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IRAQ: MASS TURNOUT FOR THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS



HE Iraqis of all communities voted massively on 15 December to elect their members of Parliament in a poll that was marked by a relative calm and strong competition between candidates. Some 15 million electors were called upon to elect the 275 members of the new Parliament. The electors had to

choose between 7,655 candidates put forwards by 307 "political entities" and 19 coalitions standing. About 70% of the Iraqi electors took part in the elections, at 33,000 polling stations — a marked increase over the last elections. Over 23,000 Iraqis residing in Germany, but also in Spain, Poland and in Holland voted in Germany in the

course of the last three days. "The number of those who took part in the election must be somewhere between 10 and 11 million electors, according to our first estimates" declared a senior official of the electoral commission, Farid Ayar. The figures for participation were 59% at the January general elections, while for the constitutional referendum they increased to 63%. The increase can mainly be explained by the unprecedented participation of the Sunni Arab minority, which had abstained from the January polls.

The Shiite list came first in five provinces South of Baghdad, while the Kurdish alliance won overwhelmingly in Kurdistan, according to unofficial results of the poll. The result of the Unified Iraqi Alliance (UIA) is no surprise, these Shiite provinces being massively behind this list, which unites the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) led by Abdel Aziz Hakim, the Dawa Party, led by outgoing Prime Minister al Jaafari and the Moqtada Sadr's radical trend. It was in Kerbala Province that this list is said to have secured its higher score, with 85% of the vote according to results given on 16 December by sources close to the electoral commission. In Missan province, according to a Dawa Party official, Latif Abud, it won 86% — but this is subject to confirmation. At Najaf is said to have won 80%, with a turnout of the same order, while at Qaddisiya the score is said to be as high as 86% according to sources close to the electoral commission. In Babylon Province, 70% of the 749,000 electors are said to have voted for the AUI, accord to a source close to the electoral commission in provincial capital of Hilla.

In Kurdistan, the Alliance, that included the two main parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), was overwhelmingly successful in the three provinces of the region. In Erbil it won 86% of the votes, followed by the Kurdish Islamic Party (3.4%) according to a PUK official. At Dohuk it won 76%, here again followed by the Kurdish

Islamic Party 7%). Finally, in Suleimaniah it won 71% while the Islamic party won 8.3% — all according to the same source. The Kurdish coalition won an absolute majority, with 52% of the votes, according to incomplete results. The two main Sunni Arab lists won a total of 20% and the Turcoman list 11%. "This is a historic day and a cause for celebration for all Iraqis" proclaimed, for his part, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, who was the first to cast his vote in a school in the city of Suleimaniah.

After having voted, an official of the Independent Electoral Commission, Hussein Hindawi pointed out that in the Sunni Arab province of Anbar, still the scene of military offensives, 162 polling stations were open as against 207 planned. To everyone's surprise, Saddam Hussein's supporters, who had been so strongly opposed to the January elections, called on the Sunni Arab community (of which most of them are embers) to vote and on the al Qaida activists not to disturb the elections. This call by the Baathists could be the sign of a growing split between Saddam Hussein's supporters and the jihadist Moslem trend. In January the Association of Sunni scholars had urged the community to boycott the poll. Today the organisation says it is neutral, though some of its members have presented participation in the elections as a "religious duty". The Islamic Conference Organisation also urged the Iraqi Sunni Arabs "massively" to take part in the elections to strengthen their position. The Council of Moslem Ulemas, the

principal Sunni clerical organisation in Iraq, had announced, on 6 December, that it would not be taking part in the 15 December elections while not call for them to be boycotted.

The final results are expected around the first week of January. According to preliminary results, the Unified Iraqi Alliance is in the lead but does not seem to have enough of a majority to govern on its own. It may win 130 — far from the 184 needed to avoid having to form a coalition with other parties. The Kurds may win 55 seats and the main Sunni Arab parties about fifty, with Allawi's coalition probably winning 25.

Kurdistan was bubbling over with post elections discussions between the Kurdish parties and those on the Shiite Unified Iraqi Alliance, which are in the lead. Negotiations on the setting up of a "great coalition", aimed at easing the ethnic and religious tensions intensified by the elections began with the visit to Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, of Abdul Aziz al-Hakim. Thus the leader of the Shiite coalition met, successively, Massud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, the present Iraqi President and leader of the second Kurdish party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). "We have agreed on the principle of forming a government with a broad popular base, involving all the parties", declared Massud Barzani, President of Iraqi Kurdistan at a press conference given jointly with Abdul Aziz al-Hakim. Le latter, whose party has been running the government,

alongside the Kurdish block, for the last year, is next due to meet President Jalal Talabani. A Sunni Arab delegation is also due, for the first time ever, to visit Iraqi Kurdistan and meet the Kurdish leaders.

Welcomed from Canberra to Washington, including capitals like Rome and Moscow, the 16 December elections aroused no official reactions from the neighbouring countries, even if the Arab press saw it as a democratic advance for the country. In Washington, US President G.W. Bush described the elections as "*an important step forward*" towards American objectives for Iraq. British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and his Foreign Minister, Jack Straw, for their part, welcomed these "*completely free*" elections as a "*historic day*". The UN General Secretary, Kofi Annan, also welcomed the smooth running of the elections, while hoping that "*everyone would accept the results and observe the rules, and that everyone would cooperate to form a national government*".

The Arab press in the region, indeed, stressed the massive turnout for the poll and particularly that of the Sunni Arabs, who had stayed away from the polls in January. In Europe, France and Germany, that had opposed the American intervention in Iraq in 2003, made no comments immediately following the elections. Even Russia, hostile to the intervention in 2003, welcomed "*the outcome of the transition period*", which opens "*a new page in contemporary Iraqi history*". No Middle Eastern country has yet reacted officially, except

for Turkey. Ankara evoked "*an important stage in the political process in Iraq*". However, the Arab press welcomed this historic poll. "*The whole of Iraq voted*" headlined the Saudi financed London based daily *Asharq al-Awsat*, observing that "*election day went by peacefully*". "*It was the voice of the Iraqi people that was heard yesterday, not terrorist bombs*", pointed out the English language daily *Arab News*. The Emirate daily, *Al-Ittihad* welcomed "*the massive participation of the Sunni Arabs*" as did the Lebanese *An-Nahar*, which considered that this participation "*gives legitimacy to the elections*". "*The Sunnis voted in force in the first parliamentary elections in Iraq*" headlined Egypt's semi-governmental daily *Al-Ahram*. "*It is democracy, not electoral boycotting or extremist groups that will protect the Sunnis and preserve their position in Iraq. This consensus is capable of getting Iraq out of its crisis and laying the first stone for the country's return to full sovereignty, which will enable the government to ask for the withdrawal of foreign troops*", noted *Al-Ahram's* editorial.

The first general elections in Iraq since the ratification of the Constitution in October will enable the election of Members of Parliament responsible for setting up a government whose term of office should be for four years. During this period, the United States and its coalition partners should gradually reduce their military presence in favour of Iraqi forces. Of the 275 seats, 230 are allocated to the 18 provinces and 45, called "*national seats*" will be allocated to parties that failed to win any seat at provincial level, but whose national score was sufficiently high. The substantial degree of participation gives the new National Assembly, due to sit for the next four years, a strong legitimacy for the first time since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Indeed, the outgoing parliament, the first elected by universal suffrage since the intervention in Iraq, only sat for eleven months. The new M.P.s will have to choose a Prime Minister who will form a government and a Presidential Council consisting of a Head of State and two Vice-Presidents.

MASSUD BARZANI AND JALAL TALABANI MEET WITH IRAQI LEADERS TO FORM THE FUTURE GOVERNMENT

THE haggling to form a broader government has begun in Iraq. The outgoing Prime Minister, Ibrahim Jaafari, arrived in Kurdistan on 31 December to meet the President of Kurdistan, Massud Barzani, while President Jalal Talabani was due to meet the Speaker of the House, Hajem al-Hassani.

The three leaders of the Concord list (Sunni Arab), Adnan al-Dulaimi, Tariq al-Hashimi and Khalaf al-Ulayan, also arrived in Irbil for discussions with Mr. Barzani. A representative of Moqtada Sadr's radical trend, made public, for his part, the fact that they had contacts with the Concord list and declared that his group, which had stood in the 15

December elections on the Shiite list, was in favour of maintaining in office the outgoing Prime Minister, Ibrahim Jaafari. The latter had already been put forward as candidate for this by his Dawa Party, one of the two pillars of the United Iraqi Alliance, alongside the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, led by Abdel Aziz al-Hakim.

For this part, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, head of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) made a very public visit to Kurdistan, in the course of which he stressed the *"strategic alliance"* between the Shiites and the Kurds, which had formed the outgoing government. On 29 December, Mr. Hakim met Jalal Talabani, who champions the idea of a government of national unity. *"The Kurdish coalition and the Shiite alliance have agreed on the principle of a government of national unity"*, Mr. Talabani stated to the Press at Dokan, a holiday resort some 400 Km from Baghdad. He stressed, however, that association with other parties had to be on the basis of a programme. *"The other parties must believe in certain principles"*, he pointed out, citing in particular *"the rejection of terrorism"*. In this context, Mr. Talabani stressed, with regard to the Sunni Arab leader Saleh Motlak, that *"he cannot be with the terrorists at night and with us in the daytime"*. For his part Mr. Hakim praised the *"strategic alliance"* between his people and the Kurds, pillars of the outgoing government. *"Our alliance does not mean the exclusion of others and is directed against no one"*, he stated.

Before meeting Mr. Talabani, Mr. Hakim met the President of Iraqi Kurdistan, Massud Barzani, who advocated a cabinet with a *"broad popular basis"*. After the discussions, the outgoing Foreign Minister, Hoshyar Zebari, explained the country's need for a government of national unity. *"Our two list could, by themselves, form a government, but this would not be in the interests of Iraq at this moment"*, he declared to the press. *"It is necessary to form a government of national unity with the participation of other parties"* he added, stressing the need to form this cabinet rapidly.

The Shiite coalition warned, even before the beginning of negotiations, that the next Prime Minister would be either the present incumbent, Ibrahim Jaafari or Vice-President Adel Abdel Mahdi. *"The choice lies between those two. They are the candidates of the Alliance and there is not a third one"*, declared an authorised source with in the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA). Mr. Jaafari, head of the Dawa Party, has already experience of the task, which he has been carrying out since last April. However, his record as Prime Minister could count against him, stressed some people in the Alliance. His government has not succeeded in subduing the terrorists and ordinary Iraqis also criticise him for not having restored basic public services. Some doubts about his democratic reliability have also arisen since the discovery, in the autumn of a secret prison managed by the Ministry of the Interior. This affair is fuelling the suspicions of systematic violations of

human rights by Shiite militia working for the government.

Adel Abdel Mahdi, a former Minister of finance, enjoys, for his part, the support of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), the other major component of the UIA. An economist, who speaks both French and English, he has spent many years in exile in France. Mr. Mahdi has good relations with the Kurds and Washington regards him as a moderate.

The United States, which is trying, in the background, to influence the course of political events in Iraq, do not hide their irritation with Mr. Jaafari. Apart from the economy and human rights, the American hold against him his links with Iran. The Iraqi Prime Minister could also suffer from his bad relations with the Kurdish partners in the outgoing coalition. The Kurds criticise him for failing to respect the coalition agreement and of failing to support their claims to the city of Kirkuk. *"We were not satisfied with this alliance because they did not observe the agreement protocol established between us"*, the President of Kurdistan, Massud Barzani had declared two days before the 15 December poll. *"This does not mean that we will cancel this alliance, but we are seeking to widen it"*, he had added. In the opinion of the Kurdish analyst and writer, Abdelguani Ali Yehya, there had never really been an alliance between the two parties. *"They agreed on certain points without really allying themselves"*, he stated. He considered that the political gap

between the UIA and the Kurds is too great *"particularly over the question of Kirkuk"*. Sami Shores, Kurdistan Minister of Culture explains that every party that wants to be allied to the Kurds must fulfil certain conditions. *"It must support the rights of the Kurdish people in the framework of a federal Iraq, allow the annulment of the Arabisation of Kirkuk and adopt a democratic basis, which is the only means of preserving Kurdish rights"*, he states. *"We must finalise a political programme with our eventual allies before forming a government"*, declared, for his part

Adnan Mufti, Speaker of the Kurdistan Parliament.

Many and serious problems appeared between the UIA and the Kurds after the formation of their alliance, particularly during the drawing up of the Constitution, on such subjects as the place of Islam in the law, on the role of women and on federalism. President Jalal Talabani had even gone so far as to accuse the UIA's Prime Minister, Ibrahim Jaafari, of monopolising power and hence forward is demanding more substantial prerogatives for the Head of State.

THE DUTCH COURTS RECOGNISE THE GENOCIDE OF THE KURDS COMMITTED AT HALABJA AND SENTENCE A BUSINESSMAN FOR HAVING SOLD CHEMICAL PRODUCTS TO SADDAM HUSSEIN

THE Dutch courts have ruled that there had indeed been genocide against the Kurdish population of Iraq, particularly at Halabja in March 1988 — a massacre that killed 5,000 people in a single day. But the court ruled that the 63-year-old businessman did not know the genocidal intentions of the former Iraqi regime. However, *"the war crimes in which he took part are extremely serious and caused the death of many people"* the court observed. Recognised guilty of collusion with war crimes, the Dutch businessman, Frans van Anraat was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment for having sold Saddam Hussein's Iraq tons of chemicals used for carrying out gas attacks.

This man had been charged before the Court at The Hague in the basis of a Dutch Supreme Court ruling that Dutch courts had universal competence for trying persons suspected of war crimes or crimes against humanity if they were resident in the country.

The court found that the accused had sold tons of active chemicals while knowing that they would be used by Saddam Hussein for making lethal gases during the Iraqi-Iranian war of 1980 to 1988 as well as against the Kurdish population of Iraq, particularly in the village of Halabja in 1988. *"His deliveries enabled these attacks and they constitute a serious war crime. It is no answer that this would have happened in any case even without his contribution"*, declared

the presiding judge to the court. *"Even the maximum sentence (of 15 years) is insufficient in view of the seriousness of these acts"*, he added. The defence lawyers have announced that they would be appealing against this verdict.

Over fifty of the victims' relatives, some in traditional clothing, were present, with interpreters, at the hearing, from which Van Anraat was absent. Fifteen Kurds of Iran and Iraq had taken civil action before this court each claiming symbolic damages of 680 euros — the maximum allowable under Dutch law at the time of the events. Although this is the first time that a court has passed a sentence regarding the Halabja massacre, this decision is unlikely to have much effect on the work of the Iraqi Special Court.

The United Nations inspectors had described Frans van Anraat as one of Saddam Hussein's most important intermediaries for procuring chemical weapons. The accused was arrested in December 2004 at his home as he was preparing to leave Holland. He had been arrested in the first instance in Milan, in 1989, at the request of the United States, before being released two months later. He then sought refuge in Iraq, where he lived under a false identity provided by members of the old regime: Faris Mansur Rasheed al Bazzaz, which means *"brave and intelligent cloth merchant"*. He lived there until the American intervention in 2003, when he returned to Holland via Syria.

The Prosecution declared that van Anraat had been involved in the sale to Iraq of over 1,000 tons of thiodiglycol — an industrial chemical that is a component part of mustard gas — 800 tons of which were used on the battlefields. The court's

presiding judge also stated that the accused had shown no remorse since he sought to sell other consignments of thiodiglycol after having seen pictures of the Halabja massacre, in which 5,000 people were killed.

IRAQI KURDISTAN REMAINS THE MOST STABLE REGIONS DESPITE THE TENSIONS OF THIS ELECTION MONTH

ON 4 December, Massud Barzani, the President of Iraqi Kurdistan, denied the presence on Kurdistan of Israeli instructors who, according to the Israeli daily *Yediot Aharonot*, had come to train Kurdish fighters. "This information is completely untrue", declared Mr. Barzani to the press following a meeting with the Head of State in Irbil.

On 1 December, the Israeli daily, *Yediot Aharonot*, reported that dozens of Israeli instructors, sent to Kurdistan by private companies specialised in the security, were training Kurdish fighters in a "secret" military base. According to the paper, the Israeli companies were also building an international airport in the Irbil region, Hawler Airport. "Irbil Airport is open and planes from many countries are landing there every day", he added. "The peshmergas don't need anyone to train them", stated Mr. Barzani.

On 30 December, the other hand, the South Korean National Assembly adopted the government's plan to withdraw a third of the South

Korean troops stationed in Iraqi Kurdistan and to extend by a year the mandate of the remaining troops. The government's plan involved the withdrawal of one third of the 3,200 South Korean soldiers working in Iraqi Kurdistan, where they are responsible for helping with the reconstruction.

Furthermore, on 6 December three Kurds, one of whom was a candidate for the 15 December elections, were killed in attacks against the offices of the Kurdistan Islamic Union. Mushir Ahmad, a leader of the Union and a candidate in the

coming elections, died in the attack on the Party's Committee Rooms in the town of Dohuk. Two other members of the party died in another attack at Zakho and several other people were wounded in acts of violence against Committee Rooms in four other towns in Dohuk Province.

The Iraqi Islamic Party, Iraq's principal Sunni political organisation, condemned these attacks, which took place "in Kurdistan, a region that enjoys, more than others, stability, democracy and freedom of expression". The President of Kurdistan, Massud Barzani, for his part, rejected these attacks. "We refuse to countenance this sort of behaviour and condemn it", he stated in a communiqué. "In Kurdistan, all the parties are free under the law and we will not allow any violation of this freedom", added Mr. Barzani, calling on the Dohuk authorities to put an end to it. The Islamic Union, which had been part of the Kurdish coalition during the January elections, is standing alone in the 15 December polls.

DAMASCUS: THE HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS ATTACK THE ARRESTS AND THE UNJUST AND UNCONSTITUTIONAL TRIALS

ON 10 December, Syrian security forces dispersed a sit-in in Damascus, organised by the opposition. About fifty people, who had gathered in the centre of the Syrian capital, were soon after dispersed by the anti-riot police. The National Democratic Rally (NDR),

a coalition of five banned parties, which, in principle, was due to take part in this sit-in to celebrate World Human Rights Day, as it does every year, had decided at a meeting on the day before not to take part in this event. The NDR took this decision because of "the situation through which the country is

going and the outside pressures at present weighing on Syria", declared Aziz Daoui, a leader of the Kurdish Democratic and Progressive Party. The demonstrators demanded, during their sit-in, observance "of the principles of human rights and a just solution to the Kurdish question in the framework of the country's unity". They also called for the restoration of Syrian nationality to the Kurds from whom it had been withdrawn. The demonstrators also demanded that the Syrian authorities "annul the State of Emergency and grant civil liberties" to the population.

Moreover, the trial of the Syrian opposition activist, Hassan Abdel Azim, spokesman of the NDR, which began on the same day, before a Damascus military court, was postponed till 19 January 2006 reported the Arab Human Rights Organisation (AHRO) in a communiqué. Some American diplomats attended the military court's hearing. Mr. Abdel-Azim is accused of "being in possession of (banned) publications", an allusion to the NDR paper, *Al Mawaqef al-Dimucrati*, which has been appearing regularly since 1991. "AHRO expresses its anxiety at the repeated violations of the Constitution by the Syrian authorities and asks them to drop the charges against Abdel-Azim", adds the AHRO spokesman, Amar Qorabi.

On 18 December, the Syrian State Security Court also sentenced a Kurd to two years imprisonment for membership of "a secret organisation", reported Mr. Anouar Bounni, the Human Rights legal activist. Mohammad Dib Bilal, a member of the Democratic Union Party, a

banned Kurdish organisation, was arrested in January 2004. "His state of health has deteriorated because of the conditions of his detention", stressed Mr. Bounni.

On the other hand, the Court postponed to next year the trial of fourteen Kurds, incarcerated for nearly a year, and "accused of belonging to al-Qaida", Ussama ben Laden's terrorist organisation. These defendants have announced their intention of "beginning a hunger strike today" along with about thirty of their comrades incarcerated in the Sayadnaya prison near Damascus, "to protest against the conditions under which they are being detained", added Mr. Bounni, who describes these trials as "unjust" and "unconstitutional".

On 20 December, the French League for the Rights of Man (LDH) and a Frenchman of Lebanese origin stated that on 15 December they had registered a complaint against X with the Public Prosecutor's Office at Nanterre (just outside Paris) for "arrest, arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment" perpetrated in Syria. "During a recent stay in Syria, my client was victim of an arbitrary arrest and detention, of torture and ill-treatment, act prohibited by international conventions and which are breaches of the French Penal Code", explained Mr. Patrick Baudouin. "On 5 September 2005, while he was travelling from Lebanon to Syria, Mr. F. was stopped by the Syrian customs at a border post, as a result of confusion with someone else of the same name", declared, for its part the LDH in a communiqué. "After a fairly violent first interrogation, during which the mistake over his identity

became apparent, he was taken to Damascus, to detention centre 235, better known as the "Palestine Branch", which is run by the military secret services", according to the League. "My client was then beaten, in particular with an electric cable and an iron bar. Then he was placed for ten days in a tiny, dark and unventilated cell with about fifty other people before finally being released on 15 September without receiving any explanation", added Mr. Baudouin. The International Federation for the Rights of Man (FIDH) has associated itself with the registration of this complaint.

Furthermore, on 4 December there were clashes between "activists" and Syrian security forces on the road running from Aleppo city centre to its Airport. The Al-Arabiya TV network also reported clashes between soldiers and activists at Aleppo, the first in the region for three months. It is not known if there were any victims of these clashes nor to what group the activists belonged. Amar Qorabi also announced that 11 islamists, arrested over a year ago, were brought before the High State Security Court in Damascus. "Eleven people, natives of al-Oteiba (20 Km East of Damascus) appeared before the Damascus High State Security Court for the fourth time, charged with belonging to the salafist trend" (which preaches a return to early sources of Islam) said Mr. Korbi. Following these hearings, the trial was postponed till 2 April it was pointed out. The Syrian authorities arrested these people "about a year and a half ago". They have forbidden their families to visit them in the Sidnaya Prison (40 Km North-East of Dam-

ascus) according to Mr. Korbi, who has asked that *"the accused be sent before an ordinary court instead of the High State Security Court, which is unconstitutional, and that their families be allowed to visit them"*.

Eight other activists were killed by the Syrian security forces during a clash on 8 December at Idlib, in Northern Syria. The Syrian soldiers killed five extremists while three others committed suicide before being captured, pointed out the Syrian press agency SANA. The Agency indicated that the activists belonged to the *"takfiri"* group, a reference to activists who consider that Moslems who do not share their views are *"infidels"*.

Terrorist attacks are rare in Syria, a tightly controlled country where the regime uses severe methods of repressing islamist extremists as well as all forms of instability, but several clashes involving *"activists"* have occurred this year. On 2 September the Syrian security forces killed five members of the extremist group Jund al-Shams (Soldiers of the East) in the North of Syria and seized bombs and arms in an operation that enabled the authorities to foil several terrorist plans. The Syrian forces also acted against another Jund al-Shams cache in Damascus, killing two of the activist. A member of the security forces was also killed. This group had been formed in Afghanistan by Syrians, Palestinians and Jordanians linked to Abu Massab al-Zarqawi, the al-Qaida boss in Iraq. In July, clashes took place between security forces and activists (including former members of the bodyguard of Saddam Hus-

sein, former Iraqi President, and other men involved in the Iraqi insurrection) in an area overlooking Damascus.

The Syrian authorities are trying to show the Americans that they are actively fighting against the islamist— and at the same time welcoming Americans that are cast in the same mould as themselves... Thus, at the beginning of the month of August, the well known Louisiana politician, David Dukes, visited Syria, where he made an anti-Semitic speech attacking *"the*

Zionist who are occupying New York and the State of Israel'. This speech was broadcast by the Syrian television network. David Duke, who is a white supremacist and former *"Knight"* of the Klu Klux Klan, declared, addressing the crowd in Damascus *"my country is occupied by the Zionists, like the Golan heights"*. In its latest edition, Duke's web site quotes a Syrian Member of Parliament, Muhammad Habash, who talks of *"Duke's magnificent visit"*. Habash is said to have added: *"He brought us a new perspective of the average American"*.

TEHERAN IS ACCUSED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION OF SERIOUS AND REPEATED VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

ON 20 December, the European Union accused Iran of serious and repeated human rights violations and of executing children in a statement published on the eve of the resumption of nuclear discussions with Teheran in Vienna. *"The fact that the human rights situation in Iran has not improved in recent years and in certain respects has even worsened, deeply worries the E.U."*, stressed this statement published by the British presidency.

"Iran has executed more children in 2005 than in recent years", the E.U. charges, adding that *"the recourse to the death sentence is frequent, including for minor crimes and the executions often take place in public"*. *"Freedom of expression is still severely limited. Censorship on Internet and in the press is widespread"*, adds the E.U.

"High-ranking people have reported important lapses in the conduct of the June 2005 presidential elections and the process allowing the selection of candidates to be allowed to stand out of the many wishing to stand was not democratic", the statement points out. *"We continue to receive information regarding about torture"* adds the E.U. *"Human rights activists continue to report harassment and intimidation and Iran continues to detain prisoners of conscience like Akbar Ganji and his lawyer Abdolfattah Soltani"*.

"The way that Iran treats its ethnic and religious minorities also worries us", continued the British presidency of the E.U. *"We call on Iran to show, by its actions, a commitment to observing human rights"* and to reopen the dialogue on human rights that took place between 2002 and 2004. According to this document, the

declaration commits the 25 but also has the support of Bulgaria, Rumania, Croatia, Turkey, Macedonia,

Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, the Ukraine, and Moldavia.

VISITS TO IRAQ BY DICK CHENEY, DONALD RUMSFELD AND TONY BLAIR

ON 18 December, US Vice President Dick Cheney, made a surprise visit to Iraq where he met President Jalal Talabani and Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari. This is Mr. Cheney's first visit to Iraq since the US intervention there in March 2003. Mr. Cheney considered that *"the level of participation (in the elections) throughout the country is remarkable"*, following a meeting in Baghdad with the principal US military commanders. *"This is exactly what must take place in the course of the setting up of a political structure (...), which can unite the different components of the population and, in time, be responsible for security"*, he added to journalist. The Vice President arrived in the morning in Baghdad, where he met Messrs. Talabani and Jaafari separately. He also made a visit to the US military base at Taji, to the North of the capital, where he greeted the American and Iraqi troops.

Dick Cheney's visit was followed by that of US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who arrived, unexpectedly, to meet the heads of the US contingent there and evaluate the situation with them. Coming from Afghanistan, the US Secretary of Defence was welcomed to Baghdad airport, on 22 December, by General George Casey, commander of US forces in Iraq. The next day,

Donald Rumsfeld chose Falluja to announce his country's intention of withdrawing two combat brigades, that is between 5,000 and 9,000 soldiers, by the spring of 2006.

Furthermore, the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, also made a brief and unexpected visit to Basra to keep up the moral of the British troops on the eve of Christmas. Speaking from the top of a tank carrier, at the logistic base of Shai-ba, near the Southern metropolis, the Labour Prime Minister assured them that their presence in Iraq was contributing to the security of the country, of the Middle East and of the whole world in the face of international terrorism. *"It is important to help this country, and the only way to do this is to bring it security so that the Iraqi forces can be consolidated — then we can reduce our own capaci-*

ties", he insisted, Tony Blair, for whom this is the fourth visit to Iraq since March 2003, met the British and American military leaders to be informed on security matters following the 15 December elections. General George Casey, Commander of the US forces in Iraq, assured the British Prime Minister that, by the summer, the Iraqis would have taken charge of 75% of the security in certain regions. Mr. Blair has, so far, refused to put forward any timetable for the withdrawal of the last 8,000 of his troops at present in Iraq, but seemed to consider, on 22 December, that the smooth running of the elections marked a turning point.

Comparing with Baghdad, that the US forces have difficulty in controlling, the region of Basra, controlled by British troops, is relatively calm, but violence has broken out in the last few months. At the beginning of the war, Britain had committed 45,000 men. Their losses, over the three years total 98 dead, a figure that cannot be compared with the 2,160 men lost by the United States.

2005 ENDS WITH AMERICAN LOSSES IN IRAQ IDENTICAL TO THOSE OF 2004, BUT WITH SOME POLITICAL PROGRESS

THE US army recorded almost identical losses on 2005 as in 2004 — but with some notable political advances. The last death of a GI, on 31 December, as a result of wounds following a mortar attack in Baghdad, brought the number of US soldiers killed in Iraq in 2005 to

842, 65 of whom in the month of December alone. In 2004 and 2003 the US losses were 846 and 485 respectively.

Violence continues, moreover, in this month of December devoted to the elections, despite American-Iraqi military operations to subdue

the terrorists. In Baghdad, on 8 December, a suicide bomber set off the explosive belt he was wearing while sitting in a coach leaving for the mainly Shiite town of Nasiriyah, in Southern Iraq, causing at least 30 deaths and 40 injured according to Iraqi hospital sources. Eleven corpses were found on 5 December, near the small town of Rutba, 370 Km West of the Iraqi capital, in Anbar province, just off the main Baghdad-Amman highway. The corpses were all in civilian dress. On the same day, he police also discovered the bodies of nine civilians who had been shot, beside a road in the area of Falluja, 50 Km west of the capital.

Iraqi President, Jalal Talabani, in a message of good wishes for 2006, stated that *"the problems of security, of electricity and water persist and I hope that they will be the priorities of the new government, which we hope will be one of national union"*. He drew a contrasted picture of 2005, paying particular attention to the successes that, in his eyes were the elections, the adoption of a permanent Constitution, the trial of the dictator Saddam Hussein and of social measures in favour of old age pensioners and people with low incomes. *"The trial of Saddam Hussein shows the difference between the summary trials of the old regime of complete injustice and those of the new era, where the accused have the right of speech and can even use it to be insulting"*, he stated in particular on the public television channel *Iraqia*. He noted, amongst the year's successes *"the progress in the training and equipping of the security forces"* while recognising the persistence of

acts of terrorism and the neglect of public services.

Mr. Talabani also recognised *"violations of human rights here and there"*, and hoped for *"a legal and moral response to the corruption that is gangrening the administrative bodies"*. He also called on the religious leaders, particularly the Sunnis, to condemn, without ambiguity, the terrorist acts, before going on to wish a prosperous year all Iraqis, who in addition to violence, are suffering from a shortage of fuel due to successive threats and to the rise in petrol prices.

For his part the outgoing Prime Minister, the Shiite leader Ibrahim Jaafari, in his wishes, considered that *"the political process overcame all the obstacles"* in 2005, with reference to the Constitutional referendum of 15 October and the general elections of 15 December. *"The Iraqis have proved that they value their unity, an unshakeable unity"* he added, before hoping that the new Parliament would be representative of all the Iraqi communities without exception and inviting all these communities to *"build a new Iraq"*.

TURKEY PROSECUTES AND SENTENCES INTELLECTUALS THAT FAIL TO FOLLOW THE OFFICIAL LINE

ON 29 December, the Istanbul Public Prosecutor closed, without further action, the case of a complaint filed against the Turkish writer, Orhan Pamuk, for *"open attacks on the Army's image"*. Already being sued for his remarks on the massacre of Armenians committed under the Ottoman Empire — Turkey denies the reality of the genocide — Turkey's most famous writer was targeted at the end of October by an association of nationalist jurists. *"I do not see the AKP (the Justice and Development Party, at present in office) as a threat to democracy in Turkey. Unfortunately, the principal threat is the Army, that sometimes harms the development of democracy"*, the writer had stated in the German daily *Die Welt*. The Prosecutor decided to dismiss the charge.

Mr. Pamuk is still, however, being

sued for *"deliberately insulting Turkish identity"*. *"A million Armenians and 30,000 Kurds have been killed on these lands, but no one besides me dares to say it"*, he had stated in a Swiss magazine. The court responsible for the case has postponed the trial to 7 February, pending the decision of the Minister of Justice, who must decide whether to sue the writer or dismiss the case.

Article 301 of the new Turkish Penal Code, which cracks down on any insults to institutions or to Turkish identity, has served as a basis for legal actions against several intellectuals, including Mr. Pamuk and the Dutch Member of the European Parliament, Joost Lagendijk. Its use has been severely criticised by the European Union.

Still on the grounds of Article 301 of the new Penal Code, on 22

December, an Istanbul Court sentenced the writer Zulkuf Kisanak for insulting the Turkish State. The writer is the author of a book on the forcible evacuations, during the 20th Century, of Kurdish, Armenian and Christian villages. It has also punished the publisher Aziz Ozer for an article on Turkish policy towards Iraq. The two men were sentenced to five months jail, but this was later commuted to a fine of 2,200 dollars. Mr. Kisanak, in his book *"The vanished villages"* tells the stories of 14 Kurdish localities which have been evacuated in the course of the last century, particularly during the clashes with the PKK in the 90s.

Furthermore, on 2 December, the Turkish semi-official news agency, Anatolia, reported that five Turkish journalist are facing ten years jail for having criticised the decision of a court to block the holding of a conference on the massacres of Armenians under the Ottoman Empire. The journalist were charged by a Public Prosecutor under those articles of the law punishing insults to a magistrate or attempts to influence the course of justice the agency pointed out. Those charged are four journalists on the daily paper *Radikal* (the chief editor, Ismet Berkan, Erol Katircioglu, Haluk Sahin, and Murat Belge) as well as Hasan Cemal, columnist on the mass circulation daily *Milliyet*. Last September a court, to which a group of nationalist had complained, had blocked the holding of a conference organised by intellectuals who challenged Turkey's official position on the massacres of Armenians that took

place during the First World War. The conference, which had already been suspended a first time in May, finally took place a day late, its organisers having changed its venue to bye-pass the court.

"The recent modifications to the Penal Code are insufficient (...). Freedom of expression is still restricted and we must fight for it", declared the president of the Turkish Pen Club, Vecdi Sayar, during a meeting organised by the media and foreign observers

covering the Pamuk trial on 15 December. The new Turkish Penal Code came into force in June in the framework of major reforms undertaken by Ankara at the request of the European Union. *"I do not understand why the E.U. approved (this document). If we are already being faced with problems in this respect it is because of the mentality (of the judiciary) and not of the law"*, stressed Metin Celal Zeynioglu, secretary of the Union of Turkish publishers.

THE SUCCESSIVE VISITS OF THE DIRECTORS OF THE CIA AND THE FBI TO ANKARA, WHICH IS DEMANDING THAT THE AMERICANS ACT AGAINST THE PKK IN IRAQI KURDISTAN

TURKEY continued to exert pressure on the United States, taking advantage of the visit to Ankara on 11 December of the Director of the CIA, Porter Goss, to renew its demand that Washington act against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). *"We have specific expectations regarding the United States, particularly regarding this separatist terrorist organisation"*, stressed the Minister of Justice, Cemil Cicek, after a cabinet meeting. During his visit, Porter Goss met with the Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and with Army and Intelligence chiefs. According to the mass circulation daily *Hurriyet*, Mr. Goss was due to discuss with his Turkish opposite numbers, the strengthening of the struggle against the PKK, considered a terrorist organisation by both Washington and Ankara.

Mr. Goss's visit to Ankara and that, two days later of the Director of the FBI, Robert Mueller, may forecast the taking of more concrete measures by Washington — including military operations against the PKK after the holding of general elections in Iraq on 15 December, considered *Hurriyet*. The daily paper also stressed the fact that General Yasar Buyukanit, commander of the Turkish land forces, is at present on a visit to the United States, where he met his American opposite number Peter Shoomaker and Pentagon officials.

Turkey has long been irritated by the US reluctance to act against the PKK bases set up in Iraqi Kurdistan, to which the PKK fighters had withdrawn after decreeing a unilateral cease-fire in 1999. It has even threatened to undertake military operations outside its own borders,

in Iraqi Kurdistan, if the threat was not eliminated. But Washington has, so far, preferred to act at source, by drying up the group's financial resources, to any military commitment.

Violence in Turkish Kurdistan has considerably intensified since the beginning of 2005. Fighting between the PKK and the Turkish Army broke out on 9 December, in Sirnak province, near the village of Guclukonak, causing six deaths, including four soldiers. According to local officials, the fighting at Guclukonak followed an army operation against the PKK the day before, near this town. There were also outbreaks of violence in the evening near Silopi, another township in the same province, where three virtually simultaneous explosions in front of shops caused at least one person injured and material damage.

Tension in the Kurdish provinces escalated in November. There were violent demonstrations following a bomb attack on 9 November against a bookshop in the town of Semdinli, in Hakkari province, owned by a suspected former member of the PKK. The inhabitants and local councillors of Semdinli had accused elements of the army of secret services of being the originators of this attack, which caused one death. Five other people were killed in the

riots that followed. The Turkish government, under pressure from the European Union to ensure the observance of democracy and the State of Law over the whole of the land, in view of its proposed membership, has promised to throw light on this attack.

Furthermore, fifty-six Kurdish mayors in Turkey called on the Danish government to resist Ankara's demands to close down the Denmark-based Kurdish television channel, Roj TV, which is accused by Turkey of "*links with the PKK*". "*For a fully democratic life to flourish in Turkey, Roj TV must not be silenced*", stated the local councillors in a letter, in English, sent to the Danish Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen on 27 December. "*Eliminating the voice of Roj TV would mean the loss of an important vector in the fight for democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms of a democratic civilisation*", they continued.

The mayors considered that the pressures being exercised by Turkey so as to ban Roj TV run counter to the declared objective being proclaimed by Turkey in its advance towards membership of the European Union, of improving its situation with respect to human rights. Ankara has asked the Danish authorities to cancel the broadcast licence it had given Roj TV on

the grounds that the channel was said to have links with the PKK. The Turkish authorities consider that the station, which has been broadcasting since March 2004, "incited hatred" by openly supporting the PKK. However the Danish body responsible for audio-visual surveillance considered, at the beginning of the year, that Roj TV's programmes did not contain any incitement to hatred of Turkey. The Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs stated in November 2005 that he had found no proof of any links between the channel and the PKK.

For his part, on 2 December, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Abdullah Gul, declared that Turkey considered Iraqi Kurdistan was part of Turkey's "*hinterland*". "*The north of Iraq is of interest to Turkey, it is part of our hinterland*", he maintained to the Turkish paper Aksam. Stressing that the "*first priority*" of his country was to safeguard Iraq's territorial unity, the Minister considered that it is "*because Turkey has contributed to it and authorised it*" that Iraqi Kurdistan is in full expansion. "*You cannot marginalise Turkey there*", he added. He also announced the inauguration of a Turkish consulate at Mossul without specifying the date, but indicated that he had appointed Huseyin Avni Botsali, a leading official in the Middle Eastern department, as consul.

RECONSTRUCTION IN IRAQ: THE EUROPEAN UNION PROPOSES A TRADE AND COOPERATION AGREEMENT TO BAGHDAD

ON 12 December the European Union proposed starting negotiations with Iraq for a trade and cooperation agreement and committed itself to opening an office in Baghdad, announced senior European officials. "Iraq is at a turning point", stressed the European Commissioner for External Relations and for External Neighbourly Policies, the Austrian Benita Ferrero-Waldner, during a signature ceremony with the Iraqi Ambassador to the European Union, Jawad al-Doreky. "Iraq is entering a crucial stage (...). The Iraqis hope for a substantial partnership with the European Union and we intend to live up to their expectations", declared Mrs. Benita Ferrero-Waldner. "Negotiations on the trade and cooperation agreement, that signal the beginning of a closer cooperation between the European Union and Iraq in the areas of trade and economics will lead to the strengthening of links that unite us", remarked, for his part, the Commissioner for Trade, Peter Mendelson.

The outline strategy of the European Union towards Iraq, adopted in June 2004 depends essentially on the creation of a stable and democratic Iraqi State. Amongst the objectives of this strategy are the setting up of a stable, lasting and diversified open market and the economic and political integration of Iraq into its region and the open international system.

"In beginning these contractual negotiations with Iraq, the Commission aims at the following objectives:

Easing Iraq's commitment to the international community in general and the European Union in particular, to the advantage of internal and regional stabilisation

Stimulating and anchoring the present institutional and socio-economic reforms, both on the political level and in the field, and favouring a mechanism of overall reform at a historical and crucial moment for the country

Contributing to the socio-economic development of Iraq and the improvement of the country's living conditions

Promoting bilateral trade relations in accordance with the principles of the WTO, based on the development of harmonious economic relations between the parties

Guaranteeing a minimum level of predictability, transparency and legal security to economic operators".

Moreover, the reconstruction of Iraq is heavily penalised by violence and corruption, is even admitted by Washington and Baghdad. "Reconstruction has not always taken place as well, as we would have hoped, principally because of the challenges due to security in the field", admitted US President G.W. Bush on 12 December. "Security and reconstruction are indissociable", said General William McCoy, in charge of the US Army

Engineers, going one better. He quoted as an example the supply of electricity in Baghdad. "Whereas we had a good supply at the end of October, at 11 to 12 hours a day, now we have dropped to 4 to 5 hours" he declared. This situation is "a result of insurgent attacks".

Dan Speckhard, head of the Bureau of Reconstruction Management pointed out on 8 December that that the sabotage was not aimed at the electric power stations but at the high voltage power lines, especially to the North of Baghdad and in its Southern neighbourhoods. But when one knows that 4 of the 21 billion dollars allocated by Washington to the reconstruction of Iraq are devoted to electricity, the bill for the delays due to violence is likely to be steep ... Mr. Speckhard states, moreover, that 16 to 22% of the 21 billion dollars are spent on security, quite apart from "the waste of resources". "It is an important element in the reconstruction programme of this country", he added, because these funds are used to fight "against the terrorists" who want to harm the development of Iraq.

A US Congress report, published at the end of October had indicated that a number of US financed reconstruction projects would not come to anything because of the rise in security costs. According to this report, that covers the third quarter of 2005, 120 American civilians working for private firms have been killed in Iraq since March 2003. Another obstacle: corruption that affects, as President Bush himself admitted, all levels of Iraqi society. "Corruption exists as

much at the national as at local level of the Iraqi government", it pointed out. An American parliamentary report drives the point home, declaring that corruption "*is not only endemic but systematic*".

Dawn Liberi, head in Iraq of the American Agency for International Development (USAID) insists that her team is working closely with

the Iraqi Minister of Finance to set up a system of control in the 33 Ministries. General McCoy tries to be optimistic, insisting that "over 90%" of the population supports the work of his team. The Americans, he says, are moving towards handing control, of reconstruction to the Iraqis. To date "*44% of our projects have been achieved by Iraqis*", he stressed.

AS WELL AS ...

• SOME WOMEN AND CHILDREN FOUND IN A MASS GRAVE IN KERBALA. On 26 December, the remains of women and children were found in a mass grave in the Shiite city of Kerbala. "*Some skulls of children and women with long hair were found in the ditch*", indicated the spokesman of the provincial police, Abdel Rahman Meshawi. According to him, about twenty bodies were exhumed and transported to the city hospital where AND tests are being made to identify them. "*Some inhabitants who lost relatives in the Shiite uprising of 1991 came forward to help in the identification*".

The spokesman pointed out that "the mass grave was found by chance, by local council workers who were laying down drinking water piping", only 500 metres from the Imam Hussein mausoleum, in the centre of the city, which lies 100 Km South of Baghdad. An inhabitant, Salman Saadun, stated that he had seen bulldozers digging at that spot in 1991, after

the entry of the Republican Guard, the former elite corps of Saddam Hussein's army. "*Some bodies were buried there and the place transformed into a little public garden*", he added.

A number of mass graves have been discovered in Iraq since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime in April 2003, especially in the Shiite South and in Iraqi Kurdistan. The former US-led Provisional Coalition Authority had indicated, in 2004, that 259 mass graves, containing the remains of 300,000 people had been discovered in the country. According to the authorities, the mass graves in the South contained the remains of victims of the repression, by the old regime, of the Shiite majority, which had rebelled against Baghdad after the end of the Gulf War in 1991.

• IRAN SIGNS A CONTRACT FOR ANTI-MISSILE PURCHASES TO THE VALUE OF 700 MILLION DOLLARS WITH RUSSIA. Iran, under Western pressure regarding its nuclear pro-

gramme, has bought an anti-missile system and developed such a programme itself, confirmed Ali Larijani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council. On 2 December, the Russian press announced that Iran had signed a contract with Russia to buy 29 Russian Tor M-1 anti-missile systems to the value of 700 million dollars. Questioned as to whether the purchase of this system meant that Iran feared an attack on its nuclear installations, Mr. Larijani replied: "*No. This is not the first time we have bought an anti-missile system. We build them ourselves*". Regarding the Iranian ballistic programme, Mr. Larijani declared that Iran always announced "*the range of the missiles it tested*". Iran was, in particular, seeking to "*defend its nuclear power station*" that Moscow was building at Bushire because "*Israel has stated that it was examining the possibility of launching preventive strikes against the site*", explained, for his part a Professor of the Russian Institute for International Relations, Serguei Drujilovski.

Washington accuses Teheran of seeking to endow itself with nuclear arms under cover of its civilian activities. The European Union (France, Great Britain and Germany — EU-3) and Iran had resumed, on 21 December in Vienna, crucial talks on Teheran's nuclear programme, but some diplomats suggested that there was not much hope of seeing any outcome. The discussions between the political directors of the EU-3 Foreign Ministries and Javad Vaidi, member of the Iranian National

Security Council are to define the context in which negotiations could take place, in the future, on mastering the cycle of nuclear combustion that Iran claims but which the West fears to see used to make a bomb.

In Teheran, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Manoushehr Mottaki, indicated that, during these discussions, his country would insist on its right to enrich uranium on its own territory. At the same time, Iran wants to discuss a precise timetable for resuming its uranium enrichment activities, pointed out a spokesman for the national Security Council in the Iranian capital. The ET-3 had broken off negotiations in August after Iran had resumed its activity of converting uranium, a preliminary stage to enrichment.

• END OF THE TUG-OF-WAR BETWEEN THE IRANIAN PRESIDENT AND PARLIAMENT: PARLIAMENT ONLY CONFIRMED THE FOURTH CANDIDATE PROPOSED SINCE JUNE 2005. Anxious to put an end to disagreements, President Mahmud Ahmedinjad nominated a veteran of the oil industry, Kazem Vaziri-Hamaneh for the post of Iranian Oil Minister. On 11 December the Iranian Parliament confirmed ultra-conservative President Mahmud Ahmedinjad's candidate for this strategic post, after having rejected three previous candidates on grounds of their incompetence. Of the 259 Members of Parliament who took part in the vote, the candidate, who till then had held the position of interim Oil Minister, secured 172 votes in favour, 53 against and 34 abstentions.

Parliament had rejected the Iranian President's three previous candidates, accusing him of not having consulted the House about these candidates, considered to be inexperienced and not having sufficient stature for this post.

Born in Yazd (central Iran) Mr. Vaziri-Hamaneh has passed his whole career in this sector, both in the Ministry and in the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), starting as an engineer and rising to the position of Deputy Oil Minister. Mr. Vaziri-Hamaneh has been interim Minister since 29 August when Mr. Ahmedinjad, elected the previous June, had proposed a new government. The appointment of the position of Oil Minister turned into a tug-of-war between the ultra-conservative President and the House, itself dominated by conservatives, after the rejection of three candidates proposed by Mr. Ahmedinjad.

The personality and competence of the Oil Minister are decisive for defending the development of this sector, which earns Iran 80% of its foreign currency, but also for its role as a major actor within the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Iran has 12% of the world's oil reserves and produces about 4.2 million barrels a day (mbd) or 5.2% of the world's production. It is the second largest producer in OPEC.

The long dispute over the nomination of the Oil Minister has illustrated the divisions within the ranks of the conservatives, divided between pragmatic and hard line

supporters. The first were opposed to Mr. Ahmedinjad's initial choices because they felt he privileged political loyalty over competence, contrary to the second. The ultra-conservative president has complained in the past that the ministry was controlled by a "mafia". Before being officially put forward by the President, Mr. Vaziri-Hamaneh stated that his country should abandon the "buy-back" system, which enables foreign countries to operate the oil and gas fields, being paid with a share of the production. "The buy-back formula is no longer approved and the financing project is also questionable. We must find other alternatives", he had declared as an aside in an energy conference. This system had been chosen by the Iranians to by-pass a Constitutional obstacle that prevents foreign companies' presence in the country's energy sector.

• TURKEY-E.U.: ACCORDING TO ANKARA, NEGOTIATIONS FOR TURKEY'S MEMBERSHIP WILL BEGIN IN MARCH 2006. Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced on 30 December that the negotiations for Turkey's membership of the European Union would begin in March 2006. Mr. Erdogan indicated that the most important event for Turkey in 2005 was the E.U. decision to undertake negotiations for Turkey's admission. Turkey's membership was a very important step for peace and prosperity in the world as well as for the alliance of civilisations, he stressed.

Referring to the economic develop-

ment of Turkey, Mr. Erdogan indicated that, by removing six zeros from the national currency, the Turkish lira, the New Turkish Lira (YTL) would diminish the rate of inflation. He indicated that the rate of inflation, which was 30% three years ago, had dropped below 8% — the lowest rate in 35 years. Furthermore, Turkey had also increased its per capital revenue by 5,000 dollars and reduced the budget deficit, which had dropped from 40 billion YTL (about 29.6 billion dollars) to 14.6 billion YTL (about 10.8 billion dollars).

For its part, the European Human Rights Court has enjoined Turkey to set up, "within the next three months", a mechanism of reparation for the Greek Cypriots robbed of their property by the invasion of its troops in the North part of the island in 1974. The Strasbourg judges formulated this injunction in a ruling in favour of a 45-year-old Greek Cypriot woman, Myra Xenides-Arestis, who had been forced to leave the city of Famagusta, where she owned several properties, including the family home. In a

ruling passed by six votes to one (that of the Turkish judge) the Council of Europe Court affirmed that she had been victim of a violation of the right to private and family life and of a violation of her right to property.

The Court declared, unanimously this time, that Turkey "*must introduce a mechanism of reparation that ensures the effective protection (of these rights) to the present petitioner but also to all similar petitions at present pending before the Court*". "*Such a mechanism should be set up in the three months following this ruling and reparations should be effective in the following three months*", added the judges. About 1,400 similar petitions are pending before the European Human Rights Court. The ruling is not, however, final. Turkey has three months in which to ask that the case be re-examined by the Court's upper division. This is the fourth time that the Strasbourg judges have ruled in favour of Greek Cypriots robbed of their property by the Turkish military invasion since a ruling made on 18 December 1996 in favour of Titina

Loizidou. Turkey only accepted in December 2003 to pay the latter the sum of 1,12 million euros. The Turkish government refused to pay, considering that the law on compensation of owners of real estate passed on 30 June 2003 in the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus (TRNC — which is not recognised except by Turkey) was an effective remedy for the victims. The European Court demolished that argument when it decided on the admissibility of Myra Xenides-Arestis' petition. In a decision dated 2 September 2004, made public in April 2005, the Court noted that this law only provides for material damages and covers neither compensation nor moral damages nor any possible restitution of stolen property.

The Court's new ruling came just as the North Cyprus Parliament ratified, on 26 December, a property law that henceforth authorises Greek Cypriots to ask for restitution of their property. The European Human Rights Court has not yet ruled on the whether this reform is in line with its own criteria.

LE FIGARO 1^{er} décembre 2005

Hoshyar Zebari : « Le départ des troupes est lié à la stabilité de l'Irak »

Pour le ministre irakien des Affaires étrangères, il n'existe ni méfiance ni mésentente entre Bagdad et Paris

A QUINZE JOURS des élections législatives en Irak, qui doivent aboutir à la formation d'un nouveau gouvernement investi d'un mandat de quatre ans, le ministre irakien des Affaires étrangères, Hoshyar Zebari, a effectué une visite de trois jours à Paris, à l'invitation de Philippe Douste-Blazy. Le ministre français des Affaires étrangères a fait part à son homologue irakien de sa volonté de développer un « dialogue régulier » entre Paris et Bagdad. Il a aussi exprimé son « appui au processus politique et aux efforts de reconstruction » en cours en Irak.

LE FIGARO. – Quelle est la raison de votre venue en France ?

Hoshyar ZEBARI. – J'ai été invité par le gouvernement français parce que l'Irak traverse aujourd'hui un moment important de son histoire. Pour nous, la France est un partenaire commercial en même temps qu'un pays ami, membre du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, et qui soutient le processus politique irakien. Le message que j'apporte à Paris est qu'il n'existe ni méfiance ni mésentente entre l'Irak et la France. Nous sommes d'ailleurs prêts, contrairement à ce qui a été affirmé, à donner suite à plusieurs initiatives françaises, notamment



« La France est un partenaire commercial en même temps qu'un pays ami et soutient le processus politique irakien », déclare Hoshyar Zebari, ministre irakien des Affaires étrangères. Kambayashi/AP

en ce qui concerne la formation des forces de l'ordre irakiennes, mais aussi dans la reconstruction et l'éducation.

Le ministre français des Affaires étrangères a plaidé auprès de vous cette semaine pour un « respect total » du droit de la défense et pour que la peine de mort ne soit pas appliquée à Saddam Hussein. Quel sort pensez-vous qu'il faille lui réserver ?

Saddam Hussein a besoin d'un procès juste et équitable, ouvert et transparent. Il est impératif que le procès ne se transforme pas en exercice de relations publiques. On l'a encore vu au cours de l'audience de lundi : Saddam se comporte comme s'il était toujours président d'Irak. Plus vite le chapitre sera clos, mieux ce sera pour la réconciliation en Irak, qui elle-même influencera de manière positive la situation en matière de sé-

curité. Pour le reste, c'est à la cour de décider du sort de Saddam Hussein.

Qu'attendez-vous des élections législatives qui auront lieu le 15 décembre prochain ?

En un an, l'Irak a déjà franchi avec succès plusieurs étapes : des élections en janvier dernier, une Constitution, un référendum. Malgré les violences, le processus politique fonctionne. Mais ces nouvelles élections seront différentes. Car toutes les communautés, y compris les sunnites, y participeront. Le nouveau gouvernement, dont le mandat sera de quatre ans, sera donc plus représentatif et plus stable que le précédent.

L'intervention américaine en Irak est de plus en plus impopulaire en Irak. Pensez-vous qu'il faille réduire le nombre de soldats américains ?

Je suis contre le principe d'un calendrier. Le départ des troupes américaines est lié à la stabilité de l'Irak. Ils ne peuvent pas partir avant. Or la stabilisation du pays doit être assurée par la formation des forces de sécurité irakiennes. Nous sommes conscients de l'existence d'un débat. Mais je pense qu'il faut de la patience et de la détermination. Car les prochains mois seront critiques pour l'Irak.

Propos recueillis par
ISABELLE LASSERRE

Saddam's system on trial

Patience is a lot to ask from the victims of a bloody tyrant who have waited decades for justice. But patience is exactly what is needed now from the judges in the trial of Saddam Hussein, from Iraqi political leaders and from ordinary Iraqi citizens.

The hope is that this trial will mark a crucial watershed in Iraq's passage from a lawless dictatorship to a constitutional government. The fear is that it will degenerate into a sorry spectacle of victor's justice and revenge, turning a monster into a martyr in the eyes of Sunni Arabs throughout Iraq and the Middle East

In the next few weeks, one or the other of these narratives will take shape in the minds of audiences around the world, the most important one being in Iraq. It is crucial that the judges presiding over this emotionally and politically charged case demonstrate the trial's fairness, legitimacy and completeness. That is why it would have been better to start building up a pattern of evidence about Saddam's system by first trying lower-level officials. And that is why it would now be a mistake to cut off the possibility of further trials for Saddam through a hasty verdict followed by a hasty execution.

The court's highest responsibility is to see to it that this haughty and hateful man and his co-defendants are accorded the human dignity and right to defend themselves that the tyrannical Baathist regime systematically denied to its millions of victims. To do so would declare strength, not weakness, as well as confidence in the set of values around which a new and better Iraq must be built.

It would at least give pause to the millions of Arab Sunnis, in Iraq and elsewhere, who seem so receptive to Saddam's self-portrayal as an Arab nationalist victim of an invading American Army. And it would provide a useful education for Iraq's newly empowered Shiites and Kurds about the morally and politically

corrosive consequences of building a regime on ethnic and sectarian stereotyping and jealousies, and of using paramilitary enforcers loyal to individual leaders, not laws.

It is becoming clearer with each passing week that such lessons are urgently needed. As American forces try to stand down in Iraqi cities outside the western heartland of the Sunni insurgency, the Iraqi forces that have been standing up in their

stead have increasingly been accused of torture and group executions. Some of those implicated work for the new Iraqi Army or Interior Ministry. Others belong either to the fearsome, Iranian-trained Badr Brigade, affiliated with one of the two Shiite ruling parties, or to the Mahdi Army, a private militia run by a charismatic Shiite cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr.

The evil of Saddam's system was not simply that Shiites, Kurds and

critics were lawlessly persecuted, tortured and murdered by a regime controlled by the Sunni minority. It was that Iraqis of any ethnic or religious group were lawlessly persecuted, tortured and murdered on the basis of their religion, ethnicity or political views.

If that kind of lawless behavior takes root again, Saddam Hussein's trial will have accomplished less than it should.

TURQUIE

Encore un effort pour être vraiment laïcs

Peut-on parler de laïcité dans un pays comme la Turquie, qui privilégie l'islam sunnite au détriment des autres cultes et religions ? se demande l'hebdomadaire populaire *Yeni Aktüel*.

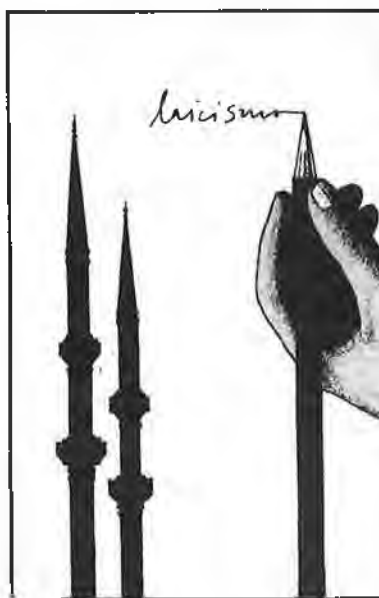
YENI AKTÜEL
Istanbul

Quand on lui a demandé si les "maisons cem" [lieux de culte des alevi, communauté représentant 15 % de la population et adhérant à une forme hétérodoxe de l'islam] pouvaient être considérées comme des lieux de culte au même titre qu'une mosquée, le ministre d'Etat Mehmet Aydin, en charge de la Direction des affaires religieuses [la Diyanet, chargée de l'organisation de l'islam en Turquie], a répondu que les musulmans n'avaient pas d'autres lieux de culte que les mosquées. Le secrétaire général de la Diyanet, Ali Bardakoglu, a abondé dans son sens en déclarant : "Les maisons cem ne sont pas des endroits où l'on pratique un culte." "La foi des alevi ne diffère pas de celle de la majorité", a-t-il poursuivi. Néanmoins, pour un dirigeant de cette communauté, "les alevi n'ont jamais considéré la mosquée comme leur lieu de culte. Les mosquées qui ont été construites dans les villages alevi ont été dans le but de 'sunnitiser' les alevi, qui ne les ont de toute façon jamais utilisées."

L'incohérence apparente des propos d'Ali Bardakoglu ne doit pas nous empêcher de réfléchir à la logique qui se cache derrière de telles déclarations. Au préalable, répondons à quelques questions fondamentales. La Turquie est-elle, oui ou non, un Etat laïc ? Oui. Et, dans ce cas, l'Etat doit donc en principe se tenir à équidistance de toutes les croyances, et les fonctionnaires observer une stricte neutralité vis-à-vis de toutes les croyances lorsqu'ils s'expriment publiquement. L'alevisme est-il une croyance ? Oui, car de toute façon dans le Coran il n'y a pas d'écoles de pensée. Celles qui existent aujourd'hui ne sont rien d'autre que le produit de l'Histoire. Seuls, donc, ceux qui appartiennent au groupe concerné peuvent décider de ce qui pour eux relève de la foi. La Direction des affaires religieuses, qui d'ailleurs

► Dessin de Sean Mackaoui paru dans *El Mundo*, Madrid.

■ **Prohibition**
Selon *Cumhuriyet*, le parti islamique au pouvoir (AKP) préparerait un projet destiné à limiter la consommation d'alcool dans le pays, n'autorisant sa vente qu'à la sortie des villes. Le quotidien laïc d'Istanbul se demande si l'AKP ne commence pas à montrer son vrai visage.



fonctionne comme un système clérical, se trouve ainsi au centre d'un dispositif où l'interprétation sunnite tient lieu de seule norme. Cette direction s'octroie dès lors le droit de normaliser ou de marginaliser toutes les autres croyances religieuses du pays.

LES ÉGLISES PAIENT L'EAU, PAS LES MOSQUÉES

Cette situation est en opposition flagrante avec le concept de laïcité. Dans ces conditions, si la Turquie ne veut pas se voir qualifiée d'Etat théocratique par l'Union européenne – à laquelle elle souhaite adhérer –, elle ferait bien de mettre fin au plus vite aux agissements de la Direction des affaires religieuses. Cette perspective semble toutefois très improbable, dès lors que la commission parlementaire créée pour enquêter sur les crimes d'honneur, une commission émanant d'un des organes les plus haut placés de notre République "laïque", demande par exemple à la Diyanet qu'elle lui rédige sur ce sujet des documents reprenant des versets du Coran et des hadith [récits de

la tradition du Prophète]. Une commission d'enquête peut bien sûr effectuer des consultations dans le but de mieux comprendre les croyances religieuses de la population. Elle se doit même de le faire. Mais elle doit alors prendre en compte toutes les croyances et leurs diverses interprétations, et pas seulement l'islam sunnite. En agissant de la sorte, le Parlement banalise en outre la discrimination religieuse pratiquée par certaines municipalités. Ainsi, par exemple, la municipalité d'Ankara, bien qu'elle ait très officiellement décidé d'exempter les lieux religieux de factures d'eau, continue d'exiger le paiement de ces factures auprès des maisons cem et des églises, alors que les mosquées et les cours de lecture coranique en sont effectivement exemptés. Le temple protestant de Batikent [un quartier d'Ankara] a d'ailleurs porté l'affaire devant les tribunaux. Or, bien qu'il ait gagné son procès, il continue à recevoir des factures d'eau.

Cette mentalité a tendance à devenir un mode de pensée dominant en Turquie. Ainsi, dans un village du district de Kulp [dans la province de Diyarbakir], une vieille église arménienne, en principe protégée, a été rasée pour permettre la construction d'une mosquée. Il n'y avait pourtant pas de problème de place dans ce village, qui comptait déjà deux mosquées. La raison de cette démolition est très claire : supprimer la diversité. Dans ces conditions, pourquoi court-on après la démocratie ? En effet, à quoi peut-elle bien servir, dès lors que l'on a gommé toutes les différences ? A partir de ce moment-là, il n'y a plus qu'à gouverner partout en fonction d'un modèle unique de citoyen. Il ne faut pas s'étonner, alors, que des policiers aient pu assister sans intervenir à l'agression orchestrée par les habitants d'un quartier d'Izmir contre la maison d'une femme qu'ils estimaient être une prostituée.

Mehmet Ali Kiliçbay

Courrier
INTERNATIONAL

DU 1^{er} AU 7 DÉCEMBRE 2005

La Turquie n'est pas un bon exemple

Souvent vantée pour sa laïcité, la République turque pratique en fait l'oppression religieuse

PIERRE
DE CHARENTENAY

Jésuite

La politique doit se garder de se mêler du religieux et inversement. On le sait en France depuis longtemps. La loi de 1905 a tenté de mettre chez nous un terme à toutes ces tentations. La politique s'intéresse aux religions quand les droits fondamentaux – au nombre desquels la liberté religieuse – ne sont pas respectés. L'exemple de la Turquie mérite examen à cet égard, ne serait-ce que parce qu'elle est souvent citée en France comme l'autre grand pays laïque.

Dans son rapport d'étape sur les négociations de l'Union avec la Turquie [publié le 9 novembre 2005], la Commission européenne, généralement timide en ces matières, vient d'émettre la critique la plus sévère qu'elle ait jamais faite sur la situation religieuse au pays de Mustafa Kemal. Quelques progrès sont constatés, notamment l'inauguration d'une église protestante à Ankara. En revanche, beaucoup de points restent problématiques : il n'y a toujours pas de cadre légal qui permette les conditions d'un bon fonctionnement des différentes communautés religieuses. Les juifs étant une minorité reconnue par l'Etat depuis 1923, ils disposent d'un certain nombre de droits. En revanche, les communautés chrétiennes ne peuvent pas être propriétaires, elles n'ont pas de centre de formation, elles ont des difficultés pour l'obtention des visas. Des églises ont été attaquées.

Les Alevis, une importante minorité musulmane, ne sont pas non plus reconnus et leurs enfants sont contraints de suivre les cours de d'instruction religieuse sunnite. Le rapport de l'Union européenne donne bien d'autres exemples qui ne laissent aucun doute sur la violation d'un droit fondamental pour les musulmans non sunnites, comme pour les chrétiens.

Toutes ces questions essentielles liées

à la liberté religieuse sont depuis des lustres cachées derrière la statue du Commandeur, Kemal Atatürk, supposé avoir apporté la laïcité à son pays.

En réalité, il a réalisé à la suite du traité de Lausanne de 1923 ce que les auteurs de la loi de séparation n'ont pas réussi à faire pour l'Eglise catholique en France en 1905 : contrôler totalement la principale religion du pays. Il y est parvenu après avoir interdit toutes les expressions publiques de la religion, y compris des confréries, dissoutes en 1925.

De cela, l'actuel premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, ne parle jamais. Alors qu'il est lui-même religieux [et issu

du parti pour la justice et le développement, islamiste modéré], il manifeste un autisme étonnant dès qu'il est question de liberté religieuse. Il n'évoque pas l'absence totale de droits de plusieurs minorités chrétiennes – notamment celles de rite latin, les orthodoxes bénéficiant au moins d'une existence légale. Ce seul fait aurait dû empêcher le début des négociations si les pays de l'Union européenne avaient été fidèles aux critères de Copenhague. Interrogé récemment par *Le Monde* sur le fondamentalisme musulman dans son pays, M. Erdogan a répondu qu'avait été mis en place « un dispositif très fort ». Etrange expression, quelque peu elliptique.

C'est à la vérité toute la vie religieuse du citoyen turc qui est soumise à un contrôle « très fort ». Le *Diyanet*, cet organisme d'Etat qui rémunère 60 000 fonctionnaires, est chargé de vérifier toutes les activités des mosquées et des facultés de

théologie musulmane. Il nomme les responsables et construit les bâtiments. Il paie les imams et les professeurs de théologie. On objectera que l'Etat belge, par le ministère de la justice, salarie directement tous les prêtres ou les pasteurs chez eux. Mais ce sont les évêques qui les nomment en toute liberté. Curieuse laïcité donc où l'Etat turc contrôle la religion.

On pourrait s'en réjouir puisque c'est un moyen d'éviter les débordements fondamentalistes. Mais cette nécessité de la manière forte – qui a si bien imprégné le

pays qu'il a connu trois reprises en main par les militaires en trente ans –, n'est-elle pas la preuve que la laïcité turque n'est pas celle d'une démocratie où la manifestation de la religion est libre pourvu qu'elle s'exerce dans le cadre de la loi ? Pourquoi ne pas en parler ? Cet autisme religieux n'est-il pas justement le pourvoyeur de tous les fondamentalistes ? Occultez une réalité, elle resurgira sous forme violente, à moins d'y opposer un régime totalitaire.

La prise en compte et le respect des besoins religieux des Turcs comme de

tous les hommes de ce temps sont la seule route de la pacification des rapports entre religion et pouvoir politique. Religions et politiques n'ont pas à se redouter si la liberté est faite de respect des deux côtés, ce qui n'existe apparemment pas entre Ankara et Istanbul. Le discours sur la laïcité, en Turquie comme ailleurs, ne devrait pas servir de paravent aux volontés de brider le religieux ou de s'en débarrasser, ce qui ne fait que surexciter l'opposition fondamentaliste.

C'est en même temps une leçon à entendre sur les relations entre société et religion. Car la question reste ouverte de savoir si le droit positif et les procédures démocratiques sont suffisants pour garantir la solidarité et la cohésion dans une société libérale. Peuvent-elles vraiment se passer des religions ? Autrement dit, la raison elle-même peut-elle se passer de la foi ? Et la foi peut-elle aussi se passer de la raison ? Ni l'un ni l'autre. Foi et raison sont appelées à traverser des processus de purification mutuelle comme l'a très bien montré le remarquable dialogue tenu entre le philosophe Jürgen Habermas et celui qui était encore alors le cardinal Ratzinger. Si, dans une société libérale, politique et religion sont appelées à dialoguer librement pour contribuer chacune dans sa sphère à la construction d'une vie plus humaine, elles le sont a fortiori dans une société où la religion est bridée par peur de ses propres débordements. Ni la politique ni la religion n'ont encore trouvé la bonne mesure de ce dialogue en Turquie. La route sera longue pour Ankara sur le chemin d'une démocratie où toutes les forces religieuses doivent pouvoir faire partie librement de la société civile. ■

Pierre de Charentenay est rédacteur en chef de la revue *Etudes*

«
Faut-il,
pour combattre
les débordements
fondamentalistes,
être aussi
autoritaire ?
»

Former covert Israeli forces 'training Kurds in Iraq'

Conal Urquhart Tel Aviv
Michael Howard Sulaymaniyah

Israeli firms are carrying out military training and commercial activities in Kurdish areas of north Iraq, according to reports in an Israeli newspaper. Yedioth Ahronoth reported yesterday that dozens of former members of Israel's elite and covert forces were training Kurdish fighters in anti-terrorism techniques.

Other companies, the newspaper said, were involved in telecommunications and infrastructure projects such as the building of an airport at Irbil.

Iraq and Israel are still officially at war, though since the 1960s Israel and the Iraqi Kurds have had a relationship. A spokesman for the Israeli foreign ministry said his country had no relationship with the new Iraq and it remained "at war".

The article follows detailed reports in the New Yorker last year saying that Israel had become heavily involved with the Kurds from 2003. It suggested Israel had a strategic interest in supporting Kurdish

forces, as a counterweight to Sunni and Shia groups in Iraq. Involvement in the region also gave Israel better access to intelligence from Syria and Iran, particularly Iran's nuclear programme.

Israel supported Kurdish rebels against the Ba'ath regime in Baghdad until 1975. The Kurds, who are Muslim, have never been as anti-Israeli as many Muslims in other countries. They have felt persecuted by Sunnis and have resented Yasser Arafat's support for Saddam Hussein.

A spokesman for the Kurdistan regional government said: "It is possible that people with Israeli passports visit. Many

Jews from Kurdistan resettled in Israel. We do not discriminate against any nationality that wants to ... work in Kurdistan, but there are no official links."

Israel cannot officially admit its involvement in the regime because it might encourage extremist groups, such as al-Qaida in Iraq. But Israelis are regularly seen in the Kurdish towns of northern Iraq, working as security guards and trainers. It is not clear whether they work for international security firms or are doing

independent work.

Israelis representing private firms were seen looking for opportunities at a recent trade fair in Irbil. Yesterday's report also



The flag of Israel, a country still officially at war with Iraq. Despite this, Israeli guards work in Iraq's Kurdish towns

stated that Israeli companies had set up a base in a remote area of Kurdistan, using it for weapons and anti-terrorism training and bringing in "dozens of motorcycles, sniffer dogs, Kalashnikov-upgrading devices, flak jackets, uniforms and helmets, all Israeli-made". It claims Israelis pose as agricultural and engineering experts.

Development and security projects in Kurdistan are undertaken by several countries, including Turkey, the US, Iran, Britain and Germany. Israel's main ally in the region is Turkey, which is concerned that the Kurds might declare independence from Iraq. Turkey, like Syria and Iran, has a substantial Kurdish minority within its population.

Road bomb in Iraq kills 10 marines

From news reports

BAGHDAD: Ten marines were killed in a roadside bombing and 11 were wounded outside the city of Falluja, the military said Friday, in one of the deadliest attacks on Americans since August.

The military said the soldiers were on a foot patrol outside Falluja when they were attacked Thursday with a bomb "fashioned from several large artillery shells."

The attack was the deadliest on U.S. forces since 14 marines were killed in combat operations near Haditha, about 240 kilometers, or 150 miles, northwest of Baghdad, on Aug. 3.

The U.S. military reported the Falluja attack as American and Iraqi forces opened an offensive in Ramadi, a provincial capital in western Iraq.

Three hundred marines and 200 Iraqi soldiers were taking part in the latest of a series of sweeps aimed at disrupting insurgent networks in Anbar Province before the Dec. 15 elections. A day earlier, insurgents fired mortar rounds at a government building in Ramadi, the military said.

No casualties were reported in those attacks, but the military said Thursday that four U.S. servicemen died Wednesday, including two marines who were killed in operations in Anbar.

The two were killed by small-arms fire in separate incidents in Falluja, 50 kilometers west of Baghdad, the military said.

About 2,000 U.S. troops and 500 Iraqi Army soldiers continued their push to root out rebels in the rural region east of Hit, 160 kilometers west of Baghdad, officials said. According to the American command, the area houses shops for the manufacture of car bombs and the kind of homemade explosives that have caused thousands of casualties since the U.S. invasion in 2003.

There have been no casualties since that operation began Wednesday, a marine spokesman said.

Beginning last spring, American and Iraqi commanders in Anbar have conducted many large-scale assaults on towns along the Euphrates in an effort to destroy the insurgency's system of smuggling routes, supply lines and safe houses.

A U.S. Army major general, Rick Lynch, said Thursday that the operations have been slowly clearing western Iraq of insurgents. He said the operations had dealt severe blows to the forces of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia.

But a study made public by the Institute of Near East Studies in Washington on Thursday suggested that the insurgency remained as robust as ever and could grow a good deal stronger.

The analysts said the insurgents had scored "important tactical and operational successes" while establishing themselves as a major force in the Sunni community. The study contended that foreign jihadists represented only five to seven percent of the insurgency and did not account for the majority of attacks or fatalities.

The deadly attack Thursday was one of the worst single incidents to hit U.S. marines in the war.

The White House spokesman, Scott McClellan, said, "We are saddened by the loss of life, whether it's one soldier who loses his or her life, or 10 or 11, we are saddened to hear that news."

The military statement said that marines "continue to conduct counter-insurgency operations throughout Falluja and surrounding areas to provide a secure environment for the national elections, Dec. 15."

Iraqi voters choose a new government in those elections, which the Bush administration hopes will help stabilize the country.

The Pentagon's official tally of U.S. military deaths in the war now stands at 2,125. Nearly 16,000 soldiers have been wounded in combat.

The deaths near Falluja occurred a day after President George W. Bush outlined a vision for "victory in Iraq" in a speech that acknowledged that the U.S. military has sustained "setbacks."

In his speech, Bush rejected calls for a timetable on bringing troops home, but said a reduction in troop levels may be possible as Iraqi security forces assume a bigger role. (NYT, Reuters, AFP)



Firat News Agency, via Agence France-Presse

In November, protesters set fire to a police checkpoint in Semdinli, Turkey, after a bombing of a bookstore owned by a member of the Kurdistan Workers Party.

In Turkey, discussing what once was taboo

By Stephen Kinzer

VAN, Turkey: The 10th-century Akhtamar Church, its stone facade alive with vivid images of birds, animals, saints and warriors, dominates a small island just off the southern shore of Lake Van. For nearly a millennium, this spectacular Armenian monument was a seat of great religious and political power.

Then the Ottoman Empire expelled and wiped away the Armenian population here in the massacres of 1915, and the church fell into near ruin. Its condition symbolized the abysmal relations between many Armenians, who say their ancestors were victims of genocide in 1915, and the Turkish Republic, which rejects that claim.

This autumn, at Turkish government expense, restoration workers began repairing the church. They have cleaned the exterior and replaced the collapsed roof, and plan to return next summer to work on the interior.

Although this is an act of historical preservation and tourism promotion, it also reflects something larger. To the horror of conservative nationalists, there is a new sense of freedom taking hold in Turkey.

The government is promoting democratic reforms that will one day, it hopes, allow Turkey to join the European Union. In the process, old taboos, like admitting the "possibility"

that the Christian Armenians were the victims of genocide, are falling.

Whether steps like restoring the Akhtamar Church will ease Turkey's entry into the European Union, however, is far from certain.

In Europe, resistance to Turkish membership has been growing. It was one reason that voters in France and the Netherlands rejected the union's draft constitution last spring. A magazine poll a year ago found that French opposition to Turkey's entry had risen to 72 percent, from 58 percent two years earlier.

Here in Turkey, even as the church reconstruction was under way, a court was giving Hrant Dink, editor of a newspaper for Istanbul's Armenian community, a suspended prison sentence for making comments "disrespectful to our Turkish ancestors." A prosecutor has indicted Turkey's leading novelist, Orhan Pamuk, on similar charges, and several other such cases are pending.

To outsiders, it sometimes seems that Turks cannot decide whether they want to embrace the standards of human rights and free speech that the European Union demands of its members.

In fact, however, many Turks say they fervently want their country to meet those standards. So, on most days, does the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. But defenders of the old order, including

prosecutors, judges and officials with influence in the army and bureaucracy, fear that steps to open Turkish society will weaken national unity, and they are trying to suppress them.

Nationalists have tried to prevent

serious investigations into incidents like a recent bombing in the southeastern province of Hakkari, which was made to look like the work of Kurdish terrorists but turned out to have been carried out by police agents.

Tension within Turkey's political class is intensifying as citizens begin voicing opinions that have long been anathema.

In September, for example, a group of historians and other academics, most of them Turkish, met in Istanbul to challenge the taboo on saying that the Ottoman regime committed genocide in 1915.

It turned out to be a historic conference on the fate of the Ottoman Armenians.

The event had been postponed twice, once after Justice Minister Cemil Cicek said it would constitute a "stab in the back" to Turkey, and again after a judge banned two universities from playing host to it. It was finally held at a third university.

Participants had to walk through a gauntlet of angry protesters, but once they found their seats, and began to speak, they observed no limits to their debate. Their papers had titles like "What the World Knows but Turkey Does Not" and "The Roots of a Taboo: The Historical-Psychological Suffocation of Turkish Public Opinion on the Armenian Problem."

The conference produced an avalanche of news coverage and led to weeks of analysis.

"I was there, and it felt like we were making history, like something incredible had suddenly happened," said Yavuz Baydar, a columnist for the mass-market daily Sabah. "Everyone was conscious of it. This is not a taboo anymore."

The response to the conference suggests that other longstanding taboos may also be ripe for challenge. If people here can now argue freely that the Ottomans were guilty of genocide in 1915, it may not be long before they promote other long-suppressed ideas, like Kurdish nationalism, with which some Europeans sympathize, or political Islam, which nearly all of them detest.

The recent rioting in France in alienated immigrant communities, however, raises new questions about Europe's willingness to accept Turkey's application in any event. The anti-immigrant French leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, for example, was quick to use the riots as a further argument for not admitting "another 75 million Muslims" into Europe.

The New York Times

Barzani urges Kurds to go to ballot boxes

Globe National file

Kurdish President, Massoud Barzani met with both, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)'s student unions in Salahaddin Summer Resorts, Tuesday.

The aim of the meeting was mainly to discuss the election process and encouraging the students in Kurdistan to participate in it. "There may be people in Iraq nowadays trying to bring a totalitarian and Unitarian regime, or perhaps an Islamic fundamentalist system back to power," Barzani warned the students, "but if someone does not partake in the elections, he will first harm himself and then his nation."

Elaborating on the mid-December elections and the choosing of the next government, Barzani added that this time, "the government and the parliament are not transitional ones, and therefore we



Kurdish President Massoud Barzani speaking to students during an election campaign gathering.

must play the greatest role in the polls and have the largest participation [that is possible] to be able to maintain what we have achieved so far and reach what we are looking for."

Concerning the educational process in Kurdistan, Barzani said, "Fortunately, we have been able to facilitate in the process non-stop since 1991, despite all the administrative and financial shortcomings."

When asked why Kurdistan does not demand

greater accomplishments, he answered: "If we compare ourselves to [where we were] 10 years ago, we realize what great goals we have already achieved. Undoubtedly, this was supported by the US, the UK, and the UN. Also, what exists in the constitution is a great achievement. We do not want to ask for something without having international support."

Concerning the administrative issues and people's demands, Mr President confirmed that no one

could prevent anyone from criticizing or complaining about the authorities' shortcomings. "We have a strong belief in democracy, but what is important is that the requests are made in an appropriate way. Let them demonstrate, but not burn or damage government institutions," he affirmed.

Referring to the allegedly existing corruption in Kurdistan, President Barzani claimed that there is in fact some corruption, but there are also exaggerations on the people's side about the matter. He believed that this was due to the lack of proficiency and experience in state governing. "We had never had such problems as electricity, roads and water in the mountains. There are many things we first heard after our return from the mountains," he reiterated.

Allawi welcomed in Salahaddin

Head of Al-Iraqiya List for the December election in Iraq, Ayyad Allawi visited Kurdistan and met with Kurdish president

Masoud Barzani Sunday.

The two discussed the situation in Iraq with respect to the forthcoming elections in December, and hoped that all the Iraqis would participate in the process.

In a joint conference after the meeting, Mr Barzani said that they are quite used to seeing Dr Allawi exchange ideas concerning circumstances in Iraq as a whole. "There is a profound relationship between the Kurdish leadership and Dr Allawi that goes a long way back," Barzani said, "whenever I see Dr Allawi, I feel glad."

Concerning the national conference held recently in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, Barzani said he supports any effort that may lead to unifying Iraqis. "Generally speaking, the conference is a positive step, but we do have some remarks on it" he added.

Furthermore, Allawi stated that he has had strong relations with Barzani, commenting that they struggled hand-in-hand against the former Iraqi regime for a long time. "Since the country is currently going through critical times and the election is at the door, I preferred to see Mr Barzani," Allawi said. "Such meetings are important and I always look forward to hold them."

Allawi moreover clarified that there has always been a great amount of cooperation between the two sides even prior to the collapse of the former Iraqi regime, commenting that this cooperation will in fact continue since the ideologies of the two lists are so similar. "We, as a political entity, appreciated Mr Barzani's role, not only as a president of Kurdistan, but also as an Iraqi national leader," he concluded.

The Globe

Tehran University students condemn Iranian government



The students shouted slogans like: "Stop genocide in Kurdistan," "Right to self-determination for Kurdistan," and "Freedom for political prisoners," in front of the University of Tehran, which lasted for two hours.

Hundreds of Iranian Kurdish students along with other colleagues at the University of Tehran

demonstrated Sunday, relentlessly condemning the recent actions of Iranian security forces in cities of

Kurdistan, Peyamner News Agency reports.

The students shouted slogans like: "Stop genocide in Kurdistan," "Right to self-determination for Kurdistan," and "Freedom for political prisoners," in front of the University of Tehran, which lasted for two hours.

In addition to asking for recognition of the right to self-determination for Kurdistan, the demonstrators also call for the Iranian government's regret for the last 27 years of oppression of the Kurds and releasing the detained activists and journalists.

The Kurdish students also demanded punishment of the killers of Shwana Qaderi and Sherko Amini, two activists who were tortured and beaten to death by security forces last June.

PNA

The mono-ethnic character of the Iranian nation

The function of violence and killing vis-à-vis the Kurds

Once again, the Kurdish city of Mahabad has been struck by the atrocity of the Iranian security forces. On 20th November, Sherko Amini, a young Kurdish student was killed by a police lieutenant named Sadeghi, while, as local witnesses have admitted preventing the officer to harass some Kurdish women in a residential area.



Iranian Kurdish revolutionary fired at in this archived picture. The physical extermination of innocent civilians is a déjà-vu practice, which has been used against the Kurdish population throughout the existence of the modern Iranian nation.

By Khalid Khayati
Globe Political Desk

Soon after his killing, hundreds of furious Kurdish youths have started to confront the security forces, followed by the close-down of a larger part of the local business as a sign of protest the day after this assassination. In a quite familiar manner, the Iranian media have represented Sherko as a "mob" and "criminal" element who "was the subject of the legal pursuit". This distorted image was rejected categorically by the sister of the assassinated youth, when she in an interview with the Kurdish TV Roj called for an impartial investigation in this case and subsequently the punishment of the perpetrator(s) of this crime.

The killing of Sherko is not the first or probably the last act of violence, inflicted to the Kurdish community in Iran. The physical extermination of innocent civilians is however a déjà-vu practice, which has been used against the Kurdish population throughout the existence of the modern Iranian nation. In this respect, the case of Sherko

Amini is to a large extent comparable to the murder of Shwana Qaderi, a young Kurdish activist carried out by the local security forces this summer, in the same city which. It is important to call into mind that the assassination of Shwana Qaderi had given birth to a large-scale uprising in many Kurdish localities which was however ended in the further killing of a significant number of protesters. Thus, it can be concluded that the violence and killing has always been an integrated part of the Kurdish collective memory since the beginning of the Iranian modern history which goes back to 1935.

Parallel to these acts of killing, the violation of human rights has been accelerated in the Kurdish region during last months. On 28th November, the Iranian Supreme Court has upheld sentences of between 15 and 20 years of imprisonment to Reza Amini, Haimat Azarpour and Abdullah Mohammadi, previously handed down by a court in Mahabad for, as it is indicated in the statement of the tribunal "being members

of the Iranian Kurdistan

Democratic Party, a counter-revolutionary organisation and acting against the Islamic regime". During the same period, a judge in the Kurdish town of Saez has sentenced Mahmoud Salehi, a well known independent workers' right activist, Jalal Hosseini, Mohsen Hakimi, Mohammad Abdipour and Burhan Diwargar to between 5 and 2 years imprisonment for as it was mentioned in the charge, organising a May Day manifestation and meeting representatives of the International Confederation Free Trade Union (ICFTU) in 2004.

Moreover, the Kurdish media and Kurdish journalists and intellectuals have been suffered hardly by the act of prohibition, suspension and even detention and even imprisonment. In a statement, addressed to the representative of the legislative, judicial and executive power of Iran on 24th November, the Human Rights Organisation of Kurdistan has deplored the atrocities committed in the Kurdish region and criticised the negative role of the Iranian medias

in their way of muddling up the Kurdish reality and thereby claimed the creation of a "truth commission" in order to put an end to the violation of human rights in the Kurdish areas. In this respect, following questions can be posed: What is the meaning and the function of the violence inflicted to the Kurds in Iran and how this violence is perceived by them i.e. the Kurds?

The function of the violence and killing vis-à-vis the Kurds

It is essential to underline the fact that the intransigence of the Iranian political system vis-à-vis the democratic demands, articulated by the Kurdish people can not be properly analysed if we do not take into consideration the inherent characteristic of the Iranian nation and nationalism which is however largely mono-ethnic and mono-confessional and as a result highly exclusionary and discriminatory when it comes to other identity constellations but the shi'a Moslems and the Persian nationals. In other words, there are any spaces for other religions, cultural and ethnic groups to enjoy a recognised political and public existence within the frame of the Iranian nation. Instead, they are confined to remain within the folkloric and private sphere of the society which is designated and determined by the dominant ethnic group i.e. the Persians. In such a context, the historical aspiration of Kurds for obtaining their own political and cultural status in Iran is violently suppressed, because it is perceived as a threat to the national unity and territorial integrity of the country. The huge military presence on the Kurdish soil and their daily use of violence and the control of all local authorities by non-Kurdish functionaries can be apprehended as a sign of such a national phobia which is transformed once again into policies and applied on Kurds. Thus, in this vicious circle, the

Kurdish reality can not be treated as a profound and dynamic political, historical and social problem, accumulated throughout years of deprivation and repression. Instead, it is regarded in a permanent way as a matter of security implying however a very specific management of the issue. And this is against the background of such a context that the violence which appears in its physical, structural and symbolic way is so tangible and omnipresent in Iranian Kurdistan. It is used effectively in order to subordinate and confine the Kurds within the limited real or discursive spaces. Subsequently, the violence and killing become and integrated part of the Kurds' collective memory.

Conclusion

This is only through democratic empowerment that Kurds can create the possibility to challenge and reverse this inequitable and hierarchical order of things in Iranian Kurdistan. The democratic empowerment can be here referred to a far-reaching project or vision, comprehending a set-up of methods, political ideas and social and cultural structures which constitute per se the substance of a hegemonic political culture. In this respect, the renewal and revitalisation of old fashioned organisational structure and political perspective should be the main priority of all Kurdish political parties and organisations if they intent to together with other democratic forces in Iranian Kurdistan launch such a political process for creating a hegemonic democratic political culture among Kurds.

Amid hope and controversy, oil in Iraqi Kurdistan

Globe Correspondent in Zakho



Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government talks to journalists at the oil rig complex, cooperation of Norwegian Public Oil company DNO and Kurdish Regional Government, that started drilling for oil in Iraqi Kurdistan, near Zakho, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2005. This is the first rig in Kurdish federal region after the 2003. war and the first one by any International company in 20 years in Iraq. Photo by cSasa Kralj/Jiwafoto

ZAKHO - The oil exploration drilling rig -the first in Iraq since 1991- was inaugurated last week in the mountains near Zakho.

It is done as a partnership between the Norwegian oil company, DNO, who provided the expertise and technical management, and Kurdistan regional government, said Magne Normann, its vice president. DNO maintains a 40 percent share in the project.

"The reason it happened here is because there is political stability

And personal security," said Stafford Clarry, a former United Nations employee in the region who now advises the Kurdistan regional government. "Who manages and controls is one thing, but revenue sharing is the goal."

"Since we are transforming from dictatorship to democracy and civil society, we want to have our fair share in everything,

in power and wealth," said Falah Mustafa, a Minister in the Kurdish government.

The Kurdistan government put great energy into guarding the secret until the opening ceremony. Journalists were transported to the northern city of Dohuk, near the Turkish border the night before keeping the destination and the news secret until the last minute. Special security forces from the Kurdish regional government were dispersed along the road of more than 20 kilometers that led from the Zakho border town to the oil drilling rig.

Piles of dirt serving as a protective barrier, and shiny new barbed wire encircled the site. Three flags - Iraqi Kurdistan, the DNO company flag and the Norwegian flag - welcomed the visitors who passed through several checkpoints and rigorous car and body search at the entrance.

The timing of the announcement last week,

just ahead of the Dec. 15 elections, caused several Sunni and Shiites politicians in Baghdad to criticize the Kurds. If Kurds are able to produce their own oil and have significant control over the profits, many people in Baghdad and in the neighboring countries fear a move toward independence.

"What we have done ... has been done in close cooperation with the ministry of oil (in Baghdad). There is nothing unconsti-



Chinese and Kurdish workers work on the drill, cooperation of Norwegian Public Oil company DNO and Kurdish Regional Government, that started drilling for oil in Iraqi Kurdistan, near Zakho, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2005. This is the first rig in Kurdish federal region after the 2003. war and the first one by any International company in 20 years in Iraq. Photo by cSasa Kralj/Jiwafoto

tutional," Mustafa said in response to the criticism.

"It's making concrete what's in the constitution now," said Peter

Galbraith, former U.S. ambassador, now adviser to Iraqi Kurdistan regional leadership.

"Here in Kurdistan, an area that's been neglected for the past 70 years, you now have the most modern technology in the whole country," Galbraith said.

Not far from where the rig is built, he said, 49 villages were destroyed by Saddam Hussein's army. "This is a sign of how much has changed."

The Iraqi constitution gives federal regions control over the production and export of oil. But the

details on cooperation with the central government and how revenue from the oil will be distributed among all Iraqis remain unclear.

"To be able to benefit from the natural resources we have, we have to go to the ballot box in the election," said prime minister of the region, Nichervan Barzani, whose office directly oversees the project and provides security. Other oil wells in the region were built by the Saddam's government and only a few are in use today producing small amounts of oil for domestic use, said an official from the regional government's Oil, Gas and Petrochemical Establishment (OGE).

Here, at the rig, oil has not yet been extracted (it will take at least two months to dig through 3,000 meters of earth) but the prospects are high, said Tarik Abdullah Chalabi, the general manager of the project. DNO expects to touch a basin 30 kilometers long by 8 kilometers wide of high-quality oil.

Nils Bang, the head of DNO's geological formation team, who participated in over 50 explorations throughout the world said, in his experience, "This one is probably the best."

The Norwegian oil company, DNO, heads this oil exploration project, but it is only one of nearly 20 planned in the next three years, Chalabi said. He added that DNO subcon-

tracted the building of the oil drilling rig to the Chinese Great Wall Company that copied the latest American model.

There are several foreign oil companies active in Iraqi Kurdistan but

DNO was the first to deal directly with the Kurdistan government ahead. It signed a Production Sharing Agreement with the regional government in June 2004.

Under Saddam Hussein oil was nationalized and the sanctions after the

1991 Gulf War prevented foreign oil companies from playing an active role in Iraq. Although many are trying to reach agreements with the central ministry of oil, the larger oil companies are reluctant to invest in a

country ravaged by war and where the political scene is in flux.

Iraqi Kurdistan contains about 40 percent of Iraq's oil reserves, according to Kurdistan official sources. Estimates put the amount of oil reserves in Iraq at 330 billion barrels. Most of the oil from 2.1 million barrels per day produced comes from the Basra oilfields in the south and Kirkuk in the north.

In projection for future, Mohammed Al-Zibari, a private oil businessman present at the ceremony said there are plans to build a refinery in

Dohuk, where this oil could be processed.

GLOBE

The Globe * Tuesday, December 6, 2005 - No.35

Kurdistan reconstruction a sad glance at yesterday, but a promising look at tomorrow!

Ambitious plans for the future, woman KRG minister remarks



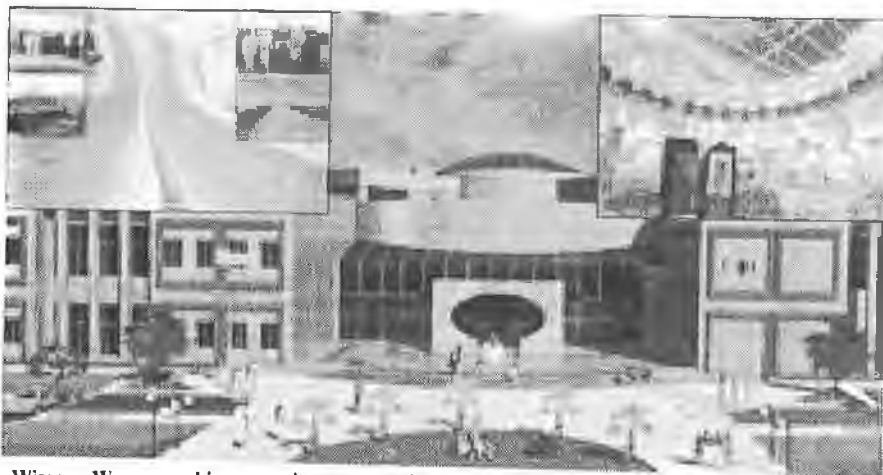
Nazanin M. Wissow

By Ibrahim A. Murad
Globe National File

Reconstruction has become top priority to the Kurdish local governments in the federated Iraqi Kurdistan since the greater task of fighting for Kurds' rights in Baghdad has now fallen to the hand of the Kurdish decision-makers.

To a foreigner re-visiting Kurdistan, there is a considerable amount of change between the wide-ly autonomous region that

would have been seen in the 1980s and that which exists today. The long ravaged, war struck region of Iraqi Kurdistan was subjected to multiple destructive campaigns launched by Saddam Hussein's various army and security establishments. But over the last 14 years, Kurdish authorities have enjoyed a relatively secure region guarded by the U.S. and U.N. forces from the Turkish port of Engerlick within the coalition imposed No-fly Zone in northern Iraq until President Hussein's government was toppled in 2003. The Kurds have started sluggish reconstruction attempts partly through their own confined capabilities, then depending on local and border taxes, partly through internation-



Wissow: We are working on an immense conference palace in the capital. PHOTO/Kamal Zada

al NGOs that darted to the only liberated part of Iraq to help the war torn area.

"After Saddam Hussein's regime was toppled in 2003, reconstruction processes entered a new status in quality and quantity," Nazanin Muhammad Wissow, the KRG Minister of Reconstruction, the only

woman Minister in the Kurdish local government in Erbil, told the Globe. She said that her Ministry has started to concentrate on strategic projects along with other public service undertakings that are always given high priorities in the Ministry's agenda. "Plans like constructing

a second airport in the capital, Erbil, following international standards, are also underway," she insisted.

The first airport in the history of the long oppressed Kurds was erected in the western part of Erbil and was originally cleared to receive planes and start



Wisow: Plans like constructing a second airport in the capital, Irbil, following international standards, are also underway. PHOTO/Kamal Zada



Wisow: The first phase of our habitation plan is on the way and we expect it within the next two months. PHOTO/Kamal Zada



Wisow: 600 kilometers of roads were constructed only in the last 6 months. PHOTO/Kamal Zada

flights only through Baghdad as its initial step. The port has, much to the joyful surprise of the people in Kurdistan, started direct flights to and from a number of Arab and European capitals.

Other strategic projects of the KRG, Mrs Wissow says, include continuous attempts for treating the burdensome problem of domiciling.

"This is a serious case since it touches the citizens' lives directly," she said. "Therefore, we are showing a special interest through constructing thousands of houses in the far-off rural areas, towns and townships."

The crisis still exists and thousands of families still suffer from the embarrassing dilemma, notably in the bigger cities. The local Kurdish government

in Suleymania run by the other major Kurdish faction, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) provides civilians with advance payment as a way out of the aching crisis. The plan enjoys a sorcerous embracement by the

people of that city and its outskirts.

KDP Irbil government has refused to follow the Suleymania example and its officials are trying to justify the rejection, with Mrs Wissow saying: "Our plan for solving this problem is mainly based on constructing residential apartments from which most of the people can benefit."

"KRG plans to construct apartments for all those who are unable to do so due to their limited and weak financial circumstances and the costs will be repaid through monthly installments."

Residence Crisis eliminated?

The minister struggled

hard to avoid the recurrent questions regarding advance payment and confirmed, instead, that her Ministry's plans will include all limited income families. "The first phase of our habitation plan is on the way and we expect it within the next two months," she said.

By this, she was alluding to the 1008 flats under construction and expected

to be completed soon. Two other similar projects are also underway; one including 504 flats in which about 65% of the work is completed and the other having 1500 flats where half of the work is done.

"Habitation crisis will be eliminated within the near future and our projects will cover all the needed civil services like schools, health centers and streets," Mrs Wissow concluded.

The KRG Ministry of Reconstruction then headed by another woman Minister, Nasreen Berwari, now Iraqi Minister of Labor, has accomplished a number of housing projects including flats that are under use by the people.

Highway System high priority

Highway projects, it seems, eclipse a considerable part of reconstruction projects in the self-ruled Kurdish region. Commenting on this, Mrs. Wissow, the Irbil KRG Minister of Reconstruction said:

"In the last few years, hundreds of kilometers of roads were opened or renovated all over the region. This is unavoidable for every citizen here or visitor of the region. 600 kilometers of roads were constructed only in the last 6 months; this is a marvelous achievement if shortcoming in pitch is considered."

She said that her ministry is working hard on the idea of establishing a complete highway system for the region connecting the major cities and the region to the neighboring countries as well.

"Sketches for this project were made by giant foreign companies," she said. She further confirmed that Italian and Turkish companies are competing to win bids.

Conference Hall and Media Center to be constructed

The Kurdish government in Irbil is working; it seems, on constructing what any government in the world needs.

"Among the significant projects within the scope of our duty," Mrs Wissow says, "is a media center in the capital to cope with the much progressed media work enterprise here." She added, "We expect the huge center done within the next two years."

As a matter of fact, the media sector has developed quite dramatically in the autonomous region following the 1991 uprising of the Kurds against Mr. Hussein's government. Most of the centers are attached to local political parties and voice out party policies, dispersed here and there in Irbil, a city of 1.5 million people.

This project, when completed, will help in facilitating media workers' duties since the center will serve the media sector in Kurdistan proper.

"Since Kurdistan is heading towards a recognized federal unit in Iraq; the capital, Irbil needs collateral establishments," KRG reconstruction minister says, "we are working on an immense conference palace in the capital. This is a vital need of the city that was doing without suitable halls for high level meetings and conferences."

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune

December 7, 2005

Iraq ■ By Wesley K. Clark

The next offensive

Last week, as the Bush administration and its critics escalated the debate over how long our troops should stay in Iraq, I was able to see the issue through the eyes of America's friends in the Persian Gulf region. The Arab states agree on one thing: Iran is emerging as the big winner of the American invasion, and President George W. Bush's new strategy and the Democratic responses to it both dangerously miss the point. It's a devastating critique — and, unfortunately, it is correct.

While American troops have been fighting, and dying, against the Sunni rebels and foreign jihadists, the Shiite clerics in Iraq have achieved fundamental political goals: capturing oil revenues, strengthening the role of Islam in the state and building up formidable militias that will defend their gains and advance their cause as the Americans draw down and leave.

Iraq's neighbors, then, see it evolving into a Shiite-dominated, Iranian buffer state that will strengthen Tehran's power in the Gulf even as it seeks nuclear weapons and intensifies its rhetoric against Israel.

We must face the implications of this critique. "Staying the course" risks a slow, costly departure of American forces with Iraq increasingly factionalized and aligned with Iran. Yet a more rapid departure simply reduces our ability to affect the outcome and risks broader regional conflict.

We need to keep our troops in Iraq, but we need to modify the strategy far more drastically than anything the president called for last week.

On the military side, American and Iraqi forces must take greater control of the country's borders. The current strategy of clearing areas near Syria of insurgents and then posting Iraqi troops, backed up by mobile American units, has had success. But it needs to be expanded, especially in the heavily Shiite regions in the south-east, where there has been continuing cross-border traffic from Iran.

We need to deploy some 20,000 troops, with adequate

aerial reconnaissance, to provide training, supervision and backup along Iraq's several thousand miles of vulnerable border. We must also continue military efforts against insurgent strongholds in Sunni areas, in conjunction with Iraqi forces. For the next year or so, this will probably require some 30,000 troops.

But these efforts must go hand-in-glove with intensified outreach to Iraqi insurgents, to seek their reassimilation into society and their assistance in wiping out residual foreign jihadists. Iraqi and American officials have had sporadic communications with insurgent leaders, but these must lead to deeper discussions on issues like amnesty for insurgents who lay down their arms and opportunities for their further participation in public and private life.

Iraq, for its part, must begin to enforce the ban on armed militias that was enshrined in the new constitution, especially in the south. Ideally this should be achieved voluntarily, through political means, but American muscle will have to be made available as a last resort.

As important as they are, military changes won't matter unless our political strategy is rethought.

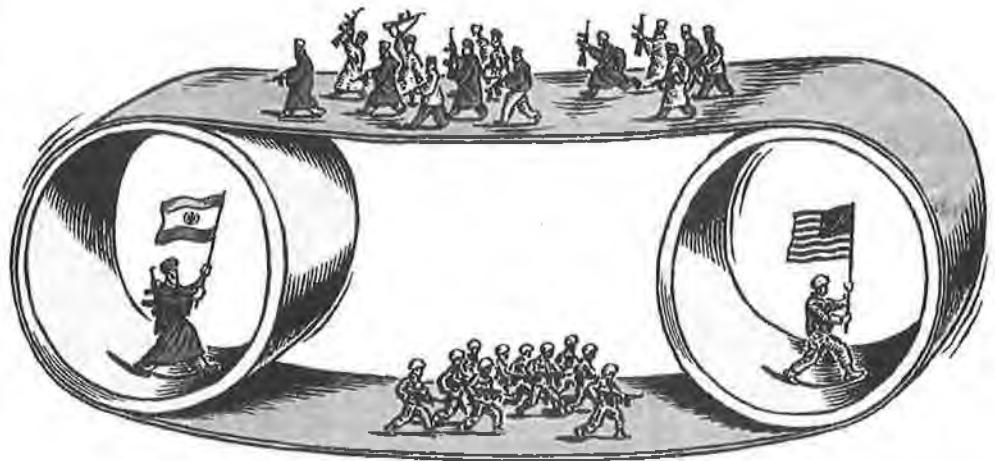
First, the Iraqis must change their Constitution as quickly as possible after next week's parliamentary elections. Most important, oil revenues should be declared the property of the central government, not of

the provinces. And the federal concept must be modified to preclude the creation of a Shiite autonomous region in the south.

Also, a broad initiative to reduce sectarian influence within governmental institutions is long overdue. The elections, in which Sunnis will participate, will help, but the government must do more to ensure that all ethnic and religious groups are represented within ministries, police forces, the army, the judiciary and other overarching federal institutions.

We also must start using America's diplomatic strength with Syria and Iran. The political weakness of President Bashar al-Assad opens the door for significant Syrian concessions on controlling the border and cutting support for the jihadists. We also have to stop ignoring Tehran's meddling and begin a public dialogue on respecting Iraqi independence, which will make it far easier to get international support against the Iranians if — and when — they break their word.

Yes, our military forces are dangerously over-



Christophe Vorlet

stretched. Recruiting and retention are suffering, and among retired officers there is deep concern that the Bush administration's attitude on the treatment of detainees has jeopardized not only the safety of our troops but also the moral purpose of our effort.

Still, none of this necessitates a pullout until the job is done.

After the elections we should be able to draw down 30,000 troops from the 160,000 now there. Don't bet against our troops.

What a disaster it would be if the real winner in Iraq turned out to be Iran, a country that supports terrorism and opposes most of what we stand for. Surely we can summon the wisdom, resources and bipartisan leadership to change the American course before it is too late.

Wesley K. Clark, a former Democratic presidential candidate, was the commander of NATO forces from 1997 to 2000.

Pair of bombers kills 36 at Iraqi police academy

By Edward Wong

BAGHDAD: Powerful explosions from a pair of suicide bombers ripped through the capital's main police academy on Tuesday, killing at least 36 police officers and wounding 72 others, Iraqi and U.S. officials said.

The blasts sent officers fleeing across the compound in disarray. Wounded police officers were carried into a nearby hospital. U.S. soldiers piled out of Humvees at the academy and helped to seal off the inner courtyard, where the explosions had scattered the body parts of Iraqi officers who had been inside classrooms.

"They were all like brothers; they were all young," said Hassan Dawood, 32, a trainer at the academy who was sobbing while lying on a marble bench in a hallway of Al Kindi Hospital. "I just want to ask, 'Is this jihad? Is this jihad against Iraqis?' I want to ask the mujahideen, 'Do you slaughter your brother in the name of jihad?'"

The attack was the deadliest in the capital in months, and came just days before elections scheduled for Dec. 15.

Striking at the very heart of the nascent Iraqi police forces, at their main academy in eastern Baghdad, the attack underscored the fact that insurgents have managed to penetrate the deepest levels of the Iraqi forces.

The bombers, each armed with explosive vests, made their way into the academy despite what some officers described as meticulous searches at the entrances. They demonstrated an unerring knowledge of the layout of the compound and the procedures inside.

After the first bomber detonated at



Scott Nelson/WPN, for The New York Times

A police trainer wounded Tuesday in a suicide bombing at an academy in Baghdad.

about 12:45 p.m. in the courtyard; the second bomber exploded inside a shelter to which many of the officers had fled, witnesses said.

Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, the group led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, claimed responsibility for the attack in an Internet posting, according to the SITE Institute, which tracks jihadist messages.

Al Qaeda said the bombers had struck after observing the academy several times, and had chosen a moment when it appeared that more than 150 officers and cadets were on the scene. Al Qaeda said the attack was aimed in particular at police officers recruited from the ranks of the Badr Organization, an Ira-

nian-trained Shiite militia that answers to one of the country's ruling parties.

On Tuesday afternoon, Al Jazeera, the Arab satellite network, broadcast a video from a militant group showing what appeared to be an American hostage, a blond man said to be a security contractor named Ronald Alan Schulz.

The captors said they would kill the man in 48 hours unless all detainees in Iraq are released.

The New York Times

Iraqi trial proceeds without Saddam

By John F. Burns

BAGHDAD: The trial of Saddam Hussein on crimes against humanity proceeded Wednesday without the former ruler, who made good on his threat Tuesday to boycott the hearing, saying he had been mistreated by an "unjust court."

After a delay of several hours, the chief judge in the case decided to proceed without Saddam, leaving an empty seat where he had sat the last two days, and then, after hearing from two more witnesses, adjourned the trial until Dec. 21.

The delay came after Saddam complained to the court on Tuesday that he had not had a shower or been allowed to change clothing in three days. When the chief judge, Rizgar Muhammad Amin, refused his request for a delay,

Saddam flew into a rage.

"I will not be in a court without justice," he said. "Go to hell, you and your agents of America!"

Saddam's seven co-defendants were present at the abbreviated hearing, and the judge said Saddam would be told of what took place in the courtroom.

The court heard from nine witnesses over the last three days, all of them presenting similar stories of torture, abuse and executions at the hands of Saddam's security forces.

For the first time, some of the other defendants began to plead their inno-

cence of the charges, and to distance themselves from Saddam. They also complained that their treatment since awaiting trial had been no better than that described by the witnesses.

"I had nothing to do with these events," Taha Yassin Ramadan, a former vice president under Saddam who is also on trial, said Wednesday about the torture described by the witnesses.

Saddam's half-brother and co-defendant, Barzan Ibrahim al-Tikriti, the former head of the secret police, described himself as a man of conscience and said that he sympathized with the

sorrow of the witnesses who described their torture.

He said that as head of the secret police he was in charge of intelligence, and had nothing to do with the torture. It was those in charge of security and the Baath Party officials who were in charge of the prisons, he said.

Barzan's rambling 10-minute speech, which also contained complaints about his own treatment, stood in contrast to the account of a witness who had just described a harrowing account of torture he had suffered at the hands of Saddam's agents.

Saddam, 68, and the other defendants are charged in the torture and killing of 148 Shiite men and teenage boys from Dujail, a town 55 kilometers, or 35 miles,

north of Baghdad, after an assassination attempt against him there in 1982. Saddam has accused Iran of ordering that attempt.

During the session Wednesday, an unidentified male witness, testifying behind a beige curtain to conceal his identity, said he was arrested after the assassination attempt and taken to Baath Party headquarters, where he found people "screaming because of the beatings," The Associated Press reported.

The witness said Barzan was present. "When my turn came, the investigator asked me my name and he turned to Barzan and asked him: 'What we shall do with him?' Barzan replied: 'Take him. He might be useful.' We were almost dead because of the beatings."

The Associated Press said that under questioning by the judge, the witness said he was blindfolded at the time and believed it was Barzan speaking because other prisoners told him so. The witness said he was taken to Baghdad "in a closed, crowded van that had no windows."

"When we arrived at the building they asked us to stand along the wall," he said. "We were told to stand only on one foot, and we kept on this position for two hours before we were taken to cells with red walls. I was thirsty but the water was very hot."

The New York Times

Maria Newman contributed reporting from New York for this article.

A U.S. contrarian defending Saddam

Attorney presses judge for a fair trial

By John F. Burns

BAGHDAD: Amid the wrenching testimony of a survivor who told of the atrocities wrought by Saddam Hussein's secret police, the presence of a former U.S. attorney general on Saddam's defense team in the trial court seemed to be one of the day's less bewildering things.

Ramsey Clark, one of America's more renowned contrarians, made a mark notable even by his own singular standards Monday when he delivered a lecture to the judge on how to give his client a fair trial.

Earlier, flushed and indignant, Clark joined in a defense walkout that brought the trial to a temporary halt.

Iraq is "a country that I love, and in a very dangerous time," Clark, 77, said when the judge, Rizgar Mohammed Amin, relenting on his demand for a written submission from the former U.S. attorney general, gave him exactly five minutes to make his case.

"There is a huge foreign military occupation, and even brother and brother are killing each other," Clark said. "This trial can either divide or heal, and so far it is irreconcilably dividing the people of Iraq."

In an interview Sunday, Clark, a tall, gaunt figure, still with a Texas drawl after decades living in New York, set out a rationale for defending Saddam that would face little contest in American law schools. All men, he said, deserved a fair trial, even history's worst criminals.

"Suppose Hitler had survived," he said. "It seems to me that it would have been absolutely critical to give him a fair trial, to let him call witnesses and cross-examine the hell out of them. If you don't do that, historical truth will be distorted."

Clark, son of a Supreme Court judge

appointed by President Harry Truman, made his mark in the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson with his role as a Justice Department official in drafting the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act, liberal landmarks of the age.

But for most of the past 40 years, he has steered an unconventional passage of his own. It has been a journey that has taken him on many a far-flung venture abroad to embrace some of the era's most notorious figures. It is a remarkable roll call, the men who have had him at their side at times of confrontation with Washington: Muammar el-Qaddafi of Libya, Slobodan Milosevic of the former Yugoslavia, Charles Taylor of Liberia.

And at home, figures like the Branch Davidian leader David Koresh, who with many of his followers died in a 1993 attack by federal agents on his Waco, Texas, headquarters, and Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, who is serving a life term in a U.S. jail for his role in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center.

Then there is Saddam. The two men met in Baghdad for the first time during the 1991 Gulf war, and at least four more times during the 1990s, when Clark op-

posed the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq after Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and renewed when he failed to comply with UN inspectors searching for unconventional weapons.

Now, Clark is one of three foreigners — the others are a Qatari and a Jordanian — on Saddam's five-man defense team, and Clark finds himself again explaining how a former Texas liberal finds himself working in support of a man as notorious as Saddam.

One thing that seems reasonably certain is that Clark is not in it for the money. Asked about his fee for representing Saddam, Clark said, "Not a penny," adding that he had taken no fee from many, more contentious clients.

He said that beyond the personal right to justice, there was the need for Iraq to find ways to heal its wounds. "If you don't give Saddam and the others a fair trial now, you're not going to get peace," he said. "Emotions are so inflamed, it would be hard to make things worse. So if there is a perception that the trial is simply war by other means, people will be deeply angered, and they'll say, 'You're perverting justice so as to destroy a man who is your political enemy.'"

But along with more scholarly arguments, Clark mixed personal observations that suggested a sympathy for Saddam that has little in common with the widely shared view of him as a psychopathic dictator. Clark still slips into calling his client "President Saddam."

He reminisces about their conversations over the years, including a meeting Clark attended between Saddam and his legal team Sunday at or near Camp Cropper, the U.S. detention center near Baghdad International Airport where Saddam is held. Clark said Saddam was eager for conversation.

"When a man has been in extreme solitary confinement for nearly two years, any chance to talk to people would be exhilarating," Clark said.

At his trial, Saddam is charged with crimes against humanity in the killing of 148 men and teenage boys from the Shiite town of Dujail after an assassination attempt against Saddam there in 1982.

But Clark suggested that Saddam's secret police had reason to act harshly against Shiite assassins who, he said, almost certainly had political links to Shiite-ruled Iran, then at war with Iraq.

In the interview, Clark linked his earlier legal career, fighting racial prejudice in the American South and apartheid in South Africa, with the seemingly crankier course he has taken since. In both periods, he said, he was engaged in confronting prejudice, prevailing against people "who have a habit of seeing the world in black and white, as good and evil, of demonized characters stripped of all humanity."

That, he said, was what America had done to Saddam, and, in a way to Clark.

"I know something about that, because I get a little bit of that demonization myself," he said.

The New York Times

Nouvelle provocation du président iranien sur les juifs

Ahmadinejad met en doute le génocide et propose de transférer Israël en Europe.

En octobre, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad avait appelé à « rayer Israël de la carte » et la diplomatie iranienne avait aussitôt tenté d'atténuer ces propos en expliquant qu'ils n'avaient simplement toute légitimité à l'Etat hébreu. Hier, le président iranien a choisi à nouveau le scandale en exprimant des doutes sur la réalité du génocide juif et en proposant le transfert d'Israël en Europe. « Maintenant que vous croyez que les juifs ont été opprimés, pourquoi les musulmans palestiniens doivent-ils en payer le prix ? [...] Que l'Allemagne et l'Autriche donnent deux ou trois de leurs provinces au régime sioniste et le problème sera réglé à la racine », a-t-il déclaré dans une interview à la télévision satellitaire iranienne Al-Alam, reprise par l'agence officielle.

Négationnistes. S'exprimant depuis La Mecque, où il participait à un sommet de l'Organisation de la conférence islamique, il a aussi défendu les historiens négationnistes, toujours bien accueillis dans les médias officiels iraniens : « Certains pays européens insistent pour dire que Hitler a tué des millions de juifs dans

« Que l'Allemagne et l'Autriche donnent deux ou trois de leurs provinces au régime sioniste et le problème sera réglé à la racine. »
Ahmadinejad

des fours et vont jusqu'à dire que quiconque affirme le contraire doit être condamné et jeté en prison. Bien que nous n'acceptons pas cette affirmation, si elle était vraie nous poserions la question suivante aux Européens : le meurtre de juifs innocents par Hitler

constitue-t-il la raison de leur soutien aux occupants de Jérusalem ? » Qualifiant l'Etat d'Israël de « tumeur », il a réitéré la position de Téhéran sur l'organisation d'un référendum « des populations natives de cet endroit afin qu'elles déterminent leur propre régime », ce qui revient à exclure la population juive arrivée après 1945.

Cette attaque contre Israël mais aussi contre l'Europe est la seconde en moins de deux mois. Le 26 octobre, il avait nié tout droit à l'existence au « régime sioniste usurpateur », ajoutant que la Palestine était « la ligne de front du monde islamique dans sa guerre contre l'arrogance mondiale (expression désignant les pays occidentaux) ». « Entre le monde de l'arrogance et le mon-

de de l'islam, il y a une bataille historique qui a commencé il y a des centaines d'années. »

Ambassadeurs. La Maison Blanche a aussitôt réagi : « Cela ne fait que souligner nos inquiétudes quant au régime iranien et nous donne raison de penser que ce régime ne devrait pas être en mesure de mettre au point des armes nucléaires. » S'exprimant au nom de l'UE, le Britannique Jack Straw a jugé que de tels propos « n'avaient pas leur place dans un débat politique civilisé ». Jacques Chirac et Angela Merkel ont exprimé leur « indignation ». Mais, cette fois, il sera difficile aux Etats occidentaux de convoquer les ambassadeurs iraniens. Début octobre, la plupart d'entre eux ont été rappelés à Téhéran et n'ont toujours pas été remplacés. ◆

JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN

Iranian leader voices doubts on Holocaust

Reuters

TEHRAN: President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Thursday expressed doubt that the Holocaust took place and suggested Israel be moved to Europe.

His comments, reported by Iran's official IRNA press agency from a news conference he gave in the Saudi Arabian city of Mecca, follow his call in October for Israel to be "wiped off the map," which sparked widespread international condemnation.

"Some European countries insist on saying that Hitler killed millions of innocent Jews in furnaces and they insist on it to the extent that if anyone proves something contrary to that they condemn that person and throw them in jail," IRNA quoted Ahmadinejad as saying.

"Although we don't accept this claim," he said, "if we suppose it is true, our question for the Europeans is: Is the killing of innocent Jewish people by Hitler the reason for their support to the occupiers of Jerusalem?"

"If the Europeans are honest they should give some of their provinces in Europe — like in Germany, Austria or other countries — to the Zionists and the Zionists can establish their state in Europe. You offer part of Europe and

we will support it."

Historians say six million Jews were killed in the Nazi Holocaust. Ahmadinejad's remarks drew swift rebukes from Israel and Washington.

Raanan Gissin, a spokesman for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel, said in Tel Aviv that Ahmadinejad was voicing "the consensus that exists in many circles in the Arab world" that the Jewish people "do not have the right to establish a Jewish, democratic state in their ancestral homeland."

"Just to remind Mr. Ahmadinejad, we've been here long before his ancestors were here," Gissin said. "Therefore, we have a birthright to be here in the land of our forefathers and to live here. Thank God we have the capability to

deter and to prevent such a statement from becoming a reality."

A White House spokesman, Scott McClellan, said: "It just further underscores our concerns about the regime in Iran and it's all the more reason why it's so important that the regime not have the ability to develop nuclear weapons."

Religious hard-liners in Iran do not publicly deny the Holocaust occurred, but say its scale has been exaggerated to

justify the creation of Israel and continued Western support for it.

Once close allies, Iran and Israel have become implacable foes since Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979. Israel accuses Iran of giving arms and money to militant Palestinian groups such as Islamic Jihad and of building nuclear weapons. Iran denies the charges.

Tehran calls Israel a "terrorist state" and has developed missiles that can reach it. It says it would use them if Israel, itself believed to be nuclear armed, tried to bomb Iranian nuclear facilities.

Earlier in his remarks, the Iranian president, a former Revolutionary Guardsman who won a surprise election victory in June, said:

"The question is, where do those who rule in Palestine as occupiers come from? Where were they born? Where did their fathers live? They have no roots in Palestine, but they have taken the fate of Palestine in their hands."

"Isn't the right to national self-determination one of the principles of the United Nations charter? Why do they deprive Palestinians of this right?"

Ahmadinejad concluded his remarks by reiterating Iran's proposal that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict be resolved via a referendum of all the inhabitants of Israel, Gaza and the West Bank, as well as Palestinian refugees in neighboring countries.

"Whatever they decide will be accepted by all humanity. This is a clear democratic solution which is based on international principles," he said.

December 8, 2005

Bush notes progress, and setbacks, in Iraq

With modulated tone, he explains plans

By Brian Knowlton

WASHINGTON: President George W. Bush on Wednesday continued explaining a broad and retooled defense of the Iraq war, underscoring plans to shift security responsibility to Iraqis so they might proceed "without major foreign assistance," and pointing to progress in rebuilding the country and its economy.

In the second of three major speeches aimed at shoring up declining public support for the war, Bush modulated his tone, acknowledging problems such as corruption and insurgents' infiltration of security forces. He spoke of setbacks, of lessons learned and of adjustments made.

But he again rejected what he called "artificial deadlines" for withdrawal from Iraq, saying they "would give the terrorists exactly what they want." In-

Artificial deadlines

'would give the terrorists exactly what they want.'

stead, he said, building Iraqi security forces' autonomy would allow American and other coalition forces to shift prime responsibility to training Iraqis and pursuing terrorist leaders.

In a comment that seemed aimed at Howard Dean, the Democratic National Committee chairman, Bush said, "I reject the pessimists in Washington who say we can't win this war." The blunt-spoken Dean had angered some Republicans, but also rattled many Democrats, when he said Monday that "the idea that we're going to win the war in Iraq is an idea which is just plain wrong."

Even as Bush spoke, House Democrats — increasingly divided between those favoring a quick withdrawal and others who fear that a precipitous departure could lead to chaos in Iraq — were meeting in an attempt to craft a more cohesive message.

The Bush speech was largely devoted to the Iraqi economy. Bush's first speech, delivered Nov. 30, focused on military strategy; a speech next week will emphasize the political advances that the administration says will be incarnated by parliamentary elections Dec. 15.



Jason Reed/Reuters

President Bush's talk at the Naval Academy was influenced by a political scientist hired to help revamp public opinion of the war in Iraq.

"By helping Iraqis continue to build their democracy," Bush said Wednesday, "we will gain an ally in the war on terror. By helping them build a democracy, we will inspire reformers from Damascus to Tehran. And by helping them build a democracy, we'll make the American people more secure."

The American public, polls indicate, remains deeply concerned by reports of unrelenting violence in Iraq, of slow reconstruction, declining oil production and internal Iraqi tensions. Yet polls also suggest that Americans are willing to absorb the high human and financial costs of war if they believe that success is ultimately likely. Much of Bush's speech appeared designed to make that case.

Bush cited the experiences of two cities, the Shiite-dominated city of Najaf in the south, and the largely Kurdish city of Mosul in the north, as examples of what he said was real, if imperfect, progress. In Najaf, he said, a tough urban battle to oust insurgents had cleared the way for an intensive effort to repair homes and schools, restore essential services, rebuild the police force and place the city in the hands of elected government officials.

"Fifteen months later," he said, "new businesses and markets have opened in some of Najaf's poorest areas. Religious pilgrims are visiting the city again." He said the pattern had been similar in Mosul, where, since insurgents were routed, bridges have been rebuilt over the Tigris, and schools and hospitals repaired.

The focused administration message, which came within a day of similar war defenses by Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, stood in sharp contrast to the

stark divisions among Democrats, which have left some in the party fearful of damaging their prospects in the U.S. midterm elections next November. The party is riven over how harshly to attack the president, both over how the country got into the war and how and when to get out. This may in part reflect a divide among Americans, most of whom no longer support Bush's handling of Iraq but still believe it is necessary to stay until matters improve.

On the one side of the party are people like Representative John Murtha of Pennsylvania, who drew enormous attention, but few party supporters, with a proposal to pull U.S. troops out of Iraq within six months. To the surprise of some Democrats, the party's leader in the House, Representative Nancy Pelosi of California, waited days and then backed Murtha's stance. Yet Representative Steny Hoyer of Maryland, the House minority whip, opposes that idea. Among Senate Democrats, Joe Lieberman of Connecticut has given Bush's handling of the war a strong vote of support. Unsettlingly for Democrats, Bush quoted at length from a recent op-ed article by Lieberman.

International Herald Tribune

Bush affirme que la reconstruction irakienne est en marche

MOYEN-ORIENT

La Maison-Blanche martèle son message pour convaincre les Américains que la victoire est possible.

De notre correspondant à Washington

MISANT sur l'effet de répétition, George W. Bush a prononcé hier un nouveau discours-fleuve sur l'Irak, y déclinant une nouvelle facette de sa « stratégie pour la victoire », martelée depuis une semaine auprès de l'opinion américaine.

Après la formation des troupes irakiennes, le président a mis l'accent hier sur la reconstruction du pays, dont il a rappelé qu'il avait « le potentiel d'une considérable prospérité ». Il a cité en exemple les villes de Nadjaf et de Mossoul, affirmant : « Les Irakiens commencent à voir qu'une vie libre sera une vie meilleure. » Il a affirmé que 30 000 créations de PME avaient été enregistrées dans le pays et que 3 000

écoles avaient été rénovées. Avec des accents de contrition nouveaux chez lui, il a reconnu que le réseau électrique n'était toujours pas à la hauteur. « Nous devons aussi gagner la bataille après la bataille », a dit George Bush.

C'était la deuxième d'une série de quatre interventions prévues d'ici aux élections irakiennes du 15 décembre. Cette stratégie de communication est l'œuvre d'une cellule confidentielle à la Maison-Blanche répondant au nom de code Whig (White House Iraq Group), dont la cheville ouvrière est un ancien professeur de science politique à l'université Duke de Caroline du Nord. Peter Feaver, 43 ans, entré en juin dernier au Conseil national de sécurité, avait publié une étude qui contredit l'idée admise depuis la guerre du Vietnam selon laquelle le soutien populaire est inversement proportionnel au nombre de victimes. D'après lui, il dépend plutôt de la confiance de l'opinion dans les chances de l'emporter.

Réponses à toutes les attaques

D'où l'antienne de l'Administration sur les progrès accomplis et l'importance des enjeux. « En Irak, nous faisons face à une menace directe contre le peuple américain », a dit hier le président. La Maison-Blanche ne laisse plus aucune contradiction sans réponse. Lorsque Howard Dean, le chef du Parti démocrate, dénonce « l'idée fausse selon laquelle nous allons gagner cette guerre », Bush met en doute le patriotisme des « pessimistes de Washington ». A l'inverse, il salue le sénateur démocrate Joe Lieberman, revenu d'Irak convaincu de « progrès visibles et tangibles ».

Jusqu'ici, cette offensive de relations publiques a porté peu de fruits. D'après un sondage CNN-USA Today-Gallup, 55 % des Américains pensent que le président n'a toujours pas de plan pour l'emporter, contre 41 %. Selon un autre sondage pour Newsweek, 65 % désapprouvent sa façon de

conduire la guerre (30 % d'avis positifs). La publication d'un « plan » sur 35 pages, où le mot « victoire » apparaît six fois dès la table des matières, n'a pas bouleversé la donne. Après son secrétaire à la Défense, Donald Rumsfeld, le président a déploré hier que les nouvelles positives « ne fassent pas les titres du journal du soir ». Pour qu'elles fassent ceux de la presse irakienne, le Pentagone avait reconnu avoir payé l'insertion d'articles écrits par des soldats chargés de la propagande.

La Maison-Blanche a appelé à la rescousse d'anciens collaborateurs de Ronald Reagan : ils ont conseillé d'abandonner les longs discours hebdomadaires, prononcés le matin devant des publics choisis, au profit d'une adresse solennelle à la nation, en direct depuis le Bureau ovale, un soir à une heure de grande écoute. La Maison-Blanche hésite encore, attendant de voir les résultats de la campagne en cours. Le souci de l'équipe présidentielle est résumé par Dan Balz dans le *Washington Post* : « Il n'y a pas de précédent d'un président parvenant par la persuasion à renverser la tendance constante au déclin (dans l'opinion) d'une entreprise militaire comme celle-ci. »

PHILIPPE GÉLIE

Saddam Hussein boycotte son procès

LE FIGARO
8 décembre 2005

Le dictateur déchu a refusé de comparaître hier devant ses juges.

SADDAM HUSSEIN a refusé hier de comparaître devant ses juges, retardant le début de la cinquième audience de son procès. Les débats sur le massacre de 148 villageois chiites dans les années 80 se sont finalement ouverts sans lui devant le Haut Tribunal pénal irakien. Ils ont débuté avec l'audition d'un témoin anonyme, installé derrière un rideau et dont la voix était modifiée électroniquement. Mais au terme de la déposition d'un second témoin, le procès du dictateur déchu et de sept de ses lieutenants a été ajourné au 21 décembre. Saddam avait reproché mardi soir au tribunal d'avoir décidé de tenir une nouvelle audience mercredi, soulignant qu'après celles de lundi et mardi il n'avait plus d'habits propres et ne pouvait pas fumer ni marcher. « Allez au diable ! », avait-il lancé

en conclusion.

Indifférence envers les victimes

Accusé de crimes qui pouvaient le conduire à la pendaison, l'ancien président irakien montre depuis le début de son procès indifférence à l'égard des victimes, agressivité à l'égard des juges et pas le moindre regret pour les crimes commis pendant ses années de pouvoir. Jamais les souffrances et les expériences terribles décrites par certains témoins assis à quelques mètres de lui ne lui arrachent le moindre signe de faiblesse. Au contraire, il qualifie ces témoins de « collaborateurs » au service d'un tribunal dont il ne reconnaît pas la légalité et qu'il accuse d'être « un valet » des Etats-Unis. Il tourne le tribunal en dérision lorsque, après le témoignage hésitant et un peu décousu d'une victime, il demande à son président, Rizkar Amine, de bien vouloir présenter des témoins « moins usés et moins fati-

gués ». Avant d'opter sans la moindre hésitation pour la politique de la chaise vide.

T. O. (AVEC AFP, REUTERS)



Saddam Hussein embrassant le Coran, avant-hier, lors du procès où il est jugé pour le massacre de 148 chiites. Furst/AFP

De nombreux Syriens soutiennent le pouvoir face à la pression internationale.

Meurtre d'Hariri: Damas organise la résistance de la rue

Damas envoyée spéciale

« **J**e demande à Dieu de protéger notre pays et son président, Hafez... heu... pardon, son fils, Bachar al-Assad. »

Mara, 22 ans, vient d'inscrire sa prière sur un volumineux cahier destiné à recueillir les réactions de la population syrienne face aux pressions internationales. Peu au fait des enjeux politiques locaux, elle trébuche sur les noms mais connaît les slogans: «La commission d'enquête internationale est politisée. Nous réclamons la vérité sur l'assassinat de l'ancien Premier ministre libanais Rafic Hariri.»

À sa droite, un homme en costume sombre écoute attentivement. Il dit s'appeler Mazen et travailler bénévolement pour des députés qui, le 24 octobre, peu après la publication du rapport du juge Mehliş – qui relève l'«implication» de responsables syriens dans l'assassinat – ont décidé de dresser une tente sur l'une des grandes places de Damas pour que le peuple, face à l'épreuve, puisse exprimer «librement» sa solidarité avec ses dirigeants. «Tous les après-midi, nous recevons des centaines de manifestants, explique Mazen. Aujourd'hui, nous attendons des étudiants.» Quelques minutes après, les voilà qui débarquent. Acheminés par trois bus, casquettes aux couleurs de la Syrie, ils sont invités par les «bénévoles» à prendre place dans l'assemblée puis à parler à la tribune. Leurs interventions sont retransmises en direct par une chaîne de télévision locale. Une heure plus tard, ils repartent, à pied.

Matraquage. Depuis six semaines, le régime baasiste, sous le coup de la résolu-



Damas, 2004. Le rapport du juge Mehliş révèle l'«implication» de responsables syriens dans le meurtre du Premier ministre libanais.

tion 1636 adoptée le 31 octobre par le Conseil de sécurité – qui exige des autorités qu'elles collaborent «sans réserve» avec la commission d'enquête internationale sous peine de s'exposer à d'«autres mesures» – organise la «résistance intérieure». Lieux de réunion sous surveillance pour la population, banderoles nationalistes déployées sur toutes les grandes artères de la capitale, émissions spéciales à la télévision, rien n'est laissé au hasard, et le matraquage est constant. «Mais si la mobilisation vient d'en haut, explique un journaliste de Damas, les Syriens ont répondu positivement et, dans leur grande majorité, adhèrent sincèrement à cette campagne tout simplement parce qu'ils ressentent le besoin de resserrer les rangs face aux menaces étrangères.»

Mira, membre de l'Association des relations publiques syriennes, qui a planté sa tente en signe de solidarité avec le pouvoir, ne sait plus quel argument avancer pour prouver sa bonne foi. «Je vous en prie, ne dites pas que je suis manipulée, implore-t-elle. Nous en avons assez de cette image mensongère véhiculée par les

médias étrangers, je crois sincèrement en notre Président. Depuis son accession au pouvoir en 2000, nous vivons beaucoup mieux, nous sommes plus libres. Bien sûr, tout n'est pas parfait, mais Bachar al-Assad a besoin de temps.» Autour d'elle, des étudiants en journalisme acquiescent. «Nous voulons juste qu'on nous fiche la paix. Cette histoire d'assassinat est absurde. Nous sommes victimes d'un complot fomenté par nos ennemis, Israël et les États-Unis.»

Cette opinion semble largement répandue dans la rue damascène où l'on soutient qu'après huit mois d'enquête la commission internationale n'est pas parvenue à fournir

des preuves convaincantes. «Et quand bien même certains de nos responsables seraient impliqués, s'emporte un commerçant, pourquoi devrions-nous tous payer le prix de leurs erreurs?» Depuis début janvier, la monnaie syrienne a perdu 15% de sa valeur par rapport au dollar, le nombre de touristes est en baisse constante et le taux de chômage en hausse après le retour sur le marché de l'emploi de centaines de milliers d'ouvriers qui jusqu'alors travaillaient au Liban. Plus inquiétant aux yeux de la population, les risques de déstabilisation du pays et la crainte, bien entretenue par Damas, que la Syrie connaisse le sort actuel de l'Irak.

«Guerre civile». Hier, selon l'agence d'information syrienne, des affrontements entre des islamistes et l'armée ont fait neuf morts à Idlib. Comme l'Irak et le Liban, la Syrie doit composer avec ses différentes confessions sunnite, alaouite, druze, chrétienne – et sa principale minorité ethnique, les Kurdes. Depuis 1966, 12% d'alaouites monopolisent le pouvoir. «Si le clan Assad est mis sur la touche brutalement, qui peut nous garantir que notre pays ne va pas sombrer dans la guerre civile?», demande Ahmed, un chauffeur de taxi. Comme beaucoup de Syriens, il se moque pas mal de la politique mais veut pouvoir manger à sa faim et vivre en paix. D'où ce souhait: que les dirigeants collaborent avec la commission d'enquête «sans réserve».

ISABELLE DELLERBA



Suicide bomber kills at least 30 on Iraqi bus

U.S. hostage killed, rebel group claims

By Kirk Semple

BAGHDAD: Two near-simultaneous explosions, at least one detonated by a suicide bomber, tore through a crowded bus in the capital's main bus terminal on Thursday, killing at least 30 people and wounding at least 25, witnesses and police officials said.

Later in the day, an Islamic insurgent group claimed in an Internet posting to have executed a kidnapped American security consultant. The posting neither named the consultant nor provided evidence of their claim. But the group, the Islamic Army in Iraq, said Tuesday that it had abducted Ronald Alan Schulz, 40, of North Dakota, and threatened to kill him within 72 hours unless all detainees in Iraq were released.

The U.S. Embassy here confirmed the kidnapping but said Thursday that it was unable to verify the claim.

The bus bombing occurred at 10:45 a.m. in the Nahda terminal in central Baghdad, which handles buses destined for the Kurdish north and the Shiite-dominated south. The bus was about to leave the terminal when the bomber, ignoring the fare collector's admonitions, forced himself on board, witnesses said.

Bystanders heard a small explosion that appeared to come from the luggage hold, then saw the bomber detonate himself, causing a fireball that engulfed the bus, killing most of its occupants and several people at a nearby food stall.

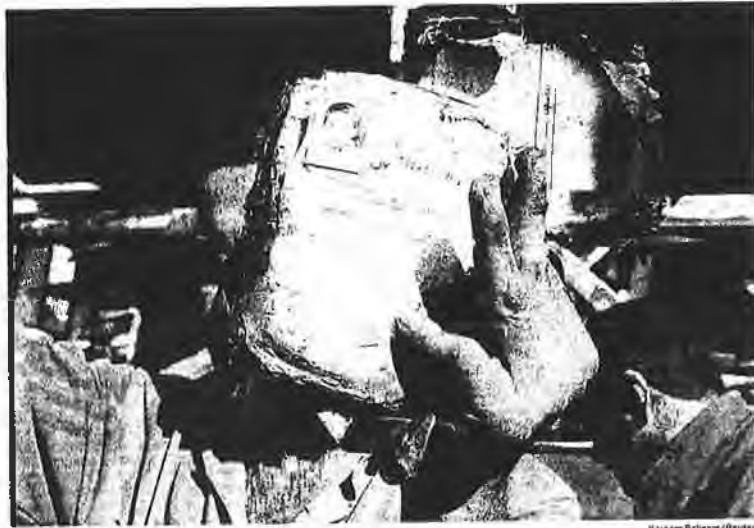
"The fare collector saw the suicide bomber and told him that the bus was full," said Ahmad Adnan Khalil, 20, another fare collector who witnessed the scene. "So the suicide bomber pushed the collector and blew himself up."

The bombing, the second large-scale suicide attack in Baghdad this week, appeared to have been driven by deadly sectarian intent: The bus was filled with passengers headed toward the predominantly Shiite city of Nasiriya.

The insurgency, in part led by disgruntled Sunnis, has apparently sought to provoke sectarian discord and further divide the nation by attacking unprotected Shiite targets like mosques on days of prayer and crowded marketplaces.

Though suicide bombers have detonated themselves on buses in Israel and London, Thursday's bombing in Baghdad may have been the first time the tactic had been used by Iraq's insurgency, Major General Rick Lynch, a senior U.S. military spokesman said Thursday.

The Nahda terminal was the site of a triple car-bomb attack at rush hour on Aug. 17, which killed at least 43 people



A rescuer holding the identity papers of an Iraqi boy killed in the attack on a bus leaving Baghdad's main terminal Thursday.

and wounded 89.

The U.S. military command has warned of a surge in violence in advance of Dec. 15 elections for a full, four-year National Assembly. Jihadist groups have ordered Iraqis not to participate in the political process.

On Tuesday, in the deadliest attack in months, two suicide bombs killed at least 36 police officers at the capital's main police academy and wounded at least 72 other people, including a U.S. contractor.

The bombings this week cast doubt on repeated claims by military commanders during the past several months that they have sharply undermined the ability of the insurgents to carry out attacks.

Since last spring, the U.S. military has conducted more than a dozen sweeps of towns and villages along the Euphrates River in western Iraq in an effort to disrupt what many commanders call "a rat line" of foreign fighters entering from Syria. Lynch, the U.S. general, estimated Thursday that about 95 percent of suicide bombers were foreigners operating under the influence of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian-born militant and leader of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, characterized by commanders and George W. Bush's administration as the driving force behind the insurgency.

But while the number of suicide attacks has dropped markedly in the past two months — from 52 in October to 23 in November — rebels continue to strike with devastating effect.

Several months ago, U.S. officials pointed to another drop in suicide attacks — from 70 in May to 40 in August — to indicate the success of their of-

fensives in western Iraq. But then the number of suicide bombings began to climb again — from 49 in September and 52 in October.

The Islamic Army in Iraq, one of scores of militant groups that compose the insurgency, said in its Internet posting that it had killed "the American security consultant," calling him "the American pig," and saying it would provide pictures of the killing later.

If the claim is true, it would be the first execution of a U.S. kidnap victim since Steven Vincent, a journalist, was abducted and killed in Basra on Aug. 2. Schulz's abduction became publicly known on Tuesday when Al Jazeera, the Arab satellite network, broadcast a videotape showing what appeared to be a captured American security consultant.

Schulz's kidnapping was the latest in a wave of abductions of Westerners in Iraq in the past two weeks, including Bernard Planche, a French engineer abducted in Baghdad on Monday morning; four aid workers — an American, a Briton and two Canadians — kidnapped on Nov. 26; and Susanne Osthoff, a German archaeologist taken on Nov. 25.

The New York Times

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune
December 9, 2005

Six morts dont 4 soldats turcs dans des combats avec des rebelles kurdes



DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 9 déc 2005 (AFP) - Des combats entre séparatistes kurdes et l'armée turque ont éclaté vendredi dans la province de Sînak, frontalière de l'Irak et de la Syrie, faisant six morts, dont quatre militaires près de la localité de Guclukonak, a-t-on appris de source officielle.

Des violences se sont également produites dans la soirée à Silopi, une autre ville de la province, où trois explosions quasi-simultanées devant des magasins ont fait au moins un blessé et des dégâts matériels.

L'instabilité dans le sud-est de la Turquie s'est accrue depuis l'annonce en juin 2004 par les séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan qu'ils mettaient fin à une trêve unilatérale de cinq ans.

Le FBI américain a d'ailleurs indiqué qu'il coopérait avec la Turquie dans la lutte contre le PKK.

"Nous travaillons avec nos partenaires partout en Europe et en Turquie pour cibler le PKK et nous travaillons en coopération pour trouver et couper les financements des groupes terroriste quels qu'ils soient, le PKK ou Al-Qaïda", a déclaré le directeur du FBI, Robert Mueller, en déplacement à Ankara pour une journée de travail avec des dirigeants de la police et des services secrets turcs.

Selon des responsables locaux, les combats à Guclukonak ont fait suite à une opération menée jeudi par l'armée près de cette ville contre la rébellion kurde.

Quatre soldats turcs ont été tués et deux autres blessés après avoir été attaqués peu après minuit à coup de fusils, de grenades et de grenades de RPG, alors qu'ils montaient la garde devant un poste militaire.

L'armée a riposté en lançant une opération couverte par un appui aérien dans la zone et deux rebelles ont été tués.

La mort des quatre soldats a été confirmée par le ministre turc de l'Education Huseyin Celik, présent pour inaugurer une école dans cette région qui souffre d'une pauvreté chronique et du conflit prolongé entre l'armée et le PKK.

A Silopi, les trois explosions font suite à une série d'arrestations cette semaine. L'agence semi-officielle Anatolie a affirmé qu'une personne avait été blessée tandis que l'agence pro-kurde Fîrat a fait état de plusieurs blessés.

Deux membres présumés du PKK, accusés de planifier des attentats, et sept autres personnes ont été arrêtées dans cette ville mercredi, des armes et du plastique ont été saisis.

La tension dans le sud-est de la Turquie a connu une escalade en novembre.

De violentes manifestations ont suivi un attentat à la bombe, le 9 novembre, contre une librairie de la ville de Semdinli, dans la province de Hakkârî, propriété d'un ancien membre de la guérilla kurde.

Les habitants et les élus locaux de Semdinli avaient avancé la thèse que des éléments de l'armée ou des services secrets puissent être à l'origine de l'attentat, qui avait fait un mort. Cinq autres personnes ont été tuées dans les émeutes qui ont suivi.

Le gouvernement turc, sous pression de l'Union européenne pour faire respecter la démocratie et l'Etat de droit sur l'ensemble du territoire en vue de son adhésion, a promis de faire la lumière sur cet attentat.

La Turquie a entamé le 4 octobre avec l'UE un processus de négociations d'au moins dix ans dont l'objectif est l'adhésion, mais sans garantie.

Le PKK est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis. L'insurrection déclenchée par cette organisation en 1984 et visant à la création d'un Etat kurde autonome a fait quelque 37.000 morts.

Iraq's election

Who will run the show next?

The Economist

December 10th 2005

The West and most neighbouring Arab countries want secular-minded parties to do better, but the Islamists, egged on by Iran, will probably triumph again



THE tension is mounting in the run-up to Iraq's general election on December 15th. The killing, mostly of Iraqis by Iraqis, has not abated. Earlier this week, at least 36 police cadets were killed by two suicide-bombers, probably fellow cadets, in Baghdad's police academy—one of the bloodiest such deeds for several weeks. Last week ten American marines were killed by a roadside bomb, the highest one-day toll of Americans in four months. But hopes are still high, among those seeking to build a federal and democratic Iraq, that the election will produce a parliament and government even more representative and legitimate than those that emerged after the poll in January, when the rest of the world was so struck by the size of the turnout and by Iraqis' determination to choose their own leaders.

The antagonism between some of the leading candidates, aside from the spectacle of insurgents and government forces killing each other, has sharpened. Last week a former prime minister, Iyad Allawi, a secular-minded Shia Arab whose candidates' list is the most prominent rival to the dominant and strongly Islamist force in the outgoing parliament, the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), was attacked by a crowd of Shia radicals on a campaign visit to the holy city of Najaf. "God curse Baathists!", they shouted, referring to his past membership of Saddam Hussein's party, as they pelted him with stones and shoes. A furious Mr Allawi said he had been sub-

jected to an "assassination attempt", and promised to "cleanse the country" of such "hurtful rebels" once he took power.

The bitter conflict between Mr Allawi and the UIA is yet another fissure in Iraq's already divided body politic. The Shia-led coalition, widely known as "the clerics' list", that swept the board in January's poll, with 48% of votes cast, has shed many of its secular-leaning members. It is now a straightforward alliance of Shia Islamists, including the radical movement whose members follow Muqtada al-Sadr, a firebrand cleric, and were probably responsible for the Najaf attack. The UIA's leaders promise to intensify the counter-insurgency against Sunni Arab fighters, and show little sympathy for former military officers or Baath party members who say they have been unfairly treated.

Thanks to a new electoral system and the widespread political mobilisation of Sunni Arabs, the UIA's share of the vote will probably go down. In January, parties competed on a single national list; since most Sunni Arabs boycotted the ballot, they ended up with scant representation. This time, each province, including the four mainly Sunni Arab ones (out of 18 in all), will have its own list, so Sunnis will be far better represented, however few of them turn out. Nonetheless, the UIA will do well, because the Shias' most influential clergyman, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, has implicitly blessed it, after some hesitation due to his reluctance to immerse

himself in partisan politics. He told his followers to vote only for a list that backs "religious and national principles".

Mr Allawi's slogan, "Iraq for all Iraqis", is a dig at the Alliance's perceived Shia sectarian bias. He has enlisted Sunni allies such as the current parliament's speaker, Hachem al-Hassani, and a former president, Ghazi al-Yawer, and has courted Sunni votes by damning the present government's human-rights record as comparable to Saddam Hussein's. In January, Mr Allawi got 14% of the vote, and hopes to improve on that. He has drawn some support from Shia secularists, military families and others opposed to the UIA's clerical links and its ties to Iran. He also hopes to pick up more support from the many Iraqis dissatisfied with the government's failure to improve security or boost the economy; electricity in most towns still works only for a few hours at a time.

But Mr Allawi no longer has the advantage of incumbency, which he used in January to promote himself as a strong leader who could put Iraq together again. Moreover, the UIA blamed much of Iraq's economic failures on corruption in Mr Allawi's cabinet. In addition, though many Shias dislike their present rulers, they dislike even more the idea of letting anyone connected with their former Baathist oppressors regain a foothold in the state. Sadrist newspapers describe Mr Allawi as "Saddam without the moustache". Some Shia media outlets say that the CIA and Sunni Arab countries are trying to engineer an Allawi victory and that the Americans, having toppled the old Sunni Baathist regime, are trying to impose a new Baathist one—with a Shia veneer.

Many Sunnis, particularly those outside Baghdad, may opt for new coalitions of their own co-religionists that have formed in the last few months, such as the Islamist-leaning Iraqi Consensus Front or ►►

Who's who?

Party/list*	Main components	Leading personalities	Platform
United Iraqi Alliance	Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq The Dawa Party Sadrist The Virtue party [§]	Abdelaziz al-Hakim, Adel Abd al-Mahdi and Hussein al-Shahristani [†] Ibrahim al-Jaafari Muqtada al-Sadr [‡]	The Shia block that swept January's elections, with 48% of votes cast, minus some secularists such as Ahmed Chalabi (see below). This time it has a more Islamist make-up. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the country's most influential cleric, has implicitly endorsed it, so it will probably again do very well. The Sadrist have sought to open lines to Sunni insurgents
Kurdistan Alliance	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan Kurdish Democratic Party	Jalal Talabani Massoud Barzani	The same Kurdish coalition, plus or minus several smaller parties, that took the second-largest share (26%) of the vote in January
Iraqi National List	Iraqi National Accord Iraqi Communist Party 13 other groups	Iyad Allawi, Ghazi al-Yawer, Hachem al-Hassani and Adnan Pachachi	Built around the personality of secular-minded former prime minister, Iyad Allawi, a Shia who promises strong leadership and "Iraq for all the Iraqis", a dig at the UIA's supposed sectarianism. He has gained some new Sunni allies, such as his three leading colleagues. It won 14% of the vote in January
Iraqi National Congress	Iraqi National Congress Constitutional monarchists	Ahmed Chalabi Sharif Ali bin al-Hussein	Coalition billing itself as a liberal, non-Islamist alternative to the UIA
Iraqi Consensus Front	Iraqi Islamic Party Two other predominantly Sunni Arab groups	Adnan al-Dulaimi, Tareq al-Hashimi and Khalaf al-Alyani	The more Islamist of two predominantly Sunni Arab coalitions; calls for all foreign troops to leave and for deBaathification and the dissolution of the army to be reversed. Wants to change the new constitution
Iraqi Front for National Dialogue	Iraqi National Front Arab Democratic Front Three other groups	Salah al-Mutlek	A more secular, nationalist, Sunni-led grouping that opposes the supposed sectarianism of the Shia Islamist block
Kurdistan Islamic Union	—	Salaheddin Muhammad Bahaeddin	Kurdish Islamist group that criticises the two larger parties' dominance of Kurdish politics
Future of Iraq Grouping	—	Ibrahim Bahr al-Ulum	Breakaway from the UIA
Independent Grouping of Iraq's Technocrats	—	Ali al-Dabbagh	Breakaway from the UIA
Iraq National Peace List	—	Laith Kubba	Breakaway from the UIA
National Two Rivers	Five predominantly Christian groups	Yunadim Kanna	Promotion and protection of Christian interests
National Reconciliation and Liberation Block	—	Mishan al-Juburi	Sunni Arab-led party which won a seat in the last elections; opposes the constitution in its current form
National Forces Parliament	—	Hazem al-Shaalan	Strongly anti-Islamist list led by ex-defence minister, a Shia, who has been accused of corruption

Source: The Economist

* More than 200 parties and groups have registered

[†] Shahristani is a non-party MP close to Sistani

[‡] He is not a candidate himself

[§] Followers of Muqtada al-Sadr's late father

► the more secular-nationalist Iraqi Front for National Dialogue. Their leaders champion causes dear to the Sunnis, such as reversing deBaathification, reinstating those who served in the old army, freeing prisoners and removing American and foreign troops. But though some of the Sunni fronts include well-known figures, none has acquired the sort of voice that the UIA gives the Shias or the Kurdish coalition gives the Kurds. So many Sunnis may vote for local tribal or religious candidates.

But will they vote at all? Many radical Sunni insurgents still oppose holding elections, though there have been few reports of explicit threats against would-be voters. The influential Muslim Scholars' Board, a group of Sunni clergy which led the boycott in January, still in principle opposes an election under foreign occupation. But most Sunni politicians have learnt the cost of not taking part in the political process. They particularly want to regain a foothold in the security ministries, which they think have become instruments of Shia oppression of their communities.

The Kurds, who make up about a fifth

of Iraq's people, alongside the Shia Arabs (60%) and the Sunni Arabs (20%), are likely to vote for a coalition of the two parties who monopolise power in Iraq's three northern provinces. Despite discontent, especially among young Kurds, over the cronyism of this ruling duo, it should win easily; tribal networks in the villages help ensure its dominance. Reports from the northern province of Dohuk that an Islamist office has been attacked by a mob and four campaigners killed suggest that the election there may turn nasty.

Some American and western officials in Baghdad hope that Mr Allawi can stage a comeback, even with a modest share of the vote, since many Sunni politicians say that they would back him as prime minister. In any event, western leaders hope for a broad-based government, including some prominent Sunnis, in the hope of pulling the more secular-minded insurgents into peaceful politics. However, the UIA's power base is so wide, and its sense of entitlement as the Shia majority's main voice so strong, that it will be loth to endorse a prime minister from outside its

ranks. The Alliance is particularly hostile to Mr Allawi.

But the Shia Islamists are themselves divided at the top. The Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) is the toughest and best organised of their main parties. The bumbling current prime minister, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, of the Dawa party, is said to want to keep his job but is unlikely to do so. Adel Abd al-Mahdi, a SCIRI man, has a fair chance of replacing him. If he does, he may be shrewd enough to build a broader coalition government.

In any event, a new government may take weeks or longer to emerge. It must then, if it is sensible, amend the constitution to reassure the Sunnis that they will get a fair deal in the new Iraq. At that point, all being well, more insurgents might accept the new order, a newly legitimate government may begin to assert itself, and the Americans and their allies could start gradually leaving. There is a very long way to go before that may happen. But the upcoming election should be a big milestone on the way. ■

TIME DECEMBER 12, 2005

MIDDLE EAST THE NEW RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

As the insurgency rages on, a TIME investigation reveals a new U.S. push to exploit splits in its ranks. Can that help lead to an exit?

By MICHAEL WARE BAGHDAD

HE SECRET MEETING TOOK PLACE EARLIER THIS year on the outskirts of Baghdad, in a safe house known only to the insurgents in attendance. One of them, an Iraqi known by the nom de guerre Abu Marwan, is a senior commander of the leading Baathist guerrilla group called the Army of Mohammed. Together with a representative of an alliance of Iraqi Islamist insurgent groups, Abu Marwan met aides to Abu Mousab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. The purpose was to discuss the idea of uniting under a joint command the disparate networks fighting U.S. forces in Iraq. When the conversation turned to leadership issues, Abu Marwan's companion suggested that al-Qaeda replace al-Zarqawi with an Iraqi, "as it would have an enormous impact on the other groups." But an al-Zarqawi aide rebuffed the notion. "Who started our organization?" he asked rhetorically. No one was prepared to ask al-Zarqawi to step aside.

That episode might seem inconsequential in a long and bloody war that's growing deadlier on the ground—20 service

members died last week, including 10 Marines killed by a bombing in Fallujah on Thursday—and increasingly unpopular at home. Yet it reflects a critical new dimension to the war, a shifting tide within al-Qaeda and the broader insurgency. The Jordanian-born al-Zarqawi and his network of hard-line jihadis have long been the driving force of the insurgency, transforming it from a nationalist struggle to one fueled by religious zealotry and infused with foreign recruits. But a TIME investigation, based on dozens of interviews with military and intelligence officials as well as Iraqi leaders inside and outside the insurgency, reveals that Iraqis are reclaiming the upper hand, forcing al-Zarqawi to adjust. Differences between Baathist insurgent groups and al-Qaeda are driven by discomfort with al-Zarqawi's extreme tactics and

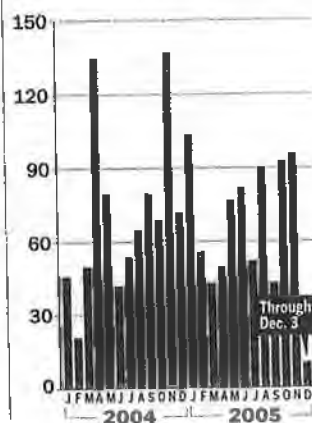


No Relief

The military says it's making progress against the insurgents. Iraqi casualties are down, but last month was the U.S.'s deadliest since January

85% of attacks occur in four provinces: Baghdad, Anbar, Salahaddin and Ninevah

U.S. troop fatalities





CONFINED Suspected rebels detained by Iraqi forces sit in al-Nsaur prison in Baghdad

those surveyed said the U.S. was wrong to go to war in Iraq, a figure largely unchanged for the past year. The U.S. doesn't have many options. Despite White House hopes that local security forces can relieve coalition troops, intelligence officials are not nearly so optimistic that Iraqification will bring stability. "Will we ever see Iraqi security forces capable of crushing this insurgency? Probably not. No," says a high-ranking military-intelligence officer in Iraq. The dilemma is that the longer U.S. forces stay, the more the insurgency is sustained by new recruits, yet withdrawing now could allow al-Qaeda and Iran to consolidate their influence in Iraq, dealing a body blow to U.S. regional interests. Even Washington's staunchest political ally, former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, says the U.S. is not winning and must have the courage to seek new solutions.

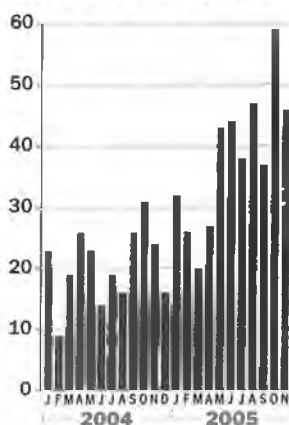
That's why U.S. officials in Iraq are reaching out to the Sunnis, the insurgents and former Baath Party members as part of a program to quell the violence by peeling them away from al-Zarqawi. "The fault line between al-Qaeda and the nationalists seems to have increased," says Ambassador Khalilzad. Here's an inside look at how those splits have started to emerge, how they are redefining the shape of the insurgency in Iraq—and why the U.S. is now turning to some of its old enemies.

INSIDE THE RESISTANCE

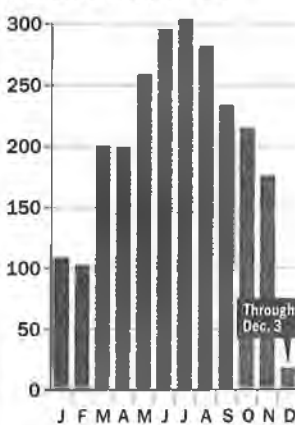
AFTER 31 MONTHS OF FIGHTING IN IRAQ, the U.S. still can't say for sure whom it is up against. Each week coalition forces kill hundreds of insurgents, but there is no end of replacements. U.S. commanders believe that as many as 20,000 fighters are in the field on any given day, a figure that has remained constant for almost two years. Many insurgent groups have become more tactically sophisticated and more lethal, and around 2,000 attacks are launched each month. Training facilities are dotted across Iraq; videos obtained by TIME show classes in infantry techniques and handling weapons. Abu Baqr, a former emir, or commander, of a nationalist militia in Baghdad who was recently released from a U.S. military prison and is rebuilding his team, tells TIME that "in the beginning, even I didn't know how to use most of the weapons, but I learned. We give out weapons from the old army, and the money that funds us comes from wealthy individuals."

Part of the insurgents' resilience comes

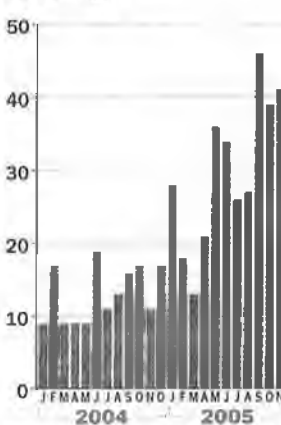
IEDs and car bombings that killed U.S. troops



Iraqi military and police killed, 2005



Multiple-fatality bombings



Sources: Department of Defense, Brookings Institution

TIME POLL

Doubts About Iraq ...

As the chaos in Iraq continues, Americans are split over what course to take. Nearly half want the troops home in a year, and a small majority says the war has made the U.S. less safe

Which comes closest to your view on U.S. troops in Iraq?

Withdraw most troops in the next 12 months or so, regardless of conditions in Iraq

47%

Keep most of the troops in Iraq until the new Iraqi government is stable, even if it means keeping troops in Iraq for a number of years

40%

Increase the number of troops in Iraq

8%

How likely is it that the new Iraqi government will be able to build a stable and reasonably democratic society?

Likely: 56%

Very Somewhat
Not very Not at all

Not likely: 37%

Have U.S. actions in Iraq made the U.S. safer from terrorist attacks or more vulnerable?

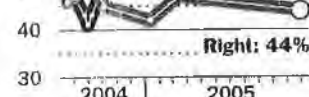
Safer: 41%

More vulnerable: 51%

Was the U.S. right or wrong in going to war in Iraq?

Wrong: 50%

Right: 44%

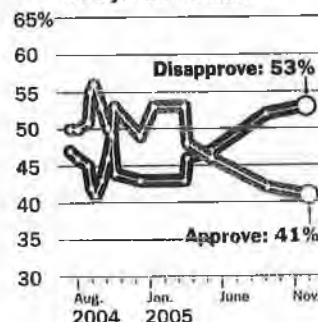


... Bring Doubts About Bush

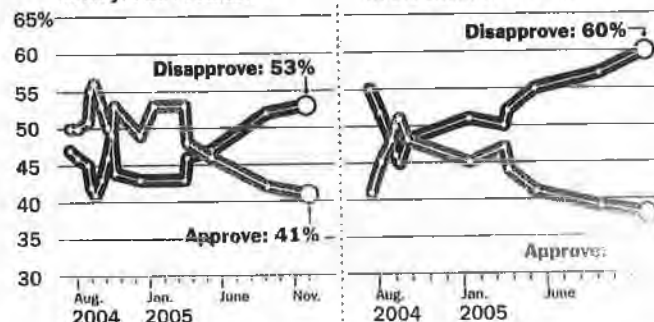
Concern over the war is also dragging down President Bush's approval rating, and the country is divided over whether the Administration was truthful in making the case to attack Iraq

In general, do you approve of the way George W. Bush is handling ...

... his job as President?



... the situation in Iraq?



Have President Bush's policies in Iraq had a negative impact on how you rate his job performance?

Very negative impact

45%

Somewhat negative impact

18%

No negative impact

33%

Do you think President Bush was truthful and honest, based on the intelligence he was given, when he presented the case for war in Iraq, or do you think he deliberately misled Americans to build his case for war?

Was truthful: 45%

Deliberately misled: 48%

This TIME poll was conducted by telephone Nov. 29-Dec. 1 among 1,004 adult Americans by SRBI Public Affairs. The margin of error for the entire sample is ± 3 percentage points. "Don't know" responses omitted for some questions

from their fluidity. "The U.S. is not fighting an army," says Abu Mohammed, a strategist for a prominent Islamic nationalist group. "We hit and move. We're more like groups of gangs that can't be pinned down and can't be stamped out." The vast majority of those groups fall into a category the military dubiously refers to as Sunni "rejectionists." Mostly Baathists, nationalists and Iraqi Islamists, they oppose the occupation and any Baghdad government dominated by Iraqis sheltered from Saddam by foreign-intelligence agencies, such as Iran's or the U.S.'s. But they don't oppose democracy in Iraq. Many voted in the Oct. 15 constitutional referendum and have plans to participate in the Dec. 15 election. Few see a contradiction between voting and continuing to battle U.S. forces. "I voted in the referendum, and I'm still fighting, and everybody in my organization did the same," says Abu Marwan, the Army of Mohammed commander. "This is two-track war—bullets and the ballot. They are not mutually exclusive."

U.S. military intelligence believes that were it not for al-Zarqawi, the nationalists

would have developed a political identity by now. Differences in means and ends have long caused friction among the odd bedfellows of the resistance. From the beginning there have been two wars fought in Iraq, one of liberation and one of global holy war. "Insurgency and terror are two different things," says Khalilzad. The divide

The U.S. is pursuing bargains that may induce Iraqi nationalists to split from al-Qaeda

was evident in Fallujah last year, when al-Zarqawi's foreign fighters dominated the city and the insurgency at large. They took over local militias' checkpoints and neighborhoods, even "arresting" leading Sunni insurgent figures. When the local clerical body, the Association of Muslim Scholars, refused to endorse his suicide bombings and beheadings of Western hostages, al-

Zarqawi branded the association's leader, Harith al-Dhari, a coward. "In Fallujah [al-Zarqawi's] leaders were foreigners who'd come to be martyred," says Abu Marwan. "What did they care about the political process? Nothing."

Though al-Zarqawi's shadow still looms over the broader insurgency, the battle of Fallujah last November forced him to give his organization an Iraqi face. "Among the foreign fighters some dispersed, some were killed, some were captured," says Abu Marwan. And over the past year, U.S. operations against al-Zarqawi's organization have chipped away at its leadership structure and squeezed its sanctuaries. As a result, Iraqis who joined as low-level cell members have risen up the leadership chain. Abu Marwan says al-Zarqawi's aides told him their boss's three top lieutenants are all Iraqis. Another Iraqi operative is Abu Abdullah, who had worked on the security detail for one of Saddam's inner circle and joined an insurgent group formed from the Republican Guard following the U.S. invasion in 2003. After he was captured by the U.S. and sent to Abu Ghraib

prison, Abu Abdullah enrolled in a prison-yard madrasah, or religious school; by the time he was released, he identified himself as a holy warrior for Islam. Today he is what the military calls a tier-two al-Qaeda leader, commanding cells in and around Baghdad.

It's through midlevel al-Qaeda operatives like Abu Abdullah, who retains ties to some of his former Baathist comrades, that nationalist groups have newfound influence with al-Zarqawi. "What he's now having to do is balance the hard-line ideology with the softer line of the Iraqis within his group," says Abu Marwan. Sunni insurgent leaders say it was their insistence on voting in the October referendum that discouraged al-Zarqawi from disrupting the poll. For now, the nationalists say they will be voting again on Dec. 15, and they expect al-Qaeda to once more hold its fire. But so far no announcements have been made, and nationalist commanders are worried that al-Zarqawi may decide to go for broke this time. "The debate is being had," says Abu Baqr, the Baghdad insurgent commander. "But soon the orders have to be given."

TALKING WITH THE ENEMY

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR THE U.S.? Ambassador Khalilzad says, "There is a reaching out to non-criminal Baathists." Evidence of shifts within the insurgency in some ways presents the U.S. with its best opportunity since the occupation began to counter parts of the Sunni resistance. Adopting the long-standing attitudes of secular Baathists, some Sunni leaders tell *TIME* they have lost patience with al-Zarqawi and would consider cutting a political deal with the U.S. to isolate the jihadis. "If the Americans evidenced good intent and a timetable for withdrawal we feel is genuine, we will stand up against al-Zarqawi," says Abdul Salam al-Qubaisi, spokesman for the Association of Muslim Scholars. "We already stood up against him on the Shi'ite issue, and if he doesn't follow us, it will be a bad path for him." Baathist insurgent leader Abu Yousif, who has met with U.S. intelligence officers, says, "The insurgency is looking for a political outlet—once we have that, we could control al-Qaeda."

U.S. officials are actively exploring political bargains that might induce nationalists to split with al-Qaeda, including an easing of restrictions on former Baathists' involvement in the new government. Khalilzad says it's time for the "excesses" in the de-Baathification process to be reversed, a call echoed by military-intelligence officials. According to Khalilzad, the U.S. believes that Baathists who committed crimes under the former regime should be tried and senior regime members barred from political office. "As far as the rest are concerned, the time has come to reintegrate them into the political process," he

cal solution could easily crumble if the next government in Baghdad fails to improve conditions in Sunni areas and clamp down on sectarian excesses by Shi'ite militias. And even if the U.S. can lure some guerrillas to the negotiating table, it still faces a seemingly inescapable quandary: so long as U.S. troops are involved in combat in Iraq, there's every reason to believe the insurgency will be able to recruit sufficient numbers of motivated new fighters to do battle with them. Rhode Island Democratic Senator Jack Reed, a former U.S. Army paratrooper who was briefed privately by military officials during a visit to Iraq in



ROUNDUP In Husaybah a Marine detains an Iraqi man for questioning while his family looks on

says. Moves have already begun to bring back the guts of Saddam's army, disbanded in the first months of the occupation. "We're reaching out to officers and non-commissioned officers that we're going to put in place in the new Iraqi army," says a U.S. military-intelligence officer, although he adds that the new army will be more "reflective" of Iraqi society than Saddam's was. Having the men they are fighting enter the government will be hard for some U.S. battle commanders to accept, the officer says. "But we're trying to shape an end state."

That's still a long way off. The willingness of moderate Sunnis to pursue a politi-

October, says U.S. commanders are striving for what some describe as "minimal compliance": establishing just enough stability so that "the country is not going to collapse [and] you're not going to have areas that are havens for terrorists" if U.S. troops begin to leave in large numbers. But merely getting to that point may require the sacrifice of more U.S. lives than most Americans are willing to bear. Says Reed: "One of the problems with an insurgency is that every time you turn a corner, there's another corner." The U.S. will have to turn a whole lot more enemies into friends before it begins to see the way out. —*With reporting by Douglas Waller/Washington*

Kurdish youth hold key to power

December 12 2005

The Guardian

Pop star drafted in as voters threaten to stay away in protest at living conditions

Michael Howard Sulaimaniya

The stadium is packed, the speakers are blaring and legendary pop star Zakaria is bouncing around on stage, revving up the crowd with the hits that have made him a hero for local Iraqi Kurds. But when he pauses for some trademark audience participation, it becomes clear the star has not been flown in from his home in Sweden to shift CDs.

Instead of rousing fans to sing along to his anthems, Zakaria has other numbers for them. "Seven-three-zero, seven-three-zero," he chants. The figure 730 is the official number assigned to the Kurdistan Alliance for this week's elections, the first under the new constitution ratified in October, and a landmark moment in Iraq's transition to democracy. The concert is part of an urgent last-minute push by Kurdish leaders to get increasingly disgruntled voters to turn out, the last steps towards democracy in Iraq: installing a full-time parliament and government in Baghdad.

With less than a week to go, there are fears young Kurds will snub the polls in protest at corruption, poor services and

lack of jobs and housing in their northern self-rule region. In the January polls, the alliance won 77 seats, making Kurds the second-largest bloc in parliament. But this time round the number of Kurdish seats is expected to shrink as Sunni Arabs vote en masse for the first time.

Against this backdrop, every last Kurdish vote will be crucial to maintaining influence and representation in Baghdad. Party leaders say they will be happy with anything above 50 MPs.

"Kurdistan is a young society; the vote of people under 30 is vital for us so we can achieve our goals in Baghdad," said Kosrat Rasoul, head of the alliance's election campaign and a senior Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) leader. Kurds would work to secure a "democratic, federal, pluralist Iraq", he said.

Kurdish politicians have criss-crossed their mountainous homeland, hosting youth forums, appearing on talkshows and announcing projects to revive the education system. But it may be too little too late. The last few months have seen street protests and student strikes across Iraqi Kurdistan. Protesters have railed at everything from lack of electricity and fresh water in student dorms to corruption among local officials, spiralling housing costs and the control on daily life exercised by the two parties.

The Kurds, who make up about 20% of the Iraqi population, have a lot at

stake. They have enjoyed a period of peace and relative prosperity that Iraqis elsewhere have come to envy. Roads and hospitals are being built. The cities of Irbil and Sulaimaniya boast new international airports. Hotels are packed with visiting businessmen.

But a poor showing at the polls could see Kurdish leaders losing the powerful political leverage they have wielded in Baghdad since the fall of Saddam Hussein. That could endanger plans to put as much distance as possible between the Kurdistan region and central govern-

"To get a job ... you need to express loyalty to a political party"

ment, as well as jeopardise ambitions to include the contested oil-rich city of Kirkuk within their federal entity.

But for many young Kurds such "national" issues take second place to the growing dissatisfaction with the way their region – free from Baghdad's control since 1991 – is being governed.

"I will not vote. I want independence for Kurdistan but I am fed up with the dominance of the two parties," Shirwan Abdul Aziz, a 20-year-old student of English at Sulaimaniya University, said, referring to the main alliance groupings.

"They play with our future and make lots of money in Baghdad, but they can't even provide more than a few hours' electricity a day for our people." His view was typical of many young Kurds who spoke to the Guardian.

"Even a small boycott could hurt us, but I think despite the complaints, many of which are legitimate, most will realise that it is in their interest to vote," said Barham Salih, Iraq's planning minister and a PUK member. As a sweetener yesterday, plans for an American university in Sulaimaniya were unveiled by Iraq's Kurdish president, Jalal Talabani.

"The youth are fed up. They feel they have no room to breathe," said Stran Abdullah, editor of Aso (Horizon) newspaper which is published in Sulaimaniya. "There are lots of media outlets but few independent voices; all are controlled by political parties," he said.

"To get a job, or to get promotion once you get that job, or even to play sport at a decent club, you need to express loyalty to a political party."

There is a yawning gap, he said, between the "ageing men" who fought the regime heroically in the mountains and who are now running the region, and those young adults who have grown up without the spectre of Saddam and "who expect efficient transparent government, not from Baghdad but from their own leaders".



دهنگ بدەن بۆ داهاتووومان

An Iraqi unfurls a Kurdish flag near an election poster in the Kurdish city of Irbil. A slogan reads 'your vote brings us joy' Photograph: Safin Hamed/AFP/Getty Images

Attacks on KIU spur pre-election frenzy

By Cyrille Cartier
Globe Correspondent
in Shaklaw

When Yassin Mohamed first heard of the fire and attack on his colleagues' office in Dohuk, he did not think anything would happen to his own Kurdistan Islamic Union office in Shaklaw. But less than three hours later, he was being escorted out by Kurdistan Democratic Party officials leaving behind the office that would be completely looted and ransacked.

Four people died in Dohuk and Zakho on December 6 in what KIU leadership estimate were orchestrated attacks on the third major party in the region. Seven KIU offices were attacked including in Bardarash, Amediya, Kadish and Akre, 15 people were imprisoned and about 20 people were injured.

Weeks ahead of the December 15 elections, KIU separated from the Kurdistan Coalition List that includes the Kurdistan Dem-

ocratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which they were part of in the January elections.

The withdrawal caused loud disapproval among the Kurdistan leadership and people. Those who are not part of the 730 list are "bastards," said Iraqi President Jalal Talabani at a press conference with Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani several days before the incident. The specific target of his insult was not lost among those gathered in Salahaddin.

"We are afraid. We are all afraid. We are their target," said Ahmad Sayd Penjwani, a KIU member of Iraq's national assembly who had a guard stationed outside his house in Irbil following the attacks. "Why are they afraid? We are only a party without militia, with the Kurdistan Coalition List gains, the less their interests will be represented in the next Iraqi national assembly. But according to Salahaddin Bahaaddin, KIU's general secretary and former member of the Iraqi

Governing Council, the decision of his party does not jeopardize Kurdistan's interests.

"Participating independently does not change our support for the national rights of Kurds that are to be discussed in Baghdad," said Bahaaddin at a press conference held two days after the attacks.

Although not all points in the Iraqi constitution are fixed, there is general support for a federal Kurdistan region, Bahaaddin said during an interview in November. As for the rest, he continued, "As Kurdistan Islamic Union we have better relations with Sunnis and Shiites (than KDP and PUK) therefore we think we can erase that ill will."

The KIU is not currently allied to any party or group, he said. Any alliance would have to meet three conditions: a fixed federal system that recognizes Kurdistan, an Islamic identity for Iraq and a commitment to democracy.

The discontent people are feeling toward the two ruling parties, stemming in part

from the lack of unification of the two administrations, translated into lower turnout during the referendum, he said.

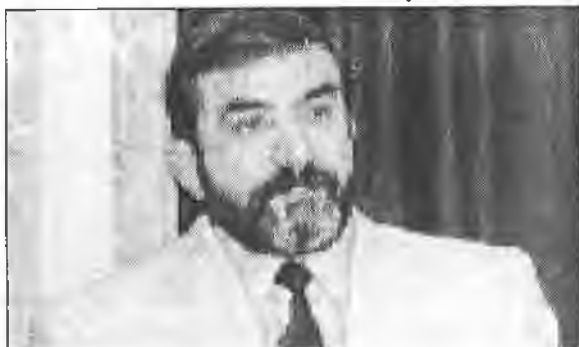
"PUK and KDP didn't care about the people and process because already they control everything here. We think it is our role, as the Islamic party, to raise our voice," said Bahaaddin. "Starting at the polling boxes, we think we have to start a new revolution against corruption in our area."

Many people think the Dec. 6 attacks on KIU offices helped to amplify in

KIU leadership have openly said KDP were the ones who planned the attacks. But some have also suggested that there is a division within KDP about how to treat this situation.

Chairs, printers, scanners, files, computers and even the copies of the Koran that the, so-called moderate, Islamic party held in their Shaklaw office were gone.

In the hours preceding the attack Mohamed was on the phone with the mayor while a crowd of mostly young men swelled to about 200 at the gate of his KIU office. They were mostly



"Participating independently does not change our support for the national rights of Kurds that are to be discussed in Baghdad," said Salahaddin Bahaaddin, head of the KIU, at a press conference.

out arms, without power. We are born out of law and constitution and we want to achieve democracy in Kurdistan."

Anger against KIU was fueled when they split from the 730 list. The less seats instead of quiet that voice.

"Our members will vote for us but there is an undecided group but this time we think they vote for us out of sympathy," said Mohamed of Shaklaw.

Mixed response

The day following the attacks KIU leadership met with KDP leadership who condemned the attacks. Massoud Barzani was vocal and clear about his condemnation of the attacks and said in a televised appearance, "We reject this sort of behavior and condemn it."

from peshmerga, police and aseish forces, and he even recognized some of them, he said.

While debating the question of whether to stay or go, "The peshmergas told us: 'There is no need for conversation or for negotiation. You can leave your office. Just like other places, it's finished,'" Mohamed said.

The forces that were supposed to protect him and his office were the ones responsible for the destruction, he said.

The mayor had offered help and the chief of police tried to dispel the crowd. But eventually, even those who are normally in control, suggested Mohamed and his staff leave the premises

to avoid the same injury and bloodshed that happened in



Iraqis stand watching fire at the Kurdistan Islamic Union building in the city of Dohuk December 6, 2005. One senior official of the Kurdistan Islamic Union was among those killed when angry youths threw stones and set fire to party buildings in six towns. REUTERS/Azad Lashkari

Dohuk and Zakho.

"Those who were obeying and listening to the mayor were few. The others were more numerous," Mohamed said.

While in the KDP office in Shaklawá where they were taken for their protection, a representative of president Barzani came to

express his regret and told the KIU members, "We are very sorry and those people who did this are very bad people."

"Barzani is balanced but other people under him do something different," said Mohamed. The split in opinion was apparent in several e-mail message groups in

heated exchange among Kurds living abroad.

Some defended the Islamic party. Others accused it of having connections to terrorist groups and Islamic parties in Iraq that are against Kurd's interests.

"They (KIU members) have been buying poor people votes in exchange for

money and clothes," read one email. "What happened ... is reaction to the negative role that the Islamic union is been playing against the unified Kurdish election list. People reacted because this party of yours did not support their own people."

"We have to teach our

people to accept each other to believe in pluralism," said Bahauddin. "It (the attack) affects our reputation. But worse, it affects the reputation of the Kurdish experiment."

Intense election campaign doesn't reach all

By Salam Abdulqadir
The Globe

IRBIL-- The intense campaign preceding the December 15 elections does not answer to the needs of many voters.

"Probably I am the only one in my family who will vote," said Jamila Mahdi, 32.

The television programs highlight the sufferings of the Kurds and accomplishments of the political parties. There are constant footages of the Anfal campaign, chemical attacks, mass graves and demolished villages. The programs end with a large graphic of the number 730, the Kurdistan coalition list that includes the two main political parties.

The message is clear: in order to avoid more catastrophes, vote for the 730 list.

"They are telling us their history. They do not talk about their future plans," she said. "We do not know about their agenda."

As the hours of the election campaign come to an end scheduled for December 13, the Kurdistan coalition list is intensifying its immense campaign. Kurdish leadership is trying to boost voter turnout. Referendum results in October were much lower than expected and many fear that the Kurds will not vote at the same levels as in January, between 60 and 80 percent in the three governorates.

Many eligible voters said they were unhappy with the lack of electricity and high gasoline prices and unaccomplished unification of the Sulaimaniya and Irbil administrations. The parties failed in achieving their

past promises and so they are afraid of giving more promises, said Hemn Mirani, a graduate student in political science.

"They like to focus on things that will never lose value," he said.

Politicians in Kurdistan have emphasized the importance of the election that will decide on the next Iraqi national assembly, which will last for four years. The assembly will have the opportunity of amending the Iraqi constitution, which can negatively affect the future of the Kurdistan region.

"This is an important election. It is decisive and entails a great campaign," said Nazhad Jalal, a fourth year student of college of politics.

Most of the local media—three satellite channels, many local television

stations, radios, newspapers and magazines—have all propagated for the 730 list. The television stations and radios have allocated most, if not all, of their programs to campaigning. Newspapers and magazines have full-page advertisements, publish extra pages and print the number "730" throughout the publication.

One of the posters, with a tick on number 730, shows a woman in Kurdish traditional dress with the Kurdistan flag painted on each of her cheeks. Another one shows a new couple in their wedding cloths casting their votes.

The markets have also seen significant number of election campaign posters. There are many more public gatherings and meetings between officials and people than in January.

In an unprecedented event, the famous Kurdish singer, Zakaria, held several concerts in which he asked the audience to vote for list 730. Another famous Kurd, Ali Affandi, a well-known overweight comedian living in Sulaimaniya, was also campaigning for the alliance list.

Despite the fact that the campaign is widespread, it has not extended to every corner of Kurdistan.

While TV plays the main role in the campaign, the entire Kurdistan is suffering from shortage of electricity. Many people do not see TV programs since they do not have electricity, said Khalid Jameel, the owner of the Solav bookshop.

"I think we should have more special newspapers for the campaign so that it reaches all people," he said.

Parez Jamal, a fourth year political science student, said, "We, as students living in the dormitories, do not know what is going on about the election. We do not have TVs."

The future of the region and the future of its people are under threat if Kurds do not vote, Jamal said. Kurds need enough seats in the next national assembly to guarantee the longevity of the articles related to the future of the Kurdistan region, she added. Kurdish people will vote "because they are concerned about the future of their region not because of the parties," she said.



Newspapers and magazines have full-page advertisements, publish extra pages and print the number "730" throughout the publication. One of the posters, with a tick on number 730, shows a woman in Kurdish traditional dress with the Kurdistan flag painted on each of her cheeks. Another one shows a new couple in their wedding cloths casting their votes.

THE GLOBE

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IRAQI KURDISTAN

A Celebration of Kurds' Hopes for Their Region, Not the Country

By EDWARD WONG

ALTUN KOPRI, Iraq, Dec. 15 — As lines of voters snaked out of two polling places along the main road, and as celebratory gunfire resounded through the neighborhood, a group of children chanting Kurdish songs, waving Kurdish flags and yelling Kurdish greetings barreled through the middle of this village on Thursday.

By all appearances here, the elections for national parliamentary seats might as well have been about Kurdistan and Kurdish dreams. Iraq, or the idea of Iraq, seemed as distant as the moon.

"I will vote for 730," Fakhri Muhammad, 32, said as he stood in line outside the village's primary school, referring to the ballot number of the main Kurdish coalition. "The list is Kurdish, and it represents the Kurdish people."

So went the refrain through much of the north, with Kurdish voters shying away from Arab candidates and siding with Kurdish groups, particularly the Kurdistan Alliance, the coalition of the two main Kurdish parties.

It was as stark an illustration as any of how much the vote across Iraq was split along ethnic and sectarian lines. For many Kurds a vote for the alliance was first and foremost an effort to secure autonomy for the mountainous Kurdish homeland in the north.

Political fervor was especially rampant here in dry, windswept Tamim Province, whose capital is the oil city of Kirkuk, 15 miles south-east of Altun Kopri. Under Saddam Hussein's rule, the government deported Kurds and Turkmens and moved in Arabs to increase its control of the region's oil fields. Kurdish leaders have made no secret of their desire to incorporate Kirkuk and other parts of the province into Kurdistan.

"This entire area is Kurdistan; Kirkuk should go to Kurdistan," Hussein Sadr, 74, said as he shuffled out of a high school in Kirkuk, his index finger stained purple to prevent repeat voting, his eyes peering from behind thick glasses at the crowds of Kurds all around.

Minibuses filled with voters and adorned with Kurdish flags sat nearby. It was unclear who had bused in the voters, but the scene seemed certain to confirm the Arabs' and Turkmens' conspiracy theories — that the Kurdish parties were transporting voters from other provinces to increase their support here.

In Altun Kopri, a mixed Kurdish-Turkmen village whose name means Golden Bridge in the Turkmen language, electoral officials at two schools said that by 10:30 a.m. they had turned away 400 people whose names were not on the voter rolls.

Some may have gone to the wrong school, but others may have been trying to vote illegally, the officials said. Ferman Abdullah, the official in charge of voting at one school, said 3,500 people were registered to vote here and 200 had been turned away,

most of them Kurds.

"That's the only problem we have right now," he said. In the weeks leading up to the elections, this province came under more scrutiny than any other because the Iraqi electoral commission had uncovered possible voter fraud.

At the end of August, in the final two days of registration, 81,000 new names appeared on the province's registration lists, an increase far above the national average. Election officials announced this week that many of the applications looked suspicious. They decided that any of the 81,000 showing up on Thursday would have to present extra identification.

The surge came from six registration centers, five of them in Kurdish areas, including one here in Altun Kopri.

At the village primary school, an election observer representing one of the Kurdish parties complained to a visiting American diplomat that too many Kurds were being turned away. "They say, 'I came from this area and Saddam kicked me out, and I can even show you my piece of land. And now I don't have the right to vote?'" said the observer, Rashad Wali.

A Sunni Arab observer outside the same school, Haithem Hashem, 25, appeared more satisfied. "The process is good, everybody is good and it's going very well," said Mr. Hashem, a supporter of the Iraqi Consensus Front, a coalition of religious Sunni groups.

Nearly two hours after polls officially closed, Farhad Abdullah, the provincial head of the electoral commission, estimated that at least 70 percent of registered voters had turned out.

A few voters stepped across ethnic and religious lines when they cast their ballots, hinting that maybe, just maybe, the prejudices here could be uprooted after all.

"I voted for the Kurdistan Alliance," said Dina Awiya, 22, a Christian student standing in the courtyard of a polling place in Kirkuk. "We have a connection with the Kurds. We've lived with them since we were children. Until now we've been one team."



Photographs by Ashley Gilheenan for The New York Times

Residents voted yesterday at a polling place in a school in the ethnically diverse city of Kirkuk, where Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens account for most of the population. This school is in a mainly Kurdish neighborhood.

Barzani, un leader kurde intransigent sur les droits de sa communauté



BAGDAD, 13 déc 2005 (AFP) - Massoud Barzani, premier président du Kurdistan irakien, se veut le champion de la cause de sa communauté, n'hésitant pas à aller à contre-courant de la classe politique pour défendre ses revendications.

"Je ne ménagerai aucun effort pour renforcer l'unité nationale, la fraternité entre Kurdes et Arabes et l'unité au sein du Kurdistan", déclarait M. Barzani après avoir prêté serment en juin, après son élection à la tête du Kurdistan par le Parlement local.

Ce sexagénaire ne cache cependant pas qu'il s'allierait à toute personne qui préserverait les droits des Kurdes, durement réprimés par le régime de Saddam Hussein.

Pour la première fois dans l'histoire du pays, deux Kurdes sont à la tête du pays: lui comme chef du Kurdistan et son ancien rival, Jalal Talabani, comme président de l'Etat.

Mais alors que la mission de M. Talabani prend fin avec les législatives du 15 décembre, M. Barzani a été élu pour quatre ans. Il a décidé de ne pas se présenter à ce scrutin et laisse son ancien rival mener leur liste commune aux élections.

Petit, rond, réservé, le chef kurde n'ôte que rarement ses habits traditionnels, même lorsqu'il est reçu à la Maison blanche par le président George W. Bush. Et comme pour marquer encore plus sa loyauté, il choisit ses vêtements de la couleur de ceux des peshmergas, les combattants kurdes.

Cet ancien guerrier, qui a passé sa jeunesse dans les montagnes à combattre les régimes successifs de Bagdad, refuse d'ailleurs la dissolution de ces milices et n'accepte qu'une "redéfinition" de leur mission. Ces forces ont protégé selon lui le Kurdistan et doivent continuer à le faire.

La position de M. Barzani sur cette question n'est pas innocente, lui qui soutient une indépendance du Kurdistan, en cas de guerre civile en Irak. A ce moment-là, cette région aurait déjà un noyau d'armée.

Pour lui, le Kurdistan compte plus que l'unité de l'Irak. En mars, il refusait de hisser le drapeau national dans ses fiefs du Kurdistan car il représente "l'une des périodes les plus noires de l'histoire de l'Irak".

Quelques jours plus tôt, il écartait toute entrée des forces de sécurité nationales au Kurdistan, sans l'accord du Parlement de cette région, qui jouit d'une quasi autonomie depuis 1991.

Le 6 juin, il faisait scandale lors de la prestation de serment du gouvernement d'Ibrahim Jaafari, en protestant contre la suppression de la mention "fédéral" du texte, en parlant de l'Irak. "C'est une violation et une menace contre l'alliance" entre la liste kurde et la principale liste chiite, avertissait-il.

La prestation de serment est alors suspendue et organisée à nouveau quelques jours plus tard, après modification du texte selon les souhaits du chef kurde.

Son discours de politique étrangère est également controversé. Il a déclaré au journal arabe Al-Hayat que des liens entre les kurdes et Israël "ne seraient pas un crime".

Lorsque les forces politiques irakiennes, réunies au Caire en novembre, n'ont pas condamné la "résistance", M. Barzani, absent de la rencontre, s'est insurgé: "Nous n'appelons pas ce qui se passe en Irak de la résistance. C'est du terrorisme (...) Pour nous, ces forces étrangères sont libératrices et non pas occupantes".

Massoud Barzani est né à Mahabad, dans le Kurdistan iranien, mais sa famille est originaire de Barzan, dans le nord-est du Kurdistan irakien. Cette région a été dévastée en 1988 par le régime baassiste lors d'une vaste opération, au cours de laquelle plusieurs centaines de villages ont été bombardés puis rasés au bulldozer.

Il est le fils du chef historique des kurdes, Moustapha Barzani, et chef du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) depuis la mort de son père en 1979.

Sunnis join large Iraqi turnout in crucial vote

By Dexter Filkins

BAGHDAD: In a day remarkable for its calm, millions of Iraqis from across the country cast ballots Thursday to elect a Parliament to a four-year term, with Sunni Arabs turning out in what appeared to be very heavy numbers and guerrillas mounting relatively few armed attacks.

Iraqi officials said that initial indications were that as many as 11 million people cast ballots, which, if the estimate holds true, would put the overall turnout at more than 70 percent. With Iraqis still lining up to vote in front of ballot centers as the sun went down, Iraqi officials ordered the polls to stay open an extra hour.

The day was strikingly peaceful, even in areas normally beset by violence. With more than 375,000 American and Iraqi troops and police fanned out across the country, the American command here reported only 52 armed attacks, including only 18 against polling centers. The daily average is around 80. On Jan. 30, when Iraqis elected a transitional government, insurgents attacked nearly 300 times.

Iraqis streamed to the polls in cities and villages, some bringing their children, some pushing wheelchairs, many dressed in their finest clothes. With streets across the country closed to vehicular traffic, many Iraqis milled about the streets after they cast their ballots, looking on as their children played soccer.

The day's most dramatic events unfolded in the country's Sunni neighborhoods, where hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who had boycotted the election in January came out this time to vote. Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad, like Adamiya, and in Kirkuk and western Mosul, ordinarily tense and bereft of security, were filled with Iraqis walking to polling centers and lining up to cast their ballots.

Even in Anbar Province, where concerns about violence kept about a quarter of the province's 207 polling sites closed, American marine officers said the voting far exceeded their expectations.

"Last time, if you voted, you died," said Abdul Jabbar Mahdi, a Sunni who brought his wife and three children to a polling station in the ordinarily tense neighborhood of Adamiya. "God willing, this election will lead to peace."

"I'm going to go and bring my moth-



Election officials unfolded ballots Thursday before starting the counting process at a polling station in Baghdad.

er," Jabbar said, and a few minutes later he did, leading her into the polling place.

For a day, at least, many Iraqi Sunnis seemed won over, if not to the American presence in their country but to the idea that they could realize their interests by the ballot and not the gun. The big Sunni turnout was helped along by the declarations of several insurgent groups, like the Islamic Army, that they would refrain from attacking polling centers.

Even a declaration by several hardcore insurgent groups like Al Qaeda denouncing the election included no threats to attack on election day.

The insurgents not only failed to stop the election, but it appeared also that they did not really try.

While it seemed doubtful that the calm would last, the day's events seemed a significant triumph for Iraqi democrats and for the Bush administration, which has long held faith that a broadening democratic process would begin to draw ordinary Sunnis away from the insurgency and encourage them to support democracy's success.

The comments by the Sunni voters, though anecdotal, suggested that a good number of them had stayed away from the polls in January not because they were disenchanted with the democratic process, but because they were afraid of being killed.

Indeed, the apparent confusion within the insurgency has prompted American diplomats to say they have succeeded in driving a wedge between the most violent groups, like Al Qaeda, and the more nationalist-minded ones, who the Americans and Iraqis believe can probably be accommodated.

The success of the elections, followed by a hoped-for drop in the violence, underlies the Bush administration's tentative plans for carrying out significant reductions in the number of American troops next year.

The electoral system now in place, which apportions parliamentary seats by provinces, means that the Sunnis will be far more likely than they were in January to have representatives in num-

bers equal to their proportion of the population, which is thought to be between 15 and 20 percent.

Iraqi officials said that election results would probably not be available for several days, possibly not even until January. Election workers began counting ballots shortly after the polling centers closed. Once they finish, they will send the vote totals to Baghdad, where election workers here will add them up.

The election, carried off by the Iraqis with help from the Americans and the United Nations, was, in a country at war, a logistical wonder. They opened about 6,050 polling centers, which were attended by about 300,000 election observers.

One notable change was the relative invisibility of the American presence here, another hoped-for blueprint of the future.

Even in the calmest neighborhoods, American soldiers, with their heavy weapons and armored vehicles, are often unwelcome. On Thursday, in Baghdad and other locales, American troops

stayed largely behind the scenes, while Iraqi troops took a lead role in patrolling the streets.

The New York Times

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune
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Les ambassadeurs européens doivent quitter Téhéran

Il y a des moments où le discours diplomatique doit faire place à des actes dépourvus d'ambiguïté. C'est très exactement ce qui se passe pour les dirigeants européens dans leurs relations avec l'Iran depuis le 8 décembre.

Le président iranien a en effet dépassé toutes les bornes admissibles en déclarant lors du sommet extraordinaire des membres de l'Organisation de la conférence islamique, rassemblés à La Mecque la semaine dernière, que « *certain pays européens insistent pour dire que Hitler a tué des millions de Juifs dans des fours* », et que « *les Européens devraient offrir une partie de leur territoire, comme l'Allemagne, l'Autriche ou d'autres pays, de manière à ce que les Juifs y installent leur Etat* ». Jamais un chef d'Etat en exercice ne s'était encore avancé aussi loin, pas même le Malaisien Mahathir, qui avait fait scandale le 16 Octobre 2003 en affirmant que les Juifs « *dirigeaient le monde par procuration* ».

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad est même allé plus loin à cette occasion que le 26 octobre dernier quand il avait comparé Israël à une « *tache honteuse* » qui « *devait être rayée de la carte* ». Et cette grande première, qui mélange le négationnisme historique des milieux néo-nazis

avec l'impératif de détruire Israël, n'a pas eu lieu lors d'une conférence à Téhéran, mais hors des frontières iraniennes, devant les représentants de 57 pays, fort embarrassés d'ailleurs par la violence inattendue de l'intervention iranienne. Le 14 décembre, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad mettait à nouveau en doute le génocide juif, comme s'il s'agissait désormais d'un thème permanent.

Il est temps de reconnaître ouvertement qui est le nouveau président de l'Iran et d'en tirer des conséquences avant qu'il ne soit trop tard. Les premières réactions se contentent de redire, comme en octobre, qu'il s'agit de « *propos inacceptables* ».

Elles auront, si elles ne sont suivies d'aucune mesure plus substantielle, exactement le même effet que les précédentes, c'est-à-dire un effet nul. Le pré-

Par
Thérèse Delpech *



« Il est temps de reconnaître qui est Ahmadinejad et d'en tirer des conséquences avant qu'il ne soit trop tard »

sident iranien est convaincu qu'il peut tout se permettre, en particulier avec les Européens, et ce pour la bonne raison que chacun fait jusqu'à présent semblant de ne pas comprendre à quel point il s'agit d'un personnage dangereux.

Avec cette attitude, l'Europe contribue *volens nolens* à le renforcer, à l'intérieur comme à l'extérieur, et a donc une responsabilité dans l'évolution du régime, qu'elle le reconnaisse ou non. En conséquence, il faut impérativement passer à la vitesse supérieure si l'on veut éviter que Mahmoud Ahmadinejad ne le fasse lui-même, ce pour quoi il semble avoir d'excellentes dispositions. Et la seule mesure diplomatique qui ait un sens consiste à rappeler les ambassadeurs des 25 pays européens pour consultations.

Ceci est d'autant plus nécessaire que le négationnisme et l'incitation à la haine raciale sont interdits par la loi de plusieurs pays européens, dont la France, où le président iranien, même couvert par l'immunité que lui confère sa fonction, ne devrait plus pouvoir se rendre avant d'être revenu publiquement sur ses propos. En outre, trois capitales européennes ont depuis 2003 des négociations nucléaires avec Téhéran, interrompues de façon unilatérale par l'Iran en août avec la reprise des activités de conversion à Ispahan. Cer-

tains diront peut-être qu'il ne faut pas tout mélanger.

Mais il est difficile d'oublier que Mahmoud Ahmadinejad exprime sa profonde conviction qu'Israël doit disparaître dans un contexte où personne n'ignore que l'Iran cherche à se doter de l'arme nucléaire. Le missile Shahab 3 a été récemment modifié pour pouvoir emporter une tête nucléaire, et des documents remis à l'AIEA en 2005 font état d'une communication à l'Iran par le réseau pakistanais d'AQ Khan des techniques d'usinage et de moulage d'uranium métal en hémisphères. La simple acceptation par l'Iran de ces documents est interdite par le TNP, comme le recel de drogue est puni par la loi, même s'il n'y a pas eu de demande formelle de drogue de la part du receleur.

En clair, l'Iran n'a pas seulement violé les engagements pris auprès de l'AIEA, ce qui suffit à imposer le transfert du dossier à New York, mais, ce qui est plus grave, ceux de l'article II du TNP permettant une saisine directe du Conseil de sécurité, sans même passer par le Conseil des gouverneurs de l'AIEA. Il est donc plus que temps d'agir aussi dans ce domaine.

L'occasion est également excellente pour que la justice autrichienne fasse connaître au reste du monde la nature de l'implication de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad dans l'assassinat d'Abdul-Rahman Ghassemlou, le charismatique secrétaire général du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan iranien, tué avec deux autres dissidents kurdes le 13 juillet 1989 à Vienne. Peter Pilz, député autrichien, et l'ancien président iranien Bani Sadr ont pu recueillir des témoignages directs qui ont été communiqués à la justice autrichienne. Le président autrichien, qui avait avec le leader kurde des relations d'amitié, pourrait faire le jour sur cet épisode tragique et effacer l'image peu reluisante qu'a donnée Vienne au moment des faits.

D'après des témoignages concordants, l'actuel président iranien dirigeait le deuxième commando chargé d'éliminer les trois personnalités kurdes et

avait aussi en charge la logistique du premier commando qui

a finalement exécuté le meurtre. L'Autriche est un des pays directement interpellé par le président iranien à La Mecque. Elle peut ainsi faire preuve de courage et de dignité.

Enfin, il faut bien garder deux choses en mémoire. La première est que Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, qui a été porté au pouvoir par les Iraniens les plus frustrés, les laissés pour compte de l'économie iranienne, n'a aucun moyen de remplir les promesses électorales qu'il leur a faites pendant la campagne. Le danger d'une fuite en avant est donc bien réel et doit même être tenu pour le scénario le plus vraisemblable dans les mois et les années à venir.

La seconde est que les Européens ont une crédibilité voisine de zéro à Téhéran, en raison de l'incapacité démontrée de mettre en œuvre les menaces qu'ils proféraient au plus haut niveau de l'Etat. Si cette situation doit être redressée, c'est maintenant qu'il faut le faire. Tout le monde nous en saura gré, y compris les pays musulmans dont la réunion à La Mecque a été bouleversée par un leader populiste piétinant tous les usages.

* Philosophe, chercheur au Céri, membre de l'Institut international d'études stratégiques de Londres.

LE FIGARO

16 décembre 2005

Au Kurdistan irakien, une formation islamique tente de bousculer le monopole de l'UPK et du PDK

ERBIL (KURDISTAN)

ENVOYÉE SPÉCIALE

Sur la route qui sort de Dohouk vers Erbil, reliant deux des trois provinces qui forment, avec Souleymaniyé, la région du Kurdistan irakien, un immeuble isolé attire l'attention. Haut de quatre étages, il est entouré de carcasses de voitures brûlées. Ses murs sont noircis et parsemés de traces de balles.

Le contraste est frappant avec les immeubles flambant neufs des environs, dans cette région en plein « boom » économique. C'est la seule trace de violence lors de la campagne des élections législatives dans ce Nord très largement autonome qui reste, au regard du reste du pays, un havre de paix et de sécurité. Moyennant un strict quadrillage par les forces des deux partis qui se partagent l'autorité – le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) de Massoud Barzani à l'Ouest, et l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) de Jalal Talabani à l'Est.

C'est pour les avoir trop vivement contestés, surtout sur le thème de la corruption, que l'Union islamique du Kurdistan (UIK) a subi, le 6 décembre, l'attaque de son siège à Dohouk, et aussi, le même jour, dans cinq autres villes de cette province, la plus « traditionaliste » du Kurdistan. Quatre de ses membres,

dont la tête de liste, ont été tués par balles lors de ces attaques.

Se présentant comme modéré et réformiste, ce parti est le troisième en importance dans la région, même s'il vient loin derrière les deux autres, forts de leur légitimité de combattants armés contre Saddam Hussein. Lors des scrutins de janvier et d'octobre, l'UIK avait rejoint la Liste unifiée du Kurdistan, celle du PDK et de l'UPK. Cette fois-ci, elle a décidé de se présenter seule, tablant sur la lassitude croissante chez les Kurdes du bicéphalisme dominant. « Le PDK nous en a fait payer le prix, il n'a pas supporté qu'on puisse avoir, ici, peut-être 25 % des voix », assure Ahmad Jeziri, un des responsables de l'UIK. « Le matin, des écoliers ont attaqué avec des pierres, puis vinrent les voyous et les incendiaires, poussés par la police. Ça a duré toute la journée. Maintenant, nos gens ont peur », dit-il, debout au milieu des papiers calcinés jonchant son immeuble.

Ubeid, chauffeur de taxi, qui avoue être un agent des services spéciaux du PDK, reconnaît sa présence parmi les attaquants : « Ces islamistes avaient des armes et s'en sont servis, on a dû riposter, pour défendre le peuple qui ne les supporte plus, dit-il. Ils avaient hissé leur drapeau à la place du drapeau kurde, ils défendent les Arabes,

les baasistes qui nous tuent. Ils voudraient qu'on devienne comme les Saoudiens qui les payent ! », lance-t-il.

Le soir même de l'attaque, Massoud Barzani, président du Kurdistan d'Irak, dénonçait celle-ci à la télévision et promettait une « commission d'enquête »... Adnane Moufi, le président (UPK) du Parlement régional, qui compte 5 députés de l'UIK sur un total de 111, se rendait, lui, au siège de ce parti à Erbil où il continue ses activités, de même qu'à Souleymaniyé, avec une garde policière renforcée. L'UIK possède même sa chaîne de télévision locale – qui supplée au fait que ses affiches sont le plus souvent déchirées dans les rues d'Erbil, pavoisées aux couleurs du PDK.

Outre ces trois partis, onze petites formations, dont celles de plusieurs minorités, sont en lice au Kurdistan, espérant obtenir quelques-uns des 10 ou 15 sièges prévus pour ces minorités au Parlement national. Plusieurs ONG kurdes dénoncent activement les manquements du pouvoir, même si elles n'ont guère accès aux plus grands médias locaux. La naissance de la démocratie se poursuit donc au Kurdistan, « même si celui-ci n'est pas encore la Suisse », comme le remarque Adnane Moufi. ■

SOPHIE SHIHAB

Les Kurdes votent pour rester la deuxième force au Parlement

ERBIL (KURDISTAN)

ENVOYÉE SPÉCIALE

Les Kurdes d'Irak ont renoué, jeudi 15 décembre, avec une part de l'ardeur qu'ils mettaient à voter lors des scrutins précédents, qu'ils espéraient décisifs pour se mettre à l'abri des massacres subis sous Saddam Hussein. A défaut de l'indépendance, qui reste un rêve, ils ont ainsi massivement voté, jeudi, pour s'assurer d'un poids maximal au sein du futur gouvernement irakien.

C'est le thème qu'ont martelé les médias des deux partis qui se partagent

le pouvoir dans les trois provinces du nord de l'Irak. Le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) et l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) ont fait à nouveau liste commune (l'Alliance kurde) pour ce scrutin national en priant les abstentionnistes d'oublier leurs griefs envers leurs autorités kurdes et de « voter au nom de leurs martyrs ».

« Voilà, il ne sera pas dit que je suis un traître », assène avec sarcasme un étudiant après avoir voté pour la liste 730, celle de « l'Alliance kurde ». Pourtant, il critique le système de pouvoir

au Kurdistan d'Irak « où les deux partis, ou plutôt une centaine de personnes, se partagent, dans l'opacité la plus totale, la part des revenus du pétrole qui revient à la région ». Des opposants, qui avaient appelé au boycott lors du référendum, ont aussi voté, cette fois-ci, « pour le Kurdistan », alors que le troisième parti kurde, l'Union islamique, victime d'attaques violentes de la part de partisans du PDK, faisait profil bas. Des familles en habits de fête se pressaient pour voter dans des quartiers pauvres qui s'étaient largement abstenus en

octobre. Quant aux partisans des deux partis au pouvoir, les *peshmergas*, les combattants kurdes, ont dansé et chanté

dans les rues vides de circulation, ici comme ailleurs en Irak, pour raison de sécurité. Même si les attentats sont de plus en plus rares au Kurdistan.

Grâce à cette forte participation, le ministre irakien des affaires étrangères, le kurde Hoshiyar Zibari, a « très bon espoir » que l'Alliance kurde restera la seconde formation au Parlement avec une cinquantaine de députés. ■

SOPHIE SHIHAB

Le Monde

Samedi 17 décembre 2005

Les Irakiens ont voté en masse pour leur Parlement

MOYEN-ORIENT

Chiites, Kurdes et, pour la première fois, sunnites, ont voté en nombre hier pour élire leurs députés, lors d'un scrutin qui conforte la démocratie en Irak.

De notre envoyé spécial à Bagdad

VOTER est presque devenu une habitude pour M^{me} Saja Salim. Pour la troisième fois cette année, cette pédiatre de Bagdad s'est rendue hier aux urnes, cette fois-ci pour élire le nouveau Parlement irakien. « Je souhaite avant tout la stabilité et la sécurité du pays », explique-t-elle, assez chic avec son maquillage pimpant et son léger voile de tulle bleu. « J'ai voté pour la Liste 618, du Front irakien de conciliation », dit cette bourgeoise sunnite. La liste est formée des trois principales formations arabes sunnites.

M^{me} Salim s'est rendue à pied au bureau de vote de l'école al-Massarrah, sur la rive droite du Tigre. Les rues de Bagdad, quadrillées par les patrouilles, étaient hier vides de toute circulation, interdite pendant la journée du scrutin. « J'avais voté en janvier pour la liste monarchiste. A l'époque, c'était la seule formation sunnite à se

présenter », dit-elle. M^{me} Salim est une exception. La plupart des Arabes sunnites et leurs partis avaient boycotté le scrutin du 30 janvier, destiné à élire une Assemblée consultative provisoire. Privés de représentants à l'Assemblée et de postes ministériels, les sunnites, qui ont dominé la scène politique irakienne depuis l'indépendance au début des années 30, ont réalisé leur erreur. Mis à pari les mouvements de guérilla engagés dans la lutte armée, les partis sunnites ont appelé à voter. Leurs électeurs se sont rendus massivement aux urnes.

Mettre fin à la division de l'Irak

Le programme du Front de conciliation réclame le retrait rapide des troupes étrangères d'Irak et la réintégration dans l'armée des cadres de l'ancien régime. Ses chefs souhaitent aussi amender la Constitution irakienne pour réduire l'autonomie des provinces imposée par les chiites et leurs alliés kurdes. « Le plus important est de mettre fin à la division ethnique et religieuse de l'Irak », dit le docteur Salim en tenant son jeune fils par la main. « Mon mari et moi avons débattu jusqu'à tard dans la nuit avant de décider de voter pour le Front de conciliation. Nous aurions sinon choisi la liste d'Iyad

Allaoui, qui lui aussi cherche à rassembler tous les Irakiens. » Allaoui, un chiite laïque qui dirigea le gouvernement intérimaire, se présentait à la tête de la Liste nationale irakienne. De nombreux Irakiens de la classe moyenne, toutes confessions confondues, se sont ralliés à cet ancien baasiste devenu en exil un des principaux opposants à Saddam Hussein. « J'ai voté pour lui parce qu'il est laïque », dit Mohammed Abdullah, un chômeur de 34 ans, qui s'est rendu dans le même bureau de vote. « Ce n'est pas le candidat idéal, mais il veut mettre fin à la mainmise des milices chiites sur l'armée et la police. C'est la priorité. »

L'incapacité des autorités à établir la sécurité dans le pays est vue par beaucoup d'Irakiens comme le principal échec du premier ministre sortant Ibrahim al-



Ayisha, sunnite, montre le doigt qu'elle a trempé dans l'encre pour voter. Un geste imité par des élus, aux Etats-Unis, par solidarité avec les Irakiens. Ali Jarekji/Reuters.

Jaafari, issu du parti islamiste chiite Dawa. Noyautées par les Brigades Badr, la formation paramilitaire chiite, l'armée et la police sont perçues comme des organes partisans. Cette opinion n'est bien sûr pas partagée par une majorité d'électeurs chiites, rangés comme un seul homme derrière leur clergé et la liste de l'Alliance irakienne unifiée. Après avoir presque remporté la majorité absolue aux élections législatives de janvier, et pris le contrôle de pans entiers de l'appareil d'Etat irakien, les chiites se sont de nouveau massivement mobilisés hier pour parachever le grand réveil politique de leur communauté.

Occupation américaine

« La liste de l'Alliance irakienne unifiée va concrétiser toutes nos espérances », explique Issam Rahim, 21 ans, un employé chiite de la télévision nationale irakienne. Il est venu voter pour la troisième fois avec ses deux collègues. L'un d'eux, Wissam Awad, est sunnite, et a choisi la liste du Front de conciliation. Mais les trois jeunes gens affirment avoir un souhait commun : la fin rapide de l'occupation américaine. « Quel que soit le nouveau gouvernement, j'espère qu'il va établir un calendrier précis pour le retrait américain. L'Irak est capable de se gouverner tout seul », dit Issam Rahim.

« Pouvoir voter dans la sécurité est en tout cas une avancée formidable », dit encore M^{me} Salim avant de rentrer chez elle. « J'avais voté non au référendum organisé par Saddam Hussein en 2002. Toute ma famille avait fait pareil. Il avait quand même remporté 100 %. Cette époque est révolue. Maintenant, notre voix compte. »

ADRIEN JAULMES

16 décembre 2005

LE FIGARO

Les Kurdes se sont mobilisés pour conforter l'autonomie de leur région

LE FIGARO vendredi 16 décembre 2005

Dans le nord du pays, les électeurs kurdes ont plébiscité la liste composée par leurs partis ethniques

SUR LA SCÈNE POLITIQUE irakienne, le vote des Kurdes est devenu un événement parallèle. Cette ethnie d'origine perse des provinces montagneuses du nord-est de l'Irak a en effet de nouveau porté ses suffrages sur la liste de l'Alliance kurde, formée par le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan et l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan. Cette coalition re-

groupe les deux plus grands partis kurdes, dirigés par les anciens « frères ennemis », Jalal Talabani, président de l'Irak fédéral, et Massoud Barzani, qui dirige la région semi-autonome du Kurdistan irakien.

Alors que, dans les régions arabes, chiites et sunnites se sont mobilisés hier pour se disputer le pouvoir par les urnes, les Kurdes se sont rendus aux urnes pour un objectif bien différent : conforter l'autonomie de leurs provinces, établie de fait, grâce à la protection de l'aviation américaine, dès

le lendemain de la première guerre du Golfe en 1991.

Alliances de circonstance

Dans l'Assemblée constituante irakienne élue en janvier 2005, les Kurdes avaient obtenu 75 sièges sur 275, devenant ainsi le deuxième groupe parlementaire du pays, alors qu'ils ne représentent que 20 % des 27 millions d'Irakiens. Alliés de circonstance des chiites, les Kurdes votaient à nouveau hier pour maintenir les garanties offertes par la nouvelle Constitution fédérale, adoptée par

référéndum le 15 octobre et qui permet à des provinces de s'associer pour former des régions autonomes.

L'autre priorité des Kurdes est d'obtenir le rattachement à leur région de la ville de Kirkouk. Cette importante capitale régionale du nord de l'Irak, au centre d'une région riche en champs pétrolifères, est historiquement peuplée de Kurdes. Mais les communautés turcomanes et arabes, installées dans la région par Saddam Hussein, disputent aux Kurdes le contrôle de cette riche région.

Privés de l'Etat qui leur avait été promis par les vainqueurs de la Première Guerre mondiale lors de la signature du traité de Sèvres en 1920, les Kurdes ont été rattachés en 1922 au nouveau pays né du découpage franco-britannique de l'Empire ottoman : l'Irak. Les répressions successives subies par les Kurdes de la part des gouvernements irakiens successifs ont culminé avec les campagnes lancées par Saddam Hussein à la fin des années 80 et dans les mois qui ont suivi la guerre du Golfe en 1991. Elles ont achevé de détourner les

Kurdes de tout esprit d'appartenance à l'Irak. Protégés pendant douze ans par la diplomatie américaine et son bras armé de l'US Air Force, les Kurdes vivent de façon quasi autonome.

Préservés dans leurs provinces montagneuses de la quasi-guerre civile qui déchire l'Irak depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein, les électeurs ont voté hier en masse pour envoyer leurs députés siéger au Parlement irakien. Mais leurs projets politiques ne sont déjà plus à Bagdad.

A. J.

LES ELECTIONS LEGISLATIVES

Les chefs des 3 formations principales



Abdelaziz Hakim
Alliance irakienne unifiée
(18 groupes, chiite)



Massoud Barzani
Liste de coalition
du Kurdistan (8 groupes)



Iyad Allaoui
Liste nationale irakienne
(15 groupes, laïque)

L'Assemblée intermédiaire sortante



☐ Alliance irak. unifiée
☒ Alliance kurde
☐ Liste du Premier ministre Allaoui
☐ Autres partis

Source : Reuters, AFP

Les chiffres du scrutin



- 15,5 millions de votants
- 7 655 candidats
- 6 291 bureaux de vote
- 33 000 urnes

Le nouveau Parlement élu pour 4 ans



230 sièges
attribués aux
18 provinces
irakiennes

45 sièges
«compensatoires»
aux petits partis

La population : groupes et religion



ANTISEMITISME: L'IRAN DEFIE L'OCCIDENT

15 DÉCEMBRE 2005



République
islamique d'Iran

Superficie: 1,65 million de km²

Population: 66,5 millions d'habitants
dont 50% de Persans
20% d'Azeris
10% de Kurdes

PIB/habitant: 2 010 dollars (2003)

Religion officielle: Islam chiite (90% de la population)



Le président Ahmadinejad multiplie les attaques haineuses contre Israël et les juifs.

Lors des funérailles de Jean Paul II, les télévisions du monde entier avaient montré le président iranien, Mohammed Khatami, et son homologue israélien, Moshe Katsav, lui-même d'origine iranienne, se saluer en persan et évoquer Yazd, leur ville natale commune. Huit mois plus tard, l'apaisement n'est plus à l'ordre du jour. Israël, comme aux débuts de la révolution islamique, est redevenu l'ennemi numéro un pour le régime de Téhéran. Hier, le nouveau président,

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a choisi d'attaquer de nouveau Israël et les pays occidentaux, qualifiant l'Holocauste de «mythe» créé par ces derniers: «Ils ont inventé le mythe du massacre des Juifs et le placent au-dessus de Dieu, des religions et des prophètes. Si quelqu'un dans leurs pays met en cause Dieu, on ne lui dit rien. Mais si quelqu'un nie le mythe du massacre des Juifs, les haut-parleurs sionistes et les gouvernements à la solde du sionisme commencent à vociférer.» Même s'il parlait devant plusieurs milliers de personnes dans la province du Sistan-Balouchistan (Sud-Est), ce n'est pas à la population iranienne qu'Ahmadinejad s'adressait. En Iran, il y a bien longtemps que l'opinion publique ne s'émue plus de la situation en Palestine. D'ailleurs, la dernière campagne présidentielle, qui a débouché sur l'élection d'Ahmadinejad, a été muette sur ce point.

Il demeure que l'anéantissement d'Israël reste un impératif idéologique absolu depuis la fondation du régime en 1979 par l'imam Khomeiny. Le chef de l'Etat iranien sait qu'il ●●●

●●● ne peut donc pas être contredit par ses adversaires au sein du régime, et qu'il peut rassembler derrière lui tous les radicaux. En insistant sur la destruction de l'Etat hébreu, il affiche son radicalisme politique, en fait celui de son mentor, l'ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, responsable d'une grande école théologique à Qom. «Ce qu'il dit s'inscrit dans le cadre de la lutte pour le contrôle de l'appareil du régime», souligne le chercheur et journaliste iranien Nasser Etemadi. La stra-

tégie du Président est d'aller de crise en crise. «Il s'en nourrit, comme il le faisait déjà sous la présidence de Khatami, quand il s'employait à paralyser l'action de ce dernier», ajoute une politologue. Ahmadinejad reprend ainsi la stratégie utilisée par Khomeiny pour asseoir son pouvoir, tout en muselant à la fois les opposants et ses adversaires au sein du sérail.

Mais, en fait, c'est la communauté internationale qu'Ahmadinejad entend surtout provoquer. Il s'y emploie habituellement, en liant ses propos négationnistes à la question nucléaire – alors qu'il n'est pas en charge de ce dossier, confié à Ali Laridjani, un de ses rivaux à la présidentielle. A quelques jours de la reprise des négociations (prévue pour le 21 décembre) entre l'Iran et trois pays européens (France, Allemagne, Royaume-Uni), pour garantir que le programme nucléaire iranien ne débouchera pas sur la fabrication de l'arme atomique, il assure que son pays ne cédera jamais aux pressions occidentales. «Soyez certains que nous ne reculerons pas d'un iota sur nos droits légitimes en matière nucléaire», a-t-il lancé à la foule. Manière de saper les efforts diplomatiques qui visent à trouver un compromis acceptable par l'Iran et l'UE.

Sur ce point, les politologues s'interrogent. «Soit il est persuadé que les Etats-Unis et Israël ne tenteront jamais rien contre l'Iran, et qu'il peut donc se livrer à toutes les provocations. Soit, il espère au contraire provoquer une frappe israélienne, qui ferait se rassembler la plupart des Iraniens derrière lui. Dans les deux cas, il est gagnant», analyse la politologue déjà citée. Quant à ●●●



Mahmoud Ahmadinejad derrière un tableau exprimant l'idée qu'après les Etats-Unis, Israël se brisera, lors d'une conférence intitulée «Le monde sans le sionisme», le 26 octobre à Téhéran.

●●● d'éventuelles sanctions économiques du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU qui pourraient frapper Téhéran, le régime compte sur la Chine – qui a besoin du pétrole iranien – et sur la Russie. Il est significatif que Moscou n'ait pas à ce jour remis en cause sa coopération

nucléaire avec Téhéran, vitale pour le régime islamique. Au-delà des propos négationnistes du Président, apparaît une véritable stratégie de confrontation avec l'Occident. «Entre le monde de l'arrogance [les pays occidentaux, ndlr] et le monde de l'islam, il y a une

bataille historique qui a commencé il y a des centaines d'années», a-t-il affirmé dans un précédent discours. Pour Nasser Etemadi, ces propos s'adressent aussi au monde arabo-musulman. «Il a pris en compte que, dans ces pays, il y a une immense vide dans l'opinion

publique, et que son message y sera donc bien accueilli.» Mais en Iran, la bataille pour le pouvoir est loin d'être finie et son principal adversaire, Hachemi Rafsandjani, loin d'avoir dit son dernier mot. ◆

JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN

Les provocations calculées du président iranien islamiste

L'analyse
de Renaud Girard *

Les déclarations anti-israéliennes répétées du nouveau président iranien, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, constituent tout sauf des dérapages incontrôlés.

En qualifiant l'holocauste des Juifs européens pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale de «mythe» et en suggérant de transférer l'Etat hébreu en Europe ou en Alaska, le président iranien a pris un risque calculé. Ces provocations verbales – qui viennent après la reprise des activités de conversion d'uranium, en violation d'une promesse faite à l'Union européenne en 2003 – visent à redonner à Téhéran un leadership idéologique auprès des masses populaires politiquement frustrées du monde arabo-musulman. Ce leadership, que l'ayatollah Khomeyni avait acquis à la faveur de la révolution islamique de 1979, l'Iran l'avait rapidement perdu, dans cette guerre arabo-persane que fut le conflit contre l'Irak de Saddam Hussein, puis dans les tentatives de réforme toujours avortées des quinze dernières années.

En leader populiste averti, Ahmadinejad entreprend de surfer sur la vague actuelle de radicalisation idéologique du monde isla-

mique, où le récent succès électoral des Frères musulmans d'Égypte n'est qu'un signe parmi d'autres. Les propos iconoclastes du président iranien ont été très bien reçus par le mouvement palestinien islamiste Hamas. Son chef politique, Khaled Mechaal, les a qualifiés de «courageux» lors d'une visite à Téhéran jeudi dernier. La population d'un pays comme la Jordanie – qui, selon un récent sondage, considère à 90 % Oussama Ben Laden comme un «résistant» et non comme un terroriste – partagera certainement cet avis.

Pris au dépourvu par le désengagement israélien unilatéral de Gaza et la nouvelle stratégie d'Ariel Sharon, désagréablement surpris par le succès de l'offensive diplomatique de l'Etat hébreu auprès du Pakistan et de l'Afghanistan, déçu par le silence de la Turquie lorsqu'il fut avéré qu'Israël avait infiltré des instructeurs militaires auprès des Kurdes iraniens, bref, victime d'un classique syndrome d'encerclement, le régime de Téhéran a choisi de jouer, dans le monde arabo-musulman, les masses plutôt que les gouvernements.

En prononçant ses propos provocateurs à l'occasion d'un sommet de l'Organisation de la Conférence islamique (OCI) à La Mecque, Ahmadinejad a délibérément sapé les efforts de l'Arabie saoudite pour isoler l'Iran dans la région du golfe Persique, où plusieurs pétromonarchies ne se cachent plus d'entretenir des liens commerciaux avec Israël. Dans le Golfe, les Iraniens, qui ont engrangé la disparition politique de leur plus sérieux rival (l'Irak), peuvent se permettre de hausser le ton, comme le montre le durcissement de leur contentieux territorial avec les Emirats arabes unis sur les îlots d'Abou Moussa.

Sur une scène internationale plus vaste, le régime de Téhéran sait qu'il est également en position de force et qu'il a donc les moyens de son arrogance. Les accords privilégiés qu'il a signés avec Pékin dans le domaine pé-

troler lui garantissent un veto chinois au cas où le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU viendrait à étudier des sanctions commerciales contre l'Iran, pour violation de ses obligations dans le cadre du traité de non-prolifération nucléaire.

Face aux Etats-Unis, les Iraniens profitent de l'enlèvement du Pentagone en Irak, en raison de l'insurrection larvée des régions majoritairement sunnites du centre et de l'ouest du pays. Le sud du pays, très majoritairement chiite (comme l'est l'Iran), reste pour le moment relativement calme. Le régime de Téhéran ne se prive jamais de brandir, à mots couverts, la menace d'un embrasement du pays irakien chiite au cas où Washington s'aviserait de frapper les installations iraniennes de conversion et d'enrichissement d'uranium.

Mais la cohérence de cette logique des rapports de forces internationaux n'explique pas tout. Il y a aussi, chez Ahmadinejad, la volonté de consolider son influence au sein de la très complexe galaxie institutionnelle iranienne. En Iran, la présidence ne constitue qu'un lieu de pouvoir parmi d'autres (Parlement,

Conseil des Gardiens de la Constitution, Conseil du discernement, etc.). Ahmadinejad cherche actuellement à galvaniser sa base, les bataillons de pasdarans (Gardiens de la révolution) dont il est lui-même issu. Son maître spirituel et ami, le bouillant ayatollah Yazdi (millénariste, comme Ahmadinejad), s'est lancé dans une féroce bataille politique pour ten-

ter de gagner les élections cléricales à l'Assemblée des experts, seul organe détenant le pouvoir de révoquer le Guide de la révolution (qui est l'arbitre suprême du pays).

L'actuel titulaire du poste, l'ayatollah Khamenei, tout conservateur qu'il soit, est beaucoup plus pragmatique que son poulain Ahmadinejad. Et il agit aujourd'hui comme un Hindenburg qui tenterait de reprendre le maximum de pouvoir à un jeune Hitler imprudemment placé au sommet...

* Grand reporter au service étranger du Figaro, auteur de Pourquoi ils se battent-Voyages à travers les guerres du Moyen-Orient (éditions Flammarion).

LE FIGARO

19 décembre 2005

« Le régime de Téhéran a choisi de jouer, dans le monde arabo-musulman, les masses plutôt que les gouvernements »

FUTURE GOVERNMENT

Top Shia calls for unity coalition

By Steve Negus, Iraq Correspondent

A leading Iraqi Shia candidate to become prime minister after today's elections said the next government in Iraq was likely to be a national unity coalition bringing in representatives of all major ethnic and sectarian groups.

Adel Abd al-Mahdi, vice-president of Iraq and senior member of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (Sciri), said in an interview with the Financial Times that Iraq needed consensus between all communities.

"All the segments, at least the three important segments [of Shia, Sunni and Kurds] should be well represented in the government," he said.

A French-educated economist, Mr Abd al-Mahdi is believed to have received his party's backing to be their candidate for prime minister.

Sciri is one of the three large movements that form

the core of the United Iraqi Alliance, the Shia-led coalition that dominates the current government and is likely to win more votes than any other force in the elections to Iraq's full four-year parliament.

The elections are the last milestone in Iraq's political process, intended to establish a parliamentary democracy after the 2003 US invasion. The US is hoping the elections will pave the way for a political solution to the conflict and has been encouraged by the participation of Sunni Arab groups, which had boycotted the January elections.

If Mr Abd al-Mahdi does replace Ibrahim al-Jaafari, the current prime minister seen by Baghdad's political elite as ineffectual, he will have his work cut trying to win the trust of Sunni Arabs, who see his party as promoting Shia sectarianism.

The vice-president said he was opposed to militias controlling security forces – a recent concern raised by the

US and by Sunni leaders. But he added that inevitably some officers might have a background with Shia militias, with the Kurdish peshmerga, or with the former ruling Ba'ath party. "You can't bring people from the womb," he said.

Asked how his new government could win Sunni trust for the security forces, the vice-president said federalism and decentralisation would allow different regions to police themselves.

"Say village A or B wants the old Ba'athists to assure their security, it's for them to decide. But they cannot impose on us that those people should secure our neighbourhoods," he said.

Mr Abd al-Mahdi, however, insisted he saw no point in opening negotiations with the predominantly Sunni Arab insurgents, an initiative proposed by President Jalal Talabani.

"With whom should we negotiate? I've been in [Iraqi governments] for two years, and I don't really know who represents what they call the

resistance," he said. He added that the insurgency-once dominated by former Ba'athists who may have had practical political goals had now been taken over by Islamist hardliners such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

"The hardcore is always those Zarqawi people, religious people, and that's why the insurgency is very fluid," he said.

"You always have this hard core, who really defends, that really fights. And then you have the troops there, waiting. If things go in favour... they will join, if things go unfavourably they will leave, they do something else."

His counter-insurgency strategy would be not so much to make deals with the guerrillas, but to bring the less committed fighters into the fold of peaceful politics.

"We have to open doors, we have to facilitate [the soft core] joining the political process in any way we can," he said.

SECTARIAN VOTING

Many seek end to religious divisions

By Neil MacDonald
in Muqadadiya

Many Iraqi voters appear to miss one thing about the old days: rule by an officially secular government, where Sunni or Shia sectarian affiliations mattered less than they do today.

In the agricultural heartland of Diyala, a mixed Sunni-Shia province to the north-east of Baghdad, citizens of both sects say they hope today's parliamentary elections will help soothe recent sectarian wounds and, maybe, lower the temperature of the Sunni-dominated insurgency that erupted in the wake of the US-led invasion nearly three years ago.

As soldiers from the Iraqi battalion based at nearby Muqadadiya brought the ballot papers to surrounding polling centres yesterday, the civilians gathered by the roadsides said they wanted to vote as a step towards national peace.

But this can only happen

if the next government acts to unify the two main Muslim sects, several prospective voters said.

The informal picture emerging from rural Diyala probably bodes well for election challenger Iyad Allawi, the secular Shia former interim prime minister, who is trying to regain the job that he first gained by US appointment in June 2004 by appealing to voters with a record of strong leadership that supposedly treated religion as a personal matter.

"In Saddam Hussein's time, no one would ever ask if you were Sunni or Shia," said a local worker at the polling centre in Harouniya village, who, along with other local men, identified himself only as a "Muslim Iraqi". Even if the dictatorship manipulated tribal, ethnic and sectarian loyalties ruthlessly, its governmental institutions were mostly indifferent to such labels, the man insisted.

It is a line often heard from long-serving army officers,

and from Sunni urbanites who feel a residual sympathy for the fallen regime of Mr Hussein. But this village, the soldiers in the ballot convoy say, is solidly Shia.

The perspective from here seems radically different than from the Shia-dominated south of Iraq, where most residents insist that the old, Sunni-led regime abused and exploited them as a matter of sectarian discrimination.

With the north seemingly sewn up in advance by a Kurdish coalition, the election has turned into a race between Mr Allawi and the United Iraqi Alliance, a list comprising most of the same Shia religious parties that captured a slight majority in the current parliament.

Allawi campaigners say that his list, unlike the UIA, will be able to pull in support from all over the country. Moreover, the multiple Sunni sectarian lists that are running this time, after a failed boycott strategy in

January's elections, look inclined to group around Mr Allawi in post-election power-brokering.

Residents of Diyala like to call their province a "miniature Iraq", with Sunni Arab and Shia Arab populations of between 40 to 45 per cent, with the rest split mostly between ethnic Kurds and Turkomans. In fact, the Sunni Arabs enjoy a rough parity here that they lack in Iraq as a whole.

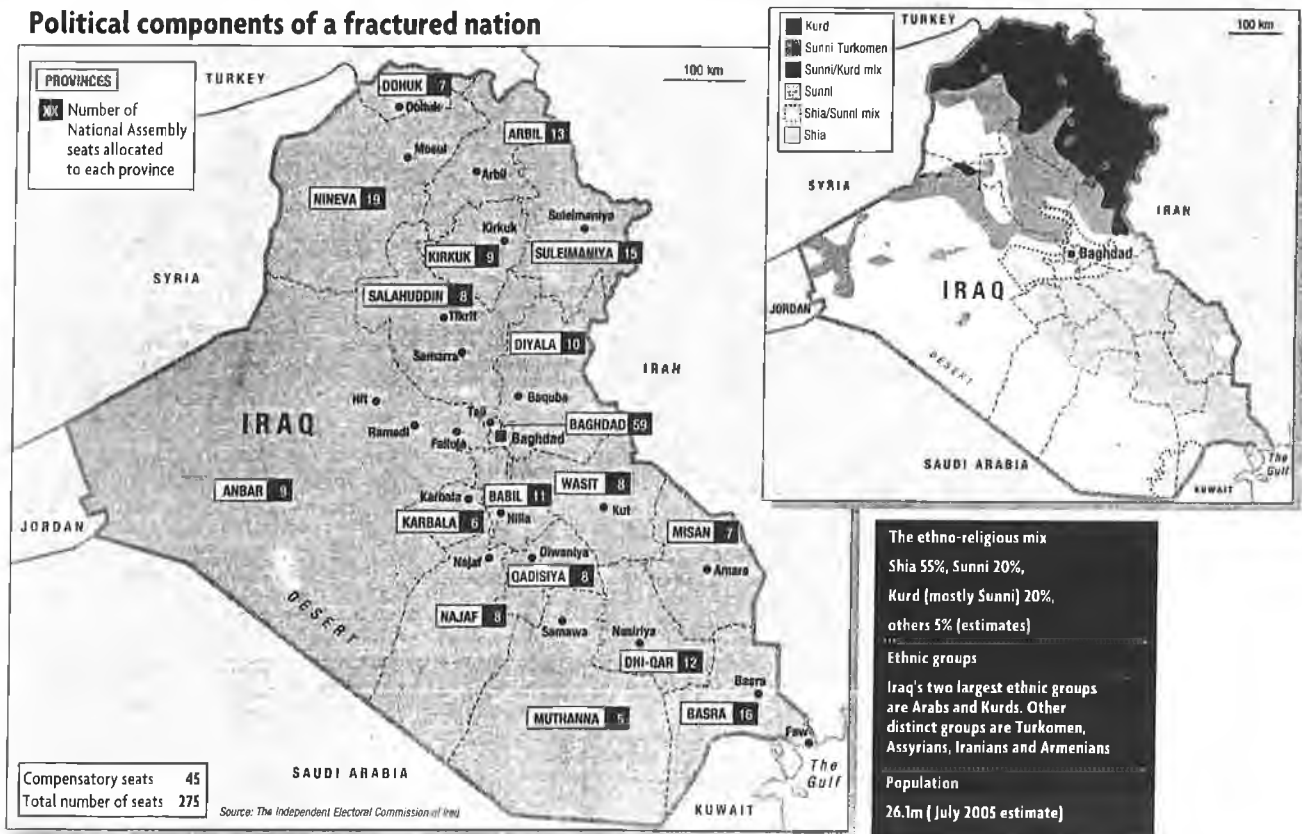
They have, consequently, grasped the power they can exert through democratic pressure, perhaps earlier than Sunni in other parts of the country, says Lt Col Roger Cloutier, the US military commander in the area.

The Muqadadiya-based soldiers are mostly Shia, but several say they come from mixed families. The driver of the command vehicle, a Sunni with a Shia wife, tells the others: "I have a brother who's a Wahabi" – one of the bearded Sunni fundamentalists widely equated with the insurgency and terrorism.

MIDDLE EAST

From Ba'ath to polling booth: why Iraq's quest for unity is facing its toughest test

Political components of a fractured nation



Today's elections are aimed at producing a broad-based assembly and a government with a four-year mandate but armed insurgency is only one of many problems that remain, Roula Khalaf and Steve Negus write

Almost every inch of public space in Baghdad has been filled in the past month by posters of candidates gazing out at a brighter future. Campaign commercials on television have virtually eclipsed regular programming. Mobile phones beep with text messages from obscure provincial coalitions.

Shia Islamists display their clerics, mosques and martyrs. An elderly Sunni sheikh, his voice so weak it is barely audible, derides the Shia-led government's failure to provide basic services. Hazem al-Shaalan, the ultra-secular defence minister known for his blood-curdling threats to crush rebels and traitors, clenches a fist. Ahmed Chalabi, the former opposition leader – who has attracted both credit and blame in Baghdad for cajoling the US into war to unseat Saddam Hussein – proclaims: "We freed the nation, and we will build it."

Yet for all the evidence that Iraq is revelling in its rediscovery of the demo-

cratic process, the country continues to struggle for unity and normality. Today's election for a full parliament – the last stage in its political transition – represents not just the best but perhaps the last hope of reaching a national compact among its various religious groups and preventing a collapse into all-out civil war.

Although two votes held earlier this year – January elections to an interim parliament and an October constitutional referendum – did little to improve security or to build a functioning state, Iraqis are optimistic.

No one expects the violence will suddenly abate. But, encouraged by the likely participation this time of Sunni Arabs – who boycotted the January poll – US and Iraqi officials say the elections could produce a more legitimate parliament with a more balanced representation of Shia, Kurds and Sunni Arabs and a government with a four-year mandate that could finally get down to the business of governing.

Ominously, however, many Iraqis seem still to view the poll through a rigidly sectarian prism, regarding it first and foremost as a contest to determine which group ends up in control of important state agencies such as the interior ministry (see below right).

For the administration of US President George W. Bush, which faces rising domestic discontent with the Iraq war, the completion of the political transition should pave the way for the gradual transfer of security to Iraqi forces and allow a reduction in the

nearly 140,000 US troops who serve regularly in Iraq. But even US officials now acknowledge that Iraq's insurgency will take many years to defeat.

Reflecting that bleak view, Anthony Cordesman, Middle East expert at Washington's Centre for Strategic and International Studies, argues the "best-case scenario for Iraq now is the kind of 'victory' that produces an unstable, partially dependent state, with a unified and pluralistic regime".

American officials say a fringe of hardcore radicals, including followers of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian Islamist, as well as the most radical Ba'athists still loyal to Mr Hussein, must be defeated by force. But in recent months the US has changed its stance to emphasise that most insurgents can be persuaded through the political process to lay down arms.

The extremist groups are trying hard to terrorise voters in the Sunni heartland and prevent a high turnout. One statement among many posted on the internet and on placards in Sunni towns brands the political process a "devilish project aimed against the mujahideen (fighters)".

But there are positive signs. At least two broad Sunni Arab political alliances have emerged to contest the elections, adopting a programme that calls for a timetable for the withdrawal of US forces. Saleh al-Mutlek, head of the Iraqi National Dialogue Front, one of the two groups, says many nationalist insurgents are backing elections as a

way of asserting Sunni power.

Analysts remain sceptical about the ability of leaders such as Mr al-Mutlek to wield real influence over insurgents. The Muslim Scholars Association, a clerical group that at times acts as the insurgents' mouthpiece, has issued a statement opposing the elections without, however, actively encouraging a boycott. And on Tuesday, more than 1,000 Sunni clerics issued a fatwa, or religious edict, telling followers to vote.

Some Iraqi leaders warn that distinguishing between two branches of a clandestine movement is difficult in practice. The turnout in Sunni areas will be a crucial indicator of the new Sunni groups' political relevance. But even if Sunni do not turn out in large numbers to vote – whether out of fear or distaste for the political process – a new electoral law guarantees that the next parliament will have more Sunni representatives than the 17 seats (out of 275) secured in the current interim assembly. Instead of considering Iraq as one constituency, seats have been divided among the country's 18 provinces.

The promise of a high Sunni turnout has raised the prospect that the elections will produce a more diverse parliament and a government in which the influence of the United Iraqi Alliance, the Shia coalition of Islamist parties, is diluted. The UIA is expected to remain the largest bloc in parliament but its own members predict it will lose the outright majority it now holds.

Shia and Kurdish officials say the UIA is still likely to lead the next government. But they say the cabinet will be a broad coalition that includes Sunni Arab representation and perhaps members of the competing electoral list led by Iyad Allawi, a secular Shia and former prime minister.

The UIA has disappointed many Iraqis and alienated even its closest allies,

including the Kurdish parties in the government coalition. Western diplomats and human rights activists say there is growing evidence that Shia militia linked to security forces are involved in extra-judicial executions of Sunni detainees, exacerbating sectarian tensions.

The UIA's human rights record, however, scarcely troubles most Shia voters. Many Shia agree that the UIA government has not delivered on its promises to stop the car bombs and restore regular electricity supplies. They concede that Mr Allawi, a member of the former Ba'ath party who champions the cause of purged Ba'athist technocrats, may well – as his campaign advertisements have it – be a man who "says it, then does it".

But they will still vote for the UIA because they fear he will bring back the old elite to ignore and oppress them once more.

Whatever government takes over next year will have a battle to convince the public that state institutions represent the entire nation and not just the sect in power. It will also have to accelerate the rebuilding of the national security forces.

Muaffak al-Rubbaie, Iraq's national security adviser, estimates that 50 per cent of Iraqi troops – 217,000 police and army forces – are now well trained and ready for combat. Mr Cordesman, of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, says that despite concerns over the ethnic composition of troops and questions about their loyalty, progress has been made towards

creating truly national forces. He notes that earlier this year three of Iraq's army divisions had a Shia commander, another three a Sunni, three a Kurd and one a Turkoman.

The next parliament must also build consensus over the new constitution, approved by Shia and Kurdish leaders but fiercely opposed by most Sunni.

Perhaps the most difficult task facing the next government is to build on the expected Sunni participation in the elections by opening channels of communication with some of the insurgent groups. Ironically, US officials seem more accepting of the concept of negotiations with rebels than do some of the Islamist Shia parties, particularly Sciri.

Some Iraqi officials are trying to identify the groups that could be brought into negotiations. Jalal Talabani, Iraq's president and leader of one of the two main Kurdish parties, has said he is ready to listen to insurgents willing to lay down their arms. Wafiq al-Samarrai, security adviser to Mr Talabani, says a range of local groups has been contacting him by telephone to say they are ready for discussions.

The Centre for Arab Unity Studies, a Beirut-based organisation run by Iraqis, last week issued a declaration that it says was agreed with several insurgent groups. The declaration offered a ceasefire in return for a withdrawal of American troops within six months, among other demands.

Although still tentative, these moves suggest that some groups are seeking a political wing and are beginning to consider negotiations as a way out of the Iraq conflict. "The only hope for a solution is negotiations with insurgents," says Toby Dodge, a London-based Iraq expert. "Once an insurgency gets under way, there can never be a military solution: there has to be a negotiated settlement."

Five main coalitions contending the leadership

United Iraqi Alliance

- Non-secular Shia Arab coalition
- 18 political groups
- Main parties:
 - Daawa party of outgoing prime minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari
 - Sciri, led by Ayatollah Abdelaziz al-Hakim
 - Followers of the radical Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, although he will not himself run
- Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's most influential Shia cleric, backed the UIA in January but has not formally given his support for today's election

Kurdistan Alliance

- Secular Kurdish coalition
- Eight political groups
- Main parties:
 - Patriotic Union of Kurdistan led by president Jalal Talabani
 - Kurdish Democratic party led by Massoud Barzani
- The Kurdistan Islamic Union Party, which won 10 per cent of the seats in Dohuk and Suleimaniya, left the coalition

Iraqi National List

- Secular and multi-ethnic coalition
- 15 political groups
- Dominant party: Iraqi Nationalist Accord of former interim prime minister Iyad Allawi, a secular Shia Arab
- The Iraqi Communist Party and the Assembly of Independent Democrats have recently joined the coalition

Iraqi Consensus Front

- Non-secular Sunni Arab coalition
- Three political groups
- Dominant party: Iraqi Islamic party led by Tareq al-Hashemi

Iraqi National Dialogue Front

- Nationalist secular Sunni Arab coalition
- Five political groups
- Dominant party: Iraqi National Front led by Saleh al-Mutlek



A voter passes a UN soldier on patrol in front of campaign posters near Baghdad.

Graphic by US Forces

Photo: Getty Images

The New York Times

Op-Chart

DECEMBER 14, 2005

NINA KAMP, MICHAEL O'HANLON AND AMY UNIKEWICZ

The State of Iraq: An Update

DESPITE President Bush's articulation of a new strategy for victory in Iraq, the American debate remains polarized. An increasing number of critics argue that the war is already lost and that we may as well withdraw, while others claim we are clearly headed to victory, and Americans would know that if only the press would stop emphasizing the negative.

Our judgment, based on data compiled by the American government, the news media and independent monitors, is that trends in Iraq do not support either of these extreme views. Things are in a state of continual turmoil, with many hopeful signs but also some deeply disquieting realities. In the good news category, one could place the real, if belated, progress in training Iraqi security forces, the greater availability of telephone and television services, renewed economic growth and more children in school (reading much better textbooks).

On the negative side, electricity and oil production remain below the levels of

the Baathist regime, even as Iraqi expectations for improvement soar. Among Sunni Arabs, who stand to greatly increase their representation in Parliament after tomorrow's elections, passive support for the terrorists is all too common. And the insurgency remains as strong and deadly as ever.

A sober reading of the data argues against a rapid withdrawal, which would concede the fight to the terrorists. But this does not mean we can't shift policy. We could announce a plan for substantial troop reductions (but not complete withdrawal) over the next 12 to 24 months, as most Iraqis say they desire. Together with the Iraqi government, we might create a job-training program in response to the chronically high unemployment rate. In the end, however, the most important factor may be how the new government decides to amend the Constitution, particularly in terms of ensuring equitable sharing of oil money and bringing lower-level former Baathists back into public life.

	NOVEMBER 2003	NOVEMBER 2004	NOVEMBER 2005		NOVEMBER 2003	NOVEMBER 2004	NOVEMBER 2005
SECURITY INDICATORS				ECONOMIC AND QUALITY OF LIFE INDICATORS			
U.S. Troop Fatalities (Number From Homemade Bombs)	82 (20)	137 (19)	96 (40)	Crude-Oil Production (in millions of barrels per day; prewar: 2.5)	2.1	2.0	2.0
Iraqi Military and Police Fatalities	65	160	176	Availability of Household Fuels (percentage of estimated need)	76	77	87
Estimated Iraqi Civilian Fatalities From War	125	1500	600	Average Electrical Power (in megawatts; prewar: 4.0)	3.6	3.2	3.7
Multiple-Fatality Bombings	6	11	41	Annual G.D.P. (in billions of 2005 dollars; prewar: 30)	19	28	29
Kidnappings of Foreigners	1	5	11	Cumulative U.S. Aid Disbursed (in billions of dollars)	0.1	3.6	12.0
U.S./Other Foreign Troops (in thousands)	128/24	138/24	160/23	Registered Cars (in millions)	1.5	2.5	3.1
Iraqi Security Personnel (in thousands)	95	114	212	Unemployment Rate (percent)	0	35	32
Number of Iraqi Security Personnel in Top Two Tiers of Quality (in thousands)	0	5	35	Felony Cases Resolved in Courts	500	700	850
Estimated Number of Insurgents	5,000	20,000	18,000	Telephone Subscribers (prewar: 800,000)	600,000	2,200,000	5,000,000
Daily Insurgent Attacks	32	77	90	PUBLIC OPINION/POLITICS			
Daily Tips Received from Iraqis about Insurgents	5	10	150	Percentage of Public Optimistic About Future	65	54	49
				Iraqis Favoring Near-Term U.S. Troop Withdrawal	30	75	80
				Expected Sunni Arab Share of Iraq's Future Oil Revenue (percent)	20	20	5-10

Corralled Tehran renews the tension

The continuing conflict in Iraq is polarising Gulf politics, heightening tensions between Sunni Arab governments and Shia Iran.

Since the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime, Tehran has emerged as the most powerful regional influence in Iraq. This new dominance, combined with Tehran's pursuit of a nuclear programme, has left Arab governments consumed with anxiety. Although both sides claim to want co-operation over future Gulf security, the strains underline the risks that a Sunni-Shia civil war in Iraq could drag in the neighbours to provoke a broader regional conflict.

Iran has been the main supporter of



Dominance: Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

Iraq's Islamist Shia parties, which won the January elections and are likely to emerge as the biggest bloc in today's poll.

Under Mohammad Khatami, the reformist Iranian president who stepped down this summer, relations with Arab governments had improved. But tensions were renewed with the arrival of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, his fundamentalist successor, and the unearthing by United Nations inspectors of Iran's sophisticated nuclear programme. Arab officials share western suspicions that Tehran is bent on developing nuclear weapons.

"Even when things were good, the Arabs were afraid of Iran's power to meddle in their affairs, especially with their Shia populations, and the Iranians were afraid that the Gulf states would be a base for America to strike against them," says Gregory Gause, who teaches at the University of Vermont, referring to the Shia minority in Saudi Arabia and the majority Shia population of Bahrain. "It's worse now. Iraq has exacerbated the Shia problem because they (the Arabs) are afraid Iran will get the dominant influence in Iraq." Iran has supported the US-backed democratic transition in Iraq. None the less, the

US and Britain also accuse it of less benign intervention, including the provision of advanced explosives to radical Shia groups.

On a trip to Washington in October, Prince Saud al-Faisal, the Saudi foreign minister, expressed alarm about Iranian interference. But Tehran officials insist Iran should be most worried, surrounded by the US military presence in Iraq, Afghanistan and much of the Gulf.

At a recent conference on Gulf security, organised by London's International Institute for Strategic Studies, Mohammad Reza Bagheri, Iran's deputy foreign minister, said Arabs had nothing to fear from Iran.

He also warned that Iraq should not be turned into "a tool for creating a new balance of power against greater countries in the region", an apparent reference to Iran.

Concerns over Iranian power in Iraq have spurred Arab governments to try to carve a more active role in Iraq. With support from the US, the Arab League organised a national reconciliation conference in Cairo last month, bringing together Shia, Kurdish and Sunni leaders. As the League prepares for another, bigger conference in Baghdad next year, it has also been urging Sunni Arabs to participate in the political process.

Sunni open to uniting with Kurds and Shiites

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD: A leading Sunni politician said Friday that his party would be open to an alliance with secular Shiites and Kurds to form a coalition government in Iraq once the results are in from Thursday's parliamentary elections.

Election officials said the elections had been conducted smoothly, with minimum violence and no reports of fraud. But officials are investigating nearly 180 complaints of intimidation and other irregularities that could delay release of the results for at least two weeks. As the count continued on Friday, no official figures were released, although officials said some numbers could be announced next week.

The alliance of Shiite religious parties that dominates the current government is expected to win the biggest share of the 275 seats in Parliament, but not enough to rule without forming a coalition with other factions.

Shiites account for about 60 percent of Iraq's 27 million people; turnout in the Shiite heartland, in southern and central Iraq, was reported high. Under the new constitution, the party with the biggest number of seats gets the first chance at trying to form a government that can win Parliament's endorsement.

But the Sunni politician, Adnan al-Dulaimi, predicted that the Shiite United Iraqi Alliance would fail to muster enough support in Parliament. Dulaimi said a coalition of his Iraqi Accordance Front, the Kurds and a party led by former Prime Minister Ayad

Allawi, a secular Shiite, would eventually end up in power.

"We believe that these elections will lead to forming a balanced government of all parts of the Iraqi people not controlled by a specific group, and this will lead to solving the problems," Dulaimi said. "We will not accept that any part of the Iraqi people be excluded unless they themselves don't want to take part."



Joao Silva for The New York Times

Shiites waving prayer mats at a rally for a political party on Friday in Baghdad.

A government with strong Sunni Arab representation could help defuse the Sunni-dominated insurgency and allow the United States and its coalition partners to begin removing troops next year.

General George Casey Jr., the top U.S. commander in Iraq, told Pentagon reporters in a video teleconference on Friday that he would make recommendations in the next few weeks about troop withdrawals. But he sought to dampen expectations that a successful election alone would end the insurgency and predicted that rebels might escalate their attacks to demonstrate they "are still strong and a factor to be reckoned with."

"We should not expect the insurgency to just go away because of yesterday's great success," Casey said. "But we should expect it to be gradually weakened and reduced as more and more Iraqis adopt the political process and the root causes of the insurgency are addressed by the new Iraqi govern-

ment and by the coalition."

That view is shared by others among the 150,000 troops in the U.S. military force in Iraq.

"The new government has to find its legs," said Captain Bradley Velotta, who

is based in Mosul. Before the Americans can begin to leave, he added, "the new government is going to need the stability and training supplied by U.S. forces."

In a statement posted on the Internet on Friday, the Islamic Army in Iraq, a major insurgent group, said it was responsible for the absence of widespread election violence because it wanted to avoid harming Sunni voters. The statement added that the group did not believe in democracy, only in God.

Kurds flock to polling stations to back de facto independence

Michael Howard in Sulaymaniyah

There was not an Iraqi flag in sight across the Kurdish self-rule region yesterday as Kurds went to the polls, many saying they were voting to preserve their de facto independence from Baghdad.

Election officials in the self-rule provinces of Dohuk, Irbil and Sulaymaniyah estimated a turnout of 75%-80%, while in the contested city of Kirkuk, which has a large Kurdish population, polling was described as "huge".

"I am voting for my future and for the future of my people who have suffered so much from central rule," said Shwan

Mohammed, a history student at Sulaymaniyah University, as he queued outside a polling station clutching the Kurdish flag.

As with the campaign in Iraq's most stable region, voting passed off largely without incident. In the worst trouble resi-

dents of a village outside Arbil threw rocks at a convoy carrying the head of an Islamist Kurdish group running against the major Kurdish alliance.

Kurdish leaders also complained that thousands of people had been deprived of the right to vote because of mistakes in the electoral roll made by the Independent Election Commission in Baghdad.

The Kurdistan Alliance, dominated by Massoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party and Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, hopes to repeat its strong performance in Iraq's first post-war elections in January. In that poll it emerged as the second largest bloc in parliament and formed a coalition government with the winning Shia alliance.

With greater Sunni Arab participation this time around the Kurds, who make up a fifth of the population of Iraq, expect to lose some of their 77 seats, but seek to at least protect their political gains enshrined in the new federal constitution.

In the northern city of Sulaymaniyah one of the first to vote as polls opened was Iraq's Kurdish president Jalal Talabani.

"It is a historic day for Iraq and the region," he said, before alluding to some of the political battles that lie ahead. "I hope that the Iraqi people will stay united. We hope that the people will vote to keep the constitution that was approved by the Iraqi people."

A steady trickle of voters in the morning turned into a flood at midday, as entire families – men in baggy traditional trousers, women in sequinned dresses, turned up to vote. Outside polling stations policemen linked arms and danced.

"Who can say it was wrong to bring us freedom?" said Barham Salih, Iraq's planning minister, as he watched the celebrations.

The Guardian

December 16 2005

SECURITE

Si les Américains partaient demain

Le plus important quotidien de Bagdad analyse les conditions d'un départ des troupes alliées.

1. L'Irak serait-il plus sûr en cas de retrait américain ? Dans un sens, oui. Cela priverait les groupes armés d'une partie importante du soutien dont ils bénéficient dans la population, l'occupation étant un motif de haine que les insurgés peuvent exploiter. Cela est d'autant plus vrai que le contexte intérieur irakien semble favorable, puisque l'on note que beaucoup d'Arabes sunnites qui avaient boycotté les élections de janvier dernier semblent prêts à participer à celles du 15 décembre. De même, les nationalistes irakiens et les partisans de l'ancien régime engagés dans l'insurrection envoient des signes de leur volonté de fonder des partis politiques plutôt que de persister dans l'action armée. De leur côté, les dirigeants irakiens ont indiqué qu'ils étaient prêts à trouver des accords avec les insurgés afin de les amener vers un processus politique. Toutefois, la CIA reste pessimiste quant à l'éventualité de voir la paix s'instaurer en cas de retrait. Il en va de même des alliés arabes des Américains dans la région, qui considèrent que la révolte risque de redoubler d'intensité et de provoquer l'effacement de l'Irak. Pour certains responsables saoudiens, la situation est irrécupérable. "Il semble tout à fait improbable que l'Irak reste un Etat unifié", écrit l'analyste saoudien Nawaf Obaid dans un rapport secret à son gouvernement. Et il est vrai que les progrès dans l'entraînement des soldats irakiens ne serviront pas à stabiliser

le pays si beaucoup d'entre eux sont plus loyaux envers leur groupe confessionnel qu'envers le gouvernement central. Qui plus est, les forces de sécurité que les Américains sont en train de mettre sur pied sont suspectées par les Arabes sunnites d'être infiltrées par les milices chiites et kurdes, désireuses de prendre leur revanche.

2. La région serait-elle plus sûre en cas de retrait américain ? Oui, à condition que l'Irak soit démocratisé et reste unifié, ce qui est loin d'être acquis. Dans ce cas, Washington aura réussi à améliorer son image, que la guerre avait largement entachée. Car la quasi-totalité des Arabes ont été hostiles à l'invasion américaine de l'Irak. Et, même si de nombreux gouvernements des pays voisins se félicitent de la chute de Saddam Hussein, ils estiment que la guerre a versé de l'huile sur le feu et alimenté le terrorisme. "Vous avez créé une vaste zone qui échappe à tout contrôle et où le terrorisme trouve un terrain fertile allant de la frontière jordanienne aux faubourgs de Bagdad", a commenté Ali Shukri, l'ancien conseiller du roi de Jordanie, après les trois attentats suicides d'Amman. Dans le même temps, ces régimes sont tout autant inquiets de l'éventualité de voir s'instaurer un gouvernement démocratique en Irak. D'ores et déjà, ils subissent les pressions américaines en faveur de la cause démocratique et l'Egypte, par exemple, a dû concéder d'organiser ses premières élections "pluralistes". D'un autre côté, si le chaos devait gagner l'Irak après un retrait américain, l'in-

stabilité contaminerait les pays voisins et y étoufferait tous les progrès démocratiques.

3. Les Américains seraient-ils plus en sécurité chez eux en cas de retrait ? Pas nécessairement. Certes, l'occupation américaine de l'Irak est perçue comme une provocation et a permis au Jordanien Zarqawi de recruter des combattants du monde entier. Mais cela ne veut pas dire que la menace terroriste contre les Etats-Unis diminuera en cas de retrait. "Que nous nous retirions ou non d'Irak, estime un responsable de la lutte antiterroriste américain, Al-Qaida voudra toujours nous frapper là où ça fait le plus mal : dans notre propre pays." Tout au plus les Etats-Unis pourraient-ils redéployer leurs forces afin de combattre le terrorisme dans d'autres régions. Quoi qu'il en soit, cela ne sera possible qu'à partir du moment où les Etats-Unis seront "dans une position de force", estime Bruce Hoffman, directeur de la Fondation Rand. "Donner l'impression de fuir les violences serait un encouragement pour les terroristes", estime-t-il. Car Al-Qaida a toujours été convaincue que le point faible des Etats-Unis réside dans son incapacité à supporter les pertes et à résister à long terme. Toute la difficulté est donc de trouver le moyen de se retirer sans avoir l'air de le faire sous la contrainte.

Al-Mada, Bagdad

Courrier
INTERNATIONAL

DU 15 AU 21 DÉCEMBRE 2005

Turkish court delays novelist's trial

By Sebnem Arsu

EU observers keep watch on proceedings

ISTANBUL: A Turkish court put off the trial of a prominent novelist after a brief hearing Friday, giving the government until Feb. 7 to decide whether to go ahead with criminal proceedings against him for mentioning the Armenian genocide by the Turks in 1915 in a magazine interview in which he also said 30,000 Kurds had been killed since the late 1980s.

Angry nationalists booed and jostled the heavy police escort that took the best-selling writer, Orhan Pamuk, into the packed courthouse, where observers from European Union countries Turkey hopes will admit it to the 25-nation group were present.

"I am sorry that I could not testify," Pamuk said in a statement issued by his publisher after the court decided that the Justice Ministry in Ankara had to give authorization for the trial to proceed.

"Dragging out cases of thought crimes which shouldn't be begun in the first place and starting new ones are not good for Turkey, for our democracy," he said. He remains free while awaiting trial but could face a jail term of six months to three years if convicted.

Policemen with plastic shields escorted Pamuk, 53, from the courthouse into a minivan under a barrage of eggs and invective by angry protesters, and as shouts of "Traitor Pamuk" echoed in

the narrow streets.

Pamuk is accused of "insulting Turkish identity" by telling *Das Magazin*, a Swiss publication, in an interview last February that the mass killing of Armenians by the Ottoman empire in 1915 and the deaths of Kurds in Turkish operations against the PKK separatist

He is facing criminal charges for mentioning Armenian genocide.

group in the 1980s were still forbidden subjects in Turkey.

Article 301 of the Turkish penal code, though revised last summer as part of Turkey's efforts to meet the legal and economic standards required to join the European Union, still criminalizes public comments that "denigrate Turkishness" or the government or the army, and nearly 60 intellectuals have been charged under it.

At the end of the hourlong hearing, Joost Lagendijk, a Dutch European Parliament advocate of Turkish member-

ship in the EU, expressed disappointment that the government had not decided to dismiss the trial.

"Now it is up to the government to take the responsibility," he said. "They can say that the penal code was reformed not to restrict the freedom of speech but to allow for more."

The Turkish justice minister, Cemil Cicek, speaking to NTV news television, accused journalists of stirring up emotions and said that the court's decision should not be taken as a surprise.

"A question has been asked, so we should wait for the reply," he said.

Denis McShane, a member of the British Parliament observing the proceedings, said that he had been hit on the face by a nationalist lawyer during the melee.

"I cannot believe these lawyers represent Turkish democracy," McShane said.

The editor of the only Armenian newspaper in Turkey, Hrant Dink, was also showered with insults and had to be escorted from the courthouse by the security force.

On Thursday, the EU Enlargement Commissioner, Olli Rehn, said that it was not Pamuk, whose novels including "Snow," "My Name Is Red" and "The Black Book" have been translated into 34 languages, but Turkey that would be on trial. He called on the government to prove that the changes in the penal code were not simply window dressing to convince Europe that it could start talking with Turkey about EU membership.

Another European Parliament member at the trial, Camiel Eurlings of The Netherlands, said, "If Turkey wants to continue toward the EU, and I hope it will, then really freedom of expression is a fundamental necessity."

Mehmet Altan, a professor at Istanbul University who had been acquitted of a similar charge, predicted that the charges against the novelist would not stick.

"This was a provocative plot by those who are trying to block Turkey's entry into the EU," Altan said. "The case served its purpose, so they've done with it."

The New York Times



Orhan Pamuk/The Associated Press



Reuters

A van carrying the novelist Orhan Pamuk, shown below, on its way to an Istanbul court Friday. Protesters threw eggs at him.



The Economist

December 17th 2005

Syria and Lebanon

The Syrians are in the dock, but the murders continue

BEIRUT

The UN's finger points at people close to Syria's President Bashar Assad

THE metaphor was more fitting than its writer intended. "We have turned the day into a dark night," said the fax posted by a hitherto unknown group claiming responsibility for this week's bomb that killed Gibran Tueni, a prominent Lebanese publisher and politician. The Arabic word for day, *an-Nahar*, happens to be the name of the high-brow Beirut daily that Mr Tueni's grandfather founded and his family still runs. Yet Mr Tueni's killing also darkened the cloud of deception and fear that has shrouded efforts to bring the light of truth into Lebanon's murky and dangerously polarised politics.

The most obvious of these efforts has been the UN-sponsored probe into last February's murder of Lebanon's long-serving prime minister, Rafik Hariri, which led to the withdrawal of Syrian troops and the ouster of the Syrian-run security establishment that had dominated Lebanon since its civil war ended in 1990. Few think it a matter of chance that Mr Tueni's assassination coincided with the release of a second progress report on this investigation, which, reinforcing an earlier report in October, suggests that people in the shadowy matrix of Lebanese and Syrian security services had Hariri killed.

With its Lebanese component now largely dismantled, most Lebanese tend to blame Syria for the 14 bombings that have shaken their country since February. These have now killed 13 people, including

four leading Christians, among them Mr Tueni, who were outspoken critics of Syria's regime. Though not mandated to look into these later attacks, the UN investigation team, led to date by a German prosecutor, Detlev Mehlis, cites new evidence in its latest report that a "high-level Syrian official" supplied arms to groups in Lebanon "to create public disorder in response to any accusations of Syrian involvement in the Hariri assassination."

Mr Mehlis's report also politely but firmly chides Syria for stalling, despite a UN Security Council resolution obliging it to co-operate fully with the investigation. Syria did let five security men, now named as being among 19 suspects in the Hariri murder, be interrogated. But it also tried hard to discredit Mr Mehlis, most dramatically by televising a key witness's supposed recantation. The UN report suggests that this witness's original testimony was corroborated by others and retracted under duress. It also revealed that Syria claims to have burned all documentation of its 30-year armed presence in Lebanon, and has failed to produce two witnesses believed to be in Syrian police custody.

Mr Mehlis is retiring from the investigation team, but the UN Security Council may extend its mandate for six months. After requests from Lebanon's government, it may also broaden the investigators' brief to look into the post-Hariri bombings and set up an international tri-

bunal to try the culprits. The council still refrains from imposing immediate sanctions on Syria for failure to co-operate, preferring instead to hold out the threat of "further action" under Chapter 7 of the UN charter, which authorises the use of force.

International wariness of hurting ordinary Syrians means that such punishment is likely, as a start, to be limited to restricting the movement of Syrian officials and diplomats. This would humiliate the increasingly isolated regime of President Bashar Assad but not bring him down. His mixture of bluster and delaying tactics followed by quiet concessions has impressed few outside Syria. Yet it has brought some sympathy from his own people: many remain persuaded by official posturing that presents their country as a bastion of Arab nationalism besieged by western and Zionist designs.

Such defiance plays well in other parts of the Arab world, including even Lebanon. Many Shia Muslims, the largest but historically most disenfranchised of Lebanon's 18 recognised confessional groups, still see Syria as the ultimate champion of the notion of "resistance". Hizbullah, the strongest Shia party, sees the extension of UN influence in Lebanon as a Trojan horse for western domination. Pro-western Lebanese, particularly Christians such as Mr Tueni, are regarded as traitors for arguing that Hizbullah's "resistance" militia be disarmed, as demanded by the UN.

But acts such as the killing of Mr Tueni, while raising the spectre of the kind of tit-for-tat confessional response that led to a 15-year-long civil war, also strengthen the outrage that has fuelled a broad-based popular movement for greater freedom. Most Lebanese, including a growing number of Shias, are tired of being held hostage to outmoded heroic notions. What they want is the light of justice. ■

Iraqi Kurdistan

Taking the oil

ARBIL

Some things are so hard to share

THERE are few more sensitive issues in Iraq than the control of its prized oil. So Iraq's Kurds were not surprised by the chorus of disapproval from their Sunni Arab compatriots at the news that a foreign company had begun drilling near the town of Zakho, in Kurdish-controlled territory near the border with Turkey. The result of a deal struck in 2004 between the Kurdistan Regional Government in Arbil, its capital, and a Norwegian oil exploration company, Det Norske Oljeselskap (DNO), the drilling heralds the first such project since Saddam Hussein's fall.

Long starved of what they say was their fair share of oil revenue under Mr Hussein and other previous rulers in Baghdad, the Kurds have been pressing hard to gain more control of natural resources in their region. Their prime minister, Nechirvan Barzani, declared at the opening ceremony: "The time has come that, instead of suffering, the people of Kurdistan will benefit from the fortunes and resources of their country." DNO is one of seven exploration companies that have signed a memorandum of understanding with the Kurdish authorities.

This riles the Sunni Arabs, most of whom live in central Iraq, which is oil-free. The Kurds had gone behind Baghdad's back, they claimed. Saleh al-Mutlek, a prominent politician who heads a Sunni list in this week's election, gave warning that Kurdish leaders were thinking about seceding from Iraq. "That is why they began drilling the well," he said.

In any event, it turns out that the Zakho deal was done with at least some knowledge of senior officials in the oil ministry in Baghdad. The canny Kurds were merely taking advantage of a grey area in the constitution, which says that, while oil and gas belong to the whole country, regional governments as well as the federal one are responsible for managing oil and gas extracted from current fields. Oil income is to be shared out by quota, according to the population of each province, with extra cash going to areas particularly neglected under Mr Hussein.

A sheikh who belongs to the Muslim Scholars' Board, which influences some insurgents, says the Kurds are treating Iraq's oil as "war booty". One reason why many Sunni Arabs voted against the new constitution in a referendum in October was the fear that its clauses on federalism would let regional governments control any new oil fields, so cutting off funds for their oil-poor region; the Kurds say there are ample reserves in the Sunni area west of Baghdad, but they are unproven.

Crucially for the Kurds, the constitution does not mention new exploration in existing fields. Article 111 provides for regional governments to control everything that is not exclusively ascribed to the federal government. A new oil and gas law will go before the new national parliament after this week's general election. It may well present the new government with its first constitutional crisis. ■



Let's have the oil as well as the water

EU warns Iran on Holocaust

By Dan Bilefsky

BRUSSELS: Just days before its envoys resume talks with Iran on its nuclear program, the EU on Friday condemned comments by Tehran that the Holocaust is a myth, and warned that they could have serious diplomatic consequences.

European leaders summoned Iran's envoys in Europe to formally complain about the recent denials by the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, of the Holocaust, and his call for Israel to be "wiped off the map." The Dutch foreign minister, Ben Bot, said the incendiary nature of the remarks had brought the EU's relations with Iran to an all-time low.

A cooling of already strained relations between Iran and the EU would

undermine the bloc's effort to end a standoff over Iran's nuclear program. It also would prevent the EU from acting as an intermediary between Tehran and Washington, which has grown increasingly impatient with Iran.

"Given provocative political moves by Iran since May, the EU agrees on the need to keep the EU's diplomatic options under close review and continue to calibrate the EU's approach in light of Iranian declarations and actions," the leaders, attending a summit meeting in Brussels on the EU budget, said in a draft statement.

In Washington, the White House said that Ahmadinejad's remarks "only underscore why it is so important that the international community continue to work together to keep Iran from developing nuclear weapons."

The Israeli Foreign Ministry said the comments "indicate clearly the extremist policy goals of the regime."

In Brussels, EU governments reiterated their call for Iran to prove that it was not building nuclear weapons. The leaders emphasized that, while they continued to seek a diplomatic solution to the standoff, "the window of opportunity will not remain open indefinitely."

Iran's interior minister, Mostafa Pur Mohammadi, said Ahmadinejad's remarks had been misunderstood. Speaking in Athens, he told The Associated Press that Ahmadinejad had "wanted to say that if certain people have created troubles for the Jewish community they should bear the expenses, and it is not others who should pay for that."

International Herald Tribune

TIME DECEMBER 19, 2005

MIDDLE EAST

The Rise Of an Evil Protégé

An inside look at how al-Zarqawi wrested control from his ex-boss and became al-Qaeda's most lethal terrorist



By TIM MCGIRK ISLAMABAD

AT THE TIME, THE MEETING hardly seemed notable—let alone the start of the world's deadliest partnership. It was late in 1999, and Osama bin Laden was sheltering in Afghanistan, already deep into his plot to attack the World Trade Center. His visitor was a burly young Jordanian, bruised and furious after spending six years inside his country's worst prisons. Abu Mousab al-Zarqawi had traveled to Afghanistan with a proposal for the al-Qaeda chief: he wanted to rally Islam's "true believers" to rise up against corrupt regimes in the Middle East. Bin Laden was skeptical. While al-Zarqawi advocated a war on all fronts, bin Laden was fixated on attacking the U.S. and Israel. He was unsure whether the abrasive, ambitious al-Zarqawi would make a reliable lieutenant. But al-Zarqawi would not be dissuaded. According to an account of the meeting by Saif al-Adel, a former member of bin Laden's inner circle, that appeared on jihadist websites, al-Zarqawi "doesn't retreat on anything ... He doesn't compromise."

So began an odyssey that would transform al-Zarqawi from a brawling thug to the leader of the jihadist insurgency in Iraq, a man deemed so threatening to U.S. security that he commands the same \$25 million bounty offered for bin Laden. By turning Iraq into a breeding ground for al-Qaeda foot soldiers, al-Zarqawi has given new shape to an organization that was fractured when the U.S., in retaliation for the 9/11 attacks, ousted the Taliban and sent bin Laden into hiding. And as al-Zarqawi's stature has risen, his relation-

ship with bin Laden has apparently grown more complex and contentious, like that of an apprentice who has eclipsed his master. At stake in their struggle for control, say those who track the two men, is the future of the global Islamic terrorist movement and its war with the U.S. and its allies.

In the four years since bin Laden disappeared during the siege of Tora Bora, intelligence agencies around the world have struggled to glean information about the whereabouts and inner workings of al-Qaeda's high command. U.S. intelligence on al-Zarqawi, bin Laden and his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is not strong. But counterterrorism and intelligence officials tell TIME they believe al-Zarqawi has expanded his reach outside Iraq's borders to the extent that he has become al-Qaeda's most dangerous operative. The U.S. believes al-Zarqawi has contacted about two dozen other terrorist groups in more than 30 countries in Europe, Africa and Asia in an effort to raise funds for his network and coordinate international operations. His network has forged links with jihadist groups in Europe that may be planning attacks similar to the London

THE APPRENTICE

Al-Zarqawi, above, has steered al-Qaeda in directions his boss, bin Laden, below, probably never intended



bombings last July. According to Arab counterterrorism authorities, since his arrival in Iraq, al-Zarqawi has been involved in attacks in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Egypt, Morocco and, most recently, the Nov. 9 triple-suicide bombing in Jordan. And American counterterrorism officials are worried that al-Zarqawi may also be reaching out to extremists hidden in the U.S. "He's certainly trying to assume the mantle of bin Laden," says an American intelligence analyst who has studied al-Zarqawi. "It may be that bin Laden's and al-Zawahiri's time has passed."

The two al-Qaeda leaders are certainly under pressure. In a statement said to have been taped in September and aired by al-Jazeera last week, al-Zawahiri claimed that al-Qaeda is "spreading, expanding and strengthening" and that "bin Laden is still leading its jihad" against the West. But intelligence officials say it's striking that bin Laden himself has not issued a videotaped statement for more than a year—a sign, U.S. intelligence believes, that while he is probably still alive, he has been forced to go further underground to avoid detection.

So, is bin Laden still in control? By tracing his relationship with al-Zarqawi through a variety of sources—interrogation of captured operatives, encrypted codes on jihadist websites, chains of messages spanning from Iraq to Afghanistan—terrorism experts have assembled a picture of the way bin Laden turned to his former acolyte to revive al-Qaeda after the fall of the Taliban. It also reveals the ways in which al-Zarqawi has steered al-Qaeda in directions his bosses probably never intended or approved of—and why that makes the terrorist threat more unpredictable, and perhaps more dangerous, than it was before Sept. 11.

The pair's first purported meeting, in Afghanistan in 1999, provided hints of their future rivalry. A senior Pakistani military officer who once advised the Taliban's inner circle says, "Osama's camp was not open to everyone. People like al-Zarqawi, who were temporary visitors, were never trusted by him." According to the officer, Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar was warned by al-Qaeda not to be swayed by al-Zarqawi's global war cry. The officer says, "Those around Mullah Omar made it clear that the Taliban should avoid fighting in other people's wars"—especially in gulf states where the Taliban and al-Qaeda had plenty of wealthy backers.

But according to a biography of al-Zarqawi written by al-Adel (now believed to be under detention in Iran), bin Laden

MAN OF MANY FACES

► He has a \$25 million bounty on his head, but it's unclear what the insurgency leader, at right in different disguises, looks like now



PUBLIC ENEMY NO. 1

▼ "Wanted" posters targeting al-Zarqawi plaster the underpass of a bridge in Baghdad



thought it "unwise to lose the chance of mobilizing al-Zarqawi and his companions in those regions"—especially if al-Zarqawi, with his ties to Jordan's militant underground, could help carry out an attack against Israel. According to al-Adel's account, bin Laden instructed al-Zarqawi to set up his own camp, far from bin Laden's activities, in the stony hills behind Herat, near Afghanistan's western border with Iran. By 9/11, al-Zarqawi was training several dozen fighters from Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq at his Herat camp. He and other jihadis brought out their wives and children and formed an armed, Islamic commune, with al-Zarqawi as self-anointed emir, or prince.

When U.S. forces attacked in October 2001, al-Zarqawi rallied with al-Qaeda and Taliban commanders in Kandahar, the last bastion of the militants. No match

for the laser-guided bombs of U.S. warplanes, al-Zarqawi and a select band of fighters fled westward into Iran and eventually northern Iraq, where he had ties with the radical Islamic group Ansar al-Islam. U.S. intelligence sources say they believe that a few months after the U.S.'s March 2003 invasion of Iraq, bin Laden dispatched a trusted aide, Abdul Hadi al-Iraqi, to see about organizing an al-Qaeda cell there. A former major in Saddam Hussein's army, al-Iraqi seemed the perfect choice. But al-Zarqawi was reportedly enraged that bin Laden had sent someone else as terrorist ringmaster and apparently refused to cooperate with al-Iraqi. U.S. intelligence officials can't confirm that account, but they do say bin Laden's choice later returned to Afghanistan. Today, say the officials, al-Iraqi acts as al-Qaeda's most lethal commander in



REIGN OF TERROR

The insurgent is said to have masterminded, from top, the beheading of U.S. businessman Nick Berg; repeated attacks on Iraqi police; and the Nov. 9 bombings in Jordan

believed to be from al-Zarqawi to al-Zawahiri in which the Jordanian laid out his plan to provoke Iraq's Shi'ites into a civil war with the Sunnis, one that would draw in Salafi Sunni extremists from across the Islamic world. Arab intelligence sources tell *TIME* that al-Zarqawi's incendiary aim may have had bin Laden's backing. The sources say that in a letter found in the possession of Hassan Ghul, a Pakistani operative arrested in Iraq in January 2004, bin Laden urged al-Zarqawi to "use the Shi'ite card"—to launch attacks on Shi'ite targets in Iraq—as a way of pressuring Iran to free a number of top al-Qaeda leaders, including bin Laden's son Saad, who fled to Iran from Afghanistan in December 2001.

In October 2004, after further meetings with bin Laden's emissary al-Iraqi, al-Zarqawi publicly joined al-Qaeda, becoming the self-proclaimed prince of its operations in the "Land of Mesopotamia." As the jihadist insurgency gained momentum, the open wariness that once characterized al-Zarqawi's dealings with bin Laden dissipated, although counterterrorism officials believe their alliance was rooted more in pragmatism than affection. "Al-Zarqawi needs bin Laden for his credibility," says a U.S. intelligence analyst. "Bin Laden needs al-Zarqawi because he is doing the real work." But the celebrity al-Zarqawi has gained through his reign of terror in Iraq has marginalized bin Laden and shrunk his circle of loyalists. A senior Pakistani intelligence officer says "several hundred" al-Qaeda jihadis, spurred by al-Zarqawi's attacks on U.S. troops, left Afghanistan for Iraq in two waves, one via the gulf and the other across the Iran-Turkmenistan border; scores were killed in Iraq, and many fell in the battle of Fallujah in November 2004.

Terrorism experts say bin Laden remains the spiritual leader of global jihad but is no longer calling the shots. "Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri may have turned al-Zarqawi into something bigger than themselves," says French counterterrorism expert Roland Jacquard. "Strategically, they didn't have much choice. They needed to give the Iraq jihad the backing and legitimacy of al-Qaeda's direction. But it's turned out to be a very emancipating development for al-Zarqawi." Evidence suggests, though, that he may have gone too far. In October the U.S. released a letter that it said was sent in July from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi—in which bin Laden's deputy urged the Jordanian to refrain from attacking Shi'ites in Iraq. It has provoked the anger of moderate Muslims

around the world. Al-Zawahiri suggests such attacks "be put off until the force of the *mujahid* movement in Iraq gets stronger."

Although some experts speculate that the letter was drawn up by Iranian intelligence to dupe al-Zarqawi, the CIA and Pentagon insist that the 13-page missive is not a forgery and that it reveals differences between the old al-Qaeda leaders and al-Zarqawi over tactics and ideology. At the same time, the letter also indicates an acknowledgment by al-Zawahiri that the al-Qaeda hierarchy has been re-ordered. "It wasn't the letter of an overall commander pulling the choke chain of a subordinate," says Bruce Hoffman, a terrorism expert with the Rand Corp. think tank in Washington, who believes it is genuine. "It was diplomatic, cajoling, flattering and in essence sucking up to [al-Zarqawi]."

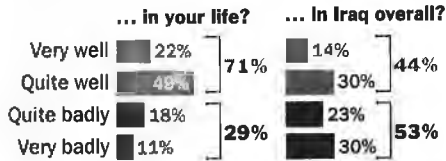
What does that mean for the future of al-Qaeda? Intelligence officials generally believe that al-Zarqawi has surpassed bin Laden as an inspirational figure for budding jihadis. "People have forgotten about bin Laden because they don't hear about him anymore," says an Arab intelligence source. Al-Zarqawi's twin challenges will be to survive divisions within the Iraqi insurgency as well as the U.S. military's hunt for him. The Pentagon believes its commandos have come close to capturing him several times. If al-Zarqawi manages to survive, he may try to attain bin Laden's global reach. He has reportedly outlined to his associates a strategy that calls for the overthrow of moderate Arab governments and the establishment of a pure Islamic state in the region in the next decade, with the ultimate goal of launching a world war against nonbelievers.

For now, although al-Zarqawi has ties to jihadist groups across Europe, they don't necessarily take orders from him, counterterrorism officials say. But over the long term, his efforts in Iraq position him to become the voice and inspiration for disaffected Muslims around the world. "More and more people are veering into Islamic extremism and embracing the Iraqi cause ... all converging on al-Zarqawi's struggle," says a senior French counterterrorism official. "To our great distress, he's doing just fine without ever turning his attention from Iraq." As long as that's true, al-Zarqawi will be at the forefront of the war against the West that his old boss started.

—With reporting by Bruce Crumley/Paris, Saad Hattar/Amman, Syed Talat Hussein/Islamabad, Scott MacLeod/Cairo and Douglas Waller/Washington

IRAQIS HAVE STRONG FAITH IN THE FUTURE ...

■ Overall, how would you say things are going these days ...

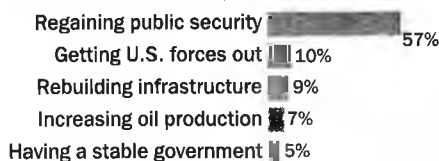


■ What is your expectation for how things will be a year from now ...



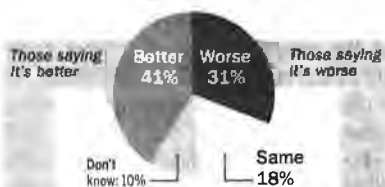
... BUT WANT SECURITY TO BE RESTORED

■ What is your main priority for Iraq over the next 12 months? (Top five answers)

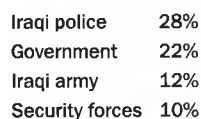


63% said dealing with members of the Saddam Hussein regime is "no priority at all"

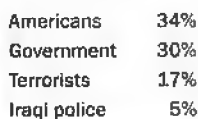
■ How has the security situation changed since Iraq regained sovereignty in June 2004?



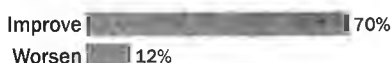
■ Who is responsible for the improvement?



■ Who is responsible for the deterioration?



■ Do you think security will improve or worsen in a year?



■ How safe do you feel in your neighborhood?



MIDDLE EAST



NORMALCY At a house south of Baghdad, an Iraqi family gathers to break fast during the month of Ramadan. A majority of citizens say they feel very safe in their neighborhoods

WHAT DO THE IRAQIS

On the eve of their election, a TIME-ABC News poll shows,

ALTHOUGH SADDAM HUSSEIN'S TRIAL HAS become must-watch TV for many Iraqis, a majority of citizens say they have little interest now in dealing with members of his ousted regime, according to an exclusive poll by TIME, ABC News and several other organizations. What interests Iraqis more is this week's election for the National Assembly, in which some 7,000 candidates will be

competing for 275 seats. More than three-quarters of the Iraqis polled expressed confidence that the election will create a stable government.

The TIME-ABC News poll, for which 1,711 Iraqis were interviewed in person in October and November, also showed Iraqis overall to be fairly confident about the future. Not surprisingly, however, the num-

OPTIMISM, BUT OLD DIVISIONS REMAIN

Iraqi public opinion is remarkably upbeat, but behind the numbers are the ethnic rivalries that have long split the country. The Sunnis, who held power under Saddam Hussein, feel the most aggrieved

ENTIRE COUNTRY



KURDISH AREA



Life is better since the war	51%	73%
U.S. was right to invade Iraq	46%	88%
Feel very safe in neighborhood	63%	91%
Approve of new constitution	70%	88%
Oppose coalition forces	64%	22%



NIGHTMARE A woman in Baghdad sits in the tent that she calls home, after a suicide bombing last month destroyed her house, her money and all her belongings

IS REALLY WANT?

Iraqis are surprisingly upbeat—yet critical of the U.S.

bers varied dramatically from region to region. Results in areas dominated by Sunnis, who were forced from power after Saddam's fall, were relentlessly downbeat: only 25% said life is better since the war began, and just 21% said they feel very safe in their neighborhoods. In Shi'ite regions, 59% said life is better since the war started, and 82% characterized their neighborhoods as very safe.

However sanguine the majority of Iraqis feel, patience with the U.S. occupation seems to be wearing thin. Nearly 60% of respondents said the U.S. and its allies have done a bad job carrying out their responsibilities in Iraq, while 65% said they oppose the troops' presence in the country. But almost everyone agrees on the nation's No. 1 priority: improving public security. ■

SHI'ITE AREA



59%

58%

82%

85%

59%

BAGHDAD AREA



59%

47%

70%

79%

72%

SUNNI AREA



25%

16%

21%

36%

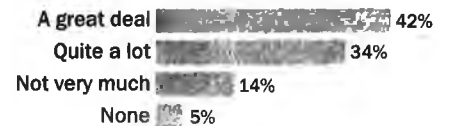
85%

THEY WANT A STABLE DEMOCRACY ...

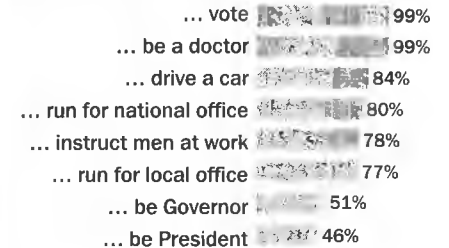
■ Which of these systems would be best for Iraq ...



■ How much confidence do you have that the elections planned for this month will create a stable Iraqi government?

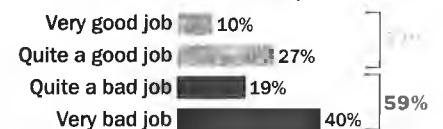


■ Percentage who think women should be able to ...

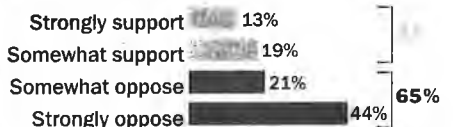


... BUT HAVE LITTLE PRAISE FOR THE U.S.

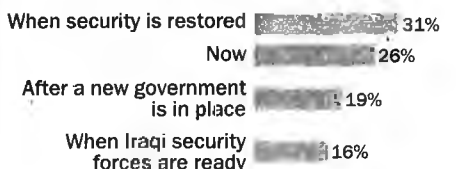
■ Since the war, how do you feel about the way in which the U.S. and other coalition forces have carried out their responsibilities?



■ Do you support or oppose the presence of coalition forces in Iraq?



■ When should coalition forces leave Iraq?



This poll was conducted for TIME, ABC News, the BBC, NHK and Der Spiegel by Oxford Research International. Interviews were conducted in person from Oct. 8 to Nov. 13, in Arabic and Kurdish, among a random national sample of 1,711 Iraqis age 15 and older. Margin of error is ±2.5 percentage points.

Le négationnisme du président iranien sur la Shoah suscite peu de réactions dans les pays arabes

Deux responsables islamistes ont publiquement adhéré au déni de M. Ahmadinejad du droit d'Israël à l'existence. Les gouvernements arabes s'abstiennent de commenter

BEYROUTH
ENVOYÉE SPÉCIALE

Les propos tenus, mercredi, par le président iranien Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, qualifiant la Shoah de « mythe inventé [par les Européens] qui l'ont placé au-dessus de Dieu, des religions et des prophètes » ont été jugés « inacceptables » par la Russie, qui a rappelé qu'ils étaient « contraires à la Charte des Nations unies ». L'Union européenne, dont « la patience [à l'égard de l'Iran] a des limites », pour reprendre l'expression du ministre allemand des affaires étrangères, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, s'appropriait à les condamner « sans réserve », vendredi 16 décembre. Les gouvernements arabes pour leur part se sont abstenus de tout commentaire. Ils n'avaient pas réagi d'avantage à ses déclarations en cascade qualifiant l'Etat juif de « cancer » et proposant à l'Allemagne, à l'Autriche ou à tout autre pays occidental d'offrir une partie de son territoire pour l'abriter.

Seuls deux responsables de formations islamistes ont publiquement adhéré

re à son déni du droit d'Israël à l'existence. Israël est un « cancer » que « nous ne reconnaitrons pas » et dont « nous espérons la disparition », a affirmé Mohammed Mahdi Akef, le guide spirituel de la confrérie des Frères musulmans égyptiens. Les déclarations de M. Ahmadinejad sont « courageuses et justes », et reflètent ce que tout musulman pense au plus profond de lui-même, a déclaré Khaled Mechaal, dirigeant politique du mouvement islamiste palestinien Hamas. Pour les gouvernements arabes en revanche, la reconnaissance de l'Etat d'Israël est chose pratiquement faite dès lors qu'ils ont soutenu le processus de paix engagé à Madrid en 1991. Lors d'un sommet réuni en mars 2002 à Beyrouth, ils se sont collectivement engagés à conclure avec lui la paix sous conditions : notamment la restitution de tous les territoires occupés et la création d'un Etat palestinien dont Jérusalem-Est serait la capitale.

« Un signe de décadence »

La question de la Shoah souffre dans cette partie du monde d'une lacune énorme. La culture, « hormis quelques contributions, ne s'est pas penchée sur la portée terrifiante de l'idée de la solution finale », écrivait il y a quelques années déjà le romancier Elias Khoury, rédacteur en chef du supplément littéraire du quotidien libanais *An-Nahar*. Ce qui rend d'autant plus aisée sa falsification à des fins politiques, en particulier pour dénon-

cer l'Holocauste dès lors qu'il justifie la création de l'Etat d'Israël. Dans la seconde moitié des années 1990, les poursuites engagées en France contre Roger Garaudy avaient servi de vecteur à une telle contestation de la part de milieux officiels et de la hiérarchie religieuse musulmane, malgré les appels répétés d'hommes de lettres et de plumes arabes à respecter la mémoire des six millions de juifs victimes de l'Occident.

Le procès et la condamnation de l'écrivain révisionniste français après la publication de son ouvrage *Les Mythes fondateurs de la politique israélienne*, lui avaient valu des manifestations de soutien dans plusieurs pays arabes. Il avait même été décoré en 1998 par le ministre égyptien de la culture de la médaille de la prédication islamique, la plus haute distinction islamique en Egypte. Du Caire à Téhéran en passant par Beyrouth, Damas, Amman, le Qatar et les territoires palestiniens, Roger Garaudy avait eu droit à bien des égards. Il avait été reçu par un vice-président, deux ministres et le mufti de Syrie et par l'imam de la grande mosquée égyptienne d'Al-Azhar. L'union des avocats arabes avait lancé une campagne de pétitions pour le soutenir. Et l'épouse du chef de l'Etat des Emirats arabes unis lui avait fait don de 50 000 dollars.

Transférer dans cette partie du monde ce débat européen est pernicieux, commente aujourd'hui Elias Khoury. « C'est un signe de décadence et un trompe-l'œil de gouvernants qui permet de cacher la faillite du soutien au peuple palestinien. Un discours idéologique qui, pour réfuter le projet colonial d'Israël, se place du côté des bourreaux nazis contre leurs victimes et revient à confondre les juifs avec le projet sioniste. L'oppression de tout individu est celle de l'humanité tout entière. » ■

MOUNA NAÏM

Le procès de M. Pamuk divise le pouvoir turc

ISTANBUL
CORRESPONDANCE

Orhan Pamuk n'est pas venu seul au tribunal de Sisli. Des dizaines de défenseurs des droits de l'homme venus du monde entier et une délégation du Parlement européen devaient assister à l'audience. C'est vendredi 16 décembre que devait s'ouvrir, à Istanbul, le procès du romancier, auteur de *Neige* (Gallimard, 2005) et récompensé par plusieurs prix littéraires cette année.

M. Pamuk est accusé d'« insulte à l'identité nationale turque » pour avoir déclaré, en février, dans un entretien à l'hebdomadaire suisse *Das Magazin*, que « sur ces terres, un million d'Arméniens et 30 000 Kurdes ont été tués ». Ces propos lui font encourir de six mois à trois ans de prison.

Face à ses accusateurs, l'écri-

vain, qui avait refusé en 1998 le statut d'artiste d'Etat, n'est pas décidé à renier ses propos. Volontiers provocateur, se plaisant dans un rôle d'ambassadeur des libertés, il s'est montré offensif. « Le gouvernement turc a peur de se dresser face à la vieille garde nationaliste », a-t-il affirmé.

Ce procès est symbolique d'une liberté d'expression sévèrement encadrée. Le commissaire européen à l'élargissement, Olli Rehn, a averti que « ce n'est pas Orhan Pamuk qui est jugé mais la Turquie ». Et d'autres procédures, au titre de l'article 301 du nouveau code pénal, visent actuellement de nombreux éditorialistes, journalistes ou éditeurs.

Mais derrière l'affaire médiatique se joue un bras de fer politique. Le gouvernement dirigé par le Parti de la justice et du dévelop-

pement (AKP) est pressé par l'Union européenne de confirmer son engagement démocratique. Il se heurte à des résistances de partis nationalistes, de l'armée et de l'administration : « L'Etat profond », selon l'expression consacrée en Turquie.

Et, en dépit d'un indéniable progrès de la liberté d'expression, qui a permis la tenue, en septembre, d'une conférence universitaire sur la question arménienne, les tabous ont la peau dure. Notamment les questions sensibles du génocide arménien, de l'occupation de Chypre et du problème kurde. Le premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, s'est voulu rassurant : « Le résultat pourrait bien être un acquittement », a-t-il anticipé il y a une semaine. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Geste américain envers les sunnites irakiens

IRAK

L'armée américaine a libéré des anciens responsables du régime de Saddam Hussein.

LA FORMATION du gouvernement irakien « va prendre du temps », a déclaré hier George W. Bush, lors d'une conférence de presse à Washington. « Les Irakiens travaillent pour établir un consensus », a expliqué le président américain, pour qui le décompte des voix aux élections législatives de jeudi dernier ne sera pas terminé avant début janvier. Ce scrutin « ne signifie pas la fin de la violence, mais le début de quelque chose de nouveau ». La recherche de l'unité nationale « nécessitera la patience du peuple irakien, et le soutien de l'Amérique et de ses partenaires », a ajouté Bush. La liste chiite conservatrice de l'Alliance unifiée arrive en tête à l'issue de dépouillements portant sur 89 % des urnes à Bagdad. Elle est créditée de 58 % des voix, devant le Front de la concorde (sunnite, 18,6 %) et la liste du chiite laïc Iyad Allaoui (13,5 %).

LE GESTE est éminemment politique. Plusieurs figures de la dictature de Saddam Hussein viennent d'être libérées, au lendemain

des élections législatives, marquées par une forte participation de la minorité sunnite, le principal soutien de la guérilla. L'armée américaine parle de quatre personnalités remises en liberté, tandis qu'un avocat irakien évoque le chiffre de 24.

Parmi elles, les scientifiques Houda Ammash et Rihab Taha, deux femmes soupçonnées d'avoir travaillé au développement de programmes d'armements biologiques, ainsi que les anciens ministres des Transports et de l'Enseignement supérieur, Ahmad Mourtada et Houman Abdel Khaliq. Sattam al-Gaoud, un entrepreneur qui faisait les emplettes de Saddam Hussein en violation de l'embargo, a également été élargi.

Des passeports ont été remis à certains d'entre eux, afin qu'ils puissent quitter l'Irak. « Nous avons considéré qu'ils n'avaient plus d'informations à nous fournir », a expliqué à l'AFP le lieutenant-colonel Barry Johnson.

Risque de morcellement du pays

Cette mesure de clémence vise d'abord à renforcer l'intégration des sunnites au processus politique, amorcée par le scrutin du 15 décembre. C'est le principal défi des six mois à venir, affir-

me, parmi d'autres, le sénateur démocrate Joe Biden, membre de la commission des affaires étrangères du Sénat américain. Selon lui, la communauté internationale doit désormais mettre la pression sur les sunnites pour arriver à un compromis sur l'amendement à la Constitution, qui doit être réalisé d'ici à quatre mois.

Faute de consensus sur le fédéralisme, principal point d'achoppement avec les sunnites, rien, selon Biden, ne pourra empêcher l'éclatement de l'Irak entre ses composantes chiites, kurdes et sunnites. Aujourd'hui, la priorité est à la consolidation de la dynamique du Caire, où s'est ébauchée le mois dernier une réconciliation nationale.

Après deux ans de violence intercommunautaire, l'Irak vit un moment charnière. La rébellion est toujours aussi forte. Mais elle n'est plus sourde aux sirènes de la politique. La trêve de la violence le jour des législatives a été respectée par certaines factions, comme l'Armée islamique en Irak, qui s'est fait connaître par de nombreux enlèvements et exécutions d'étrangers. Son agenda irakien commence à prendre le pas sur ses visées djihadistes. Reste al-Qaïda et les groupuscules qu'Abou Moussab al-Zarqawi a réussi à fédérer autour de lui. Au nom de la lutte contre

l'occupant américain, les factions nationalistes ou ex-baassistes refusaient jusqu'à maintenant de se désolidariser du terrorisme pratiqué par Zarqawi. « Un jour, quand les Américains seront partis, nous mènerons un autre combat, contre les djihadistes », déclare au magazine Time Abou Qaba al-Tamimi, un leader de l'insurrection. Autant de raisons d'être optimistes.

Dans l'immédiat, la poursuite du rapprochement dépend des autres gestes qui seront faits vis-à-vis des sunnites ainsi que de la capacité de ces derniers à se faire entendre de la rébellion. A cet égard, les remerciements publics d'un leader sunnite à la « résistance » pour ne pas avoir attaqué les bureaux de vote jeudi, s'inscrivent dans ce discours de la raison, qui commence à porter ses fruits.

Mais le chemin vers la pacification de l'Irak reste semé d'embûches. Les sunnites tiennent également à un recrutement loyal des forces de sécurité, comme c'est déjà le cas à Faludjah. Ils veulent être maîtres chez eux, et en finir avec les exactions des milices chiites liées au ministère de l'Intérieur.

Craignant une contagion chiite, les pays arabes – Arabie saoudite et Egypte en tête – poussent eux aussi à cette intégration des sunnites. « Les Saoudiens nous ont invités chez eux en janvier pour préparer la conférence nationale de Bagdad », affirme le journaliste Kaïs al-Azawi. Pour ce tenant de la mouvance nationaliste, « le prochain gouvernement de coalition doit regrouper toutes les tendances politiques » afin d'avancer vers la concorde.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

L'Alliance unifiée irakienne, chiite, revendique la victoire

BAGDAD

ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL

L'Alliance unifiée irakienne, la coalition chiite conduite par Abdel Aziz Al-Hakim, aurait obtenu la majorité absolue aux élections législatives du 15 décembre. Le vice-président irakien, Adel Abdel Mahdi, considéré comme un sérieux prétendant au poste de premier ministre, a indiqué au Monde, dimanche 18 décembre, que « nous ne sommes pas loin de la majorité absolue de 138 sièges ».

Selon lui, « il faudra une confirmation de la commission électorale mais, d'après nos calculs, nous avons 71 députés dans les neuf provinces du Sud et avons obtenu presque 70 % à Bagdad, ce qui fait une quarantaine de sièges en plus, auxquels il faudra ajouter une dizaine de députés dans les autres provinces, ce qui fera un total de 115 à 120 sièges. Enfin, on compte sur la moitié des 45 sièges attribués à l'échelle nationale. Donc, nous

sommes proches de la majorité absolue ».

« Conforter l'unité nationale »

Adel Abdel Mahdi fait preuve d'optimisme alors qu'il semblait acquis que l'Alliance unifiée (AUT) ne réitérerait pas sa performance du 30 janvier – elle avait obtenu 140 sièges sur 275. Si son calcul se vérifie, ce sera un succès inespéré pour la liste chiite, en dépit des performances décevantes du premier ministre, Ibrahim Al-Jaafari (AUT). Ce résultat placerait l'Alliance en position dominante au détriment de la liste d'Iyad Allaoui, qui espérait faire mieux que les 13,8 % obtenus en janvier et retrouver ainsi le poste de premier ministre qu'il avait occupé en 2004.

Dans l'attente des résultats définitifs, qui pourraient être annoncés d'ici à la fin décembre, M. Mahdi ne veut pas « précipiter les choses ». En revanche, il est convain-

cu que le gouvernement devra être un gouvernement d'union nationale. « La situation politique l'exige. Notre alliance avec les Kurdes nous suffit, mais nous voulons l'élargir à des listes dont nous n'avons pas besoin pour obtenir la majorité, pour conforter l'unité nationale. Nous devons travailler ensemble, être ouverts, flexibles. Il faut que les Irakiens retrouvent l'assurance que leur sécurité sera rétablie, que le pays sera gouverné avec la participation de tous, il faut que des postes importants soient confiés aux autres communautés et que nous puissions travailler ensemble sur les questions stratégiques. »

Samedi, Ibrahim Al-Jaafari avait lancé un appel aux « frères » sunnites afin de « travailler main dans la main sous la coupole du Parlement, afin de construire un nouvel Irak ». ■

MICHEL BÔLE-RICHARD



Kurdish leaders Masud Barzani and Jalal Talabani share a laughter. It is imperative to emphasize that the primary objective of Kurdish leaders and parties is not to sort out Iraq's central state institutions, but to work towards realization of Kurdish self-determination.

Will Kurds be Election Kingmakers?

By Azad Aslan
Globe Political Editor

In their article, John McGarry and Brenden O'Leary stated that 'divisions among Sunni Arabs, and between them and the Shiites, will ensure that the Kurdistan Alliance will be kingmakers. That means the new constitution will go forward and the new government will be made up of pro-constitution parties.' This optimistic evaluation is not without merit. The Kurdistan Alliance's success in the election according to unconfirmed preliminary results would strengthen the Kurdish arms in the formation of Iraqi politics like that of last January's elections. The question, however, is whether a new Iraqi coalition government will be able to bring a functioning government to deal effectively with the burning issues in Iraq, such as the issues of Kirkuk, federalism, implementation of constitution, and security. These will remain to be seen.

Such crucial issues, nevertheless, cannot be treated solely within the framework of internal Iraqi politics. The regional and international

aspects towards the formation of a new functioning Iraq have to be considered. Situated at the heart of Middle East, Iraq plays a central role for US policy in the region. A stable Iraq for the US is not only essential to withdraw its troops, but more importantly that would contribute towards enlarging what was called the Greater Middle Eastern Project. Despite the rhetoric of democracy, the GMEP would enable the US to reorganize the region with rich energy sources and corridors for its national and capital interests. Against the US, other forces such as the European Union despite its internal division, China, Russia and regional countries, particularly Turkey and Iran are determined to resist full implementation of the mentioned project for they see it as detrimental to their own interests. Thus, the ongoing conflict in Iraq cannot simply be reduced to denominational and ethnic divisions, but a wider international and regional intrigue in Iraq rather, has to be put into the equation.

The Kurds, who have considerable strength to shape a new federal and democratic Iraq, have no backing from

international and regional powers. Even the US, despite the fact that Kurds played key role in toppling Saddam's regime, is not entirely supporting them. One of the reasons that Kurds compromised to give up their right to self-determination to be written into the constitution was the US' intense pressure. Apart from internal divisions among the Kurds, lack of international support and regional enmity is the weakest point in Kurdish politics.

Kurdish political parties, especially the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, would have no chance to preserve and extend Kurdish national rights if they failed to produce a united stand. Unity cannot be limited solely to the ballot boxes. They must develop a clear and coherent national policy with which the Kurdish nation can identify itself. This is exactly where the Kurdish politics failed. The January and December elections clearly indicated that the southern Kurds are not a nation in itself, but a nation for itself. It is time that Kurdish leaders and political representatives elevate themselves to the

level of consciousness that Kurdish nation has. Thus, failure to unite two separate administrations is harmful to the Kurdish cause. No matter what type of coalition government is installed in Iraq and what percentage of Kurdish representation there is within it, and whether or not Kurds can play the role of election kingmakers, without sound unity and national politics, Kurds would have no chance, but to lose.

It is imperative to emphasize that the primary objective of Kurdish leaders and parties is not to sort out Iraq's central state institutions, but to work towards realization of Kurdish self-determination. They have the luxury to involve in Iraqi politics only for that end. It is true that current international politics and objective conditions do not provide space for Kurds to go for independence. However, evident Kurdish national awareness in the four parts of Kurdistan and the sizeable Kurdish population are what Kurdish political parties need to endeavour for such objective. It is time for Kurdish leaders to turn their attention to subjective conditions in their politics.

Les Kurdes d'Irak négocieront ferme toute alliance



ERBIL (Irak), 20 déc 2005 (AFP) - 08h36 - Les Kurdes d'Irak, qui s'étaient alliés aux chiïtes conservateurs dans le gouvernement sortant, gardent leurs options ouvertes à l'issue des législatives, n'étant pas totalement satisfaits de leurs partenaires actuels.

"Nous n'étions pas satisfaits de cette alliance, parce qu'ils n'ont pas respecté le protocole (d'accord) établi entre nous", avait déclaré le président du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, deux jours avant le scrutin de jeudi.

"Cela ne signifie pas que nous annulerons cette alliance, mais nous chercherons à l'élargir", a-t-il ajouté.

A l'issue des élections générales du 30 janvier, les chiïtes de l'Alliance unifiée irakienne (AUI), qui avaient remporté 140 sièges au Parlement, avaient conclu une alliance avec les Kurdes (75 sièges) pour former le gouvernement.

L'AUI est assurée de remporter cette fois-ci aussi un grand nombre de sièges, vue l'importance démographique de son électorat traditionnel, les Kurdes devant se positionner en deuxième place.

Pour l'analyste et écrivain kurde Abdelghani Ali Yehya, il n'y a jamais vraiment eu d'alliance entre les deux parties. "Elles se sont entendues sur certains points sans vraiment s'allier", dit-il à l'AFP.

Il estime que le fossé politique est trop important entre l'AUI et les Kurdes, "notamment sur la question de Kirkouk".

Les Kurdes demandent le rattachement de cette ville pétrolière du nord de l'Irak à leurs trois provinces quasi autonomes depuis 1991, ce que l'AUI rejette. Kirkouk, habitée par des Arabes, des Kurdes et des Turcomans, a été fortement arabisée sous le régime du président déchu Saddam Hussein.

Sami Chorache, un responsable du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK, de M. Barzani), explique que toute partie qui désire s'allier avec les Kurdes doit remplir certaines conditions.

"Elle doit soutenir les droits du peuple kurde dans le cadre d'un Irak fédéral, permettre d'annuler les mesures d'arabisation à Kirkouk et adopter à fond la démocratie, qui est le seul moyen pour préserver les droits kurdes", affirme-t-il.

"Nous devons mettre au point un programme politique avec nos éventuels alliés, avant de former le gouvernement", dit Adnane al-Moufti, président du Parlement du Kurdistan et membre de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK, de Jalal Talabani).

Moult problèmes étaient apparus entre l'AUI et les Kurdes, après la formation de leur alliance, notamment lors de l'écriture de la Constitution, sur des sujets tel que la place de l'islam dans la loi, le rôle des femmes et le fédéralisme.

Le chef de l'Etat, le Kurde Jalal Talabani, était même allé jusqu'à accuser le Premier ministre, Ibrahim Jaafari, de l'AUI, d'accaparer le pouvoir et il demande désormais des prérogatives plus importantes pour le chef de l'Etat.

"Toute formation, surtout les grandes, a ses propres particularités. Les Arabes ne peuvent pas représenter les Kurdes et le contraire aussi est vrai. Nous sommes conscients de cette situation et je pense que la prochaine coalition devra inclure tout le monde", estime M. Moufti.

Les sunnites étaient restés à l'écart de la scène politique durant l'année écoulée, après avoir boycotté le scrutin de janvier. Ils ont participé en masse au vote de jeudi, candidats comme électeurs, et doivent désormais représenter une force qui compte au Parlement.

Pour M. Moufti, le seul moyen de bâtir un Irak fort est de donner une chance à toutes les communautés du pays de participer au pouvoir, notamment au sein de l'Assemblée nationale permanente élue pour quatre ans.

Iraq Sunnis reject vote as unfair

Angry losers demand inquiries into fraud

By Edward Wong

BAGHDAD: Sunni Arab leaders on Tuesday angrily rejected early results of last week's parliamentary elections, saying the vote had been fixed in favor of Iranian-backed religious Shiites, and they called for an investigation into possible fraud. Secular politicians also denounced the results and demanded an inquiry.

The growing fury over the dominance of the religious Shiites could lead to a protracted confrontation over the election results, which would probably delay the formation of the new, four-year government. That process is already expected to take weeks, if not months.

U.S. diplomats here are pushing Iraqi politicians to speed up their negotiations over forming the government so as not to lose momentum from the elections last Thursday.

The rejection of the early results, the first set of which were released Monday, also raised the possibility that

Sunni Arab politicians could boycott the political process, as they have done several times in the last year.

The Bush administration's plans to temper the Sunni-led insurgency and reduce the U.S. troop presence in Iraq are based on the assumption that Sunni Arabs would participate in the new government. Any withdrawal by the Sunnis at this stage would be a serious setback for the White House.

"In order for Iraq to succeed, there has to be cross-ethnic and cross-sectarian cooperation," Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, said Tuesday.

The Sunni Arabs' denunciations came despite the commission's release of additional results on Tuesday that showed the main religious Sunni coalition leading in Sunni-dominated provinces. In all, the early results account for 90 percent of the roughly 15 million ballots cast, electoral officials said.

But certified results will not be announced until early January because the commission has to investigate about 700 complaints, at least 20 of which are serious, said Adel al-Lami, the commission's general director.

The inquiries could change the final outcome, Lami said in a telephone interview. He added that early results for the remaining 10 percent of the ballots would not be announced immediately because of inquiries into voting irregularities. Teams of Iraqi electoral officials and United Nations advisers have been sent out to scrutinize votes in eight provinces, Lami said.

The complaints of the Sunni Arab parties and the main secular coalition led by Ayad Allawi, the former prime

minister and the White House favorite, center on results from provinces with diverse ethnic and religious groups, especially Baghdad.

The Sunnis and Allawi had expected to perform well in the capital, where 59 of the 275 seats in the Council of Representatives are up for grabs, far more than in any other province. The early results, which account for 89 percent of the vote here, show that the main Shiite coalition, the United Iraqi Alliance, had taken a wide lead with 58 percent.

The main Sunni coalition, the National Consensus Front, came in with 19 percent, and Allawi's group with a dismal 14 percent. Both groups have filed formal complaints against the Shiite coalition, accusing it of everything from ripping down posters to casting fake votes.

"We reject the results that have been announced by the electoral commission," said Adnan al-Dulaimi, a leader of the Sunni coalition.

He added, "If the electoral commission doesn't adopt very strict measures against these violations we are going to call for another election."

Saleh al-Mutlak, a prominent hard-line candidate who heads his own party, insisted that international groups take the lead on investigating the election.

"We will not remain silent about what has happened, so we call on the international community to intervene," he said at a news conference. "We call on the president of the United States not to add another mistake to the mistakes already made in Iraq."

The New York Times

Iran's president rolls back clock

He seeks unity in diplomatic isolation by revisiting revolution

By Nazila Fathi and Michael Slackman

TEHRAN: The morning after the ultraconservative mayor of Tehran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was elected president in June, he made a pilgrimage to the tomb of the father of the Iranian revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, an act that appears to have foreshadowed exactly how he planned to lead his country.

"The path of the imam is the absolute path of the Islamic republic," Ahmadinejad said then. "He was the founder of the revolution. He is the reference of the revolution."

And so it should not have been a surprise when he quoted Ayatollah Khomeini, calling for Israel "to be wiped off the map," then labeled the Holocaust a legend that had been the fault of Europeans and said Israel should therefore be moved to Europe.

Since taking office, Ahmadinejad has had numerous problems, failing to deliver on his message of economic populism or to solidify the support of the conservatives who elected him and the

clerics who supported him.

But he has worked aggressively to roll the clock back to the early days of the revolution.

He has moved to erase the changes, especially in foreign policy, that evolved over eight years under President Mohammad Khatami, seeking national unity through international isolation.

It is in this context, political analysts said, that the new president's comments about Israel should be viewed. The remarks coincided with the firing of 40 ambassadors and diplomats, most of whom supported some improvement in ties with the West; with the removal of reform-minded provincial governors; and with the replacement of pragmatists on Iran's nuclear negotiating team with members who hewed to the president's thinking.

But it was the comments on Israel that brought the greatest outcry abroad, in part because they came as American and European suspicions deepened that Iran was trying to build nuclear weapons.

The Iranians have insisted that their



Alta Kenare/AFP

Ahmadinejad has called for Israel to be destroyed, echoing Ayatollah Khomeini.

nuclear program is geared toward energy, not weapons. But there have been some signals that Iran expects to progress more easily if it is an international pariah, like North Korea. And what better way to achieve pariah status in the West than to call for the obliteration of Israel?

Ali Larijani, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, implicitly supported the North Korean model at a news conference in September when he said the international community should learn a lesson from its approach in that conflict. "What was the result of such tough policies?" he asked. "After two years they ended up accepting its program, so you should accept ours right now."

The anti-Israeli oratory also has roots in the president's domestic standing. Some Iranian analysts say that by

increasing the world's hostility, Ahmadinejad is hoping to establish internal unity.

Analysts say he is also trying to satisfy, and perhaps to distract, supporters who have begun to be disappointed that he has not provided the financial relief that he promised, during his campaign, to achieve by redistributing the nation's vast oil wealth.

"His comments are more for domestic consumption," said Saeed Laylaz, an Iranian political analyst. "He wants to control the domestic situation through isolating Iran. Then he can suppress the voices inside the country and control the situation."

Ahmadinejad was elected primarily because he was viewed as anti-establishment, a layman and a successful administrator who had helped improve the workings of sprawling Tehran,

home to about 20 million people. But his call for justice, primarily economic justice, also resonated with a population angered by a perception that it had been denied the benefit of the oil wealth.

But even among his supporters, there was concern about the new president's lack of a foreign policy background and of experience in navigating the larger political shoals of Iran.

Since taking office, he has failed to win the support or admiration of those who opposed him.

With Iran facing many problems — widespread unemployment, collapse of rural life as more people head to the cities, and a general sense of drift among the young — his comments on Israel have drawn little domestic attention.

The New York Times

Gérard Chaliand : « L'Irak reste dominé par les communautarismes »

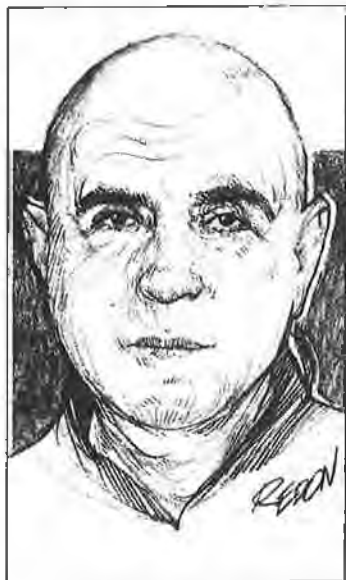
Politologue, spécialiste des conflits, Gérard Chaliand est l'auteur de *Une guerre d'Irak à l'autre* (Métailié, 2004). Il vient de publier *Guerre et Civilisations* (Odile Jacob, 2005). Au retour d'un séjour au Moyen-Orient, il s'exprime sur les législatives irakiennes. Entretien.

LE FIGARO. – Consultés trois fois en moins d'un an, les Irakiens ont voté massivement pour élire leurs députés. Quels enseignements tirer de ce dernier scrutin ?

Gérard CHALIAND. – Electoralement, ces élections sont un succès. Maintenant, il va falloir transcrire cette participation au vote en une coalition gouvernementale viable. A cet égard, les obstacles sont nombreux. L'alliance des partis religieux chiïtes va peser très lourd dans le futur Parlement. L'Administration américaine va s'efforcer de favoriser un gouvernement où la représentation des Arabes sunnites soit importante afin d'affaiblir indirectement les composantes de l'insurrection armée. Il s'agit d'isoler les fidèles de Saddam Hussein et les djihadistes en essayant de coopter les nationalistes sunnites, marginalisés par les erreurs politiques commises durant l'intermède confié à Paul Bremer.

N'y a-t-il pas un risque de renforcer encore le communautarisme en Irak ?

Les élections confirment, une



fois de plus, que la vie politique en Irak est dominée par les communautarismes. Chaque groupe se soucie exclusivement de ses intérêts propres. Le rôle des élus est de négocier avec les représentants des autres communautés et de s'assurer du maximum possible de pouvoir.

Le fait que le soin de réduire l'insurrection soit laissé à la future armée irakienne indique que la guerre ne peut être gagnée par les forces américaines. Le problème essentiel pour Washington est, malgré la non-victoire militaire, de parvenir à créer, avant la fin du mandat de George W. Bush, les conditions permettant d'écarter une défaite politique.

Quel que soit le jugement que l'on porte sur cette guerre – une

guerre de choix aux justifications manipulées –, deux groupes hier opprimés et réprimés représentant 80 % de la population participent désormais au pouvoir. Si la démocratie est l'expression des aspirations de la majorité, cette transformation constitue un succès. Reste, afin de ne pas déboucher sur un chaos, à tenter de réinsérer dans le processus politique une majorité de sunnites maladroïtement écartés naguère et dont Washington a cruellement besoin aujourd'hui.

La guerre en Irak a des retentissements négatifs pour l'Administration Bush aux Etats-Unis...

De façon croissante, George W. Bush est sur la défensive sur le plan intérieur. C'est le prix de la non-victoire en Irak dans le cadre d'une guerre que les troupes américaines étaient mal préparées à mener, compte tenu de l'importance stratégique des populations civiles. Trop d'ignorance de la culture locale, l'absence de sang-froid (comme à Falujah), tout a concouru à rendre vide l'objectif de gagner les esprits et les cœurs. Malgré les nouvelles consignes et les changements de tactique, il est trop tard. Les violations manifestes des droits de l'homme et les premiers scandales liés à une reconstruction ratée – qui constitueront demain un dossier délicat – grèvent l'avenir d'une administration à laquelle des comptes sont demandés aux Etats-Unis.

Dans ce contexte, George Bush a-t-il raison de maintenir une présence militaire massive sur le terrain ?

Etant donné l'ampleur actuelle de l'insurrection et l'incertitude de la situation, il est raisonnable pour le président de conserver sur le terrain suffisamment de forces américaines jusqu'à la fin de son mandat. Un retrait précipité des troupes américaines aurait des conséquences pires que la prolongation de leur présence à un niveau suffisant. Ni les sunnites ni les chiïtes ne peuvent entièrement dominer l'Irak post-baasiste. Pourront-ils un jour s'accorder d'un compromis ? Ou la guerre civile larvée débouchera-t-elle à terme sur des affrontements généralisés ? Nul ne peut avec certitude prévoir où en sera l'Irak d'ici à deux ans.

Propos recueillis par
FRÉDÉRIC FRITSCHER

LE FIGARO
21 décembre 2005

The Economist December 24th 2005

Iraq's election

And now for unity? Alas, not yet

BAGHDAD

The turnout was impressive. So compromise will be even harder to achieve

THE sharpest contrast with Iraq's last general election, in January, was in the Sunni Arab towns of the country's centre and west. Last time in those areas there was a mass boycott. This time, on December 15th, streets were festooned with banners, people waited happily in queues outside polling stations, and celebrated in jubilation after exercising their right to vote. Attacks by insurgents were rare, thanks largely to a truce called by several of the better-known groups. An early estimate was that 70% of registered voters, across the country, turned out. But the business of creating a national coalition government, embracing a representative swathe of Shia Arabs, Sunni Arabs and Kurds, will be as tricky as before, when a government took nearly three months to emerge. The haggling, long before official results are out, has already begun.

Preliminary results suggest that the United Iraqi Alliance, a collection of Islamist Shia groups which claims the blessing of Iraq's most influential clergyman, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, will win another landslide, though perhaps not a majority of parliament's 275 seats. Several big decisions, including changing the constitution in a bid to placate disaffected Sunnis, need a two-thirds majority, so the UIA must team up with other groups. Last time, its main partner was a Kurdish alliance, which again swept the Kurdish north. But it is essential, if the insurgency is to be contained, that it embraces a strong Sunni list too.

Most Sunni Arabs seem to have voted either for the Iraqi Consensus Front, the more Islamist of the two biggest Sunni groups, or for the Iraqi National Dialogue Front, a more secular outfit that promises to combat alleged Shia sectarianism and rebuild a strong army in which Sunnis and former Baathists play a bigger part. Other Sunni Arabs opted for tribal leaders, independents or a coalition led by a former prime minister, Iyad Allawi, a secular Shia who has courted Sunni voters.

Early reports suggest that Mr Allawi won around 14% in Baghdad (to the UIA's 58%) and less than 10% in most of the southern Shia provinces; it is unclear if this fairly modest performance will prove good enough for him to hold the balance in a coalition, as many American and western diplomats had hoped. A front led by Ahmed Chalabi, a secular Shia who was once the favourite of the neo-conser-

vatives in Washington, did far worse. Many Sunnis said their vote was complementary and not in opposition to the "resistance" against foreign occupation.

Mr Allawi's supporters played on widespread complaints that the present UIA-led government has failed to provide better infrastructure and security and more jobs, and has packed ministries with its own followers. Mr Allawi's pitch resonated with secular-minded professionals, military officers and others wary of clerics and nostalgic for the days of a strong state. But it probably fell flat with poorer Shias who remember petty humiliations at the hands of officials in Saddam Hussein's era.



This time, get it right

Whatever the UIA government's weaknesses, say many poor Shias, the clerics and their allies "represent us".

The race, in some Shia areas, turned ugly. Islamist Shias pointed out that Mr Allawi was a former Baathist who, in his time as interim prime minister from the summer of 2004 until April this year, had ordered troops into battle against Shia zealots in the holy city of Najaf. This had enraged many Shias, particularly the followers of a firebrand cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr. Many of Mr Allawi's posters were ripped down and several of his campaigners killed. A mob in Nasiriya, in south-central Iraq, burnt down his party building after word spread that a Communist ally of his had insulted the clergy on television. Mr Allawi's supporters say that on election

day UIA people stormed into polling stations in some areas and threatened them. Various other Shia, Kurdish and Sunni Arab parties also filed complaints.

Final results are not expected until the end of the first week of the new year. By then Iraq's election commission should have investigated the most serious complaints that could affect the distribution of seats. Many Sunni and secular Shia politicians, however, say they doubt whether the commission will have the nerve to insist that the dominant parties, such as the UIA, should relinquish seats unfairly won.

In any event, violations probably did not occur on a scale that would much alter parliament's make-up; many took place in Shia areas where Mr Allawi's backers concede that the UIA would have won overwhelmingly anyway. The new electoral system of proportional representation for each of the 18 provinces (rather than one national list, as in January), more or less predetermines the balance of power between Shia, Sunni and Kurd. So the UIA will have first go at shaping a coalition government. All the main parties agree in principle that Iraq would benefit from a unity government embracing representatives of all major ethnic and sectarian groups.

The bitterest arguments will be over the ministries of defence and interior. The Sunnis accuse the present interior minister, Bayan Jaber, who belongs to the strongest of the UIA's component parts, the Iran-backed Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), of packing his ministry with members of SCIRI's fearsome Badr militia and using it as against Sunnis. But SCIRI will be loth to relinquish its hold on the ministry. Adel Abd al-Mahdi, a relatively liberal SCIRI member who is a leading candidate for prime minister, says this is why Iraq needs a federal system: each region should look after its own security. The minority Sunnis, on the other hand, reject federalism, seeing it as a means to curb their influence and break up the country.

But Iraqis have agreed to awkward compromises in the past year: Shias and Kurds, for instance, have more or less accommodated each other over the disputed province of Kirkuk. It is certainly possible, however bitter the rhetoric, that Shias and Sunnis may, in the coming weeks, accommodate each other in a coalition.

Most insurgent groups say they will go on fighting as long as Iraq is occupied by foreign soldiers. Extreme jihadists, such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian who proclaims himself al-Qaeda's man in Iraq, will not relent. The real question, however, is whether other insurgent groups, with more secular and nationalist aims, can be persuaded by Sunnis recently elected to parliament to cut local ceasefire deals and take other steps to reduce the violence. It may take a few months to tell. ■

The Economist December 24th 2005

Turkey and polygamy

Too much of a good thing

DIYARBAKIR

Why a strong tradition persists in defiance of the law

ABDUL KADIR SUMER, the head man of Saridal village, near Diyarbakir, is a man with a mission—to go forth and multiply. At 60, he has two wives, 13 children and, he says, more grandchildren than he can count. “I have a duty to increase the Kurdish population,” Mr Sumer explains. His brother Suleyman, who also has two spouses, nods in agreement. Tevekelli Yildirim, the local imam, confirms that the Koran allows men to take as many as four wives, provided “that they love, respect and provide for them equally.”

In fact, both Sumers are breaking the law in a country where tradition and modernity seem as often to cohabit as to clash. Polygamy was banned by Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, over 70 years ago, as part of his drive to elevate the status of women. Much like their peers in the rest of Europe, many urban Turkish women cite infidelity as grounds for divorce. Yet across rural Turkey, home to a third of the country's 71m people, the authorities turn a blind eye to polygamy.

Some say that it was as part of an attempt to eradicate polygamy that Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the prime minister, last year sought to criminalise adultery. He was rumoured to be acting after complaints by spouses of parliamentarians, including one prominent cabinet minister from his own Justice and Development Party, who had taken second wives. But he was forced to drop the idea after a flurry of protests all round Europe.

It is hard to be sure how many men have more than one wife in Turkey, because second marriages have no legal validity—offspring from a second wife are usually registered under the name of the first. But the practice is known to be especially common in Kurdish regions, where life is still largely organised around tribal structures and Islam, and where status and power are measured in numbers. Indeed, polygamy can sometimes be a matter of survival. So it was for the widowed sister-in-law of Ahmet Turk, leader of Turkey's largest pro-Kurdish party, the Democratic Society Party. Mr Turk rescued her from a life of potential dishonour by taking her under his wing as a second wife.

Suleyman Sumer says he was forced to bring home a second spouse after his first failed to produce a son. Mr Sumer argues that he needs as many sons as possible to work the land. Such logic perpetuates a cycle of poverty that has been fed by decades of government neglect. Even Mr Yildirim, the imam, accepts that the right way to interpret the Koran is that one should have only as many children as can be adequately cared for. Contraception is, therefore, acceptable. But government health workers, who come to the village twice a year to spread the word, have trouble communicating—often because hardly any locals speak Turkish.

Saridal was established 45 years ago by semi-nomadic tribesmen on the edge of Karacadag, an extinct volcano east of Diyarbakir. There are no paved roads and no medical facilities. Villagers haul water to their homes from a single well. The government built the first school only a year ago, so most of Saridal's 400-odd residents have no formal education. Two-thirds of the men are seasonal labourers, earning some \$1 a day picking cotton in the south or harvesting hazelnuts in the north. Many say they are ill-treated because they are

Kurds. They return home with a burning nationalism that propels people like the Sumers to beget even more sons.

Yet amid the drudgery and disaffection, Cupid has a role, says Remzi Oto, a sociologist at Dicle University in Diyarbakir. His study of 50 polygamous men showed that nearly a third took a second wife after “falling in love”. Most were forced into marriage in their early teens. “Choosing their own wife is a form of self-assertion, a way of exploring their manhood and of experiencing true love,” says Mr Oto. ■

Turkey and free speech

The Pamuk test

ISTANBUL

A free-speech case puts Turkey on trial

IT TOOK Ali Babacan, the economy minister who is leading Turkey's membership talks with the European Union, a full three days before he could rouse himself to comment. At issue was the trial of Turkey's most famous author, Orhan Pamuk, on charges of insulting the Turkish identity. Turkey's image had been “hurt”, Mr Babacan confessed on a private television-news channel on December 19th.

That is an understatement. Quite apart from the trial itself—which opened in Istanbul on December 16th, only to be adjourned until February—there was the sight of far-right hooligans, who heckled and pelted Mr Pamuk with eggs as he entered and left the courtroom. Mr Pamuk could, in theory, face up to three years in prison for telling a Swiss newspaper that “30,000 Kurds and one million Armenians died in these lands, and almost nobody talks about it but me.”

European parliamentarians who came to Istanbul to observe the trial enjoyed their own share of the hospitality. Dennis MacShane, a Labour MP and former British Europe minister, was punched in the face and kicked in the shins. “If this trial does not stop immediately,” he declared, “Turkey will never join the EU.”

A decision to stop the trial is in the gift of the government, says the presiding judge, who adjourned the case until February 7th largely on procedural grounds. Mr Pamuk is accused of violating articles of the new penal code introduced in June. But he committed his “crime” last February, when the previous code, which gave discretion to the government over bringing charges, was still in force. If the hawkish justice minister, Cemil Cicek, wanted to spare Turkey more embarrassment, as well as potential victims of the new law further prosecutions, he could have ad- ▶▶



Father and sons

vised that the case should be dropped.

Instead, he and like-minded Turks, enraged by Mr Pamuk's comments on their country's dark past, appeared to revel in cocking a snook at the EU. Mr Cicek demanded that "foreign guests must show respect to Turkey's values and institutions". Mr Babacan disagreed, saying that he did not believe that the EU was pressuring the Turkish justice system. At least Mr Cicek, who said he was re-examining the Pamuk file, hinted that it might yet be shelved, say-



Orhan Pamuk runs the gauntlet

ing that "no doubt the judiciary could have made mistakes, and they will be corrected." That is what 60-odd less famous writers, publishers and journalists who face charges similar to Mr Pamuk's will be praying for. ■

Revolutionary fires ■ By Karim Sadjadpour and Ray Takeyh

Iran's hard line on Israel

Iran's belligerent foreign policy toward Israel is among the more puzzling issues in international relations. At a time when most Arab governments, including the elected Palestinian leadership, have come to accept Israel's existence as an unalterable fact, non-Arab Iran continues to call for eradication of the Jewish state. Over the course of the last several weeks President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran attacked Israel as a "tumor" that should be "wiped off the map of the world" and asserted that the Holocaust was a "myth." Despite widespread international criticism, the Iranian president has been unrepentant, saying, "Western reactions are invalid. ... My words are the Iranian nation's words." In actuality, however, the Middle Eastern country where Ahmadinejad's declarations resonate least is Iran.

There are contending explanations why he chose such a sensitive time in Iran's nuclear negotiations to engage in such inflammatory rhetoric. Since his surprise election in June, there has been a subtle attempt by the elders of the revolution to curb Ahmadinejad's powers, with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei even giving his rival, former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, an expanded role in setting the national course. What's more, contrary to the recommendations of the president's more hard-line followers, Iran has decided to resume its long-suspended nuclear negotiations with the Europeans. By provoking a crisis, Ahmadinejad may be seeking to not only scuttle such negotiations, but to reassert his control over the state machinery and regain the political influence he has steadily lost over the past few months.

In the past, Iranian factions have often provoked international crises to advance domestic political agendas. The hostage crisis of 1979 was not just a strike against America, but an attempt by Ayatollah Khomeini to radicalize the population and firmly implant the

foundations of Islamic rule. Beyond such domestic political considerations, Ahmadinejad and the hard-liners have long bemoaned the loss of revolutionary fervor and Iran's seeming abandonment of the pan-Islamic dimension of Khomeini's vision. A persistent slogan of Ahmadinejad's campaign was the need to return to the "roots of the revolution," and rejuvenate its grandiose ambitions. By pressing a dogmatic position on Israel, Ahmadinejad may perceive an opportunity to rekindle the long-extinguished revolutionary fires and reclaim Iran's leadership of radical Islam.

Whatever the calculations of Iran's new president, throughout nearly three decades of calls for the "liberation of Je-

The Israeli-Palestinian struggle should not be a major concern of Iranians.

rusalem," Iran's revolutionary regime has never come to terms with an essential reality: There exists no inherent reason why the Israeli-Palestinian struggle should be an overriding concern to the average Iranian. Iran has no territorial disputes with Israel, no Palestinian refugee problem, a long history of contentious relations with the Arab world, and an even longer history of tolerance vis-à-vis the Jewish people. To this day, the Jewish community in Iran is the largest in the Middle East outside of Israel.

Beset by practical concerns such as double-digit inflation and unemployment, Iran's youthful population is well aware of the fact that the ideological hubris of their parents' generation — often a half-baked hodgepodge of anti-imperialism, anti-Zionism, Islamism, and Marxism — has borne the country little fruit apart from a soiled international

reputation and political and economic isolation. During the 2003 summer student protests, one popular slogan, delivered in lilting Persian, was "forget about Palestine, think about us!"

Much of Iran's political elite has also come to terms with the fact that the regime's rhetoric toward Israel is self-defeating. As revolutionary-cum-reformist leader Ali Reza Alavi-Tabar told us a few months back, "We need to reinvent ourselves. We shouldn't be chanting 'death to Israel'; we should be saying 'long live Palestine.' We needn't be more Palestinian than the Palestinians themselves." The popular reformist party, the Islamic Participation Front, quickly criticized his comments, saying, "When the country is facing an international crisis, such expressions impose a heavy burden on the country's political, security, and economic interests." In a surprising convergence of views, even the conservative lawmaker, Heshmatollah Falahatzadeh, similarly claimed, "Our officials should realize that there are many facts in the world that we should not pass judgment on in a way that the world finds fault with."

Increasingly isolated abroad and beleaguered at home, Ahmadinejad would be wise to remember that his electoral mandate was not to fight Israel, but rather to alleviate an economic situation that, for many Iranians, teeters between subsistence and poverty. In making blustering statements that only increase Iran's isolation, however, Ahmadinejad's impact will likely tip that balance toward greater poverty. In their relentless calls for justice and democracy in the holy land, Iran's leaders incorrectly assume that the Iranian population wants more for the Palestinians than they want for themselves.

Karim Sadjadpour is an analyst with the International Crisis Group. Ray Takeyh is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. This article first appeared in *The Boston Globe*.

Kurdistan: from threatened entity to constituent unit

Khaled Salih

My close friend, a veteran politician, told me over the telephone that it was very unfortunate I couldn't be in Kurdistan on October 15, when people throughout Iraq voted for their constitution for the first time in the history of the country. Though he understood that I tried but did not manage to get there before the borders were closed 24 hours prior to the voting, my friend wanted to remind me of a conversation we had in 1989.

It was a tragic time for the people of Kurdistan. Only a few years later would the outside world learn of the scale of destruction Saddam Hussein's regime wreaked on Kurdistan. While in an Iranian refugee camp, my friend told me in a telephone conversation that "the Kurds in Iraq will have the same fate as the Armenians of Turkey and the Jews of Europe." Those who survive Saddam's genocidal attacks, he added, must either leave Kurdistan or remain under occupation until they die.

Only when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and the US-led coalition threw Iraq's army out of that country could I understand the destructive nature of Saddam's regime: more than 4,000 Kurdish villages were destroyed; as many as 183,000 people disappeared in Saddam's infamous genocidal assault against the Kurds, known as Anfal (the name of a Quran verse justifying the killing and looting of infidels). Life was abandoned in the countryside; vast areas were mined; animals and people were killed if they stayed in the villages; entire villages were bombed with chemical and biological weapons; water springs, the traditional lifelines of every village in Kurdistan, were sealed; people were traumatized. The outside world was busy mediating between Saddam Hussein and Ayatollah Khomeini to stop the Iraq-Iran war.

A few years later, thanks to the no-fly zone established by the anti-Saddam coalition after 1991, Kurds went back to their region to rebuild their shattered lives, land and economy. Today Kurdistan, where the multinational forces are more than welcome, is prosperous and secure and is often called "the other Iraq". In Kurdistan people are embracing change and building their own future while cautiously watching the trial of Saddam Hussein and his immediate associates. My friend wanted me to share his joy at casting a vote rather than a bomb to determine Kurdistan's future relations with the rest of Iraq by saying yes to the draft constitution. It is a dramatic change. In the latter half of the 1980s, Kurdistan and its population were threatened with extinction. In mid-October 2005, the people of Kurdistan voted overwhelmingly in favor of a new constitution.

It is easy to understand the joy of my friend and most of Kurdistan's population regarding the content of the constitution and the outcome of the referendum: 78 percent of the votes in favor. In 1992, when the Kurdistan parliament decided that the future relationship of the region with the rest of Iraq would be on a federal basis, none could envisage that Saddam Hussein and his regime would be removed and the political system of Iraq restructured and redesigned the way we have seen since mid-2003.

With the endorsement of the constitution, Kurdistan is now a constituent unit in a federalizing Iraq with its own law-making body, government, responsibility for its own internal security, and control over any future development of its oil and gas fields. What is more, the constitution has provided a legal temporal framework for the de-Arabization of Kirkuk and other Arabized regions, a process that will be concluded by the end of 2007 with a referendum over their final status. In addition, Kurdistan's laws and decisions are legalized, providing a retroactive acceptance of the region's existence and legal framework. If any constitutional amendment is decided by the Iraqi parliament due to be elected in mid-December 2005, it will require Kurdistan's consent if proposed changes have any effect on Kurdistan and its authority.

Most crucially of all, any future movement of Iraq's army into Kurdistan is conditioned on the consent of Kurdistan's president and parliament. Psychologically, in view of Kurdistan's past experience with the Iraqi army and successive governments, this is the most important achievement in restructuring and federalizing Iraq. If the rest of

Iraq chooses an Islamic orientation in terms of political institutions and individual, women's and minority rights, Kurdistan can still keep its emerging democratic and secular trends by opting out in those specific cases or enacting more protective and liberal laws in the Kurdistan parliament.

In the coming months and years, the power balance will shift from constitution-writing to interpretation and practical institution-building. This will require careful consideration about fundamental choices. As the current constitution makes clear, the purpose of this fundamental law is to keep the country together on the basis of a voluntary union. If the constitution is violated, Kurdistan will no longer be obliged to adhere to it. That is why the coming months and years will be decisive in Iraq in terms of the powers of the government, limitations on its institutions, and the way government organizations operate. A functioning, federal and democratic Iraq does not need to pose any threat to Kurdistan. But a failed or militarized Iraq will.- Published 27/10/2005 © bitterlemons-international.org

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Le Québec, un modèle pour les Kurdes

réseau **canoë**

13 octobre 2005

Le «fédéralisme est un passage obligé» pour les Kurdes d'Irak qui rêvent d'indépendance, estime Louise Beaudoin. D'après l'ancienne ministre, le Québec demeure pour eux un «modèle» notamment en matière de relations internationales et de protection de la langue

Opprimés par le régime de Saddam Hussein, les Kurdes, comme l'ensemble des Irakiens, se prononcent samedi par référendum sur leur nouvelle constitution. Invitée par l'Institut kurde de Paris, Mme Beaudoin vient d'effectuer une visite de quatre jours à Erbil, la capitale de la «région». Elle y a découvert, non sans un certain étonnement, que le Québec y était perçu comme un «exemple».



Louise Beaudoin Archives TVA

«Les Kurdes veulent continuer d'exister sur la scène internationale, a-t-elle expliqué à son retour à Paris.

Le premier ministre Barzani m'a dit que même avec les Américains, ils parlent du modèle québécois. Pour les Kurdes, le Québec est un exemple logique, en matière d'existence internationale et de protection de la langue.»

Même s'ils ont des «problèmes (constitutionnels) similaires», les Kurdes, conseillés depuis plusieurs années par le constitutionnaliste québécois André Poupart, ont obtenu au sein de leur nouveau régime fédéral davantage d'autonomie que les Québécois au sein du leur.

«Ils ont pas mal plus que la société distincte...», résume Louise Beaudoin.

L'ex-ministre oeuvre désormais dans l'enseignement universitaire, sur des thèmes comme la Francophonie et la mondialisation; avec la question kurde, elle ajoute «une plume à son chapeau». En avril, elle compte participer, avec l'Institut kurde de Montréal, à l'organisation d'une conférence sur l'avenir de cette région. Elle projette par ailleurs d'effectuer une nouvelle mission à Erbil au printemps.

«Pour les Kurdes, l'arrivée des Américains et la chute de Saddam ont été vécues comme une libération, rappelle-t-elle. Cette constitution, ils l'ont voulue. Il leur était impossible de faire plus et mieux. Pour eux, c'est certain qu'il faut en passer par le fédéralisme pour en arriver à autre chose.»

Dans le quotidien *Le Devoir*, il y a quelques jours, André Poupart soulignait que le Kurdistan irakien (comme les autres «régions» du pays) disposera après le référendum de samedi de plus de pouvoirs que les provinces canadiennes. Sur le plan linguistique, la situation est moins claire: la constitution fait du kurde une des deux langues officielles de l'Irak, mais le Kurdistan sera une «zone bilingue», alors que le reste du pays sera unilingue.

Thomas L. Friedman

A shah in a turban

I'd like to thank Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, for his observation that the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews was just a "myth." You just don't see world leaders expressing themselves so honestly anymore — not about the Holocaust, but about their own anti-Semitism and the real character of their regimes.

But since Iran's president has raised the subject of "myths," why stop with the Holocaust? Let's talk about Iran. Let's start with the myth that Iran is an Islamic "democracy" and that Ahmadinejad was democratically elected.

Sure he was elected — after all the Iranian reformers had their newspapers shut down, and parties and candidates were banned by the unelected clerics who really run the show in Tehran. Sorry, Ahmadinejad, they don't serve steak at vegetarian restaurants, they don't allow bikinis at nudist colonies, and they don't call it "democracy" when you ban your most popular rivals from running. So you are nothing more than a shah with a turban and a few crooked ballot boxes sprinkled around.

And speaking of myths, here's another one: that Iran's clerics have any popularity with the broad cross-section of Iranian youth. This week, Ahmadinejad exposed that myth himself when he banned all Western music on Iran's state radio and TV stations. Whenever a regime has to ban certain music or literature, it means it has lost its hold on its young people. It can't trust them to make the "right" judgments on their own. The state must do it for them. If Ahmadinejad's vision for Iran is so compelling, why does he have to ban Beethoven and the Beatles?

And before we leave this subject of myths, let me add one more: the myth that anyone would pay a whit of attention to the bigoted slurs of Iran's president if his country were not sitting on a dome of oil and gas. Iran has an energetic and educated population, but the ability of Iranians to innovate and realize their full potential has been stunted ever since the Iranian revolution. Iran's most famous exports today, other than oil, are carpets and pistachios — the same as they were in 1979, when the clerics took over.

Sad. Iran's youth are as talented as young Indians and Chinese, but they have no chance to show it. Iran has been reduced to selling its natural resources to India and China — so Chinese and Indian youth can invent the future, while Iran's young people are trapped in the past.

No wonder Ahmadinejad, like some court jester, tries to distract young Iranians from his failings by bellowing anti-Jewish diatribes and banning rock 'n' roll.

What is a fact is the danger someone like Ahmadinejad would pose if his country developed a nuclear weapon. But that is where things are heading. Iran has so much oil money to sprinkle around Europe it doesn't worry for a second that the Europeans would ever impose real sanctions on Tehran for refusing to open its nuclear program.



"The West has lost its leverage," notes Gal Luft, an energy expert at the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security. Europe is addicted to Iran's oil and to Iran's purchases of European goods. At the same time, the Iranian regime has been very clever at petro-diplomacy.

After the United States invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, "the Iranians knew they needed an insurance policy," Luft added. "So they did two things: they concentrated on developing a bomb and went out and struck gas deals with one-third of humanity — India and China," the world's two fastest-growing energy consumers. So it is highly unlikely that China would ever allow the UN Security Council to impose sanctions on Iran.

The whole world seems to be getting bought off these days by oil. Gerhard Schröder, the former German chancellor, just became chairman of a Russian-German gas pipeline project — controlled by the Russian government — that he championed while in office. The man just stepped down as the leader of Germany and now he's working for the Russians! I guess Jack Abramoff was not available.

The word from the White House is that President George W. Bush is trying to figure out a theme for his State of the Union speech and for his next three years.

Mr. President, what more has to happen — how many more Katrinas, how much more reckless behavior by Iran, how many more allies bought off by petrodollars — before you realize that there is only one thing to do for the next three years: Lead America and the world in an all-out push to conserve energy, reduce dependence on oil and develop alternatives?

Because three more years of \$60-a-barrel oil will undermine everything good in the world that the United States wants to do — and that's no myth.

Affaire Pamuk : Bruxelles contre Ankara

TURQUIE

Le gouvernement turc dénonce les « pressions » européennes. Pour Bruxelles, « l'Europe fait son travail ».

De notre correspondante
à Bruxelles

MALGRÉ la critique, l'Union européenne n'a pas l'intention de baisser la garde dans sa défense d'Orhan Pamuk, cet écrivain à succès poursuivi pour « insulte à la nation » après avoir évoqué le « massacre des Arméniens » sous l'Empire ottoman. Ajourné au 9 février, ce procès exemplaire des menaces pesant sur la liberté d'expression en Turquie entretient la tension entre Bruxelles et Ankara. Après une première audience houleuse à Istanbul, le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan a dénoncé les « pressions européennes » sur la justice de son pays.

En annonçant, lundi, qu'il allait trancher « sans délai » l'affaire Pamuk, dans laquelle l'Europe demande l'abandon des poursuites, le ministre turc de la Justice a critiqué l'attitude de l'Europe. « C'est devenu une habitude, chez les responsables de l'Union européenne, de faire des déclarations contraires à la Constitution turque », a regretté le ministre Cemil Cicek.

A Bruxelles, la Commission européenne assume ses interventions très fermes. « Ce n'est pas Orhan Pamuk qui sera jugé demain, mais la Turquie », avait déclaré Olli Rehn, le commissaire finlandais en charge de l'Elargissement. « C'est un test décisif qui permettra de voir si la Turquie s'est engagée sérieusement en faveur de

la liberté d'expression », insistait-il. La présidence de l'Union, alors représentée par Jack Straw, le chef de la diplomatie britannique, avait également insisté, avant l'audience, sur « l'importance » de ce procès pour l'image de la Turquie.

Priorité absolue

Ajoutant à la pression, neuf députés européens s'étaient rendus à Istanbul pour assister à la comparution de l'écrivain. Parmi eux, l'eurodéputé allemand Daniel Cohn-Bendit, très en verve. « Ce sont les négociations d'adhésion de la Turquie qui sont en jeu... Une condamnation d'Orhan Pamuk pourrait aboutir à l'interdiction des négociations », a-t-il déclaré. Rapporteur pour la Turquie au Parlement, le député Camiel Eurlings déplorait quant à lui que les « lois turques actuelles donnent l'occasion à des juges non modernes, conservateurs, de mettre en prison des gens qui expriment des opinions non violentes ». Jamais l'Europe n'avait tant fait pression sur la justice d'un pays candidat.

Aujourd'hui, aucune des trois institutions européennes, qu'il s'agisse du Parlement, de la Commission ou de la présidence de l'UE, ne regrette ses interventions dans l'affaire Pamuk. « La Commission européenne fait son travail », rétorque-t-on à Bruxelles dans l'entourage du commissaire Olli Rehn. « La Turquie doit accepter toutes les valeurs et toutes les lois européennes si elle veut entrer dans l'Union. Et parmi ces valeurs, la liberté d'expression est fondamentale. » Pour l'Union européenne, qui a ouvert les négociations d'adhésion avec Ankara, le



L'écrivain à succès Orhan Pamuk est poursuivi pour « insulte à la nation » après avoir évoqué « le massacre des Arméniens » sous l'Empire ottoman. Sipa.

3 octobre, il s'agit même d'une priorité absolue.

Dans son rapport annuel sur les progrès réalisés par la Turquie, la Commission avait salué en novembre l'adoption par la Turquie d'un nouveau Code pénal « moderne » tout en déplorant que certains articles, libellés de manière trop floue, laissent « trop de marge d'interprétation » aux tribunaux. C'est le cas de l'article 301, qui punit de six mois à trois ans de

prison les « insultes à la nation » ou à l'« identité turque ». L'interprétation de l'article par certains magistrats a donné lieu cette année à de nombreuses condamnations d'écrivains et d'intellectuels. Si ces condamnations se poursuivent, notamment dans l'affaire Pamuk, devenue emblématique, la Commission a prévenu qu'elle se réserverait le droit d'exiger une modification du Code pénal turc.

ALEXANDRINE BOUILHET

Le marchand d'armes de Saddam va en prison

PAYS-BAS

Frans van Anraat avait fourni au raïs irakien les produits chimiques utilisés lors des attaques au gaz contre les Kurdes.

COUPABLE de crime de guerre, mais acquitté du chef de génocide. L'homme d'affaires Frans van Anraat, 63 ans, a été condamné hier à La Haye à 15 ans de prison pour complicité de crimes de guerre. Ses avocats ont toutefois indiqué qu'ils allaient faire appel de cette sentence.

Entre 1985 et 1988, Frans van Anraat avait fourni au régime de Saddam Hussein des produits chimiques qui ont été utilisés lors des attaques au gaz contre des populations kurdes d'Irak. « Ses livraisons ont facilité les attaques et constituent un très grave crime de guerre, a affirmé le juge devant un tribunal bondé. Cela n'aurait pas pu arriver sans sa contribution. Même la peine

maximale n'est pas suffisante pour ces actes terribles. » Plus d'une cinquantaine de parents des victimes, certains en costume traditionnel, ont assisté aux audiences, traduites en anglais, farsi et arabe.

Des composants du gaz moutarde

Si la cour a jugé qu'un génocide avait bien eu lieu contre la population kurde d'Irak, notamment à Halabja en mars 1988 – un massacre qui a fait 5 000 morts en une journée –, elle a estimé que Van Anraat ne connaissait pas les intentions génocidaires de l'ancien régime de Bagdad. L'homme d'affaires, absent lors de la lecture du verdict, a donc été acquitté du chef de complicité de génocide.

Saddam Hussein, jugé actuellement avec ses anciens lieutenants par un tribunal spécial irakien pour le massacre de 148 chiites en 1982, est accusé de crimes de guerre et de crimes

contre l'humanité dans plusieurs affaires, dont le gazage des Kurdes d'Halabja. « Le gaz moutarde produit avec l'aide de Frans van Anraat a fait des dizaines de milliers de victimes en Irak et en Iran », a estimé le procureur Fred Teeven au cours de son réquisitoire.

Au cours des années 1980, Frans van Anraat a agi comme un intermédiaire, achetant sur le marché international des composants du gaz moutarde, qu'il revendait ensuite au régime irakien, malgré un embargo sur les exportations. L'accusé a admis avoir vendu ces produits, mais il a soutenu qu'il n'était pas au courant de leur utilisation finale, ce que plusieurs témoins entendus au procès et plusieurs documents apportés par l'accusation sont venus contredire.

Frans van Anraat a été arrêté en 1989 en Italie à la demande des autorités judiciaires américaines. Il a ensuite réussi à fuir vers l'Irak où il a vécu jusqu'à l'arrivée des troupes de la coalition, au printemps 2003. Avant d'être à nouveau arrêté en décembre 2004 à Amsterdam.

Entre-temps, pour une raison jamais expliquée, les Etats-Unis ont abandonné leur demande d'extradition. En Irak, l'homme d'affaires vivait dans la clandestinité. Sous un faux nom donné par des membres de l'ancien régime : Faris Mansour Rasheed al-Bazzaz, qui signifie « négociant en tissu courageux et intelligent ».

S. K. (AVEC AFP, REUTERS)

LE FIGARO samedi 24 - dimanche 25 décembre 2005



Des parents de victimes kurdes manifestaient le 21 novembre dernier devant la cour de justice de La Haye, pendant le procès de van Anraat. E. Oudenaarden/AFP

Charia ou raki, la Turquie doit choisir

Le parti islamiste au pouvoir veut interdire la consommation d'alcool dans les lieux publics.

Ankara envoyé spécial

L'écriteau est apposé à l'entrée des guinguettes du Mogangülü, petit lac de la périphérie d'Ankara, destination traditionnelle pour le bol d'air dominical: «La consommation d'alcool est formellement interdite». Dans les établissements des parcs des périphéries de la capitale turque, raki (traditionnel alcool anisé), bière ou vin sont désormais proscrits sauf dans quelques restaurants de luxe. Et maintenant le maire, Molih Gökcek, membre de l'AKP, le parti au pouvoir issu du mouvement islamiste, accentue encore son offensive en annonçant l'interdiction totale de l'alcool dans le Gençlikpark, le «parc de la jeunesse» en plein cœur de la ville, quand rouvriront, l'an prochain, les 40 bars et restaurants fermés pour rénovation. Une mesure sonnant comme un défi dans la capitale fondée par Mustafa Kemal, le père de la République, lui-même grand buveur devant l'éternel et mort d'une cirrhose du foie, dont un grand portrait lumineux orne l'entrée de ce jardin qu'il aimait fréquenter. Depuis, le lieu s'est dégradé, comme tout ce quartier datant des années 30, mais ce jardin reste un symbole.

Moralisme islamiste. «J'aime le raki et je suis un fils de la République. En Europe on respecte la liberté des buveurs, mais l'AKP a la charia dans sa tête et tente de grignoter jour après jour les conquêtes de la laïcité», grignote Satilmis Cimen, retraité, attablé dans une maison de thé en lisière du parc. Comme beaucoup d'autres vieux Ankaraïotes, il craint que la municipalité ne profite des travaux pour enlever aussi les deux grandes statues années 30 d'Adam et Eve, dont les seins nus irritent de longue date le moralisme islamiste. Pour la mairie, ce parc est devenu «un lieu de perdición». «Les familles n'osent plus venir après une certaine heure parce qu'on y vend de l'alcool, ce qui change le comportement des gens, qui deviennent agressifs», a expliqué mi-novembre au grand quotidien *Hürriyet* le maire, ex-militant ultranationaliste reconverti dans l'islam politique. Si hors des parcs ou des établissements municipaux on peut toujours se rincer librement le gosier dans la capitale, les municipalités d'arrondissement les plus radicales interdisent toute vente d'alcool après 23 heures.

Loin de se limiter à la capitale, la campagne antialcoolique a gagné tout le pays. Le Premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, qui trinque au jus de fruit lors des repas officiels, défend le régime sec dans les établissements municipaux «qui ne doivent pas donner le mauvais exemple», mais il répète dans ses interviews qu'il est hors de question d'interdire l'alcool. «Ce serait une absurdité, même le sultan Murat IV, au XVII^e siècle, n'avait pas réussi, mais comme dans tous les autres pays européens il y a des lois pour en contrôler la consommation que nous voulons renforcer», explique Nilhat Ergün, un des vice-secrétaires gé-

raux du parti en charge des collectivités locales. En fait ils laissent faire leurs maires les plus fanatiques qui ont désormais le pouvoir en matière de réglementation sur la consommation d'alcool, dépendant auparavant des préfectures. Une enquête de l'agence Merkez montre que de nouvelles restrictions ont été prises dans 61 chefs-lieux de province sur 81. Certains élus locaux ne cachent pas leur volonté de «ghettoiser» l'alcool hors des centres-ville. «Nous allons créer des rues rouges pour l'alcool comme en Europe pour la prostitution», expliquait ainsi crûment le maire adjoint d'Osniangazi, petite ville du Nord-Ouest. A Istanbul, le maire de l'arrondissement d'Uskûdar, sur la rive

asiatique, multiplie les obstacles bureaucratiques pour renouveler les licences et ne cache pas vouloir mettre tout le quartier au régime sec, à l'exception de quelques enclaves. Les élus de l'AKP estiment ce thème porteur vis-à-vis des secteurs les plus islamistes de leur électorat, jusqu'ici frustré par le bilan des trois ans de pouvoir. Remportant, en novembre 2002, quelque 30% des voix et près des deux tiers des sièges, le parti a réussi à stabiliser l'inflation, et à mener, au moins sur le papier, nombre des réformes exigées par l'Union européenne, obtenant l'ouver-

ture des négociations d'adhésion. Mais il n'a rien pu faire sur des revendications symboles, comme le droit au foulard. D'où cette bataille identitaire, menée théoriquement au nom de la santé publique, tel que le stipule l'article 58 de la Constitution.

«Ces mesures n'ont rien à voir avec la protection de la jeunesse. Mais comme ils ont peur des réactions ils n'osent pas dire ouvertement qu'ils agissent au nom de motivations religieuses», martèle Muzaffer Eryılmaz, maire de l'arrondissement de Çankaya, quartier chic d'Ankara resté aux mains des «kémalistes» du Parti républicain du peuple (CHP), qui dénonce «l'hypocrisie» de l'AKP. Nombre de mosquées portent d'énormes pancartes clamaient que «l'alcool est la source de tous les vices». «Ne nous laissons pas tromper, le parti d'Erdogan est en train de lentement nous envelopper dans une couverture islamiste», s'énervait Tufan Türeç, un des grands éditorialistes d'*Hürriyet*. Longtemps prudents vis-à-vis de l'AKP, les grands journaux se déchainent, annonçant à gros titres chaque nouvelle initiative contre l'alcool.

Inexplicable. Quant au succès de cette campagne, nul ne se fait d'illusion. Ainsi Konya, la ville la plus religieuse du pays, gérée depuis plus de vingt ans par les islamistes, où il est quasiment impossible de boire de l'alcool dans un local public, est aussi celle qui détient le record de consommation de raki par habitant, selon les statistiques de Tekel, l'ex-monopole des alcools. Envers et contre tout, les Turcs continuent de lever le coude malgré les quelque 80% de taxes grevant les prix du raki comme des autres spiritueux.

Désormais, les dirigeants de l'AKP mettent un bémol. Poids lourd du parti, Murat Mercan rappelle haut et fort qu'«une interdiction serait inexplicable vis-à-vis des Européens» et que «la prohibition tentée jadis aux Etats-Unis a créé encore plus de problèmes».

26 DÉCEMBRE 2005



Un magasin d'alcool, dans le quartier de Galata, à Istanbul. Les municipalités radicales interdisent la vente d'alcool après 23 heures.

«En Europe on respecte la liberté des buveurs, mais l'AKP a la charia dans sa tête et tente de grignoter les conquêtes de la laïcité.»

Satilmis Cimen, retraité

Journalistes inculpés à Istanbul

Directeur de l'hebdomadaire bilingue turc-arménien *Agos*, Hrant Dink, déjà condamné en octobre à une peine de prison pour «insulte à l'identité nationale turque», et trois de ses confrères ont été inculpés par un magistrat d'Istanbul pour un article consacré à cette affaire. Dans son journal, il appelait les Arméniens à «se tourner maintenant vers le sang neuf de l'Arménie indépendante, seule capable de les libérer du poids de la Diaspora». Ils risquent jusqu'à quatre ans et demi de prison s'ils sont reconnus coupables.

MARC SEMO

Washington a du mal à installer la démocratie en Irak

LE FIGARO SAMEDI 24 - DIMANCHE 25 DÉCEMBRE 2005

Selon les résultats partiels des élections législatives irakiennes, le rêve américain d'instaurer une démocratie pro-occidentale dans un Irak unifié est loin de s'être réalisé.

Le patron du Pentagone, Donald Rumsfeld, a confirmé hier, au cours d'une visite surprise à Faludja, que les Etats-Unis allaient retirer 7 500 soldats d'Irak d'ici au printemps 2006. Le retrait de deux brigades de combat d'Irak avait déjà été annoncé par Washington le mois dernier. Plusieurs milliers d'Arabes sunnites ont par ailleurs manifesté hier pour demander l'organisation d'un nouveau scrutin, estimant que les résultats de celui du 15 décembre ont été falsifiés. Les manifestants s'en sont pris à l'Iran, de nombreux sunnites estimant que ce pays a pesé en faveur de la liste donnée gagnante, conduite par les deux grands partis chiites, Dawa, d'Ibrahim Jaafari, et le Conseil suprême de la révolution islamique en Irak (CSRII) de Abdel Aziz Hakim.

DÈS LA PUBLICATION, cette semaine, des résultats partiels du scrutin parlementaire en Irak, George Bush s'est empressé de crier victoire en réitérant « l'engagement de l'Amérique à conduire le peuple irakien vers la démocratie et à l'aider à vaincre les terroristes et les fidèles de Saddam Hussein ». Mais les élections qui viennent de se dérouler en Irak traduisent une réalité différente du scénario américain : celle d'une nation divisée, minée par l'intégrisme, où les fondamentalistes religieux ont pris le dessus et où la laïcité se trouve en perte de vitesse. « Je pense qu'on devrait donner aux Américains le prix Nobel de la guerre. Pour leur stupidité ! », commente, avec ironie, Ismaël Zayer, le rédacteur en chef du quotidien irakien *Al-Sabah al-Jadid*.

Le vote du 15 décembre dernier a marqué un pas en avant dans le processus politique de l'après-guerre. Les Irakiens, très nombreux à s'être précipités aux urnes, ont affirmé leur volonté de prendre en main leur destin. Les sunnites, grands absents des élections de janvier dernier, ont fait

leur réapparition sur la scène politique. Mais le vote communautaire qui est ressorti du nouveau scrutin révèle la fragilité de l'unité irakienne dont rêvait George Bush. La grande coalition chiite a remporté une importante victoire à Bagdad et dans le sud du pays. La liste sunnite arrive en tête dans quatre provinces de l'Ouest et du Nord, Al-Anbar, Ninive, Diyala et Salaheddine. Les Kurdes, eux, sont les grands gagnants à Erbil, Soleymaniyah et Dohok, provinces où ils se trouvent majoritaires.

Une collaboration bien fragile

Quant à la liste d'Eyad Allaoui, un chiite nationaliste et laïc, favori des Américains, elle ne dépasse jamais 14 % des votes. Son score s'élève à environ 8 % à l'échelon national. Ahmad Chalabi, longtemps chouchouté par Washington, subit la défaite la plus humiliante. Avec à peine 0,5 % des voix, sa liste n'a même pas de quoi s'assurer un siège au Parlement irakien. « C'est comme si les gens avaient préféré voter pour leur identité ethnique ou religieuse »,

constatait l'ambassadeur américain, Zalmay Khalilzad, en début de semaine. Tout en ajoutant : « Mais pour que l'Irak réussisse, il faut une collaboration interethnique et interreligieuse. »

Cette collaboration s'annonce bien fragile. Depuis l'invasion américaine et la chute de Saddam, en avril 2003, les relations entre les différentes communautés n'ont cessé de se détériorer. Les exemples de tortures de prisonniers sunnites par des policiers irakiens chiites ne manquent pas. Les partis politiques sunnites accusent le ministre de l'Intérieur, Bayan Jaber, d'agir à la solde de l'Iran chiite voisin. A l'inverse, les chiites, régulièrement victimes d'attentats, accusent indirectement les sunnites de soutenir le terrorisme. « Qu'ils soient chiites ou sunnites, nous sommes aujourd'hui dominés par des groupes politiques religieux, qui représentent les deux faces d'une même pièce », s'inquiète Baher Butti, un des représentants de la minorité chrétienne, en avouant qu'il songe à quitter l'Irak, un pays historiquement laïc. « Les défenseurs de la

laïcité n'ont plus leur place ici », ajoute-t-il.

Pendant ce temps, les Kurdes du Nord, connus pour leurs idées plus séculières, continuent à rêver à l'indépendance. « On se dirige vers une partition du pays », note, pessimiste, l'analyste irakien Humam Shamaa. Ce parfait francophone n'est pas convaincu par la nouvelle Constitution, rédigée sous l'égide de l'ambassade américaine, et approuvée par référendum en octobre dernier. « Selon le texte, dit-il, chaque région peut diriger ses propres forces de sécurité. C'est la porte ouverte au contrôle du Sud par les milices chiites de Moqtada al-Sadr, et au contrôle du Nord par les pechmergas kurdes. Et au centre, le champ va rester libre pour les terroristes. On est à deux doigts de la guerre civile », s'inquiète-t-il.

Dans ce contexte d'incertitude, certains analystes estiment qu'un départ précipité des troupes américaines risquerait, en fait, de renforcer la violence interne. « Si les Américains n'avaient pas démantelé l'armée irakienne à la chute de Saddam, on n'en serait

pas là ! Aujourd'hui, les jeunes recrues ne sont pas suffisamment expérimentées pour contrôler le pays », enrage Ismaël Zayer. Le jour où ils quitteront l'Irak, les Américains devront se résigner à la montée en puissance de groupes plus ou moins hostiles à George Bush. Côté politique, le nouveau Parlement est dominé par des partis chiites, dont les idées sont parfois plus proches de celles de Téhéran – classé dans l'axe du Mal par le président américain – que de Washington. Et dans l'espace public, la guérilla sunnite – étrange mélange d'ex-baasistes et d'islamistes fondamentalistes – n'a pas dit son dernier mot.

D'après Movafaq al-Rubaei, le chef de la sécurité nationale, elle aurait même tendance à se radicaliser en se rapprochant des idées du terroriste jordanien Zarqaoui. « Personne n'est prêt à mourir pour le baasisme. Aujourd'hui, les salafistes recrutent dans les mosquées. En Irak, la religion est devenue une arme de destruction massive », dit-il.

DELPHINE MINOUI

L'ayatollah Sistani appelle à la sagesse pour éviter la guerre civile

LE FIGARO 27 décembre 2005

Le dignitaire religieux le plus influent d'Irak, joue un rôle pondérateur dans le chaos qui prévaut au sein du pays.

Téhéran

IL NE S'EST JAMAIS présenté aux élections. Il ne dirige aucun prêche à la grande prière du vendredi. Re-tranché derrière les quatre murs de sa modeste maison de Najaf, l'ayatollah Ali Sistani détient pourtant le pouvoir le plus précieux de l'Irak d'aujourd'hui : celui d'empêcher le pays de sombrer dans le chaos total. « Il est notre antidote contre la guerre civile. Nous devons tout faire pour le protéger », remarque Movaffaq al-Rubaei, le conseiller irakien à la sécurité nationale.

Alors que la contestation provoquée par les résultats des législatives bat son plein, le vieux dignitaire religieux chiite est sorti, ce week-end, de sa tanière en lançant un appel au calme et à un gouvernement d'union nationale. « Il a déclaré qu'il souhaitait voir les listes gagnantes prendre les choses avec sagesse et ne pas recourir à la violence », précise al-Rubaei, à l'issue d'un entretien avec Sistani.

A 74 ans, ce vieux sage au turban noir des descendants du prophète s'impose, plus que jamais, comme un acteur incontournable de la complexe scène politico-religieuse irakienne. D'origine iranienne, l'ayatollah Sistani vit à Najaf depuis 1952, ville qu'il n'a jamais quittée, même à l'époque de Saddam Hussein. Pour les chiites irakiens, – environ 60 % de la population –, il représente la doctrine quiettiste, favorable à une séparation de la religion et de la politique. Son statut de grand mar-

jaa (« source d'imitation »), rang le plus élevé dans la hiérarchie religieuse chiite, lui vaut un respect sans borne. Chaque jour, des dizaines de visiteurs se pressent à sa porte : politiciens, chefs de tribus, et clercs religieux, chiites comme sunnites.

Il déconseille le djihad

Depuis la chute du régime baasiste, il multiplie les déclarations pacifistes. Dès l'entrée des troupes américano-britanniques en Irak, en mars 2003, il déconseillait formellement le djihad (guerre sainte) contre les GI's. Par



Acteur incontournable de la scène politique irakienne, l'ayatollah Sistani a lancé ce week-end un appel au calme et à l'union nationale. Ahmad Al Rubaye/AFP

souci de neutralité, il a toujours refusé de rencontrer des représentants de l'ambassade américaine. A chaque attentat à la bombe visant délibérément la communauté chiite et à chaque nouvelle déclaration présumée de Zarqawi (lequel a récemment appelé à mener une « guerre totale contre les chiites »), Sistani est toujours le premier à appeler au calme. Pour le terroriste jordanien d'origine sunnite, les chiites sont des apostats parce qu'ils ne reconnaissent qu'Ali, gendre de Mahomet, comme unique successeur du prophète.

« Chez les chiites, la sagesse de Sistani a toujours permis de décourager les plus extrémistes de s'en remettre aux armes. A l'inverse, les sunnites ne disposent pas de leader spirituel. Dans le chaos actuel, certains jeunes sunnites se laissent alors facilement influencer par des chefs fondamentalistes », constate Houda Nuaimi, professeur de sciences politiques. L'année dernière, la médiation de Sistani permit également de mettre un terme à cinq mois de conflit sanglant qui opposèrent, à Najaf, les miliciens de Moqtada Sadr, le jeune imam chiite rebelle, et les troupes américaines.

Cible idéale des terroristes

Fidèle à sa retenue, l'ayatollah Sistani s'est toujours abstenu de toute prise de position politique. Aux élections de janvier dernier, l'Alliance irakienne unifiée, – com-

posée de partis politiques chiites –, avait pourtant reçu sa bénédiction. Mais pour le scrutin du 15 dé-

cembre, le grand ayatollah a repris ses distances, en refusant de soutenir directement une liste particulière. Un de ses représentants s'est juste contenté de déconseiller aux électeurs de voter pour une liste dont le chef de file n'est pas religieux. Lors de sa rencontre avec Movaffaq al-Rubaei, Sistani a d'ailleurs exhorté la grande liste chiite, – donnée grande gagnante et que les sunnites accusent d'avoir fraudé –, à « travailler avec les autres composantes du peuple irakien pour former un gouvernement d'union nationale représentant les principales familles (politiques) du pays ».

Cible idéale des terroristes, la vie du grand ayatollah tient aujourd'hui par le bout d'un fil. On le dit également affaibli par des problèmes cardiaques. « Sa mort porterait un coup fatal au pays », soupire al-Rubaei. Selon la hiérarchie chiite, sa succession devrait revenir à un des trois autres grands ayatollahs d'Irak : al-Fayad, d'origine afghane, al-Nadjafi, d'origine pakistanaise et l'irakien Saeed al-Hakim, – cousin de Mohammad Baqer al-Hakim –, assassiné à Najaf en août 2003. « C'est logiquement al-Hakim qui prendrait la relève, mais il est loin d'avoir la sagesse de Sistani », s'inquiète le conseiller irakien à la sécurité nationale.

DELPHINE MINOUI

Kurds Are Flocking to Kirkuk, Laying Claim to Land and Oil

By EDWARD WONG

KIRKUK, Iraq — Clusters of gray concrete houses dot the barren plains surrounding this city, like seedlings scattered here by winds blowing down from the mountainous Kurdish homeland to the north.

The villages are uniformly spartan, except for the red, green and white flag of Iraqi Kurdistan sprouting from many rooftops, even though this province is not officially part of the Kurdish autonomous region.

The settlements' purpose is as blunt as their design: they are the heart of an aggressive campaign by the Kurds to lay claim to Kirkuk, which sits on one of the world's richest oil fields. The Kurdish settlers have been moving into the area at a furious pace, with thousands coming in the past few months, sometimes with direct financing from the two main Kurdish parties.

The campaign has emerged as one of the most volatile issues dogging the talks to form a new national government. In this region, it has ignited fury among Arabs and Turkmens, adding to already caustic tension in

the ethnically mixed city, American and Iraqi officials say.

It could also be contributing to a complex web of violence. In the past three months alone, American commanders say, at least 30 assassination-style killings have happened in the area, making Kirkuk one of the deadliest midsize cities in Iraq.

The Kurdish parties are completely open about their desire to incorporate Kirkuk into Iraqi Kurdistan. No single issue is dearer to Kurdish leaders as they negotiate with the country's Arabs to form a new, four-year government. Kurdish voters cited it as one of the main reasons they flocked to the polls on Dec. 15.

"The important issues for us are those that concern all Iraqis, but at the top of them is Kirkuk," said Fouad Massoum, a vice president in the transitional National Assembly and senior official in the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, one of the two main Kurdish parties. "If we leave it, it will be like a time bomb ready to explode at any time."

Because the Kurdish parties are expected to get at least 40 seats in the 275-seat Council of Representa-

tives, they will almost certainly be a key ally for any Arab bloc that wants to muster the two-thirds vote needed to form a government. Kurdish leaders will use that leverage, they say, to force the Arabs to speed the repatriation of Kurds to Kirkuk. That would put the Kurds in an extremely favorable position by the time the province holds a referendum in 2007 to decide whether it should be governed by Iraqi Kurdistan.

The Kurds say all this goes toward redressing the crimes of Saddam Hussein, who for decades evicted Kurds and Turkmens from the oil-rich region and moved in Arabs.

There is an official mechanism that is supposed to help evicted Kurds move back to Kirkuk, a city of 800,000 with a crumbling citadel and twisting market streets at its center. Article 58 of the interim constitution, drafted in early 2004 by American and Iraqi officials, established a property claims commission to review individual cases. It also created a national panel to help make policy decisions on Kirkuk.

The Kurds say that because the Shiite-led government has dragged



Ashley Gilbertson for The New York Times

Kurds forced out of Kirkuk during the Hussein years have returned and are staying temporarily in a stadium.

its feet on empowering these bodies, thousands of Kurds who returned to Kirkuk after the fall of Mr. Hussein still live in squatters' camps.

The Kurds have wrested control of most of the government institutions here. They won the majority of seats in the provincial council last January, partly because of a Sunni Arab boycott of the elections. That, coupled with their political influence in Baghdad, has helped them get most of the top local ministry posts and retain control of the police force.

All the ethnic groups here appear to be caught in rampant violence, American officers say. There is the occasional suicide bombing: one in November killed at least 16 oil infrastructure guards. The targets of assassinations are commanders of Iraqi security forces, as well as politicians, doctors, professors and oil engineers. In November, six police commanders — four Turkmen and two Arabs — were killed.

No one doubts that peace would be easier to come by if it were not for the oil reserves, 10 to 20 percent of the country's total. They are the economic fulcrum of the Kurdish drive to secure virtual independence for Iraqi Kurdistan. During the drafting of the permanent Constitution last summer, Kurdish leaders in Baghdad managed to work in a clause that says this province, Tamim, will hold a referendum in 2007 to determine whether it should be ruled by the Kurdistan regional government or the central authorities in Baghdad.

"Clearly, for the Kurds, Kirkuk is a strategic prize," said Col. David Gray, commander of the First Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, charged with securing the province. "They feel very strongly about bringing their people to Kirkuk to right the

wrong that was done under Saddam's regime and the Arabization program. That does collide, of

Homes spring up amid bloodshed and the protests of others.

course, with the other groups in the province." Arabs and Turkmen argue that many of the Kurds moving in were not displaced by Mr. Hussein — they originated elsewhere and are settling here to ensure that the province is voted into Kurdistan in 2007.

"The Kurds are building property, houses on land they don't own," said Sangul Chapuk, a Turkmen politician who served on the American-appointed Iraqi Governing Council.

The last accurate census showed that the Turkmen, a Central Asian ethnic group that governed this area under the Ottoman Empire, had a slight majority. That was in 1957. The numbers drastically changed under Mr. Hussein's decades-long program of ethnic displacement and further shifted after the American-led invasion.

Capt. Greg Ford, the First Brigade's intelligence officer, estimated that 85,000 to 350,000 Kurds had moved into the Kirkuk region since spring 2003. The result is a building boom in Kirkuk itself and along the main roads leading to the border of Iraqi Kurdistan. In Altun Kopri, a Kurd-Turkmen village 15 miles northwest of Kirkuk, new homes constructed in slapdash fashion line dirt tracks. White pickup trucks with

Kurdistan flags roll through. "The construction is just huge," said Maj. Victor Vasquez, the head civil affairs officer for the First Brigade. "I've seen entire villages that didn't exist before spring up from rubble. It's a suburb of Kirkuk overnight."

"There's some funding from the Kurdish parties in terms of the housing," he added. "That's a fair assessment. A lot of it is also private business standing up."

The Kurds who have moved back to Kirkuk invariably say they were evicted from the area by Mr. Hussein. One, Adnan Abdul Rahman, a mathematics professor in Kirkuk, said his family was kicked out of the village of Dibis in the 1960's. "Let me tell you the honest truth," Mr. Rahman, 41, said as he stood in the courtyard of a high school on election day. "I've had 19 executions in my family, and I'll pay another 19 for Kirkuk to go back to Kurdistan."

Some Arabs say the Kurdish parties, backed by their militias, are threatening Arab families who refuse to sell their property and leave Kirkuk. Khalid al-Izzi, the Arab head of a human rights group in the city, said the Kurds had coerced Arabs into selling their property for considerably less than what it was actually worth. Kurdish leaders deny the accusations and insist it is the Kurds who are still suffering, because the repatriation process is moving so slowly. With the 2007 referendum fast approaching, the Kurds say their patience has run out.

"We've lost a lot of time," Mr. Masoum, the Kurdish politician, said. "For the Kirkuk project, there is a deadline. We insist on commitment to the deadline and implementing the Constitution."

Turkish writer avoids new charges

The Associated Press

ANKARA: Turkish prosecutors decided Thursday not to file new charges against the country's best known novelist for allegedly denigrating Turkey's armed forces, but the writer still faces charges that he insulted "Turkishness," said lawyers who sought his trial on both accusations.

Nationalist lawyers had petitioned prosecutors to file criminal charges against Orhan Pamuk for reportedly telling the German newspaper Die Welt in October that the military threatened democratization in Turkey.

European Union officials have criticized the trial Pamuk is already facing for comments he made about the massacre of Armenians and recent fighting in Kurdish areas, and called on Turkey to do more to protect free speech. Some

Novelist still accused of insulting country

have warned it may jeopardize Turkey's efforts to join the EU.

Pamuk was facing the new charges for reportedly telling Die Welt that "I don't see Justice and Development Party as a threat to Turkish democracy" and that "unfortunately, the threat comes from the army, which sometimes prevents democratic development."

The Justice and Development Party is the governing, Islamic-rooted party.

The prosecutors based their decision not to prosecute on a European human rights convention protecting free speech

and on a section of Turkey's penal code that says remarks made within the spirit of criticism are not a crime. The law draws a distinction between criticism and insult.

A nationalist lawyer, Kemal Kerincsiz, said he would appeal the decision

'For a country to enter the EU, there has to be full respect of minority rights.'

on Friday. Kerincsiz said the army had been portrayed as the enemy of democracy and called this a "grave insult."

"We've come to the point where we're no longer able to protect our national values," Kerincsiz said. "Where will it all end?"

The novelist still faces charges for telling a Swiss newspaper in February that "30,000 Kurds and 1 million Armenians were killed in these lands, and nobody but me dares to talk about it."

The remarks highlighted two of the most painful episodes in Turkish history: the massacre of Armenians during World War I — which Turkey insists was not a planned genocide — and recent guerrilla fighting in Turkey's overwhelmingly Kurdish southeast.

On Wednesday, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul acknowledged that charges brought against Pamuk had tarnished the country's image abroad and said laws that limit freedom of expression may be changed. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan also said laws could be changed if there were serious flaws.

It was the first time the government indicated it could amend laws making it a crime to insult Turkey. But officials said the government would likely wait for the outcome of the trial against Pamuk and dozens of others before moving to amend the laws.

"This is a new law, let's see how it

works, what the outcomes are," Erdogan said. "If there are serious problems, then of course the legislature will sit down, make a new assessment and take a new decision."

In an interview published Thursday, Pamuk said the government must expand freedom of expression if it wants to win EU membership.

"For a country to enter the EU, there has to be full respect of minority rights, freedom of thought and expression," Pamuk told the newspaper Aksam.

Winners and losers in Iraq

The final votes must still be counted in Iraq, but the trend is already clear. The biggest winners appear to be the Shiite religious parties whose politicians have run the ministries and whose militias have run the streets of southeastern Iraq for a year or more. The Kurdish separatist parties that supported this arrangement in exchange for absolute control of the Kurdish northeast also appear to have fared well.

Sunni Arabs did a lot better than they did last January, when most boycotted the polls. But political fragmentation left them with fewer seats than they expected. In a further blow, a court ruled last week that at least 90 candidates, most of them Sunni, could not serve if elected because of their Baath Party ties. Still, the biggest losers were secular parties and those who tried to appeal to all of Iraq's communities, not just one religion or ethnic group.

Anyone who hoped that Iraq's broadest exercise in electoral democracy so far might strengthen women's rights, secular protections or national unity will be disappointed. But anyone who expected such gains cannot have been paying attention to recent developments in Iraq.

Iraqi politics are settling into an unsettling pattern. Very few people vote as Iraqis; most vote as Shiites, Sunnis or Kurds. It is progress that Sunni Arabs turned out in large numbers, but that may not be enough to assure them a meaningful role in reshaping a dangerously divisive constitution and forming a broad-based government. If the Shiite parties can keep the support of their Kurdish allies and pick up a few independents, they may be able to assemble a two-thirds majority without Sunni participation and resist the changes Iraq badly needs.

That would be a disastrous choice, foreclosing the possibility of containing the insurgency through political means and dimming the prospects for Iraq's survival as a stable, unified state. But it's a disaster that could be avoided if the victorious parties summoned the sense to reach out to a Sunni Arab community that now has one foot in the political process and the other in the insurgency.

The strong vote for the Shiite religious parties does not necessarily mean that Iraqis have abruptly turned fundamentalist. What it does prove is that the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, or SCIRI, and the Dawa Islamic Party have out-organized, outfought and outmaneuvered rival parties in the Shiite-majority provinces. These two

parties enjoyed multiple advantages, including decades of help from Iran, inclusion by the American occupation authorities in the appointive Governing Council, the strong endorsement of Iraq's leading Shiite ayatollah and backing from intimidating armed party militias.

Their main secular rivals, Ayad Allawi and Ahmad Chalabi, showed few political skills and came with baggage. Allawi, Washington's latest favorite, made more enemies than friends when he served last year as interim prime minister. Chalabi, the earlier American protégé, was distrusted by fellow Shiites because of his ceaseless scheming and loathed by Sunnis for his campaign against anyone even remotely connected to the old Baath Party.

What happens next will be largely up to the leaders of SCIRI and Dawa. Their biggest challenge will be redeeming the pledge made to Sunni leaders that the current

flawed constitution will be radically amended. New language must guarantee that all oil revenues flow to the central government for fair distribution, that laws and policies that discriminate against Sunnis, including prohibitions against former Baathists, are eliminated and that private militias — some now incorporated into the Iraqi army and police — are disarmed and disbanded. The legal rights of women, currently in limbo between civil and religious law, need reinforcement.

The victorious Kurdish parties need to face up to their larger responsibilities. If they continue providing the margin for shutting Sunni Arabs out of power, they could alienate the U.S. support on which the security of their northeastern enclave depends.

The Sunni parties need to face practical political realities, starting with demographic arithmetic. It remains an article of faith among Sunni Arabs that their real share of the Iraqi population is far higher than the 20 percent everyone else places it at. They are right to demand fair treatment and a real share of power, but not right to insist that fraud is the only possible explanation for their failure to win more parliamentary seats. The last thing they should be talking about is reviving the electoral boycott strategy that cost them so heavily earlier this year.

It is in everyone's interest to draw the Sunni Arab community more deeply into political life, not to shut it out. Otherwise, Iraq's future will be civil war and this election will have no real winners.

Iraqi vote shows lack of Sunnis in army

Preliminary results suggest Kurds have big security presence

By Richard A. Oppel Jr.

BAGHDAD: Voting results of Iraqi military and police forces from the Dec. 15 parliamentary election were made public on Monday and indicate that Iraq's security forces, touted as largely representative of the population, in fact have few Sunnis in their ranks.

This is significant because Sunni Arabs, who make up 20 percent of Iraq, came out in large numbers for the election in hopes of taking a share of political power along with the Shiites and Kurds.

Sunnis say they fear that the security forces will be used against them.

While it has been known that Sunnis were underrepresented among the new police and military, the voting data provide the first real indication of the complete reversal of the fortunes of the Sunnis, who ran those forces under the ousted Saddam Hussein. Voting in Iraq has been nearly exclusively along ethnic and sectarian lines.

The newly released figures also suggest that Kurdish pesh merga militiamen have a disproportionate presence in the security forces, perhaps even more so than the Shiites, who comprise three-fifths of the population.

The figures are far from exact and are nothing like a census of the security forces.

But they do provide some strong clues to the ethnic composition and political sympathies of Iraqi soldiers, a crucial yet elusive data set in a country struggling to overcome deep sectarian divisions and defeat an entrenched insurgency dominated by Sunnis.

The data were just one sliver of preliminary electoral results that show that Shiites will once again dominate the new Parliament.

After a relative peaceful respite following the Dec. 15 election, at least 70 Iraqis have been slain in the past four days, including 20 killed Monday. Five policeman died in an early morning ambush in Baquba, while a half-dozen car bombs in Baghdad killed at least five Iraqis. A rocket-propelled grenade also killed an American soldier on patrol in the capital.

Though heavy turnout won Sunni parties a sizable block of Parliament seats, they have accused the ruling Shiites of widespread electoral fraud and demanded a new election. But any chance of a large-scale election re-run has been all but ruled out.

Officials from the Iraqi independent electoral commission say they see no reason for new elections — an opinion seconded on Monday by the chief

United Nations elections official here.

"We do think there might have been fraud in a few isolated places but we don't see this widespread fraud people are talking about," Craig Jenness, head of the UN electoral assistance team, said Monday. "It wasn't perfect, but it was pretty credible given the circumstances."

Although more attention has been focused on the ethnic makeup of the Iraqi government, the U.S. military is sensitive to the perception that the Iraqi forces have few Sunnis, especially in the north, where Kurdish officials have made plain their desire to expand their territory into Sunni and Turkmen regions.

American ground commanders in restive northern and western Sunni regions have also expressed concern about the ability of Kurdish and Shiite troops to interact effectively with local residents and pacify areas dominated by Sunni insurgents. To the commanders, a proportionate representation of Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish soldiers is vital to the country's long-term stability and cohesion.

But on that score there still appears to be a way to go, the election results made public Monday suggest.

The disparity was revealed in a tally of one special category of votes overwhelmingly composed of ballots cast by members of the security forces, according to election supervisors here. The category also included votes from hospital patients and prison inmates.

In that category, 45 percent of votes were cast for the main Kurdish slate of candidates and a combined total of only 7 percent for the three main Sunni political parties. The main Shiite political alliance received 30 percent of the votes.

The heavily disproportionate number of votes for the Kurds and the slight showing for the Sunnis were primarily

a reflection of their relative numbers in the security forces, the election officials said.

By contrast, while final election results will not be available for a week, Iraqi press reports have estimated that Kurds and Sunnis each received about 20 percent of the overall national vote for seats in the Parliament — roughly in line with Iraq's ethnic makeup. The main Shiite political alliance is expected to take a bit less than 50 percent of the seats in Parliament.

A spokesman for the U.S. military command responsible for training the Iraqi Army said he believes the number of Sunnis in the Iraqi military was higher than the special vote suggested.

The spokesman, Lieutenant Colonel Fred Wellman, said that some soldiers voted near their homes on Dec. 15 and that their votes would not be included in the special tally.

Wellman said he did not have detailed estimates of the ethnic composition of the Iraqi military, though he said Sunni representation "clearly lags." He also emphasized the efforts being made to recruit Sunni soldiers, including more than 4,000 signed up in the past six months.

In addition to the military, prison and hospital vote tallies, the independent election commission released separate figures showing that Iraqis living abroad voted evenly for the main Kurdish and Shiite coalitions, with each receiving 30 percent of the overseas vote.

The figures reflected the high number of expatriates who fled the ruthless regime of Saddam, whose government and military were dominated by and favored Sunni.

In the overseas tally, the three main Sunni parties combined received about 7.5 percent of the vote.

The New York Times

Kurds quietly ready for civil war

By Tom Lasseter

Seattle Times - December 29, 2005

Iraq's Kurdish leaders have inserted more than 10,000 of their militia members into Iraqi army divisions in northern Iraq to lay the groundwork to swarm south, seize the oil-rich city of Kirkuk and possibly half of Mosul, Iraq's third-largest city, and secure the borders of an independent Kurdistan. Interviews with Kurdish leaders and troops in the region suggest that U.S. plans to bring unity to Iraq before withdrawing American troops by training and equipping a national army aren't gaining traction.

Instead, some troops formally under U.S. and Iraqi national command are preparing to protect territory and ethnic and religious interests in the event of Iraq's fragmentation, which many of them think is inevitable.

The soldiers said that while they wore Iraqi army uniforms, they considered themselves members of the peshmerga - the Kurdish militia - and were awaiting orders from Kurdish leaders to break ranks. Many said they wouldn't hesitate to kill Iraqi army comrades, especially Arabs, if a fight for an independent Kurdistan erupted. "It doesn't matter if we have to fight the Arabs in our own battalion," said Gabriel Mohammed, a Kurdish soldier in the Iraqi army who was escorting a reporter through Kirkuk. "Kirkuk will be ours."

The Kurds have readied their troops because they've long yearned to establish an independent state and because their leaders expect Iraq to disintegrate, said senior leaders in the peshmerga, literally, "those who face death." The Kurds are mostly secular Sunni Muslims and are ethnically distinct from Arabs.

Their strategy mirrors that of Shiite Muslim parties in southern Iraq that have stocked Iraqi army and police units with members of their own militias and have maintained a separate militia presence throughout Iraq's central and southern provinces.

The militias are illegal under Iraqi law but operate openly in many areas.

Ethnic factions persist

The Defense Department's intelligence agency acknowledges that there are dozens of loosely organized Shiite armies in southern Iraq, Kurdish militias in the north that function as a regular army, and that Sunnis dominate the violent insurgency that includes up to 20,000 fighters in Iraq's four central provinces.

Shiites make up 60 percent of the population and dominate oil-rich areas in the South. Kurds, who represent 17 percent, seek to control the oil resources in the north and have been semiautonomous since the 1991 Persian Gulf War left them protected by U.S. air power. Kurds and Shiites were oppressed under the Sunni-led dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, and both oppose a powerful federal government. "The most important force in Iraq for breaking up the country and preventing a strong central government isn't the insurgency, it's

the Kurds, and the second most important force is the Shiites," James Dobbins, director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at the Rand Corp., told Bloomberg News recently. "It's not an Iraqi army," said Leslie Gelb, former assistant secretary of state and former president of the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations, adding that most of the militias pay first allegiance to their ethnic or tribal group.

Gelb, who visited Iraq for 10 days earlier this year, said Kurds are loyal to Kurds, Shiite militias resembling "mafia operations" run the south, "the central region has the insurgency, and Baghdad is all mixed up," he said. Peshmerga leaders told Knight Ridder they expected the Shiites to create a semiautonomous and then independent state in the south as they would do in the north.

The Bush administration and Iraq's neighbors, including Turkey, which has its own Kurdish insurgency, oppose the nation's fragmentation, fearing it could lead to regional collapse. U.S. plans to withdraw significant numbers of American troops in 2006 will depend on turning U.S.-trained Kurdish and Shiite militiamen into a national army. The interviews with Kurdish troops, however, suggested that as the U.S. military transfers more bases and areas of control to Iraqi units, it may be handing the nation to militias bent more on advancing ethnic and religious interests than on defeating the insurgency and preserving national unity.

Col. Talib Naji, a Kurd serving in the Iraqi army on the edge of Kirkuk, said he would resist any attempts to dilute the Kurdish presence in his brigade. "The Ministry of Defense recently sent me 150 Arab soldiers from the south," Naji said. "After two weeks of service, we sent them away. We did not accept them. We will not let them carry through with their plans to bring more Arab soldiers here."

One key to the Kurds' plan for independence is securing control of Kirkuk, the seat of a province that holds some of Iraq's largest oil fields. Should the Kurds push for independence, Kirkuk and its oil would be a key economic engine.

The city's Kurdish population was driven out by Saddam, whose "Arabization" program paid thousands of Arab families to move there and replace recently deported or slain Kurds. "Kirkuk is Kurdistan; it does not belong to the Arabs," Hamid Afandi, the minister of peshmerga for the Kurdistan Democratic Party, one of the two major Kurdish political groups, said at his office in the Kurdish city of Erbil. "If we can resolve this by talking, fine, but if not, then we will resolve it by fighting."

Afandi said his group had sent at least 10,000 peshmerga to the Iraqi army in northern Iraq. "All of them belong to the central government, but inside they are Kurds ... all peshmerga are under the orders of our leadership," Afandi said.

"We will do our duty"

Jafar Mustafir, a close adviser to Iraq's Kurdish interim president, Jalal Talabani, and the deputy head of peshmerga for

the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, a longtime rival of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, echoed that.

"We will do our best diplomatically, and if that fails we will use force" to secure borders for an independent Kurdistan, Mustafir said. "The government in Baghdad will be too weak to use force against the will of the Kurdish people."

The Kurds have positioned their men in Iraqi army units on the western flank of Kirkuk, in the area that includes Irbil and the volatile city of Mosul, and on the eastern flank in the area that includes the Kurdish city of Sulaimaniyah.

The Iraqi army's 2nd Division, which oversees the Irbil-Mosul area, has some 12,000 soldiers, and at least 90 percent of them are Kurds, according to the division's executive officer. Of the 3,000 Iraqi soldiers in Irbil, some 2,500 were together in a peshmerga unit previously based in the city. A brigade in Mosul, about 3,000 soldiers, is composed of three battalions that were transferred almost intact from former peshmerga units, with many of the same soldiers and officers in the same positions. Mosul's population is split between Kurds and Arabs, and any move by peshmerga units to take it almost certainly would lead to an eruption of Arab violence.

"The Parliament must solve the issue of Kurdistan. If not, we know how to deal with this: We will send Kurdish forces to enforce Kurdistan's boundaries, and that will have to include the newly liberated areas such as the Kurdish sections of Mosul," 1st Lt. Herish Namiq said. "Every single

one of us is peshmerga. Our entire battalion is peshmerga."

Namiq was riding in an unarmored pickup in an Arab neighborhood in eastern Mosul where Sunni Arab insurgents frequently shoot at his men. As he leaned out the window with his AK-47, scanning the streets, he said, "We will do our duty as peshmerga."

Col. Sabar Saleem, the head intelligence officer for the 4th Brigade, said he answered to the peshmerga leadership. He also said he had little use for most Sunni Arabs.

"All of the Sunnis are facilitating the terrorists. They have little influence compared with the Kurds and Shiites, so they allow the terrorists to operate to create pressure and get political concessions," he said. "So they should be killed, too ... the Sunni political leaders in Baghdad are supporting the insurgency, too, and there will be a day when they are tried for it."

Because of a U.S. military mandate, the 4th Division battalion serving in Kirkuk is about 50 percent Kurdish, 40 percent Arab and 10 percent Turkmen. The battalion on the outskirts of Kirkuk is about 60 percent Kurdish.

Capt. Fakhir Mohammed, a former peshmerga and the operations officer for the battalion on Kirkuk's edge, said he wasn't concerned that the Kurds had only a simple majority in the two Kirkuk battalions: "It's not a problem, because we have an entire brigade in Sulaimaniyah that is all Kurd. They would come down here and take the Kurdish side."

Israelis born in Iraq plan visit to Kurdistan

By Sara Toth

Associated Press - December 29, 2005

A group of Israeli Jews who were born in Iraq are planning a spring trip to the Kurdish-controlled zone, but the continuing conflict could keep them from visiting the city where many of them once lived, an organizer said Wednesday.

Anti-Jewish violence that erupted with the creation of Israel in 1948 put an end to centuries of relatively peaceful Jewish life in Iraq. Most Jews left for Israel, unable to even think about returning to visit until the U.S.-led assault toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein.

Now the Mosul Jewry Heritage Center in the Israeli port city of Haifa is organizing tours to northern Iraq, where Kurds, traditionally friendly to Jews, are in control, said Aharon Efroni, chairman of the center. One purpose is to visit the graves of Jews, he said.

The ultimate goal is to visit the city of Mosul, about 75 miles south of the Turkish-Iraqi border, where many taking part in the trip are from. But Efroni said that might not be possible because of the ongoing conflict in Iraq.

The trip was originally limited to 10 people, but many more expressed interest, he said, so there will be at least two groups going in the spring. If all goes well, there will be more trips in the future, he said.

Jewish communities, with synagogues, yeshivas, and charitable organizations, once thrived in Baghdad, Mosul and other Iraqi cities, according to the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center in Or Yehuda, outside Tel Aviv.

Fleeing the violence, about 120,000 Iraqi Jews came to Israel, most of them in a series of airlifts in 1951, according to the World Zionist Organization.

The group plans to fly to Turkey, then take a bus into Iraq through Kurdish-controlled areas, Efroni said. Once inside Iraq, a Kurdish guide will meet the group, he said.

Since the end of the first Gulf war in 1991, many Israelis who were born in Iraq began going back to the country because its Kurdish-controlled areas were relatively autonomous and friendly to Israeli visitors, said Moti Zaken, a former Arab affairs adviser to the Israeli prime minister's office. Like other Israeli immigrants, Jews from Iraq feel bonds with their former homeland. This is especially true for Israelis who came from Kurdistan, now part of Iraq, Zaken said. "Relatively, Jews had good relationships with the Kurds and Muslims there," he said. "Therefore, they have some good memories about the culture."

Zaken said Israelis used to go to Turkey and look across its southern border to Iraq, "just to see and smell their homeland."

Tribe in northern Iraq feels let down by U.S.

Yazidis still struggle for a political voice, escape from poverty

By Ann Scott Tyson

THE WASHINGTON POST

KHARSI, Iraq—When the 101st Airborne first reached this remote village in Iraq's northwestern Sinjar Mountains in 2003, elderly Yazidi tribesmen were thrilled: Their ancient religious prophecy had come true.

"We believed that Jesus Christ was coming with a force from overseas to save us," said the village leader, Khalil Sadoon Haji Jundu, wrapping his gold-trimmed cloak around him against the morning chill. Scrawled behind him on the wall, images of U.S. helicopters and soldiers depicted the arrival of the blue-eyed fighters awaited by the Yazidi, an obscure sect of sun worshipers with roots in Zoroastrianism who have inhabited the valleys of the Sinjar range for centuries.

But more than two years later, as the Yazidis struggle for a political voice and an escape from the poverty they suffered during decades of oppression under President Saddam Hussein, tribesmen say they feel let down.

"We thought you guys were our saviors," Mr. Jundu told Lt. Col. Gregory Reilly as the two ate figs and sipped spiced coffee one recent morning. "We still believe it. But we actually thought we'd be helped a little more," he said, his voice tinged with frustration. "We're kind of disappointed."

From subsistence farmers to activists, Yazidis inhabiting the sand-swept highlands near the Syrian border complain that despite new freedoms—including a slot on Iraq's Dec. 15 election ballot—they still are pushed around by bigger, wealthier and more politically powerful groups. One of the central power struggles here isn't between Shiite and Sunni Muslims, but between the Kurds, who are Muslims, and the Yazidis. By all accounts, the Kurds are winning.

After the fall of Mr. Hussein in 2003, Kurdish political parties backed by hundreds of militiamen known as *pesh merga* rushed to fill a power vacuum in this part of Nineveh province.



The Yazidi, sun worshipers who have lived in the valleys of Iraq's Sinjar Mountains for centuries, suffered under the rule of Saddam Hussein. Now they say their struggle for political and economic relief has been stymied by Kurdish parties.

"We do have freedom, but the invasion of the Kurds and all their *pesh merga* and money from the north are overwhelming us," said Soad Hassan Qassim, a Yazidi women's activist in the town of Sununi.

Yazidis, with an estimated several hundred thousand members in Iraq, are ethnically related to Kurds but aren't Muslim and so eat pork and drink alcohol. Tolerant of other religions, they worship the peacock as a symbol of a powerful angel and sunlight as an expression of God. Yazidi women go without veils and circulate in public much as men do.

Ms. Qassim and other Yazidi activists say they want their children to learn Arabic but lack the choice because of a proliferation of Kurdish-language schools funded by the dominant Kurdish political parties. They also accuse the Kurdish parties of buying Yazidi votes with offers of jobs and financial assistance, and of election irregularities such as forcing Yazidi observers out of polling places. In the district seat of Sinjar, government officials display the Kurdish flag and conduct business in Kurdish.

"I'm an educated guy, but I can't read" Kurdish, said Mirza Mundo Hussein, representative for the Yazidi Movement for Reform and Progress, over soda in his small office in Sununi, protected by civilians with AK-47 assault rifles. He says many Yazidis now in office, including three members of parlia-

ment and the mayor of Sinjar, have been "bought" by Kurdish parties.

In downtown Sinjar, behind high dirt barricades constructed after a car bombing, the mayor's office stands a few feet from a huge Kurdi-

stan Democratic Party headquarters heavily guarded by *pesh merga* in dark-green uniforms. Inside, Mayor Daqhil Qasim Hason, who makes a point of saying he is of the Yazidi faith but is ethnically Kurdish, sat in a maroon leather chair drinking tea with the KDP leader for western Nineveh, Sarbast Omar Hassan Terwanishi.

After decades as an underground movement here, the KDP now has 10 offices and tens of thousands of supporters in the Sinjar district. The KDP won 80,000 votes in the Dec. 15 elections, or about 75% of the total for western Nineveh, compared with about 11,000 for the Yazidi party, according to the parties' tallies.

Mr. Terwanishi rejected accusations of KDP voter manipulation, leveling his own charges at the Yazidis. "The voice those other small parties got was from forgery and fraud," he said, waving an envelope that he said contained evidence of broken seals on election booths.

The mayor and KDP leaders make clear they will fight a

U.S.-backed plan to withdraw the as many as 500 *pesh merga* from Sinjar and western Nineveh as

early as next month. "If they leave, this area will become like Tall Afar or other difficult, violent places," Mr. Hason warned, referring to a city farther west that had fallen into insurgent hands this year.

The KDP's political and military sway here is matched by its economic impact through investments and aid to the region. The party has hired 1,200 teachers, rented school buildings and water tanks, and provided medicine and emergency supplies of blood to local hospitals. It also gives money every month to Sinjar's poorest residents.

Yazidis, meanwhile, are appealing for U.S. support for their fledgling political movement, asking U.S. officials to mediate election disputes and to aid their quest for greater economic independence.

In Kharsi, Mr. Jundu greeted Col. Reilly, the U.S. military commander in the region, with a flourish of praise, spraying him with puffs of cologne. Then, gazing over terraced fields of tobacco and fig trees, he de-

scribed his people's plight.

"Back in the Saddam days, it was like someone threw a big rock on us and we fell down the hill with a rock on our chest," he told Col. Reilly. "Now, with Saddam gone, we feel the rock has been lifted off our chest but no one has helped us up."

Forced off their farmland by Mr. Hussein decades ago, the 137 Yazidi families in Kharsi cultivate tiny plots here in the Valley of Tiers, traveling by donkey to lowland markets to sell produce and buy food. Some work as laborers on lowland farms owned by Arabs, but drought in recent years has shriveled this income. With jobs almost nonexistent, many Yazidi youth seek to escape poverty by joining the Iraqi police or army—but even here the Yazidis say they face discrimination, with only two or three from the village gaining entry.

Desperate for help, the village welcomed Kurdish funds for refurbishing its school. In return, the whole village voted for the KDP in the Dec. 15 election.

"We, the Yazidis, are the weakest people in the world," Mr. Jundu said, inviting Col. Reilly to a breakfast of fried eggs, soft cheese, flatbread and honey. "The Americans have the strongest army in the world—you have air power and sea power, and even the land is afraid of you. You are the supreme law—why can't you make things work and help us?"

Col. Reilly, commander of First Squadron, Third Armored Cavalry Regiment, and a Gulf War veteran, is used to such expectations from Yazidis. Once a villager asked him to park a tank in front of his house "forever." He promised he would return with a pallet of packaged military meals and a one-day medical clinic for the village and would hire three villagers to work at his camp in Sinjar. "We'll do what we can," Col. Reilly said.

"Thank you," Mr. Jundu said heartily, pulling out a worn book with blank pages. "May I have your autograph?"

Kurds begin meetings to seek coalition rule

From news reports

BAGHDAD: Kurdish leaders began Tuesday what is expected to be a series of meetings with Shiite and Sunni politicians to try to form a "national unity" government that would contain Iraq's main sectarian and ethnic groups.

Masoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party, met with Abdul Aziz Hakim, the head of the Shiite coalition that is expected to capture the largest share of votes cast in the Dec. 15 election.

Hakim is expected to meet Wednesday with Jalal Talabani, the president of Iraq and head of the other large Kurdish party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

The meetings with Hakim will be followed by discussion with at least three other groups: the Iraqi Consensus Front, a coalition of mostly Sunni political parties, and the National Democratic Rally, a group of secular parties led by a former prime minister, Ayad Allawi.

Iraqi officials with knowledge of the meetings said the Kurds were trying to form a government that would be supported by more than just a simple majority of those elected to the Parliament, and include representatives of all the major Iraqi parties.

Such an outcome is strongly favored by the United States, whose ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad, spent Christmas Day with the two Kurdish leaders at the mountain resort of Dukan.

The negotiations come at a tense

They talk first with a Shiite leader

time. Preliminary results from the voting have sparked anger among a number of Iraqi leaders, who complain that widespread fraud tilted the election in favor of the Shiite alliance.

Iraqi and U.S. officials are concerned about the Sunnis, whose inclusion in the new government is considered vital in helping to marginalize the insurgency.

American and Iraqi officials have said they would like at least some of the Sunni parties to be included in a government.

They have expressed some worry that the Shiites and the Kurds, who are likely to comprise more than half of the seats in Parliament, would either leave the Sunnis out of a new government altogether or agree to the outlines of the government and bring in the Sunnis as a secondary partner.

There were further signs Tuesday that the good feeling that had spread since the large Sunni turnout in the Dec. 15th election was rapidly dissipating.

In Baghdad, several thousand supporters of the Sunni political parties gathered to protest the results of the election.

The protest, which also included supporters of Allawi, was the latest in a number that appear to be part of an orchestrated effort to gain the Sunnis

more seats in Parliament than they won at the polls.

In violence, at least three people were killed and six wounded in attacks Tuesday in the northern oil city of Kirkuk and the town of Mahaweel, 75 kilometers, or 45 miles, south of Baghdad.

And the U.S. military said four Americans died Monday, two of them in a helicopter crash in western Baghdad.

Workers in the Shiite holy city of Karbala uncovered remains believed to be part of a mass grave dating to a 1991 uprising against Saddam Hussein.

(Reuters, AP)

Herald  Tribune

December 28, 2005

Vers un gouvernement d'union nationale en Irak

MOYEN-ORIENT

La contestation des résultats des législatives du 15 décembre est de plus en plus forte. Le président Talabani doit engager des contacts avec les différentes composantes du pays.

ASSOMMÉ par la violence des attentats quotidiens, l'Irak se débat désormais également dans une crise politique après les législatives contestées du 15 décembre. Dimanche, plusieurs milliers de manifestants ont de nouveau défilé dans les rues de Bagdad, mais aussi dans le bastion rebelle sunnite de Faloudja, pour protester contre la victoire attendue de la liste de chiites conservateurs.

Pour tenter de sortir de l'ornière, l'instauration d'un gouvernement d'union nationale est de plus en plus évoquée. Depuis

mercredi, le président Jalal Talabani a donc engagé des contacts politiques avec l'intention de rapprocher les points de vue. L'idée s'est renforcée dimanche

lors d'une réunion de leaders kurdes dans le nord du pays, en présence de l'ambassadeur des Etats-Unis, Zalmay Khalilzad. Le chef de la région autonome, Massoud Barzani, y a en effet plaidé en faveur d'« un gouvernement d'union nationale représentant toutes les composantes du peuple irakien, des Arabes sunnites aux Kurdes en passant par les chiites ».

Nouvel appel à manifester

Du côté des contestataires des résultats, le leader sunnite Saleh Motlak s'est lui montré ouvert à « la formation d'un gouvernement national qui corrige l'injustice subie par certains ou pour de nouvelles élections ». Il estime néanmoins, tout comme d'autres leaders sunnites, que les résultats annoncés ont été falsifiés. Le Front de la concorde nationale, alliance de trois groupes sunnites et de la liste de l'ancien premier ministre, le chiite laïc Iyad Allawi, ainsi que 35 groupes et mouvements politiques exigent l'annulation du scrutin et l'organisation d'une nouvelle consulta-

tion. Ils ont déposé auprès de la commission électorale quelque 1 500 plaintes pour fraudes, mais seules 37 ont été classées comme de nature à affecter le résultat. Ils appellent à une nouvelle manifestation aujourd'hui à Bagdad.

Samedi, les leaders chiites conservateurs sont montés au créneau pour rejeter ces accusations. Selon eux, la victoire de l'Alliance irakienne unifiée (AIU), qui groupe notamment le Daoua de l'actuel chef du gouvernement, Ibrahim al Djaafari, et le Conseil suprême de la révolution islamique en Irak (CSRII), ne représente que « la volonté du peuple ». Ils ont mis en garde contre la poursuite des manifestations de rue, y voyant une tentative d'influencer la commission électorale.

Les chiites religieux seraient cependant également enclins à former une coalition de gouvernement ouverte à d'autres formations. Le plus prestigieux des chefs religieux chiites, le grand ayatollah Sistani, se serait également rallié à cette idée d'un gouvernement. Le président Jalal Ta-

labani souhaiterait maintenant inviter la tête de liste chiite conservatrice, Abdel Aziz Hakim, leader du CSRII, à des discussions qui s'annoncent délicates.

Dimanche, l'ancien secrétaire d'Etat américain Colin Powell a reconnu craindre que les dernières élections accentuent les divisions. « Il apparaît, a-t-il souligné, (...) qu'il existe un fort soutien pour la majorité chiite qui est, à mon avis, plus fondamentale que ce que nous aimerions tous. »

T. B. (AVEC AFP)

LE FIGARO

27 décembre 2005

L'armée irakienne n'est pas prête à prendre la relève

BAGDAD

ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL

Au moment où, pour la première fois, les Etats-Unis annoncent pour 2006 une réduction de leurs forces en Irak, la question est posée de savoir quand les forces de sécurité irakiennes seront-elles en mesure de prendre véritablement la relève ? Labeed Abbawi, vice-ministre des affaires étrangères, bondit lorsqu'on lui parle d'agenda. « C'est ridicule. Tout le monde est d'accord pour que la force multinationale reste, sinon il y aurait un vide. L'agenda, ce sera pour quand nous serons prêts et ensuite ce doit être graduel. Réclamer un agenda n'est qu'un slogan politique. Il faut être réaliste. En plus, ce serait un signal d'encouragement aux terroristes. Cela conduirait au chaos. »

Combien de temps les Américains et les Britanniques devront-ils donc patienter pour que les Irakiens eux-mêmes soient en mesure d'assurer la sécurité intérieure du pays, de protéger les frontières et de lutter contre l'insurrection ? Personne n'est en mesure de le dire car trop de points d'interrogation subsis-

tent. Des progrès incontestables ont été accomplis. L'armée irakienne commence à être efficace et elle est, de plus, souvent associée, sinon directement engagée, dans des opérations contre la guérilla, même si elle ne dispose pas de moyens lourds, et notamment de blindés. Le général Martin Dempsey, chargé de la formation des soldats irakiens, par-

le des 33 bataillons qui contrôlent désormais « leurs propres espaces de combat », alors qu'en mars ils n'étaient que trois. De fait, l'armée américaine est beaucoup moins présente, y compris dans le centre de Bagdad. Elle sert de plus en plus d'appui. Quelque 2 500 officiers de l'armée de Saddam Hussein doivent être intégrés dans les six mois.

Mais la nouvelle armée irakienne pêche surtout par un manque d'officiers intermédiaires entre le simple soldat et le haut gradé. Comme le reconnaît le gé-

néral Babakir Zebari, chef d'état-major : « Nous avons encore besoin de temps pour boucher les trous au niveau de la formation, de l'armement et du matériel », a-t-il déclaré à l'Agence France-Presse.

Améliorer le recrutement

Côté police aussi, des progrès ont été réalisés, même si elle manque aussi cruellement de moyens. Le général Adnan Abdel Rahman, au ministère de l'intérieur, reconnaît que le recrutement n'a pas toujours été des meilleurs, que

CHIFFRES

TROUPES IRAKIENNES. Deux cent douze mille soldats et policiers – 100 000 soldats et 112 000 policiers – ont déjà été « entraînés et équipés » en Irak. Ces effectifs devraient passer à 270 000 en juillet 2006 et à 300 000 à la fin de la même année.

ARMÉE AMÉRICAINE. Avec l'acheminement de 20 000 hommes en renfort pour les élections du 15 décembre, l'armée américaine compte 160 000 hommes en Irak. Ses effectifs doivent être réduits d'ici au printemps 2006, pour tomber sous le seuil de 138 000.

des criminels ont été engagés, qu'il y a des infiltrations de terroristes au sein même des forces de l'ordre. Mais, dit-il, « en partant de zéro, il n'est pas facile d'opérer une sélection rigoureuse ».

« Aujourd'hui, on procède à des épurations et à la fin de l'année l'Irak sera sécurisé », assure-t-il. Quant aux dérapages et aux bavures commis par les brigades spéciales, il les minimise et exhibe un paquet de cassettes vidéo dans lesquelles, indique-t-il, « les terroristes reconnaissent avoir commis des atrocités ».

Les tortures commises dans la prison de Jadria par les forces de police ont été, selon lui, beaucoup exagérées, puisque sur 176 prisonniers seuls 7 ont été maltraités. Les méthodes plutôt brutales de la brigade spéciale Wolf sont à ses yeux justifiées :

« Lorsque l'on fait la guerre au terrorisme, il est quelquefois nécessaire de ne pas prendre de gants, notamment quand un terroriste avoue 60 assassinats », plaide-t-il. Autre-

ment dit, toutes les exactions commises sous couvert du ministère de l'intérieur, aux mains des chiïtes, contre les sunnites ne sont que des affabulations.

Les forces de sécurité irakiennes ont encore beaucoup de chemin à faire avant de devenir véritablement efficaces, et surtout autonomes. Les autorités américaines comptent sur un recrutement accéléré. Les effectifs de 300 000 soldats et policiers confondus projetés pour la fin 2006 ne suffiront sans doute pas pour permettre un désengagement véritable. À défaut d'être total, de la force multinationale. Mais le premier objectif des Irakiens est de voir disparaître des villes les forces d'occupation.

Les statistiques officielles des ministères de la santé, de la défense et de l'intérieur pour novembre donnent une idée du chemin qu'il reste à faire pour rétablir un semblant de sécurité. Il y a eu 24 attentats à la voiture piégée, 30 attaques

à l'explosif et au mortier, 58 attaques avec des armes diverses et 3 kamikazes portant des ceintures explosives, 666 personnes ont péri dont 548 civils. Depuis le 1^{er} janvier, on dénombre 5 446 Irakiens tués dont 3 862 civils, 1 154 policiers et 430 soldats. En outre, 1 662 insurgés ont été tués. Georges Bush a reconnu que depuis le début de la guerre au moins 30 000 Irakiens avaient péri.

Pour inverser la tendance et infléchir durablement le nombre des morts, les Irakiens fondent beaucoup d'espairs sur la mise en place d'un nouveau gouvernement issu du scrutin du 15 décembre. Adel Abdel Mahdi, de la liste chiïte de l'Alliance unifiée irakienne, probable vainqueur des élections et à ce titre grand prétendant au poste de premier ministre du « nouvel Irak », reconnaît que ce sera sa première tâche. ■

MICHEL BÔLE-RICHARD

UN aide finds Iraq vote 'credible'

Despite setback, Sunnis persist in seeking a new election

By Sabrina Tavernise

BAGHDAD: In a blow to Iraq's Sunni Arabs, a UN official stated publicly for the first time Wednesday that the results of the recent parliamentary election were firm, and ruled out holding another vote, a demand set forth by some Sunni groups.

"The UN is of the view that these elections were transparent and credible," said Craig Jenness, the official who led the agency's election coordination effort.

"Complaints must be weighed thoroughly," he said, but, "we at the UN see no justification in calls for a re-run of the elections."

The announcement, made at a news conference in Baghdad, was a fresh setback for Iraq's Sunni Arabs, who claim that ballot box stuffing and other fraud were widespread and that the results have been distorted. The United Nations provided assistance to Iraq's Election Commission, which ran the vote, and its public show of support bolstered the authorities' claims that the vote was largely legitimate.

It did not appear that Sunni Arab parties would be quick to drop their demands.

Dhafir al-Ani, spokesman for the main Sunni alliance, the Iraqi Consensus Front, which has been particularly vocal in its criticism of the results, said that his group rejected the conclusion put forth by Jenness and that they would continue to press their demands for a substantial revamping of the vote.

"Several international workers sitting inside the green zone are not able to evaluate the election matter," Ani said by telephone Wednesday. "We still

believe that huge fraud happened in the Iraqi election and it completely changed the results."

In addition, Sunnis and secular parties that have organized demonstrations in a number of Iraqi cities to protest the results of the vote, continued to do so Wednesday, with a large crowd filling an area near the main government building in Samarra, north of Baghdad. Protesters with banners also gathered in Baquba, northeast of Baghdad.

Several Sunni parties, as well as some secular groups, have called for the authorities to hold a new vote, but that demand looks increasingly unlikely to be met. Adel al-Lami, general director of the electoral commission, said at the

'We at the UN see no justification in calls for a re-run of the elections.'

news conference that the commission might cancel some ballots in some areas, but that it had all but ruled out holding a new vote because it had not found evidence of widespread forgery.

Iraq's electoral commission said in a statement that it might cancel some of the results in certain polling stations located in Baghdad, the northern cities of Erbil and Kirkuk, and the provinces of Anbar in the west, Nineveh in the north and Diyala in central Iraq.

Two teams of investigators are reviewing results in the southern cities of

Babel and Basra, according to the statement. The results of all the voting reviews will be announced in several days, and they can be challenged within two days of the announcement.

The election development came as Shiite and Kurdish leaders met in northern Iraq to discuss forming a government that would include representatives from all Iraq's religious and ethnic groups.

Abdul Aziz Hakim, the head of the Shiite coalition that is expected to capture the largest share of votes that were cast in the parliamentary election on Dec. 15, met with Masoud Barzani, the leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party, and said that he had held "preliminary consultations" on the formation of a government, but that talks were still in the very early stages. He indicated that the Sunnis were not yet involved.

"We need to evaluate the previous alliance and study its weaknesses and strengths," Hakim said at a news conference with Barzani, The Associated Press reported. "Then we will try to include the others."

In a speech to the Kurdish Parliament, Hakim emphasized the bonds between the Kurds and the Shiites, and supported the Kurdish demand, now codified in the constitution, to hold a referendum on the future of the ethnically divided city of Kirkuk.

The New York Times

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune

December 29, 2005

28 DÉCEMBRE 2005

Libération



A Bagdad, hier, des manifestants sunnites protestent contre les fraudes aux élections du 15 décembre et réclament la formation d'un gouvernement d'union nationale.

Les sunnites dénoncent les fraudes qui ont amené la victoire chiite aux législatives.

La tension entre communautés ravivée par les urnes en Irak

Les législatives du 15 décembre devaient contribuer à la stabilisation de l'Irak. Elles n'ont fait que dresser davantage les communautés les unes contre les autres, comme le montrent les manifestations quasi quotidiennes de groupes sunnites qui contestent les résultats et demandent de nouvelles élections. Principale accusée: la liste de l'Alliance irakienne unifiée (AIU, qui fédère les partis islamistes chiites). Selon des résultats encore provisoires, elle apparaît comme la grande triomphatrice du scrutin, en dépit d'un bilan gouvernemental accablant. Non contente d'avoir fait régner la terreur dans le sud du pays au moment du scrutin, y compris par des assassinats d'opposants, et d'avoir bourré les urnes, fait pression sur les électeurs, elle a eu recours massivement à des fraudes pour s'imposer à Bagdad. Dans cette ville que se partagent notamment chiites et sunnites, l'AIU obtiendrait quelque 60 % des suffrages, un chiffre supérieur à... celui de la communauté chiite. Depuis, les leaders sunnites, qui

s'étaient engagés pour la première fois dans le processus électoral, enragent. D'autant plus que certains, comme dans le bastion sunnite de Ramadi, avaient même fait protéger les urnes par les insurgés. «Dans les villes du Sud, le triomphe chiite peut se comprendre. Pas à Bagdad. Pour les sunnites, c'est une douche froide. Cela veut dire que les leaders chiites ont confessionnalisé la ville et voulu dresser une communauté contre une autre», souligne le politologue et anthropologue irakien Hosham Dawod.

A ce jour, l'AIU obtiendrait près de 150 députés (sur 275), soit un score supérieur à celui du scrutin intérimaire de janvier 2005 (140 députés). À l'inverse, la liste de l'ancien Premier ministre Iyad Allaoui, lui-même chiite mais laïque et proaméricain, soutenue par les communistes et des sunnites modérés, n'aurait qu'une quinzaine de sièges contre 40

auparavant. Les islamistes chiites pourraient donc avoir la majorité absolue au Parlement, au grand dam des sun-

nites, des laïcs mais aussi des Américains, qui entendaient former un gouvernement d'union nationale – qui leur permettrait un retrait graduel plus facile de leurs forces.

Revanche. Un tel résultat est d'autant plus inacceptable pour Washington qu'au sein de l'AIU ce sont les partisans du trublion Moqtada al-Sadr, radicalement anti-américain, qui se taillent la part du lion, au détriment des autres formations. «Lui et ses alliés représentent aujourd'hui la première force politique en Irak. C'est la revanche des marginaux, des déshérités. Moqtada a mobilisé sa base sur son opposition à un Etat laïque, laquelle a ●●●

●●● trouvé un certain écho au sein des radicaux sunnites», ajoute Hosham Dawod.

En fait, ce vote massivement confessionnel, qui se traduit par l'émergence d'un bloc chiite, est un camouflet pour George W. Bush, qui avait parlé de «grand pas en avant dans l'accomplissement de notre objectif»: susciter un Irak démocratique et un allié au Moyen-Orient. En fait, les Etats-Unis sont plus que jamais sur le quivive face à la future majorité parlementaire. Non contente

d'être anti-américaine, celle-ci défend des positions hostiles à celles de Washington: confessionnalisation de l'Etat, dégradation de la situation des femmes, hostilité aux Kurdes, clientélisme acharné... Pour l'affaiblir, les Etats-Unis ne sont pas hostiles à la dénonciation des fraudes. Cela leur permettrait de faire pression sur les chiites pour qu'ils acceptent un gouvernement d'union nationale où serait présent Allaoui et dont les principaux ministères – Défense, Intérieur, Affaires étrangères – échapperaient à l'AIU.

Sur le terrain, les réactions aux fraudes ne se sont pas fait attendre. Les listes sunnites se sont réunies au sein du mouvement Maram (initiales arabes pour le Congrès du refus d'élections falsifiées). Elles ont été renforcées par celle d'Allaoui. Selon Ali Tamimi, le porte-parole, pas moins de 42 partis et groupes ont adhéré à cette organisation: «Cela ne signifie pas que nous boycottons le processus politique. Le Maram cherche, au contraire, à faire avancer ce processus, mais en dévoilant les fraudes qui ont accompagné les opérations de vote.»

Union nationale. Les représentants de la liste chiite ont répliqué en dénonçant ce qu'ils considèrent comme une pression de la rue et en affirmant qu'il n'était pas question d'organiser un nouveau scrutin. De son côté, le président irakien, le Kurde Jalal Talabani, s'emploie à rapprocher les deux camps. «Il y a une crise [...] et il faut reconnaître l'existence des problèmes au lieu de les cacher.» Il a défendu aussi l'idée d'un gouvernement d'union nationale, dimanche lors d'une réunion de leaders kurdes avec Massoud Barzani, le chef de la région autonome kurde, en présence de l'ambassadeur américain, Zalmay Khalilzad. Le plus prestigieux des chefs religieux chiites, le grand aya-tollah Sistani, qui avait déjà montré une certaine distance avec la liste chiite, contrairement au précédent scrutin, a fait aussi savoir qu'il y était favorable. Reste à convaincre l'AIU et, derrière elle, sans doute Téhéran. ◆

JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN

Kurds remain as powerful

According to preliminary results of the last week's Iraqi elections released by the Iraqi High Electoral Commission, the Shiite Alliance has, again, come first with the Kurdistan List 730 second.

By Dashti Salih
Irbil Correspondent

Kurds will apparently have a strong position after the elections. They feel no list can form the next Iraqi government without them. Furthermore, Kurds see their future being as a bright one, with no one any longer able to cause them harm, or do wrong against them.

Position of Kurds in the next council

In the last Iraqi National Assembly, Kurds were the second power with 77 seats in the House. This time, however, the number will be lower due to the strong participation of certain Iraqi groups that had decided to boycott last January's election.

Some Kurdish politicians anticipate that the Kurdish position will not remain as powerful. Dr Nouri Talabany, independent Kurdistan MP and professor of law remarked, "The Kurdish position is not stronger than it was (in Jan 2005) because of others' partici-

pation - namely the Arab Sunnis, which have made the role of the Kurds and the Shiites less than before. However, I do hope that the Kurdish faction will remain the second largest in parliament and balance the power between the Shiites and Sunnis." This is despite the fact that many others have different ideas and see the Kurds' position strong in the next Iraqi council.

"The Kurdish domain in the next Iraqi House of Representatives will decrease since in this election, Iraq was divided into 18 centers whereas in the first one, Iraq was simply one center. But nonetheless, the Kurds will remain as powerful as before in Baghdad," said Sa'di Ahmed Pira, politburo member of Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

In the last Council, Kurds stood firm on some points and made other sides subject to their demands. Deputy Speaker of Kurdistan Parliament,

Dr Kamal Kirkuki said that from now on, no decision would be made by the next Iraqi House of Representatives without consent from the Kurdish.

The nature of the council-to-be

In the formation of the previous Iraqi council, there was a gap since all Iraqi people did not cast their vote. The council was dominated by Kurds and Shiites, with the Sunni Arabs simply acting like onlookers, closely watching what was going on in Parliament.

"The next council will be multiethnic and representatives of all Iraqi peoples such as the Shiites, the Kurds, the Sunnis, the Turkmen, and the Chaldo-Assyrians will go to the next council," said Pira.

Mr. Omer Ismael, Head of the Kurdistan Islamic Union in Irbil deemed Arab Sunnis' participation in the election a good sign, believing that it might lead to diminish

the rate of violence in the country. "It is not true to say Sunnis will take seats from Kurds and Shiites, but Sunnis being absent in the last Iraqi National Assembly was not a normal situation," said Ismael.

Whom will the Kurds cooperate with?

It is not easy at this point for Kurds to say which side or list will form a coalition in the full-term council with them. "We will create an alliance in the next council according to a standard, which is to what extent is the side, who wants to form a coalition with Kurds, ready to listen to the Kurds' legal demands?" Kirkuki said.

Furthermore, he suggested that the party that the Kurdistan list wants to make coalition with should believe in democracy, agree on the federal system of the country, and not believe in absolute authority.

The Kurds' demands will be on the top of the agenda in any negotiation between the Kurdistan list and any other list. As Mr. Ismael said, "Kurds have issues concerning their rights and

some demands that they want to achieve. Whoever is ready to reply to such demands, Kurds should form a coalition with."

In Dr. Talabany's opinion, the Kurdistan Alliance should aim to cooperate with Allawi's list, but if this is not possible, they would have to cooperate with the Shiites, though with certain conditions. "The future Prime Minister must not be extremist like Jaafari - someone more open like Adil Abdul Mehdi, who is more liberal and understands the rights of the

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I prefer the
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Kurdish people," he said.

Azad Jundiani, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan politburo member stated in an interview with radio Sawa that the Kurdistan list will negotiate with all sides to form a wide-based government from all political parties, which gained seats in the election.

It was reported that the Kurdistan list planned to

make coalition with Iraqi list, headed by former Iraqi Prime Minister, Ayad Al-lawli and a Sunni Al-Tawafiq list.

Kurdistan list and KIU list

In the last election, the KIU separated from Kurdistan list and decided to run for office with an independent list. During the campaign-

ing days, things did not go quite as smoothly as expected. Some people in the Badinan area became angry towards the KIU List's decision, which led to a lot of criticism by the Kurdistan president and high Kurdish officials.

"Before and after the election, the KIU has always been the same, the dispute between the Kurdistan list

and the KIU was a domestic one. I anticipate the KIU list members in Baghdad stand in the same front with Kurdistan list members," pera said.

Mr. Ismael, KIU high official said, confirming that the KIU's attitude towards Kurdish national issues will not fluctuate, whether they participate as part of the Kurdistan list or not.

"The KIU will be the main supporter to the Kurdistan list to achieve Kurdish demands. We see this as a national, as well as a religious duty," he added.



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Kurdistan in the post-Saddam era

By Baqi Barzani
The Globe-Virginia

For myriad decades, Iraq was governed by high profile Bathist forces with strong aristocratic family ties. These forces under the clout of absolutists, like Saddam as the last one, subjected the Iraqi multitude to most inhuman and barbaric practices including systematic bigotry, banishment, exile, execution, and the use of wean of mass destruction. It imposed the war in Iran culminating in more than one million dead, more than 2 millions injured and handicap, and several million of displaced humans. The usurpation of Kuwait left thousand of fatalities and one hundred and fifty thousands dead Iraqis. The crackdown on Kurdish and Shiite upheavals are assessed each in exclusive of two hundred thousand life cost. The material loss from Saddam's fascism and totality is beyond delusions.

In the wake of US de-throning Saddam Hussein regime, Kurdistan has been rapidly democratized, modernized and veered cohesively into a multi-ethnic, multi-religion and multi-sect cloud nine. Bush administration's commitment to a massive reconstruction effort in Kurdistan has crafted substantive after-effects. The pro-democracy campaign in Kurdis-

tan has shaped a populist boom comparable in magnitude and significance to the one fashioned by the end of the Cold War. Americans and Kurds share a unique bond formulated on their shared values, joint commitment to freedom and democracy, and mutual interests in triumphing over terrorism and promoting security and stability in Kurdistan.

In the new post-Saddam era, Kurdistan has gained a bursting forth economy and a reconstruction boost in large part due to international assistance. "Primarily, on the whole, that assistance is from the United States in the economic aspect, renewal, and in the security services, including the training

of the Kurdish army and police, and the strengthening of Kurdish administration. Most Kurds are beholden to US philanthropist adherence in Kurdistan and deem them as their strategic allies in the region. Pro-Americanism sentiments and representation into political process is surpassingly on the rise and most citizens are getting more adapted to benevolent US takeover.

In Kurdistan, massive increment has become nascent in terms of human rights, political and civil liberties. The ratio of redundancy is shrinking and the KRG authorities have initiated major re-



In Kurdistan, massive increment has become nascent in terms of human rights, political and civil liberties. The ratio of redundancy is shrinking and the KRG authorities have initiated major re-establishment and redevelopment ventures. Photo by Walid Ismael/Globe

establishment and redevelopment ventures. After lingering browbeating, Iraqis are now enthusiastically embracing the potentials of unskewed media after years of grave censorship. Under the old regime the regional stations minimally relayed programs produced in Baghdad. The system was heavily centralized and tightly illicit. The slump

of the old regime triggered a media free-for-all. Iraqis were soon able to opt from more than 200 publications, relative to just a handful during the Saddam era. The citizens of Iraq experienced a modest but potentially significant increase in cultural, civic and political rights.

The newly drafted Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the self-rep-

resentative government generally respects these rights in practice; however, there were some limitations. Newspapers and magazines are regularly published, and television channels broadcast, investigative reports and allegations of government wrongdoing, and the press generally promotes human rights and criticizes perceived government lapses.

In Kurdistan region, human rights records remained slightly fragile.

There is no institutionalized effort to guarantee that journalists can express their voices without fear of victimization or re-

taliation. The verdict of a prominent KDP-critic Dr. Said Qadir short of any legal averment was an indicative case of consti-

tutional violations and application of abusive policies and practices against journalists. There is definitely freedom of expression but there is just no freedom after expression.

Kurdistan has stood out as a paradise for its exclusivity in prosperity, social equity, economic growth and security and harvested creditable steps forward in the preceding decade.

