for ignoring orders to appear at hearing in October 2002. No news since. Case closed.

Gulcan KAYA (f): editor of the MEM publishing house. On trial in May 2002 before the Istanbul State Security Court on Charges of disseminating propaganda for publishing an article by Freedom and Democracy Congress of Kurdistan (KADEK) Abdullah Öcalan, formerly leader of the PKK. Closed due to lack of further information.

Sinan ÖZYURT: owner and editor-in-chief of *Yürüyüş (The March)*. On trial on 27 January 2003 on charges under Article 312 of the Penal Code for a comment relating to the banning of headscarves. Case closed due to lack of further information.

Nazan YILMAZ (f), Sadik ÇELİK: Journalists for *Kurtuluş (Liberation)*, Zonguldak. Arrested 29 December 1995 under Article 168 (2) of the Penal Code. Sentenced on 17 October 1996 to 12 years 6 months. Accused of membership of an illegal organisation. No news since 2002 – case closed.

INTERNATIONAL PEN Writers in Prison Committee

Caselist January to June 2004

IRAN

Main Cases

Abbas ABDI

Profession: Journalist and Director of the *Ayandeh* public opinion firm. **Date of arrest:** 4 November 2002. **Sentence:** 9 years and six months' imprisonment. **Expires:** 3 May 2012. **Details of arrest:** Detained on charges of 'having received money from either the US polling firm Gallup or a foreign embassy.' The head of court 1410 (known as the press court) also ordered a search of his house. This followed the publication of an *Ayandeh* poll indicating overwhelming support for a resumption of Iran's ties with the US by the official news agency. **Details of trial:** His trial began on 1 December 2002, and he was sentenced to eight

years in prison on 2 February 2003. In April 2003 his sentence was reduced on appeal to four-and-a-half years, but was reportedly extended by five years in October 2003 for a count on the charge sheet that has not been made public. **Place of detention:** Evin Prison. **Treatment in deten-**

tion: Reportedly moved into incommunicado detention in March 2003 for further questioning and all contact with family and lawyer severed. Fears of ill-treatment. Suffering from a severe pain in his right foot and making repeated requests for a doctor. **Health concerns:** In September 2003 it was reported that Abbas Abdi was on hunger strike and had lost a great deal of weight. **Professional details:** Abdi, a former editor of the now-closed daily *Salam*, has worked for many pro-reform newspapers. **Previous detentions:** Abdi was detained for 11 months in 1991 for criticising then-president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Hashem AGHAJARI

D.o.b.: 1957 **Profession:** Prominent reformist intellectual. Head of the history department at the Tarbiat Modarress University in Tehran. **Date of arrest:** August 2002 **Sentence:** Eight years' imprisonment, commuted to four years in July 2003. **Expires:** August 2006 **Details of arrest:** Detained in connection with a speech in which he reportedly rejected demands to "blindly follow" clerical rule. **Details of trial:** He was sentenced to death for apostasy on 9 November 2002 by the Fourteenth District Court in the western city of Hamadan. In addition to the death

sentence Aghajari was sentenced to 74 lashes, eight years' imprisonment in internal exile and a 10-year teaching ban. On 17 November 2002 Ayatollah Khameni ordered the sentence to be reconsidered following extensive student protests, and on 2 December 2002 Professor Aghajari's lawyer lodged an appeal. On 10 December 2002 a senior Iranian justice official reportedly tendered his resignation in protest against the severity of the sentence. In January 2003 the Supreme Court quashed the death sentence against him 'on technical grounds' and ordered a re-trial. In July 2003 the Supreme Court reportedly commuted the death sentence to four years' imprisonment. On 15 February 2004 Aghajari sent an open letter from prison protesting the barring of pro-reform candidates from standing in the 19 February 2004 elections. On 3 May 2004 the Hamedan court is believed to have re-imposed the death sentence and sent the case back to the Supreme Court. On 1 June 2004 the Supreme Court is again reported to have quashed the death sentence. **Place of detention:** Evin Prison, Tehran. **Other information:** Member of the left-wing reformist political group the Islamic Revolutionary Mujahidin Organisation. **Honorary member of:** Norwegian PEN.

Hojjatolislam Hasan Yousefi ESHKEVARI

D.o.b.: 1950 **Profession:** Researcher and journalist. Director of the Ali Shariati Research Centre and contributing editor of the newspaper *Iran-e Farda*, banned in April 2000. **Date of arrest:** 5 August 2000 **Sentence:** 7 years **Expires:** October 2007 **Details of arrest:** Eshkevari was arrested at his home, a few hours after he flew into Tehran from a trip to Europe. He was one of a number of Iranian writers, journalists and academics who attended a conference at the Heinrich Boll Institute in Berlin on 7-9 April 2000 entitled "Iran after the elections", at which political and social reform in Iran were publicly debated. Eshkevari reportedly learned that a warrant had been issued for his arrest shortly after the conference, and had since been staying in Germany and France. Many other prominent Iranian intellectuals who attended the Berlin conference were arrested and charged. **Details of trial:** Eshkevari's trial was held behind closed doors from 7-17 October 2000 in the Special Court for the Clergy. He is believed to have been convicted of "acting against national security" in connection with a speech he gave at the conference, "defaming government officials in articles", "starting a campaign against the system", and "denying and insulting the holy religion of Islam". He was also additionally charged with "declaring war on God", "being corrupt on earth", and apostasy, all of which carry the death penalty, but the latter three charges were overturned. New charges of 'propaganda against the Islamic Republic' and 'insulting top-rank officials' were filed against him at the Special Court for the Clergy, for which he received a sentence of seven years' imprisonment on 17 October 2002 - five of which he will have to serve. His sentence was upheld upon appeal on 7 March 2003. Was eligible to apply for conditional release in January 2004. **Health concerns:** Eshkevari is an insulin-dependent diabetic, and there are unconfirmed reports that he has been unable to obtain insulin in custody. In October 2003 the Special Court for Clerics reportedly agreed to give him 5 days leave from prison per month for medical treatment. He is said to have suffered an eye haemorrhage in prison caused by diabetes. **Place of detention:** Transferred to Prison 59, a military detention centre, in April 2001. Held incommunicado until mid-July 2001. **Other information:** Adopted by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in 2001. **Honorary member of:** Canadian, Danish, Ghanaian, American, Scottish and English PEN Centres.

Amir Abbas FAKHRAVAR

Profession: Writer, journalist for the now-banned pro-reform dailies *Mosharekat* and *Khordad*, and medical student. **Date of arrest:** 10 November 2002 **Sentence:** Eight years in prison **Expires:** 9 November 2010 **Details of trial:** Sentenced by Bench 26 of the Revolutionary Court on or around the 10 November 2002 to eight years in prison for criticising the supreme leadership of Iran in his book *Inja Chah Nist* ('This Place is Not a Ditch'), shortlisted for the 2001/2 Paulo Coelho Literary Prize. Following a period of leave from Evin prison he was ordered to appear in court on 18 March 2003 for an appeal hearing. When he appeared he was denied representation by the two lawyers who had represented him on previous occasions. After an argument with the judge he was beaten in front of Bench 26 before being transferred to prison. It is thought that he may have been targeted for writing an open letter to the authorities on 4 February 2003 criticising the Iranian government and demanding a referendum on the future government of Iran. **Place of detention:** Qasr prison **Treatment in prison:** Reportedly held amongst common law prisoners and is being denied medical treatment for the reportedly severe injuries sustained in court and an existing foot injury. Said to have been repeatedly attacked in staged assaults by fellow inmates. In January 2004 he was taken from Qasr prison to a military detention centre - called "125" and which is run by the Revolutionary Guards - for interrogation about alleged links with an opposition political organisation called Jonbesh-e Azadi-ye Iraniyan. He was held in

solitary confinement and subjected to a technique of sensory deprivation is called "white torture" (*shekanjeh-e sefid*). On or around 8 February 2004, Amir Abbas Fakhravar was reportedly allowed to leave the detention centre. However, two days later he was taken into custody again. While he was free he was able to tell others about what was being done to him. It is not clear whether he is now held at "125", Qasr or elsewhere. **Health concerns:** Thought to have sustained a broken leg during the court assault. **Other information:** His sister and brother-in-law were reportedly arrested on 17 June 2003 for talking to journalists about the incarceration of Amir Abbas Fakhravar. **Honorary member of:** English PEN.

Akbar GANJI

Profession: Journalist. **Date of arrest:** 22 April 2000 **Sentence:** 6 years' imprisonment. **Expires:** 21 April 2006 **Details of arrest:** Arrested following his participation in an academic and cultural conference held

in Berlin on 7-9 April 2000 entitled "Iran after the elections", at which political and social reform in Iran were publicly debated. **Details of trial:** Trial started on 9 November 2000 at the Revolutionary Court in Tehran. On 13 January 2001 he was sentenced by Bench 3 of Tehran's Revolutionary Court to ten years' imprisonment plus five years' internal exile, four years for his attendance at the conference and six years for other charges, including "spreading propaganda against the Islamic regime", for a series of articles he had written implicating leading figures in the murders of several dissidents and intellectuals in the mid-late 90's. On 15 May 2001 an appeal court reduced his 10-year sentence to six months and overturned his additional sentence of five years internal exile. However, although he had served the entire sentence, the Tehran judiciary challenged the appeal court decision and brought new charges against him in connection with newspaper articles he wrote prior to April 2000. Sentenced on 16 July 2001 to six years' imprisonment on charges of collecting confidential information harmful to national security and spreading propaganda against the Islamic system. On 15 October 2003 he was reported to have appeared before an examining magistrate to answer questions about his book *Prison-like Archipelago*. There are said to be several cases pending against Ganji for articles he has written, including charges of 'propaganda against the regime' and publishing lies, insult and libel. **Professional details:** Author of the best-selling book *Dungeon of Ghosts*, a collection of Ganji's newspaper articles published in early 2000, in which he implicated the former president, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and other leading conservative figures in the "serial murders" of 1998. The book is said to have seriously damaged the reputation of Rafsanjani, and is thought to have been a major factor in the conservative defeat in the parliamentary elections of February 2000. **Place of detention:** Evin Prison. **Treatment in prison:** Reported in April 2003 to have spent 70 days in solitary confinement. **Health concerns:** In April 2003 his wife reported that he had been refused necessary hospital treatment for a back complaint. Said to be looking well physically and mentally in October 2003. **Other information:** Recipient of the Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE) 2000 International Press Freedom Award. **Honorary member of:** Canadian, American, Liechtenstein and English PEN Centres.

Hossein GHAZIYAN

Profession: University lecturer and director of the Ayandeh Research Group. Formerly worked for the now-banned newspaper *Nowrooz*. **Date of arrest:** 31 October 2002. **Sentence:** Nine years' imprisonment. **Expires:** 30 October 2011. **Details of arrest:** Detained by judicial officials on following a search of his Tehran office. The Ayandeh Research Group has since been closed down according to an order by the judiciary. **Details of trial:** Ghaziyan's trial began on 1 December 2002, and he was sentenced on 2 February 2003. **Place of detention:** Evin Prison, Tehran.

***Ensafali HEDAYAT**

Profession: Freelance journalist, has written for a number of reformist and overseas newspapers. **Date of arrest:** 17 January 2004. **Sentence:** 18 months' imprisonment **Expires:** 16 July 2005. **Details of arrest:** Arrested at his home in Tabriz, northwestern Iran, on 17 January 2004 by Ministry of Intelligence officials, who searched his house and seized computer equipment and personal documents. Hedayat had recently returned from Berlin, where he had been attending the founding conference of the 'Unity for Democracy and Secular Republic in Iran' (*Ettehad-e Jomhouri Khahan-e Iran*), a group which supports the peaceful establishment of a democratic and secular republic in Iran. The

conference took place in Berlin on 8-10 January 2004, and is believed to have been attended by up to 800 delegates representing a range of political views, seeking to establish a peaceful alternative political structure in opposition to the current government of Iran. Hedayat is believed to have been covering the conference as an accredited journalist. **Details of trial:** Sentenced by the Tabriz Revolutionary Court on 14 April 2004 to

eighteen months' imprisonment. He received one year for 'insulting senior officials of the Islamic republic' and six months for 'propaganda against the regime'. Sentence upheld on appeal on 11 May 2004. **Place of detention:** He is believed to be held at a detention centre under the control of the Ministry of Intelligence. **Treatment in detention:** Feared to have been ill-treated during interrogation sessions. **Health concerns:** Reported in May 2004 to have started a hunger strike. **Previous political imprisonment/problems:** Ensafali Hedayat was previously detained on 16 June 2003 whilst covering student demonstrations at the University of Tabriz, and was released on 14 July 2003. He reportedly spent 20 days in solitary confinement, and claims to have been tortured and held in poor conditions during his imprisonment.

Alireza JABARI

Profession: Translator and freelance contributor to several independent newspapers, including *Adineh* and *Shahrvand*. **Date of arrest:** 17 March 2003 **Sentence:** 4 years in prison, reduced to three years on appeal. **Expires:** 15 March 2006 **Details of arrest:** Summoned to the Police Department on 16 March 2003, where he is feared to have been ill-treated. **Details of trial:** Sentenced on 19 April 2003 to four years' imprisonment, 253 lashes and a fine of six million rials for 'consuming and distributing alcoholic drinks' and 'adultery and incitement to immoral acts.' It is believed that Jabari is being targeted for his membership of the Iranian Writers' Organisation and for sending materials to foreign-based news websites. His lawyer was not allowed to attend his trial. Reportedly summoned to court in February 2004 to answer new charges of "publishing lies with intent to disturb public opinion" for two articles published online about his treatment in detention and his criticism of the February 2004 parliamentary elections. **Place of detention:** Rajaei-shahr Prison, Tehran. **Health concerns:** Suffers from diabetes and a heart complaint, and said to be denied access to proper medical care. **Previous political imprisonment/problems:** Previously arrested on 28 December 2002 from his office in Tehran by individuals in civilian clothes. He was escorted to his home, which was searched, and videos, books and his computer's hard drive were seized. Held in solitary confinement until his release on 5 February 2003.

Siamak POURZAND

D.o.b.: 1930 **Profession:** Journalist and film critic. **Date of arrest:** 24 November 2001. **Sentence:** 11 years' imprisonment. **Expires:** 23 November 2012 **Details of arrest:** Abducted by the Iranian intelligence services on 24 November 2001. It is thought that his arrest may be connected to his position as manager of the *Majmue-ye Farrhangi-ye Honari-ye Tehran*, a cultural centre for writers, artists, and intellectuals. Pourzand is also known for his articles critical of the Islamic regime, and is said to have worked with Iranian foreign-based media. **Details of trial:** On 6 March 2002, the Iranian authorities began closed and unannounced proceedings against Pourzand. On 13 April 2002 the Tehran General Court reportedly sentenced him to eleven years' imprisonment on charges of "undermining state security through his links with monarchists and counter-revolutionaries". It is widely believed that the charges against him are based on 'confessions' which are thought to have been

extracted under duress. The sentence was reportedly confirmed on 21 May 2002 following an appeal by his court-appointed lawyers. **Place of detention:** Evin Prison **Health concerns:** Pourzand suffers from diabetes and a heart complaint. Said to have been denied necessary medical treatment in detention, and reported by his family to be in a serious condition. In May 2003 he made an application from prison for medical assistance. On 18 April 2004 he was reportedly admitted to cardiac care unit of Tehran's Modares Hospital following a reported heart attack on 30 March 2004. Reported on 25 April 2004 to have left the cardiac care unit, but his condition reportedly deteriorated and he was re-admitted to hospital. Said to have undergone surgery on his spine on 23 May 2004. **Treatment in prison:** In late July 2002 it was reported that some days earlier Pourzand had appeared on state television and confessed to espionage and denounced other intellectuals and writers. He was in apparent distress and there are concerns that he has been placed under extreme duress. **Other information:** Siamak Pourzand is the husband of writer and lawyer Mehrangiz Kar. Adopted by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. **Honorary Member:** Norwegian, Canadian and American PEN.

Taghi RAHMANI, Hoda SABER and Reza ALIJANI

Profession: Journalist with the banned weekly *Omid-é-Zangan*, co-editor of the banned monthly *Iran-é-Farda*, and editor-in-chief of *Iran-e-Farda* respectively. **Date of arrest:** 14 June 2003. **Sentence:** Seven, five-and-a-half and four years respectively. **Expires:** 13 June 2010, 13 December 2008, and 13 June 2007 respectively. **Details of arrest:** Rahmani, Alijani and Saber were reportedly arrested at their homes in Tehran on 14 June 2003 for meeting secretly with students in support of the anti-government

protests that began on 10 June 2003. The charges against them are thought to include 'attempting to overthrow the state' and 'acting against national security'. **Details of trial:** Rahmani, Saber and Alijani were among seven journalists who were sentenced on 10 May 2003 for their membership of the National Religious Alliance (Melli Mazhabi), a nationalist Islamic group that has been banned since March 2001 (see 'sentenced, free on bail' below). They received sentences of eleven, ten and six years' imprisonment respectively on charges of "subversive activities against the state". All three men remained free on bail pending appeal, but were each arrested at their homes in Tehran on 14 June 2003 for allegedly meeting secretly with students in support of the anti-government protests that began on 10 June 2003. They remained detained, and details of their detention remained unclear until 1 May 2004, when Reza Alijani learned that their appeal had been heard in absentia and their sentences confirmed as seven, five-and-a-half and four years' imprisonment respectively. Lawyers for Rahmani, Alijani and Saber have not been allowed access to their clients' files. **Place of detention:** Evin Prison. **Treatment in prison:** Held for long periods in solitary confinement and without access to their families or lawyer. Feared to be at risk of torture. Said to have started a hunger strike. **Previous political imprisonment/problems:** Rahmani previously served 13 years and Alijani 7 years in the 1980's and 90's for opposition activities

Khalil ROSTAMKHANI

D.o.b.: 1953 **Profession:** Translator and journalist with the *Daily News* and *Iran Echo*. **Date of arrest:** 8 May 2000 **Sentence:** 9 years' imprisonment, reduced to eight years on appeal. **Expires:** 7 May 2008. **Details of arrest:** Detained with translator Said Sadr (see below) for his involvement in an academic and cultural conference held at the Heinrich Böll Institute in Berlin on 7-9 April entitled "Iran after the elections", at

which political and social reform in Iran were publicly debated. The conference was marked by strong protests by Iranian political groups in exile, and was considered by members of the Iranian judiciary to be aimed at overthrowing the Islamic regime and therefore to be "harmful to national security". **Details of trial:** Rostamkhani appeared in court on 9 November 2000. He is thought to be charged with being a 'mohareb' ('fighter against god'), having 'received and distributed leaflets and press releases from opposition groups based abroad and of having participated in the organisation of the Berlin conference, which posed a threat to the country's security'. He was reportedly released on bail on 15 November 2000. On 13 January 2001 Bench 3 of Tehran's Revolutionary Court announced that he had been convicted and sentenced for organising the Berlin conference. He remained free on bail pending appeal. His appeal was heard at Branch 31 of the Supreme Court on 27 August 2001, and his conviction was upheld though his sentence was reduced by one year. He was immediately taken into custody. He is said to be seeking a re-trial. **Place of detention:** Bandar Abbas prison, southern Iran. **Other information:** Has a wife (since deceased) and child in Germany. **Previous political imprisonment/problems:** Previously arrested in June 1990 for his membership of the Organisation for Communist Unity, and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Released in May 1992 under amnesty. **Honorary member of:** PEN America and Canada.

Said SADR

Profession: Translator and editor **Date of arrest:** 8 May 2000 **Sentence:** 10 years in prison. **Expires:** 7 May 2010. **Details of arrest:** Detained with Khalil Rostamkhani (see above) for his involvement in academic and cultural conference held at the Heinrich Böll Institute in Berlin on 7-9 April entitled "Iran after the elections", at which political and social reform in Iran were publicly debated. The conference was marked by strong protests by Iranian political groups in exile, and was considered by members of the Iranian judiciary to be aimed at overthrowing the Islamic regime and therefore to be "harmful to national security". **Details of trial:** Sentenced in November 2000 for having participated in the organisation of the Berlin conference, which allegedly 'posed a threat to the country's security'. **Place of detention:** Birjand **Professional details:** Has served as editor and translator on a number of publications since 1979.

*Mohsen SAZGAR

Profession: Leading reformist journalist. Editor of the now-suspended dailies *Jameh*, *Neshat* and *Tous*, and founder of the website www.alliran.net. **Date of arrest:** 15 June 2003 **Sentence:** One years' imprisonment **Details of arrest:** Arrested on 15 June 2003 and charged with "undermining national security", "insulting the Guide of the Islamic Revolution" and "propaganda against the regime". Held until 6 October 2003 when he was released on bail. Sazgara is currently abroad receiving medical treatment, but was tried *in absentia* and learned on 8 March 2004 that he had been convicted and sentenced.

Nasser ZARAFSHAN

D.o.b: 1946. **Profession:** Author, translator and barrister. **Date of arrest:** 7 August 2002. **Sentence:** Five years' imprisonment (2 years' for disseminating state secrets, 3 years' for the possession of firearms) and seventy lashes for the possession of alcohol. **Expires:** 6 August 2007. **Details of trial:** The Judicial Organisation of Armed Forces (JOAF) brought the original complaint against Zarafshan and arrested him in October 2000. He was released after a month pending trial. In February

2002 he was tried behind closed doors by a military court, and was sentenced on 19 March 2002. The presiding judge was also a prosecutor with the JOAF. Zarafshan has repeatedly denied the charges against him, asserting that he was simply carrying out his duties as an attorney, and alleging that the weapons and alcohol were planted in his office, which was reportedly searched while he was in detention. On 6 April 2002 he reportedly told the Iranian Students News Agency that he would appeal against the sentence and demand a retrial, adding that 'the Armed Forces' Judicial Department does not have the competence to investigate charges against civilians.' However, his sentence was upheld by an appeals court on 16 July 2002. Zarafshan has reportedly appealed to the Supreme Court and is currently awaiting a decision. He is said to be undergoing medical examinations to ascertain whether he is healthy enough to face the flogging sentence. **Place of detention:** Evin Prison, Tehran. **Treatment in prison:** Zarafshan is reported to be in 'quite satisfactory' health. **Professional details:** A distinguished member of the Iranian Writers' Association (Kanoon), the Committee on Serial Killings in Iran and the Iranian Bar Association, Nasser Zarafshan is the legal representative of two of the families of Iranian writers assassinated in November 1998 in what came to be known in Iran as the 'serial murders' case. The action against Zarafshan is thought to be both in retribution for his criticism of the official investigation carried out into the murders, and also as a means of silencing others who seek the truth behind the killings. On 29 January 2003 the Iranian Supreme Court commuted the death sentences of at least two former secret agents found guilty of the murders. **Other:** Recipient of American PEN's 2004 Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award. **Honorary member:** Norwegian PEN Centre, Canadian PEN, English PEN, Swedish PEN.

Sentenced, free on bail pending appeal

Morteza KHAZEMIAN, Salde MADANI, Ezzatollah SAHABI and Ali-Reza REDJAI

Profession: Journalist with the now-banned daily *Fath*, journalist with *Iran-e-Farda*, managing editor of the journal *Iran-e Farda*, and journalist with *Asr-e-Azadegan* respectively. **Sentence:** 10, 10, 4 and 4 years' imprisonment respectively. **Details of arrest:** Ezzatollah Sahabi, who is reportedly the son of one of the founders of the National Religious Alliance, was first detained on 26 June 2000 for his participation in the Berlin conference. He was released on bail on 21 August 2000, but re-arrested on 17 December 2000 on new charges. He remained detained until 2 March 2002, when he was freed on bail. Madani, Khazemian, and Redjai were reportedly among a number of people arrested on 11 March 2001 when security agents raided a gathering at the home of journalist Mohammad Basteznaghar (see below). The gathering constituted 20-30 supporters of the 'Iran Freedom Movement' ('Nehzat-e Azadi-ye Iran') and Milli Mazhabi (National Religious Alliance), a broad and informal group of individuals advocating reform in Iran (see Rahmani, Alijani and Saber in 'main cases' above). According to the head of Tehran's Revolutionary Court, the group were "conspiring to overthrow the Islamic government". They spent periods of varying length in detention before being released on bail pending trial. **Details of trial:** The journalists were handed down sentences ranging from four to thirteen years by the Tehran Revolutionary Court on 10 May 2003 after a closed trial. They are all believed to be among fifteen members of the National Religious Alliance (Melli Mazhabi), a nationalist Islamic group that has been banned since March 2001, whose trial began in camera on 8 January 2002 on charges of "subversive activities against the state" and "blasphemy". **Honorary member** of English and American PEN.

Malihe MAGHEZEI (f): Translator and writer. Reportedly sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment in October 2003 for translating a book by prominent Moroccan feminist writer Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, into Farsi. The book was first published in Tehran in December 2001 with authorisation from the Ministry of Guidance and Culture and was reprinted after three months. However, after the second edition, and whilst Maghezei was out of the country, it was banned. Maghezei, who returned to Iran from the U.S. in July 2002, was charged in April 2003 with insulting Islam. The book's publisher and the Ministry of Guidance official each received one year's imprisonment for publishing and authorising the book. The book has reportedly been translated into eleven languages, and is said to argue that Islam sought to uplift women's status but accuses a male elite of introducing inequality. Maghezei remains free pending appeal.

Narges MOHAMMADI (f):

Profession: Prominent female journalist working for *Peyam Ajar*. **Sentence:** One year in Prison. **Details of trial:** Sentenced to one year in prison on 9 March 2003 for granting interviews to media outlets during the imprisonment of her husband, journalist Taghi Rahmani. Mohammadi reportedly remains free on bail pending appeal but is allegedly the subject of new court proceedings including 'propaganda against the regime' and 'insult to the authorities.'

Sentenced, suspended

Emadeddin BAQI: Journalist with the now suspended daily *Fath*. Charged in connection with a series of articles published in the reformist press and his book *The Tragedy of Democracy in Iran* implicating Iranian officials in the murders in recent years of a number of intellectuals and dissidents. He was tried on 9 November 2003 and on 4 December 2003 it was announced that he had been sentenced to one year in jail, suspended for five years. Details of the charges are not known. On 3 March 2004 he was summoned before the Tehran Revolutionary Tribunal's Third Division for an article critical of the February 2004 Parliamentary elections. **Previous political imprisonment/problems:** Previously arrested on 29 May 2000 and sentenced to five-and-a-half years in prison, commuted to three years on appeal, on a number of charges stemming from his critical writings, including articles that "questioned the validity of ...Islamic law", "threatening national security", and "spreading unsubstantiated news stories". Baqi was released on 6 February 2003 on completion of his sentence but since his release has been subject to repeated harassment and interrogation.

Fariba DAVOUDI (f): Journalist for the reformist press. Reportedly handed down a three-year suspended jail sentence on 28 September 2003 by the Tehran Revolutionary Court for "anti-government propaganda" and "harming state security" in articles she had written. She was also accused of signing a petition to release prisoners.

Free on bail pending trial

Alireza ESHRAGHI

Profession: Journalist for the newspaper *Hayat-e-No*. **Date of arrest:** 12 January 2003. **Details of arrest:** On 8 January 2003 *Hayat-e-No* published a reprint of a 1937 US newspaper cartoon depicting the influence that then-President Roosevelt had on the American Supreme Court, represented by a bearded, black-robed old man resembling the founder of the Islamic regime, the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. It was printed alongside an article discussing 'social collapse' in Iran. The cartoon was deemed insulting to the memory of the Ayatollah and caused the

Religious Court to order the newspaper's closure on 11 January. Editor Hedi Khameni apologised for the 'misunderstanding' and proceeded to accuse Eshraghi and a colleague, Rahman Ahmadi, of being responsible for printing the cartoon. The two journalists were subsequently arrested. Eshraghi was released on US\$27,000 bail on 9 March 2003. WIPC seeking an update.

Investigation

Alireza AHMADI: Correspondent for the daily *Asia*. Reportedly arrested on 29 July 2003. Held incommunicado without access to his family, and his lawyer has only been allowed to visit him once. Said to suffer from a heart condition, and neurological and psychological problems. There are serious concerns about his health. Still reportedly detained as of 30 June 2004.

Rahman AHMADI: Journalist for the newspaper *Hayat-e-No*. Arrested with Alireza Eshraghi (see 'free on bail pending trial' above) on 12 January 2003. On 8 January 2003 *Hayat-e-No* published a reprint of a 1937 US newspaper cartoon depicting the influence that then-President Roosevelt had on the American Supreme Court, represented by a bearded, black-robed old man resembling the founder of the Islamic regime, the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. It was printed alongside an article discussing 'social collapse' in Iran. The cartoon was deemed insulting to the memory of the Ayatollah and caused the Religious Court to order the newspaper's closure on 11 January. Editor Hedi Khameni apologised for the 'misunderstanding' and proceeded to accuse Ahmadi and Eshraghi of being responsible for printing the cartoon. The two journalists were subsequently arrested. Eshraghi was released on bail on 9 March 2003, but there has been no news of Ahmadi since his arrest. WIPC seeking further details.

Iraj JAMSHIDI: Editor-in-chief of the economic daily *Asia*. Arrested on 6 July 2003. It was originally reported that he had been charged with "propaganda against the regime" for publishing a picture of Maryam Rajavi, leader of the opposition People's Mujahideen, on 5 July 2003. However it is now unclear whether he is facing charges in connection with journalism or personal and financial issues. Jamshidi has reportedly been summoned for interrogation several times in recent years and was on a blacklist of journalists subject to surveillance. Trial reportedly

opened at the Tehran Revolutionary Tribunal's 26th Division on 24 February 2004 and is ongoing as of 30 June 2004. Held in Evin prison.

***Abbas KAKAVAND:** Freelance journalist, formerly with the conservative daily *Ressalat*. Reportedly detained on 7 June 2004 on charges of "disseminating false news" for a series of articles alleging official corruption published since February 2004 on the website www.gooya.com and in several reformist dailies. Still detained as of 30 June 2004.

Tuka MALEKI (T), Banafsheh SAMGIS (S), Jaafar HOMAI: Writer, book critic and publisher respectively. Reportedly received prison terms (length not known) in August 2003 for their involvement in the publication of two books, *The History of Women's Music in Iran from Antiquity to Present* and *Men in Armor, Women in Veil* (see **Mallheh Maghazeli** above). Both books had received official authorisation to publish from the Ministry of Islamic Guidance. Thought to remain free on bail pending appeal. WiPC seeking further details.

Hossein QAZIAN

Profession: Journalist, doctor of sociology and researcher at the Ayandeh Research Institute. **Date of arrest:** 4 November 2002. **Sentence:** Four years and six months in jail. **Details of arrest:**

Reportedly arrested with Abbas Abdi (see 'main case' above), details of charges against him not known. There was no publicity about his arrest until October 2003. WiPC seeking further details. **Place of detention:** Evin Prison.

Ali SULEYMANI: Journalist with *Shamsi-Tabriz*. Arrested immediately after visiting Baku, Azerbaijan in November 2002. His writings and some belongings were confiscated. He was detained for 28 days and was reported to have been tortured. He was released on bail, and appeared before the Ardabil Revolutionary Court on 8 January 2003. His trial continued on 21 January 2003 and was then postponed until 28 January 2003. It is thought to be likely that he will be imprisoned for an extended period. WiPC seeking an update.

SYRIA

Main case

***Aref DALILA**

D.o.b.: 1943. **Profession:** Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Economics at Damascus University, also wrote for the banned weekly *Al-Doumari*. Has written many books on economics, politics and social history. **Date of arrest:** 9 September 2001 **Sentence:** Ten years hard labour. **Expires:** 8 September 2011 **Details of arrest:** Reportedly arrested on 9 September 2001 for a lecture in which he called for democracy and transparency, and alleged official corruption. Arrested with nine other members of the Civil Society Movement. **Details of trial:** Sentenced in early 2002 to 10 years in prison with hard labour. WiPC seeking further details of charges against him. **Treatment in prison:** Said to be held in solitary confinement and denied medical treatment. **Health concerns:** Said to be seriously ill with heart problems.

***Abdul Aziz AL-KHAYER**

D.o.b.: 1951 **Profession:** Medical doctor and dissident writer. **Date of arrest:** 1 February 1992 **Sentence:** 22 years' imprisonment. **Expires:** 31 January 2014 **Details of arrest:** Arrested in Damascus for his membership of the *Hizb al-'Amal al-Shuyu'i* (Party for Communist Action), which is not known to have used or advocated violence. **Details of trial:** Convicted in August 1995 by the Syrian State Security Court (SSSC). Four others tried at the same time as Al-Khayer, including poet and former PEN main case Faraj Baraykdar with whom he shared a prison cell, were released in December 2001 under a presidential amnesty. It is not known why Al-Khayer was not included in the amnesty. He was not taken up by International PEN until now as he was not known to be a writer. His writings reportedly include many political essays, including 'Nuptials of Dictatorship', and a publication called *The Black Book* which reportedly alleged corruption in Assad's regime. **Place of detention:** Sednaya prison, Damascus. **Treatment in prison:** Reported to be allowed greater freedom within the prison in recent years and to be able to provide medical care to a great number of prisoners. Said to have been denied family visits for over a year.

***Abdel Rahman al-SHAQOURI**

D.o.b.: 1972 **Profession:** Internet activist. **Date of arrest:** 23 February 2003 **Sentence:** Three years' imprisonment, reduced to two-and-a-half years. **Expires:** 22 August 2005 **Details of arrest:** Reportedly arrested at

a checkpoint near Damascus for sending an email newsletter from the banned website www.thisissyria.net (Levant News), which posts political news, including reports about Syrian political prisoners. The authorities reportedly consider material on the site to be "detrimental to the reputation and security of the nation" and "full of ideas and views opposed to the system of government in Syria". **Details of trial:** Sentenced to three years' imprisonment for "disseminating false information" by the Supreme State Security Court, a military court with no recourse for appeal, on 20 June 2004. The sentence was reportedly immediately reduced to two-and-a-half years. **Place of detention:** Saidnaya prison, near Damascus. **Treatment in prison:** Held incommunicado in solitary confinement since his arrest. **Other information:** He is married with two children. This is the first known jailing of an internet dissident in Syria.

Nu'man 'Ali 'ABDU

Profession: Journalist for Lebanese monthly *Al-Tarik*. **Date of arrest:** 1992 **Sentence:** 15 years **Expires:** 2007 **Details of trial:** Apparently sentenced in 1993 to fifteen years' imprisonment for his membership of the Party for Communist Action. **Place of detention:** Reportedly transferred from Seydnaya prison to a detention centre in Damascus on 16 November 2000. **Health concerns:** He is said to suffer from a chronic open leg wound, according to reports from former prisoners.

Investigation

***Habib 'ISSA:** Lawyer, journalist and writer. Reportedly arrested in September 2001 and sentenced by the State Security Court to five years' imprisonment for his activities with the Civil Society Movement (see Aref Dalila above). WiPC seeking further details.

***Aktham NU'AYSA:** Lawyer and human rights defender. Head of the Committee for the Defence of Democratic Liberties and Human Rights (CDDLHR). Reportedly arrested on 13 April 2004 and believed to be facing charges of "carrying out activities contrary to the socialist system of the state" and "opposing the objectives of the revolution", which carry a maximum penalty of 15 years' imprisonment. The charges against him are thought to relate to his work with the CDDLHR, including an annual report on human rights violations in Syria published shortly before his arrest. Nu'Aysa is said to be in very poor health, suffering from kidney disease and a heart complaint. He is said to have suffered a minor stroke following his arrest, and to have been taken to Tishrin Hospital. Now believed to be held in solitary confinement in Sednaya Prison. Reported to have started a hunger strike in June 2004.

***Muhannad QUTAYSH, Haytham QUTAYSH and Yahia al-AWS:** Internet activists. Reportedly arrested around January 2003 for sending articles to an electronic newspaper in the United Arab Emirates. Said to be charged with "receiving secret information on behalf of a foreign state which threatens the security of Syria" and "publishing false news outside of Syria". Haytham and Muhannad Qutaysh are both reportedly charged with "encouraging the transfer of secret information" and Haytham Qutaysh is additionally charged with "writing which threatens the security of Syria and her relations with foreign states". They had reportedly been writing articles under pseudonyms about government corruption, politics, economics and human rights issues in Syria. Held in Sednaya prison without trial as of 30 June 2004.

Brief detention

***Mohammed GHANEM:** D.o.b.: 1955. Writer and journalist. Reportedly arrested by the Syrian military intelligence on 22 March 2004 in Ar-Raqah as he returned home from the school where he works as a teacher. His detention is believed to have been connected with the publication of

an article 'They are murdering the Kurds', in which Ghanem condemned the recent violent clashes between Kurds, Arab tribes and security forces in the Qamichli region, north-east Syria. The authorities reportedly saw his article as inciting 'disunity'. Mohammed Ghanem has published two novels, *The Death of Silence* and *al-Amili*, and is a regular contributor to several Arabic newspapers, in particular *Al-Khaleej* and *Al-Bayane*. He is described as an "independent opposition figure", and has been actively involved in campaigning for the rights of Kurds and Iraqis living in Syria. Released on 4 April 2004.

Released

Marwan OSMAN ('UTHMAN): Kurdish writer and poet, leading member of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Unity Party (SKDUP). Arrested on 15 December 2002 for his participation in a peaceful demonstration held by the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Unity Party on 10 December 2002 demanding greater protection for the rights of Kurds living in Syria. Charged on 15 January 2003 with 'inciting religious and ethnic discord.' Acquitted by the Supreme State Security Court on 22 February 2004.

