

INSTITUT  
**KURDE**  
DE PARIS

Information and liaison bulletin

**N°288**

**MARCH 2009**

*The publication of this Bulletin enjoys a subsidy  
from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGCID)  
and the Fonds d'action et de soutien pour l'intégration et la lutte contre les discriminations  
(The Fund for action and support of integration and the struggle against discrimination)*

This bulletin is issued in French and English

Price per issue : France: 6 € — Abroad : 7,5 €  
Annual subscription (12 issues) France : 60 € — Elsewhere : 75 €

Monthly review

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Numéro de la Commission Paritaire : 659 15 A.S.

ISBN 0761 1285

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### MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN TURKEY: A DROP IN AKP VOTES, DTP GAINS IN THE KURDISH REGIONS

**W**ith just over 31% of the vote the justice and development party (AKP) remains the dominant party in Turkey, followed by the People's Republican Party ((CHP) the principal opposition force in parliament that secured 23.3% of the vote and the nationalist action party (MHP) with 16.1% of the vote.

This victory is, in fact, a semi defeat for the Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who had

declared that he would consider anything less than 47% of the vote (the score he won in the 2007 general elections) a setback. *"That's not enough"* the Prime Minister admitted on hearing the results, *"We should learn a lesson from this"*.

In the Kurdish regions, the AKP even lost ground to the DTP, which has won the city of Van, and held on to Diyarbakir, where the sitting mayor Osman Baydemir, won 65.43%. This was not unexpected, as he is

very popular, despite the government's declared intention of capturing this symbolic stronghold of Kurdish resistance. Another important town won by DTP, is Tunceli (Dersim) which elected the DTP at 30%, beating a local independent (24%). Note should, however, be taken of the AKP score, (21%), in an Alevi region where distrust of Moslems, even Kurdish ones, remains very persistent.

In Batman, the DTP had the

same overwhelming victory, with Necdet Atalay's 59%, the AKP only managing to win in 36%. At Siirt the DTP won 49%, followed by the AKP with 45%. The most crushing victory won by the pro-Kurdish party was at Hakkari, with 79%. The candidate here, moreover, was a woman, very new to the political scene, who gave the AKP a bitter lesson since it only won 15% of the votes this time, although it had won the Parliamentary seat in the 2007 general election.

Sirnak, another town that had suffered particularly badly from the war and the JITM's violent abuses of power and which has again recently been shaken by the discovery of mass graves, also voted DTP with 53% against AKP's 42%. Igdir, a Kurdish town at the foot of Mount Ararat, on the Armenian border, gave the DTP 36.47% and the AKP 32.33%. Finally there is Van, a major city that was lost by DTP in 2004 because of its unfortunate alliance with the

SHP, returned to the DTP fold with 51.84% of the vote as against 40.77% to the AKP.

However, other important towns with Kurdish majorities were won or held by the AKP: Mardin (which also contains many Arabs and from which the Syrians, i.e. Nestorian Christians, have left in mass) voted AKP by 45% as against 36% for the DTP; Bitlis chose the AKP by 43.1% against 34.43% for the DTP. At Mush, the AKPs soundly beat the DTP, with 51% as against 39%; similarly at Bingol, with 42% for AKP against 34% for DTP. At Agri, there was less of a difference: 39% for AKP as against 32% for the DTP. At Kilis, a small region where the Syrian border cuts the Kurds living there from their kinsmen in Afrin (Syrian Kurdistan), the AKP beat MHP with 48%, and the DTP came virtually nowhere.

With regard to mixed Turkish-Kurdish towns or ones with Kurdish minorities: Adiyaman

voted mainly AKP (49%) and the DTP won little support (5%), far behind the Islamic Party (SP), the CHP and even the ultra-nationalist MHP (6%). Elazig, voted, unsurprisingly, AKP (47.76%) but the government party at least succeeded in ousting the MHP (23%) that has always been well established there. In Karamanmarash, formerly an Alevi region but seriously decimated by pogroms, the AKP overwhelmed the MHP by 65.31% to 21.97%.

One election surprise was at Urfa, which voted neither AKP nor DTP but re-elected its outgoing mayor by 44% against 39% for the AKP and only 10% for the DTP. He was standing as an independent against the official AKP candidate, pitch-forked in from outside the area.

Finally, in Istanbul Akin Birdal, former President of the Human Rights Association, standing on a DTP ticket, only won 4%.

## SYRIA: A BLOODY NEWROZ AND SERIOUS ATTACKS ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

**T**he Kurdish Yekiti (Unity) party, announced in a communiqué the arrest of 26 of its members during a silent demonstration on 28 February, in the Kurdish town of Al-Jezira against the newly promulgated decree that forbids anyone inhabiting the "border regions" (essentially the Kurdish regions) from buying, renting or building on their land on their own land. This measure has seriously damaged the economy of Syrian Kurdistan. The Kurds see it as an underhand renewal of the old plan of "Arabising" their region — a plan that was "frozen" but not repealed in the 70s.

The reaction of the security services was almost immediate. Ten minutes after the demonstration had started, 26 of those taking part had been arrested and carried off to detention.

Yekiti also reported acts of repression against demonstrations, all through the month. On 12 March 30 Aleppo students tried to commemorate the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the repression of the 2004 Newroz celebrations in Qamishlo. They were arrested and since then there has been no news of 4 of them: Bahzad Muslim, Kawa Deqo, Alan Hussein and Abdi Rami have simply disappeared.

On 16 March, the Security Services kidnapped two Kurds in the streets of Damascus, the capital. Once again there is no news of their fate. They are Fuad Hassan Hussein, born 1982 in the town of Durbassa and Maher Hussein, a geography student at Damascus University.

However, the climax of Syria's repression of the Kurds remains the events at Newroz. This year, the Kurdish political leaders had been warned by the authorities that they should not attend the New Year celebrations. Those warned included Abdul Hamid Darwish, Secretary of the Kurdish Progressive Democratic Party and Ismail Omar, General

Secretary of the Kurdish Democratic Union, who then warned party's' against taking part in the demonstrations. Other Kurdish movements, however, encouraged their members not to give in to intimidation.

On 20 March, six people were arrested at Hassaké, including Osman Oso, a leader of the Yekiti party's Political Committee. He was preparing the Newroz celebrations with other Kurds when about a hundred police and Army officers suddenly appeared and destroyed the platform with bulldozers. Amongst them the Kurds present recognised General Yassar Selman al-Shofi. In other towns, such as Turbaspi, Amude, Drik, Koban and Romelan, the platforms prepared for the celebrations were similarly destroyed.

In the Sheikh Maqsud and Ashrafié quarters of Aleppo, 10,000 police and security officers were deployed in the evening of 20 March and arrested 120 Kurds who had lit New Year candles, striking and insulting those taking part, including women. In the town of Sereqaniyeh, a teen-ager was arrested, two people were arrested at Amude and at Derik a group of children were beaten and taken away by the police.

The most serious events took place at Qamishlo, where the Syrian forces fired on the crowd, killing three young people between the ages of 18 and 25. There were also a number of people wounded.

Joe Stork, director of the Middle East section of Human Rights Watch, condemned these acts of violence: *"The Syrian authorities must explain why the security forces opened fire on Kurdish*

*festivities. Those who were guilty of such useless acts of deadly repression must be brought to trial"*.

Witnesses told Human Rights Watch (HRW) that about 200 people had gathered in a street in the Western part of Qamishlo around 6.30 pm. They lit candles along both sides of the street and a bonfire in the middle around which they started a Kurdish folk dance. *"It was just a Newroz celebration, not a political demonstration"*, stated one of these witnesses to the Human Rights defence organisation.

The fire brigade then rushed up to extinguish the fire while the police and plain-clothes officers threw tear gas at the celebrants and fired real bullets into the air to disperse them. Two of the witnesses told HRW that, when the crowd refused to disperse, some men, in plain clothes driving a pick-up of the same kind as commonly used by the secret services, opened fire on the crowd with rifles: *"without any warning, at ground level not in the air and completely at random"*.

No reason has been given for the security forces firing on the crowd. According to three of those taking part in the celebrations, none of the celebrants were armed and no violence had taken place. Reuters news Agency reported that one Qamishlo resident had reported that some young people were burning tyres and throwing stones at the police. However, HRW has been unable to confirm this version. As for the Syrian authorities, they have not commented on the incident.

*"The Syrian authorities are not very credible when it's a matter of investigating their own misdeeds"*, commented Joe Stork. *"To disarm sceptics they should allow an*

*independent and transparent enquiry"*.

Human Rights Watch recalls that, with regard to demonstrations, the security forces should conform to United Nations basic principals about the use of force and firearms. These international criteria recommend that police officers use non-violent means before resorting to force and that even then it should be in proportion to the seriousness of the aggression. Security forces should only use lethal weapons to protect their lives.

In Syria, repression covers any form of open opposition, even peaceful, and is also used against the media. Thus, a report by the *Institute for War and Peace* on the situation of independent news in Syria gives a very tepid assessment on the liberalisation of this in the country: *"While, in the last eight years, the Baathist regime has authorised a certain amount of private media to appear, the strict limitations on the right of expression have not been eased. Previously, the Syrian regime had exercised an absolute monopoly of News services, only the State television channels and papers were allowed. After the present President, Bashar al-Assad, came to office a new press law was passed in September 2001, which legalised an independent press. Today there are some 150 newspapers and magazines in the country. However, according to Ahmed Khalif, a lawyer with a Damascus practice, the non-government press has hardly any possibility of freely treating political issues, or questions regarding Human Rights or any social issues. Authors of articles that disturb the authorities are systematically in anger of arrest and prison sentences if they deal with tabooed subjects like*

breaches of Human Rights, setbacks in government policy, or even the cost of living in Syria. *“What kind of independent media can we have seeing that anyone who holds a pen can be blocked without any apparent reason? If independent journalists cannot discuss the way the Syrian State is built, what’s the point of their existing?”*

Indeed, the law on the press he is very restrictive and can involve imprisonment of up to three years for journalists and televised programmes considered *“a threat to national security”* or *“insulting to the State”*. Dozens of Syrian journalists and writers have been prosecuted over the last few years and their cases are regularly denounced by defenders of human rights. The generalised use of Internet has also given birth to a new kind of prisoners of opinion: Bloggers and Webmasters. Over a hundred sites are recorded as having been blocked in Syria because they dealt with political, social or economic problems. According to *Reporters sans Frontières*, this country is classed among the most repressive towards the Web press.

Habib Saleh, aged 61, a journalist on Internet, was arrested last year for having written articles aiming *“at weakening nationals feeling”* and for *“incitement to civil and religious war”*. RSF has called for his liberation as well as that of four other cyber-

dissidents who are also being detained: Firas Saud, Taiq Bassi, Karim Arabji and Hammam Hadad. The organisation has also reported that seven young people have been imprisoned for the last three years for having created a discussion group on Internet and for having posted articles critical of the government.

Some analysts consider that the Syrian authorities are desperately trying to stop the flood of information and news, which is coming from Internet and televised news channels and for this is having recourse to intimidating journalists, forcing them to self-censorship by depriving them of access to information. Omar Kosh, a journalist living in Damascus, thus evokes the difficult working conditions with which he and his colleagues are faced because of the authorities’ total lack of transparency. Thus the government has recently forbidden the Syrian Central Bank from giving any interviews, or allowing the slightest enquiry on the part of the media, sick because it was irritated at the manner in which the latter covered the country’s economic problems. Forbidding access to official meetings, for example, is an everyday way of punishing a journalist who has displeased the regime. Journalists can thus quite simply be banned. Thus Al-Domri, the first free newspaper since the Baath took power in Syria in 1963, which was founded in

2000, had to stop its activities in 2003, officially because it had not made the necessary approaches for renewing its licence. Local observers, however, state that the real reason is that the newspaper discussed corruption in power and other tabooed subjects. Television does not escape such reprisals. Thus the private satellite channel Sham, which began broadcasting in Syria in 2006, was banned eight months later and had to delocalise to Egypt.

Other channels have succeeded, up to now, in surviving by playing an ambiguous gamble between the powers that be and their role as a free media. Thus, the channel Dunya openly complains about the pressures exercised by the Ministry of Information, thus claiming a neutral position: *“We are at television channel not a political party”*, declares the present director of Dunya, Fuad Sabarji, who used to be a director of Al Jazeera. Thus Dunya, by transgressing one of the taboos on information in Syria, avoids talking about the serious incidents and problems shaking the country while covering a suicide car bomb attack against a Shi’ite quarter in Damascus. Other observers, however, point to links between this channel and the authorities by recalling for example, the vigorous campaign that the channel had waged against Saudi Arabia during the Israeli offensive against Gaza.

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## TURKEY: KURDISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IS IMPOSSIBLE ACCORDING TO ERDOGAN

**I**n Turkey, the democratisation of the State and the government’s attitude to the Kurdish question always comes up

against the question of teaching in the Kurdish language, one of the key points required by the European Union for Turkey’s joining the Union. On 3 March, the European Court for Human

Rights (ECHR) found Turkey guilty for having temporarily expelled 18 students from their University after they had demanded that optional courses be opened in their mother

tongue. The ECHR considered this measure “disproportionate” and contrary to the right of education. It awarded each of the students 1,500 euros “moral damages”.

They had, indeed, been expelled for two terms from Afyon University in 2002 for having demanded courses in Kurdish. The Turkish Courts had supported this decision, seeing their demand as creating a danger of “splits based on language” and as a “new strategy of civil disobedience advocated by the PKK”. This ruling was finally quashed by the State Council and another Court cancelled the penalties in 2004, declaring the student’s demands “were in conformity with the general aims of higher education, namely the educating objective, open minded citizens who respected human rights”. The Strasbourg Judges also ruled that the plaintiffs had “not committed any reprehensible act nor caused any damage to good order in the University”.

At the same time, the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, replying to Ahmet Turk, leader of the DIP group in the Turkish Parliament, who had demanded that Kurdish be taught in schools, affirmed that “education in Kurdish was impossible and that such a thing did not exist anywhere in the world”. He cited the case of Germany: “Three million of my Turkish brothers are living there but they don’t have access to education in Turkish either”, he declared at an election meeting in Van. He carefully omitted mentioning the measures in the European Union’s Charter on regional languages or his own remarks in 2008 when he visited that country and had stated that: “assimilation (of Turks) was a crime against humanity”.

Joost Lagendijk, President of the European Parliament delegation to the mixed E.U.-Turkey Parliamentary Commission, immediately denied that pertinence of this comparison between regional languages and the language of immigrants. Expressing himself in the Turkish paper Zaman, he considered, on the contrary, it was “possible” to use a language other than Turkish in Turkey since the changes in Article 26 of the Constitution: “These reforms provide for the right to learn Kurdish, to broadcast and publish in that language”.

According to the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages, the languages so considered are those traditionally used in a defined territory inside a State or else by a numerically inferior group differing from the rest of the population and whose speech is other than the official language. Not covered by the Charter are dialects of the State language or the speech of an immigrant population. Thus Turkish cannot be a “regional” or “minority” language of the European Union, whereas Kurdish would come into this category if Turkey were to join the European Union.

Under this Charter, the right to use a regional or minority language, in public or in private, is unalienable and is also comes under the International Pact of the United Nations on civil and political rights as well as the Council of Europe’s Convention on the protection of Human Rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Turkish Prime Minister’s stand also provoked a reaction from a Green Party Member of the German parliament, himself of Turkish origin, Cem Ozdemir,

who expressed his annoyance at R.T. Erdogan’s remarks by saying: “If Turkey forbids the Kurdish language then I’ll become a Kurd”.

In the same month, a report by Minority Rights, an international NGO whose purpose is the protection of the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and of indigenous peoples all over the world, condemned Turkey for its policies of discrimination against the children of minorities, be they Armenian, Jewish, Greek, Kurdish, Rom etc., especially in the area of education. Minority Rights criticises the absence, in Turkish schools, of any place for teaching children, coming from minority communities, their own language, history or religion. In the contrary, the minorities have to suffer a policy of assimilation and the promotion of “Turkish identity” as well as of a nationalism with undertones of hostility to all minorities.

According to Nurcan Kaya, Turkish co-ordinator of the Minority Rights Group (MRG) who wrote the report, “Turkey must change its policy on minorities by recognising that the existence of a variety of groups such as the Assyrians, the Kurds, the Roms, the Laz and the Caucasians. It must recognise their educational rights and take remedial measures where necessary”.

One of the points most criticised by religious minorities is the compulsory attendance at classes on religion and morals, which, in fact, are classes on Moslem religion. Since they are not considered a separate religion, Alevi children are obliged to attend these. Only Christian and Jewish children are exempt. However, according to Nurcan Kaya, to secure

exemption they are obliged publicly to declare their religion, which is contrary to the very spirit of secularism. Moreover, the programmes of these “*courses of religious culture*” often include religious practices such as the ablutions, prayers and attendance at mosques, which goes far beyond an “*introduction to religious culture*”. Minority Rights cites amongst the groups most penalised in their access to education the case of the Kurds and Roms. Moth of these communities have, indeed, suffered enforced population movements, the Kurds because

of the destruction of their villages by the Army and their deportation to major cities, the latter because of so-called “*urbanisation*” projects which have driven them out of areas where large numbers of them lived. According to this report, over 30% of the Kurdish families deported to Istanbul and Diyarbakir do not send their children to school, largely for financial reasons. Indeed, providing school stationary and uniforms is expensive for families that have lost everything and are unable to find work and the children’s

work is often a major resource. This is especially the case as many families have lost a parent, if not both, and that trauma caused by the war or torture have made many of these refugees physically or mentally unemployable.

*“These conditions exacerbate the discrimination, the harassment and the humiliation with which these children of minority communities are already faced in Turkey, to such an extent that they often hide their ethnic or religious identities. Several minorities fear that their unique culture will disappear”*, wrote Nurcan Kaya.

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## IRAQ:

### THE FIRST VISIT OF A TURKISH HEAD OF STATE TO IRAQ FOR 34 YEARS

**O**n 23 March, the Turkish President, Abdullah Gul, made the first official visit to Iraq in 34 years — in fact since President Fahri Koruturk went to meet his Iraqi opposite number Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, Saddam Hussein’s predecessor in 1976.

The aim of this two-day visit was to discuss the issue of the PKK with the Iraqi government. Already, during the 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum in Istanbul, the Iraqi President, Jalal Talabani, himself a Kurd, had made known a joint appeal by all the Kurdish parties of Iraq, Syria, Iran, Turkey and Europe calling on the PKK to lay down its arms. As for the water problem, this is an old source of conflict between Turkey and its Syrian and Iraqi neighbours. This is due to the Turkish dams on the Tigris and the Euphrates that check the flow of these two rivers. According to UNO: “*the building of new dams and reservoirs in countries bordering on Iraq could lead to a drop in the water representing 76% of the flow of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers*”.

Abdullah Gul mainly had discussions with Jalal Talabani, who had himself visited Ankara the year before, also to discuss the PKK issue. The Turkish President also met Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Neçirvan Barzani, who had travelled from Irbil to Baghdad to see him.

On the PKK issue, Jalal Talabani merely re-iterated the ultimatums already issued on the subject, which had never been followed by any specific action: “*The PKK has two possible choices — to lay down its arms or to leave Iraq. The PKK has to enter into political and parliamentary life and stop the use of arms, because this is harming the Kurds as well as the Iraqis. Our Constitution bans armed groups, the PKK’s like any others*”.

This ultimatum was backed by the Prime Minister of the Kurdish Regional Government, Neçirvan Barzani. On his return to Irbil, he also declared to the press: “*It is not reasonable that a group wages attacks on a State and*

*then retreats to our region*”. However, as usual, the head of the Kurdish Government denied that any military means were effective against the Qandil Mountain bases: “*Experience has shown that this problem will not be solved by military means*”, he added, undoubtedly referring to the Turkish Army’s numerous incursions into this area, particularly to the operation launched in February 2008, which ended with heavy casualties in the Turkish ranks.

At the same time, the increasingly conflictual relations between Baghdad and Irbil should be subject to some normalisation. This, in any case was what the Kurdish Prime Minister stated in passing. He did, indeed, take advantage of his visit to Baghdad to have discussions with Nuri al-Maliki: “*We have decided to normalise our relations and we are expecting a Baghdad delegation to arrive shortly to settle our differences*”.

Among the Kurdish grievances and sources of anxiety, is the Shiite Prime Minister’s political determination to orient his



policies towards centralising Iraq, with an increase in his own role in the State. To this can be added the creation, by the same Minister, of “Support Committees”, i.e. militia formed from Arab tribesmen in regions claimed by the Kurds, in which a referendum was supposed to take place in accordance with Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, as well as differences over the sharing of oil revenue.

On the subject of Kirkuk, the UN mission to Baghdad recommends a “power sharing” between the Kurds, the Turcomen and the Arabs although provincial elections are due to be held this year. The early withdrawal of US forces is seen by many as a threat: “I think that Kirkuk will be like a barrel of TNT that will explode and burn us all”, stated bluntly a Turcoman member of the Iraqi Parliament, Mohammed Mahdi Amin al-Bayati.

The Kurds are estimated to make up 52% of the towns population, the Arabs 35% and the Turcomen 12%. There are also some 12,000 Christians. On the strength of these figures, the Kurds insistently demand the holding of a referendum to decide whether to include it in the Kurdish region and the holding of provincial elections. They reject the plan for “power sharing” between the communities, originally put forward by the UN mission, that did not take into account the real ethnic distribution of the population.

The UN plan has not yet been made public but has already been the subject of leaks and speculation. One of the options most strongly proposed is that the province be controlled both from Baghdad and Irbil as well as by the local governors. This

would give Kirkuk a special status for a period of ten years, leading eventually to a resolution of the problem. However, the growing dissension between the Kurds and the Shiite Prime Minister, al-Maliki’s determination to strengthen centralisation and the complete loss of any illusions the Kurds might have had about Iraqi willingness to respect federalism leave little chance of this option succeeding.

Another possibility would be to give Kirkuk some form of autonomy that would, nevertheless make it dependent on Baghdad, particularly for its budget and operation. Those Turcomen close to Ankara are said to be in favour of this as their main objective (supported in this by Ankara) is to avoid being included in the Kurdistan Region. Ali Rizgari, who is currently President of the Kirkuk Provincial Council, has said that he is not hostile to autonomy for Kirkuk, but would want it to be linked to Irbil rather than Baghdad.

In an interview given to the Kurdish paper *SOMA*, Fuad Hussein, who heads Kurdistan’s presidential staff highlights the innumerable postponements of the referendum, describing them as political manoeuvres arranged by “certain forces in Baghdad” whose only object is to prevent the linking with Kirkuk: “At first this was done because of the political and security situation in Iraq, but as it continued I thought that Baghdad’s aim was to keep on postponing, since none of those in power believes in applying Article 140 nor that the Kurds have any rights in the disputed regions”.

According to Fuad Hussein, this negative attitude shows the persistence of an attitude, in Iraqi Arab political circles, of

denying the Kurds any right over these lands, which have been subjected to ethnic cleansing for decades, despite the provisions of the Constitution. In the opinion of this Kurdish leader, this constitution is an asset — but it is not the only one. The fact that the people living in these regions support the Irbil government is another one — witness the results of the last provincial elections held in other claimed regions such as Nineveh or Diyala: “It was not just an election to choose members of the Council. Personally, I think that they saw it as a form of referendum: do you want to become part of Kurdistan or not? And that is why they turned out to vote so massively. We have the population on our side and we will not be robbed of our rights. We will continue to conduct a legal and political struggle and we will use all the arguments to win our case”.

However, this victory of the Kurdish Alliance, which won the votes of all the Kurds as well as those of other minorities threatened by nationalist or religious fanaticism, be they Christian, Shabak, or Yezidi may have further encouraged Baghdad to postpone this referendum, by confirming that the choice of the Kurds of Kirkuk would be to join Kurdistan. Especially as the Kirkuk Christians are beginning to suffer from the same threats of assassination as in Mosul — which could also considerably influence them in seeking to be attached to Irbil and its policy of protecting minorities. This is one of the reasons on which Fuad Hussein bases his denial that postponing the referendum would avoid an inter-ethnic war. “If we look at what has been happening in Baghdad over the last two or three years, there were several areas that suffered what is close to the ethnic cleansing of the

past. The Sunni Arabs were pushed into the background and displaced; the Shiite Arabs were moved from one area to another and many of them were killed. The question is why this didn't happen in Kirkuk? There are many factors that show that if they had been in control of Kirkuk they would have carried out the same policy of ethnic cleansing. As you can see, it was the Kurds who really protected Kirkuk. Thus the argument used by the UN is baseless".

Another argument in favour of inclusion in Kurdistan is the neglect and under-development in which the Kirkuk region is kept, despite its wealth of oil, creating a flagrant contrast with the economic boom being enjoyed by cities like Irbil, Duhok and Suleimaniah: "There is no economic development in Kirkuk, despite its wealth of oil. Even that part of the budget allocated to

Kirkuk has never been paid, but remained in Baghdad. It's a disaster! People think that they are bound to find the best schools and hospitals in the world there, because of its wealth. However, when they go there all they see is a great big village. Kirkuk has been destroyed, its inhabitants and the town have been destroyed and nothing has been done for Kirkuk".

Another departure envisaged that creates a problem for future Iraqi policy and the Kurd-Arab differences is that Jalal Talabani has confirmed that he will not stand again for the Iraqi Presidency. This raises the question of who will succeed him. Under the tacit rule for sharing power, the President should be Kurd or a Sunni Arab since the Prime Minister is a Shiite.

"Either it will be a Sunni Arab or

(the Presidency) will remain with a Kurd. If that is the case, the two parties will have to decide which of them will have it", explained Mahmud Othman, a Kurdish member of the Iraqi Parliament who is independent of both the major parties.

Although the Presidency has very limited power, to avoid the authoritarian drift of previous dictatorships, Jalal Talabani's position and influence have carried weight in Iraqi politics and the fact that he is a Kurd have enabled him to act as mediator between rival Arab factions.

Moreover, his diplomatic skill and his long political career have helped to reinstate Iraq into the international scene, especially into the Middle East and into the Arab League as well as to normalise relations with Iran.

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## TURKEY: BRINGING THE "DEATH PITS" TO LIGHT IS RE-OPENING THE OLD WOUNDS OF THE DIRTY WAR

**T**he search for mass graves is continuing in Sirnak Province of Turkish Kurdistan, especially since, as part of the Ergenekon scandal investigations, several ex-members of JITEM mentioned the number of extra-judicial executions carried out in the 1990s and the existence of "death pits" into which they had succeeded hiding the bodies, either by burying them or by disintegrating them in acid. The confessions of Abdulkadir Aygan, a former member of the JITEM, and of Tuncay Guney, considered a key figure of the Ergenekon network, have prompted the Turkish law to start an enquiry carry out excavations in the Sirnak region. On 9 March, on the outskirts of Silopi, near an Army base, they have discovered the remains of

human bones, fragments of a skull and pieces of cloth, which are being examined by forensic scientists in Istanbul.

According to the Sirnak Bar Association, the number of people who "disappeared" totals some 17,000 and their families have all filed complaints with the Public Prosecutor's office so as to learn the truth about the fate of their relatives. Soon after the first of these discoveries, five people were arrested in Sirnal, on 17 March. Among them are two sons of a former mayor of Cizre, members of the "village guardian" militia and three inhabitants of a village close to a mass grave. The former mayor of Cizre is himself the on the wanted list. However, Nusirevan Elçi, president of the Sirnak Bar Association, condemns the slow rate of the enquiry (ordered at

the beginning of the year, the excavations only began in March) and the absence of any protection of supervision of the mass graves. He suspects that some of the pits were "cleaned up" before being officially brought to light. These accusations had already been made last January by the columnist Adem Yavuz Arslan, who mentioned at the time suspicious nocturnal activity round the places that were due to be excavated two or three months later.

The existence of these graves and the discovery of bodies is nothing new in this region. The last of the previous discoveries goes back to 2005, but several bodies had been found as far back as 1996. The political climate at that time, however, prevented families from

resorting to the law, as Nusirevan Elçi explains: *"Indeed, the relatives of people who had 'disappeared' were afraid to complain to the public prosecutor, but once the Minister of Justice had proclaimed that that any one who know anything about the pits should not hesitate about filing complaints, then people stated to speak. Were he to make another proclamation to speed up the enquiry, we might get results"*.

In addition to the JITEM, the enquiry is also trying to find out to what extent the Hizbullah is also responsible. This islamist group had been used by the

secret services to perpetrate a number of assassinations and terrorist actions against the Kurds, and was said to have been personally founded by General Veli Kuçuk, one of the major actors in the Ergenekon conspiracy. At Kustepe, a former stronghold of the Hizbullah, near Cizre, a mass grave was found containing dozens of human bones that are suspected of being the remains of people who were known to have been kidnapped by this organisation. The principal suspect, here too, is an ex-mayor of Cizre, Kamil Atak, at present *"village guardian"* at Kuztepe, who has

fled. One of his sons, Temel Atak, arrested on 17 March, was officially charged on 20 March, and is being detained. Four other suspects arrested on the same day, including his brother, have been released.

Five days later, a colonel was charged and kept in detention. Gemal Temizoz, is accused of *"membership of an illegal armed organisation and of incitement to murder"* by the Diyarbakir Court. Up to now commander of the Gendarmerie at Kayseri, he had commanded a unit at Cizre between 1993 and 1996.

#### FILMS: "I SAW THE SUN" IS NOW BEING SCREENED IN TURKEY

**G**unesi Gordum" (I saw the sun), a film directed by the Kurdish singer Kimizigul, tells the story of a Kurdish family, the Altuns, living in a war area whose village was forcibly evacuated by the Army and suffered a forced migration, at first to Istanbul, from which some of them hoped to reach Norway. *"This film shows the human dimension of the Kurdish problem very well"*, writes Oral Calislar, a columnist on the Turkish newspaper *Radikal*. *"Those who see the Kurdish problem as a terrorist problem must go and see it. They must see the people of this region. They must see their despair. And then they can decide whether it is just a terrorist problem"*.

Torn apart by exile, the Altun family is also torn by the war: one of the sons, the younger, is an Army conscript, the elder is a member of the PKK. *"What will happen if we meet in battle? Asks the younger. "If I am killed I'll be a terrorist. If it's you, you'll be a martyr"*, replies the elder. Mahsun Kimizigul several times

treats the ideological discourse both sides as identical by putting the same words in the mouths of both belligerents. Thus, when an Army officer addresses the villagers: *"Its for your sakes that we have taken to these mountains"*, the same words had already been used by been brother fighting in the guerrillas when speaking to his younger brother.

With its pretty dark tone, the story seems to provide no other way out for the Kurds but exile. Thus a teenager who has lost his leg is only able to walk again after receiving an artificial limb on reaching Norway. *"Children here cannot shape their own destiny"*, declared one of the characters in the film.

According to Sirri Sakik, a Kurdish DTP member of Parliament, this film could have a positive effect in helping change Turkish public opinion on the Kurdish question: *"Even though the emperor is naked, many sections of the population is incapable of saying that the emperor is naked. Perhaps a step forward has been taken today"*.

The film has also been praised by members of the government, including the Minister of Culture, Ertugrul Guney, and Deputy Prime Minister, Cemil Cicek: *"This is a film that shows, in the best possible way Turkey's pains, the tears of the last 25 years"*.

Mahsun Kirmizigul, aged 39, is a successful singer, who has already made several films. He hopes that his latest product will reach the country's leaders: *"We want concrete acts to solve the Kurdish conflict"*. The producer thinks that the reforms carried out in Turkey have contributed to increase tolerance of such films in Turkish society. *"These days society is more open, the atmosphere more positive"*.

Released in Turkey this month, it has been distributed to 700 cinemas and seen by nearly 616,000 spectators in its first week, which has put it up amongst the Top 10 of Turkish films. The production company has also indicted that it will be released in Germany as well as other European countries having large communities of Turkish origin.

# Les mères kurdes exigent la vérité sur les disparitions

À l'image des mères de la place de Mai en Argentine, des familles de disparus kurdes se réunissent chaque samedi à Istanbul et Diyarbakir pour demander la vérité et la fin de l'impunité

ISTANBUL  
De notre correspondante

**E**n ce samedi de février, Hanım Tosun a une nouvelle fois défié la pluie et le froid. Cette mère de cinq enfants, originaire d'un village kurde, près de Diyarbakir, dans l'est de la Turquie, est venue manifester en silence devant le lycée francophone Galatasaray, à Istanbul. À la main, un œillet rouge et le portrait de son mari, Fehmi Tosun, disparu le 19 octobre 1995 en plein cœur d'Istanbul. *«Avec mes enfants, j'ai assisté à son enlèvement par des policiers en civil. Ils l'ont fait entrer de force dans leur voiture. Nous ne l'avons jamais revu. Nous avons relevé le numéro d'immatriculation, mais il était faux. La police n'a rien fait pour nous aider.»*

Comme chaque samedi depuis un mois, une cinquantaine de mères, d'enfants, de frères sont venus demander que la lumière soit faite sur la disparition de leurs proches. Malgré les mauvaises conditions météo, la foule s'assoit à même le macadam, sous les yeux des forces de l'ordre. *«Nous voulons nos disparus, lance l'une des manifestantes. Que l'on arrête de protéger les responsables des puits de la mort et des fosses communes.»*

Selon l'Association turque des droits de l'homme (IHD) qui organise ces rassemblements, plus de 3 000 personnes auraient disparu dans les années 1990, au plus fort de la «sale guerre» menée par l'État turc contre les militants et sympathisants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). Aujourd'hui, l'association dispose d'environ 1 500 dossiers de personnes disparues lors de gardes à vue, essentiellement dans l'est de la Turquie.

Fehmi Tosun était lui aussi un sympathisant de ce groupe de combattants kurdes qui, à l'époque, exigeait l'indépendance du Kurdistan. Avant de disparaître, ce père de famille a passé trois ans et demi en prison pour soutien à une organisation terroriste. Pendant ce temps, sa famille a dû fuir le village natal, brûlé et rasé, pour s'installer dans la grande ville voisine, Diyarbakir, avant de déposer finalement ses bagages à Istanbul. *«Je n'ai aucun espoir que mon mari soit encore vivant, confie son épouse. Mais nous, les familles, nous n'abandonnerons jamais. Nous voulons savoir où sont les corps.»* Cette femme de 42 ans est une habituée des sittings. Entre 1995 et 1999, elle n'en a pas raté un seul. *«Nous avons souvent été arrêtés par la police, parfois même avant d'arriver sur le lieu du rassemblement, se souvient-elle. Depuis le début de ces actions, treize ans ont passé. Se réunir à nouveau, au même endroit, avec les mêmes photos, est vraiment très difficile.»*

Si l'organisation des droits de l'homme a relancé ces rassemblements chaque samedi, à Istanbul mais aussi à Diyarbakir, c'est en raison de nouveaux éléments apparus ces derniers mois. Depuis juin 2007,

**Selon l'Association turque des droits de l'homme, plus de 3 000 personnes auraient disparu dans les années 1990, au plus fort de la «sale guerre».**

la justice tente de démanteler un réseau ultranationaliste, appelé Ergenekon. Dans le cadre de cette enquête, plusieurs personnalités soupçonnées d'avoir mené des actions contre les Kurdes dans les années 1990, et d'appartenir à ce que l'on appelle «l'État profond», ont été arrêtées. Parmi elles, Veli Küçük, le chef du Jitem, le service de renseignements de la gendarmerie chargé de la lutte contre le PKK. D'autres person-

nes ont été arrêtées, comme Levent Ersöz, un général de gendarmerie en poste à Silopi, à la frontière irakienne, au moment de la disparition de deux politiciens kurdes. Par ailleurs, fin janvier, Abdulkadir Aygan, un ancien membre du PKK devenu informateur

pour le Jitem avant de s'exiler en Suède, a révélé dans les colonnes du journal *Taraf* avoir assisté à la mort d'une trentaine de personnes lors de gardes à vue. *«D'après ce que j'ai vu et entendu, je dirais que 80 % des meurtres non résolus dans la région ont été menés par le Jitem, estime-t-il. Faire son travail signifiait attraper quelqu'un de manière illégale, le questionner, le tuer, enterrer le corps ou le brûler.»*

Ce genre d'aveux et l'ampleur de l'enquête ont relancé l'espoir des familles de disparus. *«Nous savons depuis le début que tout le monde est impliqué: des généraux aux hommes politiques, explique Leman Yurtsever, présidente de la commission des disparus du bureau stambouliote de l'IHD. Or, pour la première fois, il y a des arrestations.»* Autre avancée, notamment après les aveux d'Abdulkadir Aygan, des recherches ont commencé dans des puits appartenant à l'entreprise publique Botas, à Silopi. Des corps imbibés d'acide y auraient été jetés.

L'espoir des familles et des militants reste toutefois fragile. *«Jusqu'où ira cette enquête?», s'interroge Leman Yurtsever, qui souhaiterait que les hommes politiques au pouvoir à l'époque soient poursuivis, comme l'ancien premier ministre Tansu Ciller. «Mais, en fait, les principales figures sont relâchées les unes après les autres pour des raisons médicales, regrette-t-elle. Nous voulons nos disparus morts ou vivants, mais malheureusement notre combat est encore long.»*

DELPHINE NERBOLLIER

## « Notre mission en Irak sera terminée au 31 août 2010 », annonce Barack Obama

Les « brigades de combat » américaines quitteront le pays dans dix-huit mois, tandis que 50 000 soldats resteront sur place jusqu'à la fin 2011

La guerre américaine en Irak n'est pas finie. Le pays « n'est pas encore en sécurité » a reconnu le président américain Barack Obama, mais, « d'ici au 31 août 2010, notre mission sera terminée », a-t-il annoncé vendredi 27 février devant les marines du camp Lejeune en Caroline du Nord. « J'ai fixé un calendrier qui prévoit le retrait de nos brigades de combat dans les dix-huit prochains mois », a-t-il précisé.

Au nombre de quatorze, ces brigades représentent environ 55 000 combattants. Si leur départ s'effectue au rythme espéré, ce mouvement devrait pouvoir entraîner le retrait concomitant de 30 000 à 40 000 soldats supplémentaires appartenant à la logistique. La veille de cette annonce, en recevant des parlementaires démocrates et républicains à la Maison Blanche pour leur présenter son plan de retrait, Barack Obama n'a toutefois pas exclu de « réviser » son calendrier en cas de besoin.

Selon le plan initial, une majorité des 142 000 soldats présentement engagés dans le corps expéditionnaire envoyé en Irak en mars 2003 par l'administration Bush, pourraient avoir quitté le pays dans les dix-huit mois.

Ce calendrier va légèrement au-delà des « seize mois » de délai promis par le candidat Obama durant sa campagne pour, disait-il, « mettre un terme » à une guerre qui a déjà coûté quelque 1 000 milliards de dollars (788,8 milliards d'euros) au contribuable américain. Ce calendrier « est celui que le chef d'état-major interarmées, le général Michael Mullen et moi-même souhaitons », a commenté Robert Gates, le secrétaire à la défense qui occupait déjà ce poste dans la dernière période de l'administration Bush. Les commandants de terrain, en particulier le général Raymond Odierno qui a succédé à David Petraeus à la tête du contingent en Irak, craignaient qu'un retrait en seize mois menace les suc-

cès obtenus depuis 2007 en termes de sécurité publique, invariablement qualifiés de « fragiles ».

Certes, les élections régionales du 31 janvier se sont déroulées sans violence notable, les forces irakiennes ayant démontré qu'elles pouvaient maintenir l'ordre. Mais des élections générales sont prévues pour la fin 2009 et les Américains, de même que plusieurs experts irakiens, ne sont pas absolument certains qu'elles seront aussi pacifiques. Les groupes d'insurgés arabes sunnites n'ont pas encore désarmé, notamment ceux qui se réclament d'Al-Qaïda. L'armée américaine, secondée par les Irakiens, conduit d'ailleurs quasi quotidiennement de violents raids contre eux dans le centre-nord du pays. Et d'autres dangers menacent.

### La nouvelle administration veut encourager toute la région à se stabiliser

Beaucoup redoutent en particulier les fortes tensions qui éclatent sporadiquement entre le gouvernement central dirigé par Nouri Al-Maliki et le pouvoir autonome kurde de Massoud Barzani qui, au nord du pays, cherche à étendre son territoire jusqu'à y inclure, entre autres, la ville pétrolière de Kirkouk. « La violence continuera à faire partie du quotidien en Irak », a averti, vendredi, le président Obama. « Trop de questions politiques fondamentales concernant son avenir restent sans réponse », a-t-il ajouté. Il se référait notamment à la loi sur un partage équitable des ressources pétrolières qui n'a toujours pas été agréée par les partis politiques et les dix-huit provinces du pays. De plus, a encore dit le président, « la baisse des revenus du pétrole va accentuer la pression sur un gouvernement qui avait déjà des difficultés à assurer les ser-

vices publics essentiels à ses administrés. » Le budget 2009 a déjà dû être revu deux fois à la baisse ces derniers mois.

En ces circonstances, et « durant cette période sensible » a précisé Robert Gates, l'option d'un retrait étalé sur dix-huit mois « fournit le nombre maximal de forces disponibles au général Odierno », s'est-il félicité. Il a aussi réaffirmé son « intention de retirer tous les soldats américains d'Irak au 31 décembre 2011 », conformément à l'accord conclu fin 2008 avec les Irakiens.

S'adressant directement à eux depuis le camp Lejeune, Barack Obama a profité de son discours pour leur répéter que les Etats-Unis ne nourrissent « aucune prétention sur [LEUR]territoire ou [LEURS]ressources. Nous respectons votre souveraineté et les énormes sacrifices que vous avez consentis pour votre pays », a-t-il ajouté.

L'Amérique veut « un transfert complet des responsabilités vers les autorités d'Irak », a conclu le président.

La veille, au Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies, l'ambassadrice américaine Susan Rice avait expliqué que la réduction de l'effort militaire américain en Irak « ne diminue en rien le soutien à long terme de l'Amérique pour un Irak souverain, stable, démocratique et prospère qui soit une force de paix dans une région turbulente ». La nouvelle administration entend ainsi « encourager d'autres pays à se joindre à l'effort de stabilisation de la région ». L'ouverture vers l'Iran, ancien rival et puissant voisin de l'Irak, reste à concrétiser. ■

Patrice Claude

Preparing for withdrawal ■ Michael E. O'Hanlon and Kenneth M. Pollack

# Iraq's year of living dangerously

WASHINGTON

**T**he Iraq war isn't over. And while President Obama's apparent decision to withdraw the bulk of American troops by August 2010 is not necessarily a mistake, it cannot be carried out rigidly.

If all continues to go well, it should be eminently feasible; if not, the administration will have to show the strategic wisdom to slow down as needed to deal with problems.

Having just returned from a trip to the country arranged by the top American commander there, General Ray Odierno, we agree that Iraq continues to make tremendous strides, thanks to American assistance and, increasingly, the efforts of Iraqi politicians and security forces. But both those ready to dust off the infamous "Mission Accomplished" banner and declare victory and those who continue to see Iraq as an inherent disaster that must simply be abandoned have to realize that continued American involvement will be crucial for several more years.

Young democracies are fragile entities. Political scientists generally agree that achieving a peaceful and credible second round of elections is critical in putting a new democracy on a path toward stability, because such elections test whether the country can accomplish a nonviolent transfer of power.

Iraq is holding its second round of real elections this year. It just concluded extremely successful provincial votes, and national parliamentary elections are to follow. Iraq's calendar this year is also jam-packed with other important political events.

If the United States can help the Iraqis secure even modestly positive outcomes for these events, we Americans will have gone a long way toward realizing our goals of sustainable stability in Iraq and bringing most of our troops home next year.

Iraq is no longer convulsed by the chaos, sectarianism and terrorism that were driving it into all-out civil war in 2006.

To be sure, friction remains, most notably in the ethnically diverse city of Mosul in the north, where coalition forces have only recently been reinforced to the point where they can conduct the kind of counterinsurgency campaign that secured the rest of the country.

Unfortunately, they are racing against the clock to do so, since the recently signed security agreement between Baghdad and Washington requires American combat forces to leave Iraq's cities by June 30.

But the main challenge now is that some key political players, strengthened by Iraq's enormous recent progress, are less interested in moving their country forward than in using every tool at their disposal to put themselves in advantageous positions after the American withdrawal.

Worse still, some — perhaps many — are doing so by exploiting the immaturity of the political process and the ambiguities in Iraq's constitution.

Iraq has several important challenges that could strain its political system over the next year. They include the return of up to four million displaced people to their homes; the release of thousands of people detained by coalition forces, some of them

surely dangerous; the continued search for permanent jobs for the largely Sunni Sons of Iraq, whose actions against the insurgents in Anbar Province were a key to the success of the "surge"; falling oil prices that will hamper the government's ability to pay its workers; and the more general tasks of increasing oil exports, employment and the quality of life for Iraqis.

Perhaps the most vivid demonstration of the problems Iraq faces is the enormous tension brewing between the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government, led by Massoud Barzani, and the central government led by Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki.

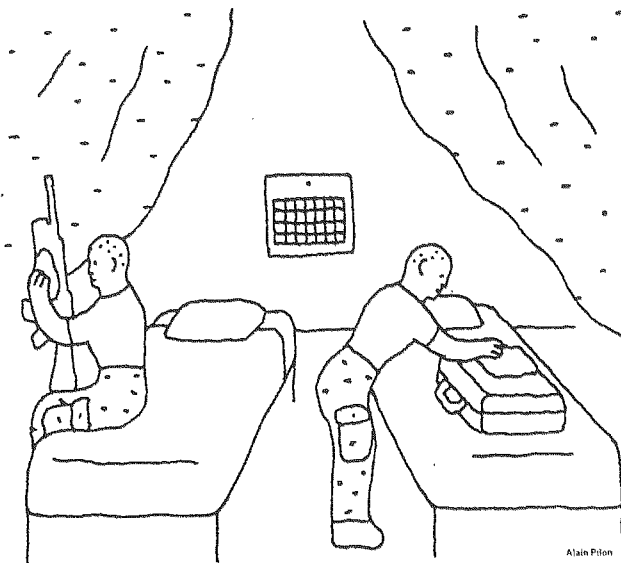
During the years of warfare between Sunni and Shiite Arabs, the Kurdish issue lay dormant. But now it has roared back to the forefront. Nearly everyone we spoke with in the area this month — Kurds, Arabs, Americans and others — described the situation as explosive and the enmity between Barzani and Maliki as ferocious.

The Kurdish difficulties do not revolve around suicide bombers, visions of seventh-century caliphates, disdain for the United States or pure sectarian hatred as in the Sunni-Shiite civil war. They concern the cold, hard issues of land and oil and cash, as well as the distribution of power between Iraq's center and its regions and provinces.

In addition to the three provinces that are run by the Kurdish regional government, the Kurds claim lands in three other Iraqi provinces, including the emotionally charged and oil-rich region of Kirkuk.

To back up these claims, and because the Iraqi gov-

**Many politicians are exploiting the immaturity of the political process.**



ernment previously had been unable to secure much of northern Iraq, the Kurds deployed their pesh merga fighters in these disputed places — often originally at Baghdad's request. They have also used their considerable political powers in much of the area to undo the effects of Saddam Hussein's brutal policy of Arabization of Kurdish lands.

Meanwhile, they have exploited ambiguities in the Constitution to strike deals with foreign firms for oil wells within their three provinces, much to the displeasure of Baghdad.

These tensions nearly led to violence last summer

in the ethnically mixed city of Khanaqin, which lies outside the current boundaries of Kurdistan, in Diyala Province, but was under the control of the pesh merga.

Maliki, emboldened by recent battlefield successes of Iraq's Army and police against Shiite militias in Basra and elsewhere, apparently decided to put the Kurds in their place as well.

Maliki deployed army forces to Khanaqin, only to have them run right into a standoff with the pesh merga troops. Ultimately, cooler heads prevailed, but it should be noted that many of those cooler heads were American — the United States troops who were partnered with the Iraqi Army formations ran interference between the Iraqi Army units and the Kurdish soldiers and brokered a peaceful resolution.

Today other crises loom. An oil field in Kurdistan developed by a Norwegian company is poised to begin production in March. It is not clear whether the Kurds will contribute the revenue from the field to the common Iraqi oil pot, as the central government demands, or will claim the proceeds entirely for themselves. Not only does Maliki view any Kurdish effort to go it alone on oil as unacceptable, he may also sense that inflating it as a campaign issue could help him and his Dawa Party in parliamentary voting this year.

And while key leaders from Maliki's government, various parliamentary opposition parties, and the Kurds all insist that they plan to resolve their differences peacefully, several members of the American military command for Northern Iraq warned us during conversations in Iraq last week that the officers of the newly forming Iraqi 12th Infantry Division have repeatedly stated that once their unit is ready, they plan to occupy their entire area of operations — which includes Kirkuk. The pesh merga fighters, of course, are just as adamant that this would be unacceptable.

While the United Nations has been putting together a grand plan for resolving the Kurdish issues, it cannot impose a solution — and under the terms of the new security agreement, neither can the United States. But just because Washington no longer holds vice-regal authority does not mean it is powerless.

America's military forces, which increasingly serve as peacekeepers, and its commitment of nation-building tools (including provincial reconstruction teams and technical advisers in the Iraqi government) still give American officials tremendous influence. Washington must employ this leverage deftly to help Iraqi Arabs and Kurds (and Turkmens and oth-

ers) overcome their differences.

The Obama administration has been handling the Iraq war pragmatically so far. And while announcing a timetable poses a serious risk, the details of Obama's plan leaked to the press this week are promising, especially leaving behind a large residual force including trainers and quick-reacting "maneuver units" and slowing the drawdown by three months relative to what he had promised on the campaign trail.

Those few months are vital, as they should give the Iraqis adequate time to form their new government before the American troop levels are vastly diminished. Ideally, whatever he announces now, Obama will remain flexible, and slow the pace next year if necessary.

Given Iraq's strategic significance, the mission ceased to be a "war of choice" the moment American forces crossed the border in March 2003. Now we have no choice but to see Iraq through to stability.

It is worth remembering that America's current economic disaster started with a great rise of oil prices from 2004 to 2007, which then helped set off the mortgage and credit meltdowns. Although the increase in oil prices had more to do with inadequate refining capacity and increased demand from China and India than with instability of the Middle East, previous recessions have resulted from the area's political calamities; it is easy to imagine others in the future.

In addition, we cannot overlook Iraq's enormous regional significance. Obama has rightly insisted that the Bush administration committed cardinal sins by failing to engage Syria and Iran in its regional strategy and by remaining aloof from the Israeli-Palestinian and Lebanese conflicts for too long. But any broader Middle Eastern agenda is hostage to the situation in Mesopotamia.

If Iraq slips back into chaos, President Obama is going to find little desire among Jordanians, Saudis, Syrians and Turks for taking the hard steps to forge a durable peace with Israel — or among Iranians to reach a rapprochement.

In the end, it is up to the Iraqis to make their nation peaceful and productive — we should not baby-sit Iraq through all of its problems as a young democracy. But it faces one last crucially tense period in the coming 12 to 18 months. American interests argue strongly for using all the leverage we have gained among Iraqis during six years of intense partnership to help Iraq through its "year of transitions" — then we can bring our troops home quickly, but responsibly.

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WorldTribune

March 2, 2009

## Kurdish government warns U.S. military pullout will spark war in N. Iraq

**B**AGHDAD Kurdistan is pressing the U.S. military to remain in northern Iraq to prevent a takeover by the Baghdad government.

Kurdish officials said the Kurdistan Regional Government has sent messages to Washington that called for U.S. troops to remain in the north until a resolution of territorial and oil disputes with Baghdad. Officials warned that a U.S. pullout could spark a war between Arab and Kurdish forces.

"I restate that the role of the United States should be to help resolve the problems in Iraq such as Article 140, the oil law, and the law on the distribution of its oil wealth," Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani said.

Barzani's reference was to an article in Iraq's new constitution that called for the resolution of Kirkuk. Under the former

Saddam Hussein regime, Baghdad expelled the Kurds and replaced them with Sunni Arabs.

In a Feb. 18 briefing, Barzani linked a U.S. withdrawal to the growing feud between Baghdad and Irbil. The prime minister said the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki has failed to fulfill his pledge to resolve oil and other disputes with KRG.

Officials said KRG was concerned that Al Maliki would wait for a U.S. withdrawal before resorting to force against the Kurds.

"[U.S. President Barack] Obama has said more than once that they will withdraw in a responsible manner from Iraq," Nechirvan said. "What we understand by a responsible withdrawal is that the United States resolve the problems outstanding in Iraq and help the Iraqis confront these prob-

lems."

So far, officials said, the United States has refused to intervene in the dispute between Baghdad and KRG. In January 2009, then-Vice President-elect Joseph Biden traveled to Kirkuk to discuss the dispute with the Kurds.

Barzani said Baghdad was also threatening KRG's economy by seeking to block oil deals with foreign companies. The Iraqi Oil Ministry has boycotted companies that signed energy deals with Kurdistan.

"We haven't done anything that is unconstitutional," Barzani said. "[Iraqi Oil Minister Hussein] Shahrastani has no right to block oil contracts concluded by the Kurdistan government with foreign companies as long as the contracts respect international criteria and the constitutional powers granted to Kurdistan." ♦

REUTERS

March 3, 2009

## Iraq plans census to map ethnic divisions

**B**AGHDAD (Reuters) - Iraq will hold a nationwide census in October, its first in 22 years, mapping ethnic divisions in a survey which could encourage reconciliation or fan the feuds threatening its fragile calm.

The census, the first including Iraq's Kurdish north since 1987, will take place over the course of one or two days, said Mehdi al-Alak, who heads Iraq's Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology (COSIT).

Alak is planning to send at least 250,000 schoolteachers to homes across major cities and dusty hamlets to shed light on the true makeup of Iraq's diverse population.

Questions on ethnicity and religion promise to make the census a charged affair in a country emerging from years of sectarian violence and still gripped by disputes over political power, disputed territory, and oil. Six years after the U.S.-led invasion to oust Saddam Hussein, Iraq's population is believed to be around 28 million, an estimate obtained via distribution of state food rations.

But after years of bloodshed prompted millions of Iraqis to flee their homes, in addition to Saddam-era policies that packed strategic areas with fellow Arabs, the composition of sensitive areas is far from clear.

Such murkiness has made for easy political manipulation across the country. Perhaps the best example of where demography has fueled discord is the oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

Kurds, believed to be around a fifth of Iraqis, claim a majority there and want to make it part of their semi-autonomous northern region, an idea rejected by its Arabs and Turkmen.

The breakdown of Kirkuk's population will be decisive if and when officials hold a referendum on the city's future.

A clear snapshot could be telling in other disputed areas, like Diyala

and Nineveh provinces, where the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is looking to assert central government authority at the expense of Kurdish authorities in Arbil.

"We will not allow political, religious or ethnic interference. Our work is simply technical," Alak said.

The census might also alter allocation of the budget, 17 percent of which goes Kurdistan based on population estimates.

### NO SECTARIAN BREAKDOWN

Preliminary results, a simple population count, should be ready several days after the census, but more detailed data on ethnicity and religion are not expected until late July 2010.

Alak said religion questions will not delve into sect, so the census will not provide data on the breakdown between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, who have fought a bloody feud since 2003.

The census will count those displaced within Iraq at their current residence, but will note where they lived previously.

It will also seek to include, through outreach by Iraqi embassies, the millions of people who have fled the country.

Alak said a national curfew would be imposed on census day to ensure the survey can be carried out in country where violence is still a fact of daily life.

Even the safest of Iraqi cities are girded by concrete walls and soldiers rumble down the streets in heavily armed vehicles.

The northern city of Mosul, like several other restive areas, is still under siege. In the city, where minority Kurds have controlled the government since 2005, Sunni Islamist insurgents stage car bomb attacks and assassinate police.

AP Associated Press

## Shiites protest vote results

2,000 demonstrate against what they say is election fraud

March 2, 2009 BY KIM GAMEL Associated Press

**B**AGHDAD -- About 2,000 Shiites staged their first significant street protests against provincial election results yesterday, marching in tense Diyala province.

The demonstrators in the Shiite enclaves of Muqadadiyah and Khalis alleged that Shiites were the victims of fraud and were denied seats on the influential provincial council.

Under heavy guard, the protesters -- waving Iraqi flags and chanting "No to sectarianism" -- also demanded the election commission be replaced, alleging a Sunni bias.

The rural province holds a mix of Iraq's main sectarian and ethnic groups -- Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds -- and has been a flashpoint for bloodshed among them and attacks on U.S. forces and Iraqi police.

Sunnis won 15 seats on the incoming council in the Jan. 31 elections. Kurds took six and Shiites five. A secular party won three. The current council has 20 Shiites, 14 Sunnis and seven Kurds.



The elections were seen as a chance to extend the Sunni political voice and test the strength of main Shiite parties before national races this year.

The provincial councils have no direct sway over national affairs but carry wide powers over regional matters such as business deals and local security.

A large number of Shiite voters in Diyala could not find their names on eligible-voter lists at the polling centers, while people who had been driven from their homes by the violence were unable to cast ballots, said Saja Qadouri, a member of the current provincial council.

An appeals period to consider challenges to the results ends March 9, and the new councils are to be seated March 24, said Faraj al-Haidari, the

head of Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission.

The nationwide vote occurred without major violence, which was considered a success for the Iraqi forces who are trying to prove they can take the lead in providing security as U.S. troops begin to draw down.

However, the electoral commission said ballots in more than 30 polling stations nationwide were nullified because of fraud, but that was not enough to declare the election a failure.

In violence yesterday, a suicide bomber targeted an anti-insurgent Sunni tribal leader near Fallujah, killing the son of Sheik Khalid al-Eifan.

ASIA TIMES  
www.asiatimes.com

March 5, 2009

## Iraqi Kurds dreading US troop withdrawal

By Mohammed A Salih -(Inter Press Service)

**COLUMBIA, Missouri** - When United States President Barack Obama announced his plan last week to pull out all US combat troops from Iraq by September 2010, the news did not generate much enthusiasm among Iraqi Kurds.

Simple math reveals the reasons behind the Kurds' anxiety - add the withdrawal plan to the recent staggering victory of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's supporters in the country's recent provincial elections.

Kurds are now counting on Obama's oft-repeated pledge for a "responsible" withdrawal, hoping their interests will be preserved. But a review of statements by Kurdish and US officials reveals the

two sides are mostly talking at cross purposes when they speak of "responsibility".

Recently, Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani gave his interpretation of the term "responsible".

"I restate that the role of the United States should be to help resolve the problems in Iraq such as Article 140, the oil law, and the law on the distribution of its oil wealth," Barzani told reporters in the northern city of Irbil, tallying the list of contentious issues between Kurds and the Iraqi government.

Article 140 refers to a constitutional provision to settle the critical issue of disputed territories between Kurds and Iraqi Arabs, including the gold-prize contested city of Kirkuk which is afloat on some of the world's largest oil reserves.

But for the US, "responsibility" appears to mean making sure Iraqi security forces can take over the task of protecting the country against rebellious forces once it leaves. To achieve that end, the US is equipping and training

Iraqi security forces. But this is hardly reassuring to Kurds, many of whom see a conflict with Baghdad forthcoming in some form in the future.

When asked whether the US will act to resolve the problems between Iraqi Arabs and Kurds before leaving the country, US State Department spokesman Robert Wood replied: "It's not really up to the United States to reassure anyone," and that Iraqis had to work out their differences through their "democracy".

But the balance of power in Baghdad is quickly tilting toward forces which Kurds do not perceive as amenable. Just shortly before Obama officially declared the US withdrawal plan, the Kurds' number-one opponent in Baghdad, Maliki, found himself in a boosted position as his coalition of the State of Law scored a quite unexpected victory in nine of Iraq's 18 provinces including Baghdad, the country's most populous city of around six million.

With Kurds and Baghdad at odds over several crucial issues, Obama's withdrawal plan would only further strengthen Maliki's position.

Disputes between the country's Kurds and central government go back to the early days of the foundation of modern Iraq by British colonialism in the 1920s. At the heart of contention are large chunks of territory marking the separation line between Kurdish and Arab Iraq.

Iraqi governments, most notably under Saddam Hussein, expelled tens of thousands of Kurds and Turkomans from those areas and replaced them with Arab settlers. While Kurds want to annex these areas to their autonomous region known as Kurdistan, the vast majority of the country's Arab political parties vehemently oppose such plans. Kurdish attempts to expand their feder-

al region have sparked fierce reactions in Baghdad.

Spearheading a growing trend in Iraqi politics to abort Kurdish efforts and stalling the establishment of new autonomous regions is Shi'ite Prime Minister Maliki. He has called for further centralization of power in Baghdad, accusing Kurds of going overboard with their demands.

Besides strengthening Maliki's position, the provincial elections delivered a major blow to the Kurds' only powerful ally in Arab Iraq that advocates federalism: the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council, previously known to be the most powerful Shi'ite Arab party in the country.

With their power in Baghdad thought to be in decline, Kurdish leaders are these days loudly beating their anti-Maliki drum to draw international attention to their problems with the rest of Iraq. Barzani told the Associated Press last month that he thinks Maliki is seeking a "confrontation" with the Kurds.

Kurdish officials have even reportedly called on Obama to appoint a special envoy to resolve their long-standing problems with Iraqi Arabs.

One Kurdish official took it even further, telling the Associated Press that al-Maliki was a "second Saddam". The alleged statement by Kamal Kirkuki, Kurdish parliament deputy speaker, was so ill-calculated that he had to issue a statement denying that he ever gave an interview to the AP.

As tensions appear to escalate, a consensus is taking shape among many analysts that things are moving toward a possible flare-up.

"The threat [of conflict] is real," Kirmanj Gundi, head of the Kurdish National Congress (KNC) in North America, told IPS in a phone interview from Nashville, Tennessee, where the largest Kurdish community in North America resides.

"It's unfortunate that the Kurdish leadership became more vocal about this only recently," Gundi said. KNC is a non-profit organization lobbying for Kurdish interests in the US and Canada.

But concerns about a possible outbreak of conflict between Kurds and the Iraqi government have gone far beyond Kurdish circles.

"It is critical for the US to start thinking about this now because as we proceed with the disengagement, our influence will wane in Iraq," said Henry Barkey from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, of the need for the US to address existing problems between Kurds and the Iraqi government before it leaves the war-torn country.

Barkey authored a report for the Washington-based think-tank on how to prevent conflict over Kurdistan. "Therefore, we need to hit the iron when it is hot. And so, it is very important to help and we haven't done this in the past, to help look at some of these issues," Barkey said on the sidelines of an event at Carnegie to discuss his report last month.

While Washington appears indifferent, at least in its official discourse, to calls for helping forge a common understanding between Iraqi Kurds and Arabs, tensions are continuing to build.

In an attempt to flex its muscles, the Iraqi government recently announced it will not recognize the visas stamped by the Kurdish government on the passports of foreign visitors. It also tried to send an army division to take over security tasks in Kirkuk but had to halt the plan for the time being as it met stiff Kurdish opposition.

The coming two years - from now until the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq - will be decisive in determining how the Kurds' relations with the central government and the country's Arabs will turn out. But all signs suggest that Iraq is far from long-term stability.

★★★



## Arab, Kurd crisis has legal solution

KIRKUK, Iraq, March 3, 2009 (UPI)

CONFLICT between Arabs and Iraqi Kurds can be averted if the status of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk is resolved through legal provisions, officials said.

Kirkuk lies at the center of disputes between Iraqi Kurds and their Arab counterparts. Article 28 of the Iraqi provincial elections law calls for a power-sharing agreement between the city's ethnic groups.

The dispute over Kirkuk prompted a vote there to be delayed. Iraq held provincial elections in 14 of the 18 provinces Jan. 31. A vote in the Kurdish provinces and

Kirkuk is scheduled tentatively for May.

Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani said recently the dispute could lead to conflict if the matter went unresolved before U.S. forces left the country.

Muhammad Khalil al-Jibouri, a member of an Arab slate in Kirkuk, challenged those sentiments in an interview with the Iraqi political Web site Niqash.

"I do not believe that an Arab-Kurdish war will erupt if U.S. troops withdraw from Iraq," he said. "I also don't believe that U.S. forces are a guarantor against the eruption of conflict."

He went to say that resolving the issues between Arabs and Kurds would make progress toward national reconciliation in greater Iraq.

"We believe that resolving Kirkuk's crisis is a key to resolving all other unsettled disputes (in) Iraq," he added.

BBC NEWS

March 3, 2009

## Kurdish 'grave site' digs begin

Authorities have begun digging up wells and other sites in south-eastern Turkey, searching for the bodies of Kurds killed by the security forces.

A prosecutor in Silopi ordered the digs last month as part of an investigation into claims that hundreds of Kurds were killed in the 1990s.

The first excavations began on Monday at a storage facility of the state Botas Petroleum Pipeline Corporation.

The alleged killings took place during a Kurdish campaign for independence.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has been fighting for an independent state since the 1980s, since when close to 40,000 people have been killed.

During the conflict, which reached a peak in the mid-1990s, thousands of villages were destroyed in the largely Kurdish south-east

and east, and hundreds of Kurdish civilians disappeared.

Lawyers for more than 70 families applied to the prosecutor's office in Silopi after information emerged suggesting the location of their missing relatives' bodies.

A former security forces officer, now in hiding abroad, gave information about the torture and execution of Kurdish civilians.

The families were also boosted by the unprecedented arrest of members of the Turkish military, retired and active, in connection with an alleged plot to topple the government. Several of those in custody were in command in the region in the 1990s.

The prosecutor subsequently ordered the excavation of five sites, including two old well-shafts behind an abandoned roadside restaurant and land owned by Botas.

Lawyers also want to examine parts of a municipal cemetery, where they believe a mass grave of the missing could be found.



Kurdistan Regional Government

## President Barzani arrives in Germany to meet Chancellor Angela Merkel after Italy visit

KRG.org - 04 Mar. 2009

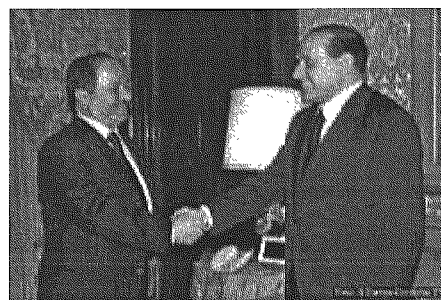
**Berlin, Germany (KRG.org)** – Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani arrived in Germany today to hold meetings with Chancellor Angela Merkel, the German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and other senior officials.

Foreign Minister Steinmeier visited the Kurdistan Region last month to open the Consulate General in the capital, Erbil.

President Barzani is on the second stage of his European tour. Earlier this week in Rome, he met Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

President Barzani has been active in pursuing stronger relationships with the international community, recently completing a trip to Qatar and Kuwait. He will continue his European tour with a visit the United Kingdom. He said, "The Kurdistan Region has much to gain from developing friendships with European nations in a wide variety of fields and economic sectors, and I look forward to a closer partnership with countries such as Italy."

Prime Minister Berlusconi and President Barzani discussed a number of issues, focusing on opportunities for mutually beneficial economic cooperation and the improved relations between the Kurdistan Region and neighbouring states.



President Barzani with Prime Minister Berlusconi in Rome last week

Pope Benedict praised the Kurdistan Region's commitment to tolerance and peaceful coexistence. President Barzani extended to the Pope an invitation to visit the Region. President Barzani was accompanied by his Chief of Staff, Dr Fnuad Hussein; Kurdistan Regional Government Minister for Finance Mr Sarkis Aghajan, who in 2006 was knighted by Pope Benedict for his services to the Christian community in Iraq; and Iraq's Ambassador to the Vatican.

AFP

## Au moins 11 morts et 33 blessés dans une série d'attaques en Irak

BAGDAD 4 mars 2009 (AFP) —

**ONZE IRAKIENS** ont été tués et 33 blessés mercredi dans une série d'attaques, dont des attentats suicide, visant la police et les milices luttant contre Al-Qaïda à Bagdad et à Mossoul, un bastion du réseau extrémiste dans le nord du pays.

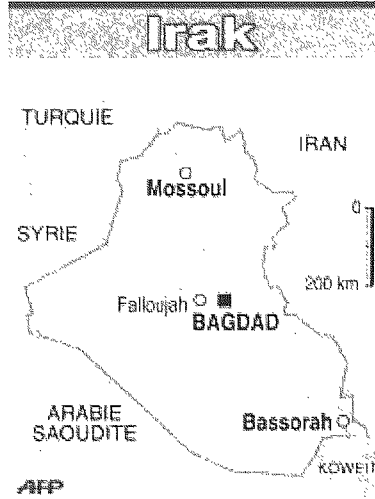
Quatre personnes, dont un chef des "Sahwa", ces milices d'anciens insurgés reconvertis dans la lutte contre Al-Qaïda, ont été tuées dans un attentat près de Balad, à 75 km au nord de Bagdad.

Selon le colonel de police Ghanem al-Baldaoui, "une mine artisanale a visé la voiture du chef local des Sahwa, Dhiab al-Ali, alors qu'il se trouvait avec sa femme, son fils et son petit-fils".

L'attentat, qui a tué tous les membres de la famille, s'est produit dans un faubourg de Balad, qui a longtemps été un bastion d'Al-Qaïda.

Balad est situé dans la province de Salaheddine, une région régulièrement touchée par des attentats, résultat de la lutte meurtrière entre des partisans d'Al-Qaïda et les "Sahwa".

Par ailleurs, quatre policiers ont été tués et 33 personnes blessées dans deux attentats suicide à Bagdad et à Mossoul, le "dernier bastion urbain d'Al-Qaïda", selon l'armée américaine.



Le premier attentat s'est produit vers 10H45 (07H45 GMT) à Karrada, un quartier très commerçant du centre de la capitale irakienne, et visait une patrouille de la police.

Le kamikaze a actionné sa ceinture d'explosifs au milieu des policiers. Deux d'entre eux ont été tués et 12 personnes, dont sept membres des forces de l'ordre, ont été blessés.

A Mossoul, à 370 km au nord de Bagdad, un attentat suicide à la voiture piégée a été perpétré à un barrage de police. Deux policiers ont été tués et 21 personnes blessées (13 blessés et 8 policiers), selon la police de la ville.

Par ailleurs, un soldat irakien a été tué par un tir d'un sniper à Mossoul, selon une source policière locale, qui a ajouté qu'un civil avait aussi été abattu en pleine rue par des inconnus ayant pu prendre la fuite.

A Kirkouk (255 km au nord de Bagdad), un avocat chiite, Fayçal Fayçallaoui, a été tué d'une balle dans la tête dans son bureau, selon la police locale.

Riche en pétrole, la province de Kirkouk compte plusieurs communautés qui se disputent le pouvoir: des Kurdes, qui souhaitent son rattachement au Kurdistan irakien, des Turcomans, qui se considèrent comme ses habitants historiques, des Assyro-chaldéens (chrétiens) ou des Arabes, souvent arrivés à l'occasion de la politique d'arabisation forcée de Saddam Hussein.

## L'ARMÉE TURQUE ESTIME À PRÈS DE 400 LES PERTES DU PKK DEPUIS OCTOBRE EN IRAK

ANKARA, 6 mars 2009 (AFP)

**PRÈS DE 375** rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont été tués ou blessés depuis octobre dans des bombardements par l'aviation et l'artillerie turques de leurs positions dans le nord de l'Irak, a affirmé vendredi l'état-major de l'armée turque.

"Durant la période allant d'octobre 2008 à aujourd'hui, l'organisation terroriste a subi selon différentes sources près de 375 pertes, incluant morts et blessés, rien que lors des opérations aériennes et des tirs d'artillerie visant le nord de l'Irak", a déclaré lors d'un point de presse hebdomadaire le général Metin Gürak, cité par l'agence de presse Anatolie.

L'officier a par ailleurs fait état de dissensions au sein du PKK, qui ont selon lui conduit à des affrontements meurtriers entre rebelles, et d'un nombre croissant de défections.

Le général Gürak a également appelé "tout le monde à agir avec bon sens et responsabilité" le 21 mars lors des célébrations du Newroz, le nouvel an kurde, qui sont souvent l'occasion de heurts entre militants kurdes et forces de sécurité.

Le PKK est un mouvement séparatiste basé principalement dans le sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé majoritairement de Kurdes, et dans le nord de l'Irak, une région qu'il utilise comme une base arrière pour ses opérations en Turquie.

Il mène depuis 1984 une lutte armée contre Ankara qui a fait environ 44.000 morts.

L'armée turque effectue régulièrement des raids aériens contre des bases du PKK dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak, avec l'aide de renseignements fournis par les Etats-Unis. Elle y a aussi mené une courte incursion terrestre en février dernier.

## HILLARY CLINTON EN TURQUIE SOUS LE SIGNE D'UN PARTENARIAT RENOUVELÉ

ANKARA 7 mars 2009 (AFP)

**LA SECRÉTAIRE** d'Etat américaine Hillary Clinton a entamé samedi ses entretiens à Ankara visant à améliorer les relations stratégiques des Etats-Unis avec son allié turc, mises à mal par la question irakienne sous l'administration Bush.

"C'est un honneur de visiter de nouveau" la Turquie, cette fois "pour mettre l'accent sur les efforts que doivent faire les Etats-Unis et la Turquie" en matière de "paix" et de "prospérité", a-t-elle déclaré à la presse après avoir visité le mausolée d'Atatürk, fondateur de la Turquie moderne (1881-1938).

Mme Clinton était déjà venue en Turquie en 1999 pour y accompagner son époux Bill, alors président des Etats-Unis.

Dans la matinée, elle s'est entretenue avec le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan en présence de son homologue turc, Ali Babacan. Selon un communiqué du service de presse de M. Erdogan, les relations bilatérales, la situation au Proche-Orient, l'Irak, l'Afghanistan et la lutte contre le terrorisme ont été évoquées "en détail" lors de cet entretien avec la secrétaire d'Etat d'un pays "ami et

allié".

Les discussions de Mme Clinton à Ankara, dernière étape d'une tournée de huit jours au Proche-Orient et en Europe, devaient porter sur le retrait programmé des forces américaines d'Irak, sur une possible nouvelle contribution de la Turquie à la force internationale de sécurité en Afghanistan (Isaf) et sur la médiation d'Ankara dans le conflit au Proche-Orient.

Les relations entre Washington et Ankara se sont réchauffées après une période de tension provoquée par le refus des Turcs en 2003 d'autoriser les forces américaines à utiliser le sol turc pour leur invasion de l'Irak. Ankara avait ensuite reproché au président George W. Bush de laisser les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) lancer des attaques contre la Turquie à partir du nord de l'Irak.

Mais aujourd'hui, la Turquie se dit prête à ouvrir ses bases et ports aux troupes américaines quittant l'Irak. Mme Clinton devait s'adresser à la presse au terme de son entretien avec M. Babacan au ministère des Affaires étrangères, avant de quitter la capitale turque pour Washington dans la soirée.

## La sale guerre a déjà fait 40 000 morts **Turquie: détente sur le front kurde**

A l'approche des élections locales, le Premier ministre multiplie les gestes symboliques

De notre envoyée spéciale

**S**ivan Perwer, célébrité chanteur kurde, vit en exil en Allemagne depuis 1976. Il risquait la prison chaque fois qu'il chantait dans sa langue maternelle, interdite en Turquie depuis 1925. Jugées dangereuses pour l'unité nationale, ses chansons sont toujours interdites d'antenne. Mais il y a deux mois, une de ses mélodies a été choisie pour servir de jingle à la toute nouvelle chaîne de télévision nationale en langue kurde (TRT6) lancée en décembre dernier et saluée avec enthousiasme par le public kurde. Plus encourageant encore, le Premier ministre Erdogan, prenant la parole il y a quelques jours à Diyarbakir, au cœur du pays kurde, dans le sud-est de l'Anatolie, a tendu la main à tous ceux qui ont été traités injustement par l'Etat turc. Résultat étonnant dans un pays jamais à court de paradoxes : Sivan Perwer pourrait rentrer dans son pays alors que des producteurs de radio qui ont diffusé ses chansons sont toujours sous le coup de poursuites et risquent cinq années de prison...

Le gouvernement conservateur issu de l'AKP (parti islamiste) va-t-il enfin trouver une solution à l'interminable conflit kurde, cette sale guerre qui a fait, depuis 1984, près de 40 000 morts, provoqué la destruction de 3 000 villages et entraîné l'expulsion de leurs terres d'un million de paysans ? En 2002, l'arrivée au pouvoir de l'AKP – peu suspect de collusion avec la frange ultranationaliste et militariste responsable du pourrissement kurde – a soulevé un immense espoir. Mais il a fallu d'énergiques pressions de l'Union européenne pour que la détente se dessine enfin. A l'approche des élections locales du 29 mars, Recep Tayyip Erdogan multiplie les gestes symboliques. Lors de sa tournée électorale des villes kurdes, il n'a pas hésité à prononcer

publiquement quelques mots en kurde (en contravention avec la Constitution !) : « *Nous sommes tous des citoyens de première classe, personne ne peut traiter l'autre en "invité". Ce pays est notre maison commune* », a-t-il affirmé.

Enjeu électoral oblige, l'AKP promet aussi des investissements massifs (8 milliards de dollars) dans les infrastructures, l'éducation, la création d'emplois et l'aide sociale. Une promesse de renaissance pour cette région martyrisée, vidée de ses habitants et ruinée



par une politique délibérée de désertification. « *L'AKP a opté pour une solution économique et culturelle de la question turque*, résume Ertugrul Kurkçu, rédacteur en chef du site Bianet. *Et l'armée, sans doute poussée par ses soutiens américains, semble désormais accepter la stratégie de l'AKP, à condition de ne pas toucher au statut quo politique.* »

Les Kurdes, qui ont durement combattu pour leur liberté, abandonneront-ils leurs aspirations à l'autonomie politique ? La réponse à cette question dépendra en partie du rapprochement esquissé ces derniers jours entre Ankara et le Kurdistan irakien. Si la Turquie réussissait à établir des relations économiques fructueuses avec la région autonome de Massoud Barzani, les Kurdes pourraient se laisser convaincre de tourner la page des tueries.

URSULA GAUTHIER

LE FIGARO vendredi 6 mars 2009

## Le départ américain d'Irak attise la violence

### MOYEN-ORIENT

Quatre mois avant que les GI commencent à quitter les villes, l'attentat d'hier montre la fragilité des acquis sécuritaires.

AU MOINS dix personnes ont été tuées et une cinquantaine d'autres blessées, hier, dans un attentat à la camionnette piégée perpétré sur un marché au bétail de Medhatiyah, à 120 km au sud de Bagdad. Cette attaque intervient au lendemain d'une série d'attentats, visant la police et les milices en lutte contre al-Qaïda, plus au nord, à Mossoul et dans la capitale. L'attaque d'hier est la plus meurtrière depuis l'attentat suicide commis le 13 février à Iskandariyah, toujours au sud de Bagdad, où 35 pèlerins chiites avaient été tués, alors qu'ils se rendaient dans la ville sainte de Kerbala.

Si l'Irak est sur la voie de la stabilisation, les attentats et les exécutions

restent quotidiens. En février, 258 civils, militaires et policiers ont encore trouvé la mort à travers le pays. « Les acquis sécuritaires restent fragiles et réversibles », répètent les militaires américains. D'autant que leur début de retrait des villes, programmé pour juin, laisse planer la menace d'une recrudescence de la violence.

« Les mois qui viennent seront très sensibles, prévient Joost Hilterman, spécialiste de l'Irak, à l'International Crisis Group. Tous les acteurs politiques sont en position d'attente, ils se préparent militairement, via leurs milices, qui n'ont toujours pas été démantelées. Si d'ici juin, les Américains ne sont pas capables de conclure des accords avec les principales factions irakiennes, la violence repartira de plus belle, car il n'y a toujours pas d'État capable d'imposer sa loi », poursuit Hilterman. Si l'armée et la police ont renforcé leur capacité

d'action, faute d'équipements et d'entraînement, elles restent incapables d'assurer, seules, la sécurité à travers l'Irak.

Désormais, une course contre la montre est engagée pour combler le vide que laisseront les Américains à leur départ. Affaibli, al-Qaïda n'a pas disparu complètement. « Ses activistes, Irakiens pour la plupart, se cachent et font le dos rond », selon les experts de la mouvance terroriste. La localisation des derniers attentats ne doit rien au hasard : ils ont lieu dans les zones de repli d'al-Qaïda, ces zones mixtes, où les terroristes peuvent jouer sur les tensions communautaires. C'est là également que les conseils tribaux, ces groupes d'anciens insurgés recrutés par les Américains pour combattre al-Qaïda, sont les plus faibles.

### Une réconciliation en panne

Or, aujourd'hui, de plus en plus d'ex-rebelles sont mécontents : le gouvernement irakien avait promis d'en intégrer 20 000 dans les forces de sécurité et d'offrir un travail à 80 000 autres. Mais l'engagement est resté, dans une large

mesure, lettre morte. « Quand les Américains vont se retirer, les ex-guérilleros peuvent très bien retourner avec al-Qaïda, pour lutter contre l'Iran, qui restera l'ennemi proche », analyse Hilterman. « Nouri al-Maliki, le premier ministre, devrait en exiler certains, en intégrer d'autres, et combattre les derniers », recommande, de son côté, un universitaire à Bagdad.

Malgré le bon déroulement des récentes élections provinciales, au plan politique, la réconciliation nationale marque toujours le pas. Les députés restent incapables de se mettre d'accord sur une loi pétrolière – cruciale pour le partage de l'or noir – ou sur l'épineux dossier des régions, que se disputent les communautés, au premier rang desquelles Kirkouk, la cité pétrolière au nord de Bagdad, arabisée sous Saddam Hussein que revendique aujourd'hui la minorité kurde. Bref l'Irak va mieux, mais elle est encore loin d'être sortie du tunnel.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

LE FIGARO vendredi 6 mars 2009

## Les grandes puissances nucléaires unissent leurs voix face à l'Iran

### DIPLOMATIE

Une déclaration commune exprime leur inquiétude face au programme nucléaire iranien, mais n'évoque pas de nouvelles sanctions.

Vienne

LA NOUVELLE approche du président américain, Barack Obama, vis-à-vis de l'Iran a trouvé sa première application concrète, lors de la réunion à Vienne cette semaine du conseil des gouverneurs de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA). Mardi, le groupe des « 5 + 1 », regroupant les cinq grandes puissances nucléaires de la planète (France, États-Unis, Grande-Bretagne, Chine et Russie) plus l'Allemagne, a publié une déclaration commune, une première depuis la découverte en août 2002 d'un programme nucléaire clandestin en Iran. Jamais auparavant la Russie et la Chine n'avaient consenti à s'aligner sur les Occi-

dentaux pour stopper les ambitions nucléaires de l'Iran.

Exprimant leur inquiétude au sujet des progrès de Téhéran en matière d'enrichissement de l'uranium et des restrictions croissantes imposées aux inspecteurs de Vienne, les Six se sont néanmoins abstenus d'évoquer de nouvelles sanctions au Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies à l'égard du régime chiite. Une perche inattendue a même été offerte aux Iraniens : « Nous restons fermement détermi-

nés à la recherche d'une solution diplomatique globale, notamment par le biais d'un dialogue direct », stipule la déclaration lue devant le conseil des gouverneurs.

### Le bâton et la carotte

Cet exercice d'équilibrisme illustre les intenses pourparlers auxquels se livrent en coulisses les grandes puissances pour adopter un ton commun face à Téhéran. Le nouvel exécutif américain veut appliquer à la fois le bâton et la carotte, en appe-

lant d'un côté au renforcement du régime des inspections en Iran et de l'autre à l'ouverture d'un nouveau chapitre dans les relations entre l'Iran et l'Occident.

Le directeur général de l'AIEA, Mohammed ElBaradei, s'est félicité de ce nouvel état d'esprit, appelant de ses vœux des négociations directes « pour sortir de l'impasse ». L'Iran continue pour sa part de poser les mêmes conditions à la tenue de pourparlers : « Pas de conditions préalables », une allusion directe à

l'arrêt des activités d'enrichissement de l'uranium, ainsi que l'exigent quatre résolutions du Conseil de sécurité depuis février 2006.

Mercredi, le Guide suprême de la Révolution islamique, Ali Khamenei, a en outre qualifié Israël de « tumeur cancéreuse », dans une provocation de plus à l'égard de l'État hébreu, qui redoute tout autant l'avènement d'une bombe chiite que la pusillanimité des grandes puissances à l'égard de Téhéran.

MAURIN PICARD



Turkey

# The enduring popularity of Recep Tayyip Erdogan

**ANKARA AND VAN / But will popularity blunt the reforming zeal of Turkey's prime minister?**



**AT A** recent rally in the predominantly Kurdish city of Van, in south-east Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan was in his element. Turkey's prime minister rattled off his government's achievements, belabouring out to a jubilant crowd, "22 primary schools, five health clinics, 82 kilometres of paved roads".

With only three weeks to go before countrywide municipal elections on March 29th, Mr Erdogan has hit the campaign trail in a confident mood. Most opinion polls suggest that his mildly Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) will clobber its opponents yet again. The secular opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) is so desperate that it no longer talks much of the risk of sharia law or the dangers of Kurdish separatism. Instead it has resorted to recruiting female candidates who wear the Islamic headscarf and calling for the Kurdish new year to be declared a national holiday.

None of this is likely to make much impression on voters, most of whom will stick with the AKP. Nor will it affect Mr Erdogan's policies. Ever since he was handsomely re-elected in the 2007 general election, his critics say that the prime minister has become increasingly autocratic, drifting away from the reformist agenda that first brought the AKP to single-party rule in 2002. It does not help that the European Union is continuing to prevaricate in the long-drawn-out talks about Turkey's membership application, sapping enthusiasm for reform in Ankara.

As further evidence of autocratic tendencies, the critics point to Mr Erdogan's continuing quarrel with Aydin Dogan, the country's biggest media mogul, whose outlets have exposed corruption scandals in which individuals close to the government have been implicated. Mr Dogan believes this explains why he faces a \$500m claim for allegedly unpaid taxes, a

charge he passionately denies. "Turkey has become a republic of fear," complains Sedat Ergin, managing editor of Milliyet, a leading Dogan newspaper.

On the international front Mr Erdogan is raising eyebrows for more than his (understandable) loss of enthusiasm for the EU. He has also attracted unfavourable attention for his virulent attacks on Israel, especially during its war in Gaza, and for his budding friendships with Iran and Sudan.

Among ordinary Turks, however, Mr Erdogan remains the most popular and charismatic leader since a visionary former prime minister and president, Turgut Ozal. One old Kurdish woman in Van sums up the mood: "Tayyip is one of us, he treats us as equals." Mr Erdogan's popularity has even forced his enemies, notably the country's hawkish generals, who have often tried to topple his government, to back off.

Mr Erdogan's touch was in evidence in Van as he and his vivacious wife, Emine, handed out toys to ragged children. Elsewhere in Turkey, the government has been giving away coal, school textbooks and, as the elections draw near, even fridges and washing-machines to the poor. Such profligacy has angered the IMF. A long-delayed standby facility with the fund has yet to be signed because of differences over public spending. But a defiant Mr Erdogan insists, in an interview, that Turkey's economy is robust enough to get through its current troubles without IMF help.

Like most countries, Turkey has been hit by the world financial crisis. The Turkish lira is slipping against the dollar, GDP is expected to shrink this year and unemployment is rising. Yet, partly thanks to tough regulation, not a single Turkish bank has gone under. The economy is wobbling but remains on its feet.

No wonder Mr Erdogan is so confi-

dent. Many worry that another big electoral win may swell his head further. Yet for all his pre-electoral posturing, there are signs that his pragmatic self may come back. He seems to have grasped that he has an image problem. He has hired a new, affable spokesman and is courting foreign journalists for the first time. In an interview with this correspondent, he freely bestowed smiles (and dried fruit) as he insisted he was no autocrat. "I can be impatient at times," was all he would admit.

The launch of Turkey's first official Kurdish-language television channel in January and the government's calls for the establishment of Kurdish literature departments at state universities have raised hopes of more reforms. After years of mutual hostility, Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds are at last talking. A deal with separatist guerrillas from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), who have been fighting the Turkish army since 1984 from bases in northern Iraq, is said to be on the table. Turkey's generals are tentatively compliant.

All of this will make Mr Erdogan's meeting this weekend with Hillary Clinton, America's secretary of state, especially significant. Mr Erdogan will brief her on talks with another former Turkish foe, Armenia. Once the local elections in Turkey and the April 24th anniversary of the mass killings of Ottoman Armenians in 1915 are past, it is expected that formal ties will be re-established between the two countries and their long-closed border will be reopened. This may also stave off attempts by America's Congress to pass a resolution calling the massacres a genocide.

An IMF deal is widely expected after the local elections as well, though Mehmet Simsek, the economy minister, insists that the IMF must drop some of its more "orthodox" demands. On progress towards joining the EU, the next big test for Mr Erdogan will be whether he can budge a bit more on the opening of Turkish ports and airports to Cyprus, shaming Turkey's detractors within the EU (notably the French) into stopping their efforts to undermine the membership talks.

The appointment of Egemen Bagis, a sharp young English-speaker, as Turkey's first cabinet-rank EU negotiator suggests that Mr Erdogan may make a fresh effort to put the EU talks back on track. But if he is genuinely serious, he will have to take a second shot at rewriting Turkey's constitution, crafted by the generals after a military coup in 1980. His previous attempt at this almost led the Constitutional Court to ban the AKP on the ground that it was trying to impose sharia law. That is because he started off in piecemeal fashion by trying to ease bans on the Islamic headscarf in government offices and universities. Mr Erdogan would do better this time if he worked with the opposition to produce a constitution that met the wishes of all Turks, not just pious ones.



March 5th 2009

AMERICA AND IRAQ

# Take them home responsibly

**President Obama is right to be flexible about the pace of America's departure from Iraq**

IT IS six years ago this month since American forces invaded Iraq and toppled Saddam Hussein, only to see their victory sour as the country descended into a hell of sectarian killing. Barack Obama, who opposed the war from the start and campaigned for the presidency on a promise to end it, has begun to fulfil his promise. In a speech last week he said the bulk of American troops would withdraw by September next year. But because that is a trifle later than his original promise of getting them out within 16 months of taking office, and because he says he may keep up to 50,000 soldiers in Iraq (for training but also for "counter-terrorism") even longer, he is being accused by some of slithering away from his campaign pledge.

In fact the plan looks both shrewd and responsible. Under an agreement signed by Iraq's government and George Bush, all American troops were anyway scheduled to withdraw from Iraq by the end of 2011, and from its towns by the end of June this year. Mr Obama will extract the bulk of American forces a shade faster, but by keeping on a residual force he is giving himself a bit of extra wiggle room in case things go bad again. He is entirely right to do so.

Iraq is in an incomparably better state than it was two years ago, when some 3,500 Iraqi civilians were being killed every month, mostly by Iraqis. Now the monthly death toll may be ten times smaller. A month ago, provincial elections were successfully held across the country, except in the Kurdish

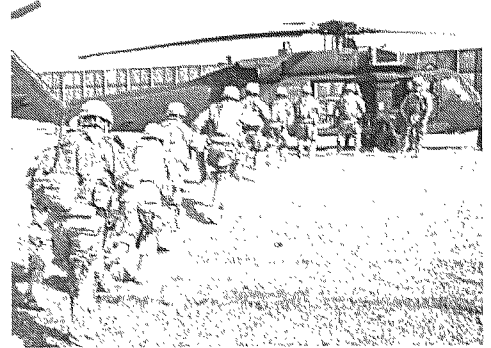
region and a disputed province, Kirkuk. The outcome in terms of winners and losers was messy, but the trend was hopeful.

A new alliance led by the authoritarian but canny prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki, did well. Politicians and parties who argued for a more strongly centralised state, as Mr Maliki did, fared better than those who urged devolution for the regions. Religious parties and the hitherto leading Shia one, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, better known as ISCI, which many Iraqis think too close to Iran, did dreadfully, losing ground to more secular and nationalist rivals. The Kurds did badly in mixed areas where they had previously prospered. Iraq's Sunnis turned out in greater numbers than before and recovered their clout in various provinces, including Nineveh, whose main city, Mosul, had previously been run by Kurds. Here and there, efficient former Baathists came back to the fore.

**A problem shared**

And yet politics in Iraq is still fraught. No politician successfully appeals to all Iraqis. That is why General David Petraeus, the architect of America's successful military "surge" under Mr Bush, has always called the gains fragile. The Kurds, after enjoying almost untrammelled autonomy for nearly two decades, increasingly loathe Mr Maliki's new establishment in Baghdad; their feeling is reciprocated. Rivalries within each of the three main communities—Shia, Sunni, Kurd—are bitter. A vital law to share out the country's oil wealth still shows no sign of being passed. The next political watershed, a general election by the end of the year, will be a nerve-jangling event, and American troops will be needed to help oversee it.

Having campaigned against the war in Iraq while emphasising the need to do more in Afghanistan, Mr Obama will face a continuing temptation to end the former war while reinforcing the latter. And that may be possible, thanks to Mr Bush having supported the surge when many people, including Mr Obama, were urging America to cut and run. But America's moral responsibility to the



people of Iraq, and its own interest in maintaining stability in this strategic corner of the Middle East, have not disappeared with the departure of Mr Bush.

One way Mr Obama could lighten America's burden would be to use the goodwill he has earned around the world to urge international bodies, especially the United Nations, to play an ever bigger part in helping the Iraqis to entrench their shaky democracy. For sure, his eyes will focus more keenly in the near future on Afghanistan-Pakistan, not to mention Israel, Palestine, Syria and Iran (see article). But he must be ready, just in case, to keep his troops in Iraq rather longer than he promised during his election, and perhaps even longer than called for in his new plan, if another bloodbath should appear to be in prospect. There would be no shame in doing so. The dishonour would come from abandoning Iraq's long-suffering people for the sake of a deadline.



Mar. 11, 2009

By TRENTON DANIEL

## Ethnic tensions in Kirkuk turn U.S. military into mediator

When U.S. Col. Ryan Gonsalves strapped on his helmet and body armor and climbed into his mine-resistant vehicle on a recent Saturday afternoon, he wasn't heading to battle.

The commander was rushing off to mediate the latest dispute between the Kurds, who dominate the local government, and the Shiite Muslim Arab-led Iraqi army, which is trying to assert its authority in this contested area in northern Iraq.

Gonsalves, who's from Fort Hood, Texas, had just taken a complaint from the mostly Kurdish police department and was now off to meet with the Iraqi army across town.

As American forces shift their focus from combat

operations to peacekeeping efforts because of recent security gains, Gonsalves and his soldiers from the U.S. Army's 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, are working against the clock to mediate a long-standing dispute over oil and land and federalism and nationalism in the battleground of Kirkuk. The sense of urgency: Washington plans to pull out combat troops in August 2010. If left unresolved, the Kirkuk issue could explode.

Kurdish parties have dispatched forces well south of the Green Line, a United Nations-created boundary that's marked the semiautonomous region of Kurdistan since 1991. Arabs say that the Kurds are seizing land that rightfully belongs to them, while Kurds say the land was theirs until former dictator Saddam Hussein purged them from it. In this bitter contest, both sides have employed tactics that range from intimidation and detention to murder.

The central government and Kurdish troops

nearly came to blows last year in Khanaqeen, in neighboring Diyala province, when Iraqi forces tried to move into the area. Stepping in, the Americans averted imminent clashes.

It's easy to see why the sectarian divisions could prove even more explosive: The region houses what's thought to be the sixth-largest oil reserve in the world.

The political battle between Baghdad's Shiite-dominated government and the Kurdish-controlled north is almost certain to be the biggest hot-button issue in Iraq in the coming years. Despite their fiery differences, the two sides agree on this: A full-fledged civil war will break out if the matter goes unresolved.

"In the absence of U.S. mediation, the situation may quickly deteriorate into violence, assassinations and maybe war," said Haider al-Musawi, a political analyst based in Baghdad. "The politicians seek supremacy, and the people want peace. It has all the

makings of a time bomb."

American military leaders say they'll devote all their resources to stop Arab and Kurdish security forces such as the peshmerga from taking up arms. "If something happens, we'll flood the zone," said Maj. Christopher Norrie, a 2nd Brigade operations officer from Winamac, Wis.

The Obama administration's plans to withdraw combat troops by August 2010, however, could create a vacuum in peacekeeping efforts, raising the question of who will take on that responsibility after their departure.

"I foresee us leaving and they either solve it politically or the possibility of a direct confrontation between the Iraqi army and the peshmerga looms large," said retired Col. Jeffrey McCausland, a professor at Penn State University's Dickinson School of Law and a senior fellow at the Carnegie Council in New York.

The U.S. military's emerging role as a hands-on peace broker in the Kirkuk issue comes weeks after the political party of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite Arab, took a plurality in nine of 14 governorates in Iraq's provincial elections Jan. 31; polls weren't held in Kurdistan and Kirkuk. Mostly free of violence, the vote boosted Maliki's reputation as a law-and-order kind of leader after his administration clamped down on Shiite militias in the south and Baghdad. The poll also showed that voters favored a strong national government over the Kurdistan-like federalism that the premier's rivals had endorsed.

The telltale signs of oil wealth in the Kirkuk province - and the grab for it - are abundant. At night, giant gas flares turn the skyline the color of Halloween. Then there's the strife, trespassing accusations and low-level violence.

At a police station on a recent Saturday in Dibbis, in Kirkuk province, the mayor, police chief

and a pair of officers - all Kurds - heaped invective on the Iraqi army, whose troops reportedly plan to take over key installations near Dibbis and the city of Kirkuk in coming weeks.

Police officers said the Iraqi army had thwarted their attempt to serve an arrest warrant for a suspected kidnapper a few hours earlier.

An Iraqi army spokesman said by telephone that he had no knowledge of the incident, but local Kurdish officials said the army frequently overstepped its bounds, by firing at them or occupying buildings. The mayor said he had received hundreds of calls from residents saying that they feared for their lives.

"That's why I want the coalition to help," said Mayor Hadi Mustafa, whose son, the American military and Iraqi police say, later was shot and wounded in the leg by unknown gunmen. "I don't want there to be a civil war."

Gonsalves, whose 2nd Brigade Combat Team, known as the Black Jack Brigade, is based in Fort Hood, told them that Washington planned to withdraw combat troops by next year. The next three months are "very, very important," he said, and above all he advised the officials to keep their cool.

"You must have calm heads like you had today," he said. "If a leader gives a bad order, it can resonate throughout the whole organization."

After the meeting, Gonsalves and his soldiers climbed into their armored vehicles and rumbled across town to meet with an Iraqi army commander. The closed-door meeting lasted a little more than an hour; a U.S. Army public affairs officer declined to allow a McClatchy Newspapers reporter to sit in it.

Washington's concern for Kirkuk's future is clear.

In late February, Army Gen. Ray Odierno, the U.S. commander in Iraq, met Maj. Gen. Abdul

Ameer, the commander of the Iraqi army's 12th Division, in Kirkuk, and relayed his concerns about Kirkuk to Maliki, Gonsalves said. In January, U.S. military leaders sent in a brigade to replace a battalion at the Kirkuk forward operating base, a dramatic increase in troops. Vice President Joe Biden also visited Kirkuk in January and urged Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen to put aside their differences.

At a government building in downtown Kirkuk, the deputy governor, a Sunni Arab, said he had little hope for peace. Complicating negotiations, he said, is the widely held belief that the American mediators prefer Kurds to Arabs.

In the immediate aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, coalition forces teamed up with the peshmerga, a powerful Kurdish militia.

"I believe (a resolution) depends on the solutions that can be created between Kurds and Arabs. In this case, there will be no problems," said Rakan al-Jubouri, the deputy governor. "If the opposite happens, then it can get worse. ... The worst thing I expect is a clash between the central government and Kurdish Regional Government."

Jubouri said he had only "10 percent" faith that the two sides would settle their differences.

Experts say that Washington is likely to put the responsibility for governance on the shoulders of Iraqis and that it's up to Iraqis to rebuild their country.

"They will say, 'The only solution to Iraq is political, not military,'" McCausland said.

*(Daniel reports for The Miami Herald. McClatchy Newspapers special correspondent Sahar Issa contributed to this report.)*

KurdishMedia.com  
8 March 2009

## PJAK: Character of Iran is violence and coercion

**PJAK: An appeal for the Human Rights Organizations and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)**

6 March 2009

**United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)**

Since the aftermath of the Iranian Islamic revolution and due to its radical repressive Islamic ideology, basic human rights have been denied for the peoples of Iran particularly for women, different religions and ethnic minorities. In the constitution and the state apparatus there is no place secured for the basic human rights, children rights, women rights and political-civil rights activists.

The foundation of the state is based upon the denial of other internal existing nations such as the Kurds, Azari, Baluchi, Arabs and others. They are regarded and treated as second class citizens and their basic ethnic and democratic rights are violated on a daily basis.

Because of the continuous struggle and resistance of the Kurdish people for freedom, peace and democracy, they have been encountered with a culminated violence and oppression more than any other Iranian nations. The Kurdish nation has suffered intensively from the Iranian states policies of assimilation and militarization of the region. Between the years of 1979 -1989, thousands of Kurdish political and civil activists were executed in the Iranian prisons without any mercy.

For the last five years, the violations of human rights have been escalated and once again the Kurdish political detainees are faced with execution or long-term imprisonment with full range of violence and unbearable torture. The poverty have forced thousands of Kurds to work on the borders, but they have been assaulted and stricken by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, dozens of innocent people were killed and few hundreds wounded.

Meanwhile over 16 Kurdish detainees including Farzad Kamangar, Farhad Vakili, Ali Haydarian, Abdolvahed (Hiwa) Boutimar, Anwar Hossein Panahii, Arslan Oliya'i, Sherko Moarefi, Farhad Chalesh, Ramazan Ahmad, Rostam Arkia, Habibollah Latifi, Fasih Yasmini, Zeynab Jalalian, Ehsan' Fattahian, Shorsh Mehdi xani, Anwar Rostami,

are given death sentences. Hikmet Hesên Demir a member of the Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK) was executed, while he was suffering from serious wounds. His execution took place in Urumeye Prison on 20 December 2007.

At the present time the health conditions of Zeneb Bayzidi the woman rights activist and Ronak Sefazade are at a serious stage. Zeneb Jelalyan a woman rights activists and member of PJAK was given death sentence.

Since, 14 of December, 2007, the Iranian artilleries have been daily shelling the villages of the Qandil's regions located inside the Iraqi's territory, under the pretext of the PJAK's presence in the region. The shelling has resulted in heavy human casualties and inflicted big economic and psychological damages and difficulties for thousands of civilian villagers. The environment and the nature of the region have also suffered heavily from the shelling.

During the state military operations, they have deliberately set fires to the forests of Mariwan city, located in the province of Kurdistan. The environment and the nature of this region have been faced with a fatal disaster.

The major character of the Islamic Republic of Iran is violence and coercion. The members of Iranian society including women and children along with all other strata of the society are repressed and humiliated, their dignity and integrity are being violated.

We appeal to the Human Rights organizations and all the institutions of the United Nations to sensitively bring their attention to the plight the Kurdish people, to put stop to the Islamic Republic of Iran's repressive violent policies and human rights violations against the Kurdish people.

In the meantime we appeal to the European Committee of Human Right and all civil institutions to exert pressure on the Iranian regime to abolish death penalty in Iran and particularly in Kurdistan.

**Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK)  
Political and Diplomacy Committee**



# Endgame in Iraq? Not yet, but it's inching closer

By Steven Lee Myers

**MAHMUDIYA, Iraq:** As he returned to base here after a day patrolling a place once called the Triangle of Death, Captain Landgrove Smith of the 1st Battalion, 63rd Armor Regiment summarized the war in Iraq in a way that would have once been unthinkable.

"We're in the endgame now," he said. President Barack Obama's plan to withdraw American forces called for the end of combat operations by August 2010, but here in Mahmudiya, like in many parts of Iraq, the war is effectively over, the contours of an exit strategy having taken clearer shape than at any time before.

There is no guarantee that Iraq will remain stable, that the nihilistic violence of Al Qaeda will not continue, that the sectarian bloodletting of 2006 and 2007 will not return. While Iraq's security forces have improved greatly, they remain heavily dependent on the Americans.

Still, as an economic depression often becomes clear only in hindsight, so have the changes in the American war effort.

Attacks are at the lowest level since September 2003, falling 70 percent since last March. Scores of outposts have closed as American forces regroup on larger bases in advance of withdrawing virtually from all cities by June. Commanders at Camp Bucca in southern Iraq plan to close the American prison there, turning over its prisoners to Iraqis, and are considering the base as a way station for troops heading home.

In Iraq today, on the eve of the war's sixth anniversary, only two significant combat operations are under way: "Operation New Hope" in Mosul and "Operation Wolf Pursuit" in Diyala. Neither is on the scale of operations during the worst months of the war, and in both the Iraqi Army has the lead.

The main mission has instead shifted almost entirely from combat to stability operations, from fighting insurgents to rebuilding Iraq's services and shattered economy in a way that could offer a better chance for the country to succeed, thus making America's exit more like a victory than a retreat.

The task now involves the sort of effort that former President George W. Bush once sought to discredit: nation building. It means ceding real control to the Iraqi government, something that the United States has previously done more in word than in deed.

"We need to take our hands off the handle bars, or the training wheels, at some point," Major General David Perkins, the American military spokesman, said on Monday.

The biggest change, commanders say, has been the new security agreement between the United States and Iraq that



American and Iraqi troops patrolling in Mahmudiya, where security has improved since its "Triangle of Death" days.

explicitly put the Iraqis in charge of military operations beginning on Jan. 1. That reduced, by design, the American role.

Since then, the Iraqis have planned and carried out security for the provincial elections on Jan. 31 — which took place with strikingly little violence — and for an annual pilgrimage of millions of Shiites to Karbala last month.

As Obama said in announcing his withdrawal plan, there will still be combat operations, and with them casualties. Since Inauguration Day, 26 Americans have died in Iraq, 17 of them from hostile fire. The deputy commander in the north, Brigadier General Robert Brown, called Al Qaeda "a dying snake," though one that "still has a punch." As the Iraqis take the lead, though, fewer casualties are likely to come from direct clashes with enemy fighters.

In interviews over recent weeks, commanders and soldiers cautioned against overconfidence and, worse, complacency.

They said much work remained before the war could be declared won. That caution informed recommendations by the senior American commander, General Raymond Odierno, to keep a force as large as possible through national parliamentary elections scheduled for December.

Iraq's security forces still require significant training, not to mention basic intelligence, airpower, medical care and logistics that, for now, only the Americans can provide. Those functions will fall to the force of 35,000 to 50,000 that Obama announced would

remain after the August 2010 deadline, though they, too, are to withdraw before 2011.

The national election, in which Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki is vying for a second term, is viewed as the crucial test of Iraq's democratic transition, the moment that could prove the country's ability to sustain itself. Or security could crumble, as factions struggle for power and ethnic and sectarian divisions flare.

"I don't think there is any illusion by anyone that this is by any means over," Major General Guy Swan 3d, Odierno's operations director, said. "In fact this may be the most fragile time in the six years we've been here."

More than 140,000 American troops remain in Iraq — more than the level before Bush's "surge" in 2007 — and the still-unanswerable question is what kind of Iraq will be left behind when the majority of them leave.

"What is good enough in Iraq to say that we can pull out in 18, 19 months?" asked Colonel Burt Thompson, commander of the 1st Stryker Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division at Forward Operating Base Warhorse in Diyala.

Obama's plan, however, set a deadline — and for more than just combat operations. It has now given commanders a finite window in which to empower Iraq's security forces.

At Forward Operating Base Sykes in northern Iraq, that is happening.

When the commander, Lieutenant Colonel Guy Parmeter of the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division, arrived in December, he invited Iraqi officers into his operations center, instead of isolating them in a separate office. The

Iraqis and Americans now work so closely together that one of his captains discusses plans with his Iraqi counterpart by Yahoo instant messaging.

"You know they're going to stop the clock," Parmeter said, "and you've got to get as far as you can."

The capabilities of Iraq's army and police — their professionalism, skills, equipment — vary from province to province, as do the threats.

In Mahmudiya, Smith was nearly run over by a battered Nissan truck carrying Iraqi soldiers.

The truck, its brakes apparently having failed, skidded and hit a median where the captain stood, in what was a striking breakdown of discipline and functioning equipment. In most of Iraq, Smith's patrol that day has become the norm, not the exception.

He and his soldiers stopped by an Iraqi Army headquarters to discuss a proposal to train sergeants.

They visited the market to check on a furniture maker who had received an American grant.

They meant to pick up a receipt for a sign they had made announcing the re-opening of highway next to the American base, but his lieutenant had forgotten the necessary paperwork.

"Iraq is safe," Colonel Wassim Saedi of Iraq's 25th Brigade told him. "This is the right time for you to leave."

Increasingly, the Americans are doing so. Until last fall, six American battalions — more than 5,000 soldiers — patrolled the region southwest of Baghdad that stretches from Mahmudiya to the Euphrates. One battalion does now.

The Americans have closed a dozen bases around Mahmudiya, leaving 1,000 soldiers at the main base, just north of the city.

Memorials around the base honor soldiers who died serving here, but there has not been a combat death in the

region since March 2008. At a recent staff meeting, the only casualty reported was a sergeant who twisted his ankle playing basketball.

Lieutenant Colonel Jim Bradford, commander of the 1st Battalion, 63rd Armor Regiment, calls what he now faces "good problems." The Iraqis, he said as an example, are carrying out raids without telling him.

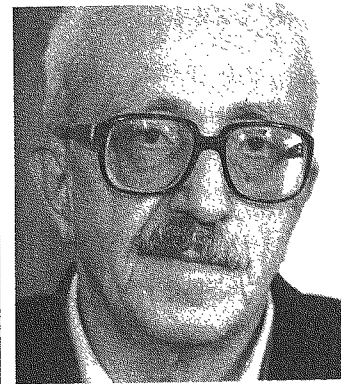
"It's not unusual for us to wake up in the morning and learn the Iraqi Army did a search last night, and then we're running around trying to figure out what happened," he said. "The good part is they're doing it."

Steven Lee Myers reported from Mahmudiya, Baghdad, Diyala and Nineveh provinces. Marc Santora contributed reporting from Camp Bucca in Southern Iraq, and Thom Shanker from Washington.

Le Monde  
13 mars 2009

Irak

## L'ex-dirigeant irakien Tarek Aziz condamné à quinze ans de prison



BAGDAD. L'ancien chef de la diplomatie irakienne et vice-premier ministre sous Saddam Hussein, Tarek Aziz (photo), 73 ans, a été condamné, mercredi 11 mars, à quinze ans de prison pour « crime contre l'humanité » dans l'affaire de l'exécution de 42 commerçants en 1992. Ces derniers avaient été condamnés à mort pour avoir spéculé sur le prix des produits alimentaires alors que l'Irak était soumis à des sanctions de l'ONU. Deux demi-frères de Saddam Hussein, Ouotbane Ibrahim Al-Hasan et Sebaaoui Ibrahim, respective-

ment ministre de l'intérieur et chef de la police politique lors des faits, ont pour leur part été condamnés à la peine capitale pour cette même affaire. Si Tarek Aziz n'a pas réagi à la lecture du verdict, son avocat, M<sup>e</sup> Aref Badaea, l'a jugé « extrêmement sévère », ajoutant que son client était « hors d'Irak quand ces [commerçants] ont été exécutés ». Tarek Aziz avait été blanchi le 2 mars dans un premier procès. Il doit encore être jugé pour deux autres affaires. — (AFP, Reuters.) ■ (PHOTO AFP)

## Troisième condamnation à mort pour « Ali le Chimique »



BAGDAD. Ali Hassan Al-Majid, connu sous le surnom d'« Ali le Chimique » (photo) après son recours aux armes chimiques contre les Kurdes, a été condamné pour la troisième fois à la peine capitale, lundi 2 mars, par un tribunal de Bagdad pour « crime contre l'humanité » contre des chiites. Jugé pour les mêmes raisons, Tarek Aziz, ex-vice-premier ministre de Saddam Hussein, a été acquitté mais reste poursuivi dans d'autres affaires. Ali le Chimique et Tarek Aziz étaient accusés, avec 12 autres prévenus, d'implication dans la mort de dizaines de chiites en 1999, dans le quartier de Sadr City à Bagdad et dans la ville sainte de Najaf (sud). — (AFP.) (PHOTO : AFP)

20  
MARS

9 MARS 2009

### LE COIN DES LIVRES

#### L'ENGAGEMENT D'UNE REBELLE KURDE DANS LA GUÉRILLA



Photojournaliste et collaborateur régulier de notre quotidien, Olivier Touron se passionne pour la Turquie et les Kurdes depuis une dizaine d'années. C'est ainsi

qu'il a rencontré Farachine et sa famille, des Kurdes de Turquie qui ont émigré en France dans les années 1990 pour échapper à la vague de répressions de l'armée turque. Mais Farachine, la fille de la famille, va décider, à la fin de son adolescence, de faire le chemin inverse de ses parents. A 17 ans, elle décide de rejoindre la guérilla du PKK, dans les montagnes du Kurdistan irakien.

« Armée de défense du peuple kurde, organisation politique, centre de formation idéologique, le mouvement, clandestin, est composé d'hommes et de femmes dont le nombre exact reste mystérieux », écrit Olivier Touron. Elle compte des Kurdes venus d'Irak, d'Iran, de Syrie, et, bien sûr, de

Turquie. Mais aussi des hommes et des femmes, regroupées au sein d'une branche militaire autonome, l'YJA-Star. Au sein du PKK, en effet, hommes et femmes combattent sur un pied d'égalité, au motif que la femme kurde représente plus de la moitié du peuple kurde. Pour Farachine, qui se souvient des préceptes archaïques de la société dans laquelle elle a grandi, en Turquie, ce nouveau statut est une belle revanche. De même que le retour au collectivisme préconisé par l'organisation, qu'elle trouve plus intéressante que le consumérisme auquel elle a goûté en France. Malgré tout, le quotidien qu'elle s'est choisi n'est pas toujours facile. Et depuis 2006 et la reprise des affrontements avec l'armée turque, il est en outre extrêmement risqué. Cela fait cinq ans qu'Olivier Touron n'a plus revu Farachine. Mais il a écrit cette histoire pour elle, « Farachine, paysage de la rébellion kurde ». ■ ARMELLE LE GOFF  
**Amazon Farachine, rebelle kurde, Olivier Touron (Michel Lafon, 17,95 €).**

LE DEVOIR

11 mars 2009

SERGE TRUFFAUT

## Attentats en Irak - Le retour

Après des mois de relative accalmie, l'Irak fait à nouveau les manchettes. Deux attentats à l'ampleur plus prononcée que ceux réalisés dans les mois antérieurs viennent d'être commis. La cible du premier? Les policiers et apprentis policiers. Celle du second? Les membres des forces de sécurité et les chefs tribaux qui participaient à une conférence consacrée à la réconciliation nationale. Entre les deux, le dénominateur commun est évident: les forces de l'ordre davantage que les chefs de clans, les policiers plutôt que les pèlerins chiïtes.

Les soubresauts sanglants des derniers jours sont évidemment liés au retrait progressif des troupes américaines et britanniques qui, soit dit en passant, doivent avoir quitté les villes irakiennes d'ici la fin de juin. Cet objectif fixé dans un traité signé entre le président Bush et

le premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki en novembre dernier a eu pour conséquence un regain des luttes entre différents mouvements politiques. En clair, depuis qu'une date a été arrêtée, les patrons des ces derniers dépensent temps et énergie à disposer leurs pions avec l'espoir qu'une fois les villes du pays sous la gouverne des Irakiens et d'eux seuls, ils récolteront les bénéfices escomptés.

À cette effervescence il faut ajouter le combat des combats qui a cours dans ce pays. Il s'agit évidemment de celui qui oppose Maliki à Massoud Barzani, président de la région autonome du Kurdistan. C'est un secret de polichinelle que le rapport de forces entre ces deux dirigeants est d'autant plus vif que le Kurdistan n'a jamais été aussi indépendant qu'actuellement. À preuve, la politique que suit Barzani en matière pétrolière: il signe d'énormes contrats d'exploitation avec des compagnies étrangères sans demander la caution ou la permission du gouvernement central.

Qui plus est, en ce qui concerne la rente pétrolière, les Kurdes ont multiplié

les signaux selon lesquels ils ne veulent pas la partager avec les habitants des autres provinces. Si cet état des faits perdure, alors il faut s'attendre à ce que les chiïtes largement majoritaires dans le sud du pays, où sont concentrées les plus importantes réserves d'or noir en dehors du Kurdistan, imitent Barzani et consorts. Ainsi, les sunnites qui habitent le centre et l'ouest se retrouveraient Gros-Jean comme devant. Sans rien, ou trois fois rien.

Il est probable que cette perspective en vue, sans oublier la série d'élections qui se tiendront dans le courant de l'année dont des législatives, des sunnites aient décidé de multiplier les coups d'arrêt. Selon les échos qui nous parviennent, bien des sunnites seraient frustrés de voir que les chiïtes cultivent l'indifférence alors qu'ils ont fait beaucoup pour pacifier le pays en moins d'un an. Autrement dit, il serait étonnant que l'Irak évite l'implosion à moyen terme.



## RAIDS TURCS DANS LE NORD DE L'IRAK: QUATRE COMBATTANTS KURDES TUÉS

ERBIL (Irak), 15 mars 2009 (AFP)

QUATRE combattants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan ont été tués dans trois jours de bombardements turcs dans le nord de l'Irak la semaine dernière, a déclaré un responsable du PKK dimanche.

"Quatre combattants du Parti ont été tués lors de ces attaques aériennes turques contre Zab et Zagros", près de la frontière, a indiqué ce responsable, Rush Wolat, membre du comité des relations extérieures du PKK.

Les bombardements ont eu lieu les 11, 12 et 13 mars, a-t-il dit à des journalistes par téléphone.

"L'armée turque a également lancé une offensive contre le PKK il y a deux jours et elle se poursuit, près de Judi et Dersim" (Cudi et Tunceli en turc), dans l'est de la Turquie, a dit M. Wolat, sans plus de détails.

L'armée turque avait annoncé vendredi que son aviation avait mené de nouveaux raids la veille contre des repaires du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak.

L'armée avait indiqué le 6 mars que près de 375 rebelles du PKK avaient été tués ou blessés depuis octobre dans des bombardements par l'aviation et l'artillerie turques de leurs positions dans le nord de l'Irak.

L'armée turque mène des raids contre le PKK en Irak en vertu d'un feu vert du Parlement turc aux opérations à travers la frontière.

Ankara estime qu'environ 2.000 rebelles du PKK sont positionnés dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak, d'où ils lancent des attaques en territoire turc.

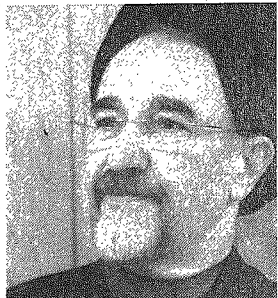
L'armée turque effectue régulièrement des raids aériens contre le PKK dans le nord de l'Irak, avec l'aide de renseignements fournis par les Etats-Unis. Elle y a aussi mené une courte incursion terrestre en février.

Le PKK est un mouvement séparatiste basé principalement dans le sud-est de

Le Monde

18 mars 2009

## Mohammad Khatami renonce à briguer la présidence



TÉHÉRAN. L'ancien président réformateur iranien Mohammad Khatami (photo) a décidé, lundi 16 mars, de se retirer de la campagne pour l'élection présidentielle du 12 juin, pour renforcer les chances du modéré Mir-Hossein Moussavi contre le président sortant ultraconservateur Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Dans un communiqué diffusé sur un site Internet par ses partisans, M. Khatami, 65 ans, a expliqué son désistement par le fait qu'il souhaitait éviter l'éparpillement des voix entre un trop

grand nombre de candidats réformateurs. Il a souhaité que l'élection présidentielle iranienne soit « libre et honnête ». Ce retrait laisse en lice, pour l'instant, l'ancien premier ministre Moussavi et l'ancien président du Parlement réformateur Mehdi Karoubi. Le président Ahmadinejad n'a pas encore fait part de ses intentions, mais un de ses proches a assuré qu'il se représenterait. - (AFP.) (PHOTO: REUTERS)



## Turquie: le Parlement européen évalue les progrès accomplis en vue de l'adhésion

RELATIONS EXTÉRIEURES 11 MARS 2009

### Turquie : le Parlement préoccupé par l'absence de progrès dans les négociations

Le Parlement a adopté une résolution sur les progrès réalisés par la Turquie en 2008 qui dénonce l'insuffisance des réformes démocratiques et insiste sur la nécessité pour le gouvernement turc de "démontrer sa volonté politique de poursuivre les réformes" pour lesquelles il s'est engagé en 2005. La résolution appelle également à régler la question de Chypre et celle des Kurdes.

La Turquie n'a ouvert à ce jour que 10 des 35 chapitres de négociation avec l'UE. Le ralentissement continu du processus de réforme en Turquie, pour la troisième année consécutive, préoccupe le PE. En 2008, seuls quatre nouveaux chapitres ont été entamés, dont deux sous la présidence française de l'UE (liberté de circulation des capitaux, et société de l'information et médias). Un seul chapitre (science et recherche) a été conclu depuis l'ouverture des pourparlers en octobre 2005.

### Les réformes démocratiques ne vont pas assez loin

Dans une résolution rédigée par Ria Oomen-Ruijten (PPE-DE, NL), les députés regrettent que la liberté d'expression et la liberté de la presse ne soient toujours pas pleinement protégées en Turquie. Ils estiment aussi que l'amendement à l'article 301 du Code pénal, adopté en avril 2008, ne va pas assez loin car les personnes continuent à être poursuivies pour avoir exprimé des opinions non violentes. C'est notamment le cas de Leyla Zana, lauréate du Prix Sakharov du Parlement européen en 1995. La résolution a été adoptée à une large majorité par 528 voix pour, 52 voix contre et 43 abstentions.

La poursuite de la polarisation au sein de la société turque et entre les principaux partis politiques, s'est aggravée au cours de 2008, souligne la résolution. Les députés ont également regretté que "les premiers efforts consentis pour réformer la constitution de manière approfondie se soient soldés par une controverse sur la question du port du foulard et aient accru la polarisation de la société".

Les demandes d'interdiction introduites en 2008 à l'encontre de deux partis parlementaires inquiètent les députés, particulièrement l'affaire encore en instance contre le Demokratik Toplum Partisi, (DTP). Ils soulignent la nécessité de modifier en priorité la législation sur les partis politiques.

La résolution appelle également le gouvernement turc à reprendre ses travaux sur une nouvelle constitution laïque et à prendre des mesures pour réduire le nombre de "crimes d'honneur" touchant les femmes. Les députés se félicitent de la création, au parlement turc, d'une "commission pour l'égalité des chances entre hommes et femmes".

### Nécessité d'un règlement global de la question de Chypre

La résolution souligne la nécessité de parvenir à "un règlement global de la question chypriote, fondée sur les résolutions du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies". Le Parlement soutient les négociations directes en cours entre les dirigeants des deux communautés chypriotes et exhorte la Turquie à favoriser un climat approprié aux négociations par le retrait de ses forces.

Les députés déplorent le fait que l'union douanière CE-Turquie et son protocole additionnel n'aient pas encore été pleinement mises en œuvre par le gouvernement turc. Ils font également remarquer que le non-respect des engagements pris par la Turquie en décembre 2009, risque d'affecter gra-

vement le processus de négociation.

La non-reconnaissance de Chypre est à l'origine du blocage des négociations sur huit chapitres économiques. En outre, la Turquie refuse d'autoriser l'accès de ses ports et aéroports aux navires et aux avions chypriotes.

Les députés demandent à la Turquie de "se conformer à ses obligations au regard du droit international, des résolutions correspondantes du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies et de l'arrêt de la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme de Strasbourg dans la quatrième affaire interétatique opposant Chypre à la Turquie au sujet des enquêtes sur le sort des personnes disparues". Tous les États membres sont instamment priés d'inviter la Turquie à prendre les mesures appropriées sur ce problème essentiellement humanitaire.

### Un règlement durable de la question kurde

Le gouvernement turc devrait lancer, à titre prioritaire, une initiative politique apportant une solution durable à la question kurde, qui doit porter sur les possibilités d'ordre économique et social offertes aux citoyens d'origine kurde, et d'améliorer de manière tangible leurs droits culturels, y compris des possibilités réelles d'apprendre le kurde dans l'enseignement public et privé et de l'utiliser dans les émissions radiodiffusées et dans l'accès aux services publics. Les députés se félicitent du lancement d'une chaîne de télévision publique émettant 24 heures sur 24 en langue kurde à compter du 1er janvier 2009.

### Nabucco, un "projet prioritaire"

Les députés européens ont appelé à l'ouverture de négociations sur le chapitre énergétique depuis octobre 2007. Ils regrettent qu'aucun accord n'ait été conclu sur ce point au sein du Conseil et encouragent la Turquie à devenir membre à part entière de la Communauté européenne de l'énergie.

Chypre, qui fait actuellement de la prospection de gaz et de pétrole au large de ses côtes, a des réserves sur le chapitre énergie. Les députés appellent la Turquie à l'appui de cette "Europe des projets prioritaires".

Le projet Nabucco a pris davantage d'importance depuis la crise du gaz entre l'Ukraine et la Russie, qui a souligné l'extrême dépendance de l'Union européenne à l'égard de Gazprom. Le gazoduc Nabucco peut fournir l'UE en gaz de la mer Caspienne, qui transite par la Turquie, ce qui permet d'éviter le territoire russe.

### Moyen-Orient et du Caucase

Le Parlement salue les efforts de médiation de la Turquie au Moyen-Orient et au Caucase du Sud, notamment à la suite du conflit entre la Russie et la Géorgie.

Enfin, le Parlement invite le Conseil à faire participer la Turquie, qui est l'un des plus importants fournisseurs de troupes, aux étapes de planification et de prise de décision de la politique européenne de sécurité et de défense.

# Le sort incertain de Kirkouk, poudrière ethnique du nord de l'Irak

Assise sur de riches réserves pétrolières, la ville arabisée par Saddam Hussein est considérée comme la « Jérusalem des Kurdes », qui veulent la rattacher à leur région autonome

**Kirkouk (Irak)**  
Envoyé spécial

Un baril de poudre. Kirkouk traîne cette image comme un mauvais présage. Symbole du casse-tête démographique irakien, assise sur un « trésor » pétrolier estimé à 10 milliards de barils, la ville, à 250 kilomètres au nord de Bagdad, est convoitée par les Kurdes, qui réclament son rattachement à la région autonome du Kurdistan, pour des raisons autant stratégiques qu'historiques et culturelles. Le président irakien, Jalal Talabani, originaire de la région, la considère comme la « Jérusalem des Kurdes ». Mais Kirkouk est une mosaïque instable, qui compte également quelques chrétiens, une forte minorité turcomane – les descendants des troupes du sultan ottoman Murat IV arrivés au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle – et des Arabes. La plupart sont favorables, eux, à un renforcement de l'autorité du gouvernement central de Bagdad.

A l'heure d'un éventuel retrait américain, la question du statut de Kirkouk, dans cet Irak en reconstruction, demeure dangereusement en suspens.

La désillusion est grande chez les réfugiés du Stade olympique. L'enceinte, inaugurée en 1986 par le fils de Saddam Hussein, s'est transformée en bidonville poussiéreux. En attendant un hypothétique relogement, 2 000 à 3 000 Kurdes survivent sous les gradins, dans des réduits raccordés à l'électricité par des branchements sauvages. Des enfants gambadent au milieu des ordures et des poules qui s'égaient en tous sens sur les restes de la piste d'athlétisme. « On souffre ici et personne ne fait rien », se lamente une vieille femme.

Des milliers de Kurdes avaient été chassés de Kirkouk par la brutale politique d'arabisation de Saddam Hussein. Ils sont revenus, plus nombreux, après la chute du régime baasiste.

Sur le marché central de la ville, dans l'effervescence du vendredi, le fusil mitrailleur AK 47 se négocie sous le manteau à 150 000 dinars (100 euros). Dans les ruelles, on trouve des étals entiers de char-



geurs de Kalachnikov et d'armes diverses. Un marchand kurde en habit traditionnel soulève une pile de tissus pliés sur sa charrette et exhibe fièrement son arsenal. « C'est pour se défendre, affirme son ami, Imad Darwish, en dégainant les deux revolvers qu'il porte à la ceinture. Nous voulons que Kirkouk soit rattachée au Kurdistan et nous sommes prêts à nous sacrifier pour cela. »

Deux rues plus loin, une femme en tchador noir est assise sur un tas de fripes qu'elle vend en haranguant les passants. Arrivée en 1981, elle appartient à une famille de « 10 000 », le nom donné aux Arabes amenés du sud du pays par Saddam ; 10 000 dinars, c'est la somme qui leur était allouée en compensation du voyage. « Maintenant, on nous force à partir, gronde cette femme qui explique que l'un de ses fils a été jeté en prison. J'ai rempli les papiers officiels pour rentrer à Bagdad et toucher les compensations. Mais les Kurdes viennent encore nous menacer. Les soldats américains aussi sont venus et ont tout cassé. »

L'incertitude qui plane toujours sur le futur statut de Kirkouk nourrit ces inévitables tensions ethniques. La ville fait partie des « territoires disputés » revendiqués par le Kurdistan autonome. Selon l'article 140 de la Constitution irakienne de 2005, un référendum doit être organisé pour décider du sort de

Kirkouk. Mais après avoir été reportée plusieurs fois depuis 2007, sa tenue demeure hautement improbable en 2009. « Plus le temps passe et moins les Kurdes seront en position de force, estime le député du

## En attendant un hypothétique relogement, 2 000 à 3 000 Kurdes survivent dans le stade olympique

Parlement régional du Kurdistan, Nuri Talabani, originaire de la ville. Mais nous ne pouvons pas abandonner Kirkouk. »

Pour tout officiel kurde, Kirkouk constitue un tout : un berceau culturel chanté par les poètes, une terre nourricière gorgée d'hydrocarbures. Car la richesse de son sous-sol est l'autre enjeu-clé de la bataille de Kirkouk.

Visible à des kilomètres, une immense flamme de gaz naturel illumine les champs pétroliers de Baba Gurgur, au nord de la ville. D'après la mythologie kurde, les femmes venaient autrefois prier devant ce feu sacré, symbole de fertilité, qui brûle depuis 4 000 ans.

Dans le centre-ville, c'est la paix armée. « Dans les quartiers sud, nous nous battons contre Al-Qaïda et d'autres groupes terroristes »,

fait remarquer le chef de la police de Kirkouk, Jamal Taher Baker, le portable vissé à l'oreille.

Les assassinats et les attentats, moins nombreux qu'en 2007, restent fréquents. Le restaurant Abdullah, l'un des plus fameux kebabs de la ville, a été la cible, en décembre 2008, d'un attentat-suicide. Soixante personnes, des clients et des serveurs, dont trois Bangladais, ont été tués dans l'explosion. Les leaders kurdes locaux, qui tenaient réunion, à l'étage n'ont pas été atteints. Pour oublier, Abdullah, le patron, a tout reconstruit en un mois mais la salle reste aux trois-quarts vide.

Le siège du Front irakien Turkmène (FIT), lui, n'est pas encore remis d'aplomb. L'été dernier, le bâtiment a été mis à sac par des manifestants kurdes, accusant les Turkmènes d'être à l'origine d'une voiture piégée qui venait de tuer 22 personnes. « Nous nous sommes défendus mais huit des nôtres sont toujours en prison », enragent les militants qui gardent l'entrée.

Pour Kirkouk, le compte à rebours est enclenché. « Si le contentieux demeure après le départ des forces américaines, ce sera la guerre entre les deux parties », a récemment nié Mehdi van Barzani, le premier ministre de la région kurde. Le gouvernement irakien du chiïte Nouri Al-Maliki, sorti renforcé des élections provinciales du 30 janvier, est accusé par les Kurdes de perpétuer une tradition de centralisme autoritaire de Bagdad. « Franchement, nous n'avons pas confiance, admet Ihsan Gilli, dans son bureau du gouvernorat de Kirkouk. Bagdad tente de remplacer des officiers sans nous avertir. »

Le représentant spécial de l'ONU, Staffan de Mistura, milite, lui, pour une solution « raisonnable » : un statut spécial, taillé sur mesure pour Kirkouk, avec un partage des postes entre communautés et une autonomie hors du Kurdistan. « C'est la seule solution, approuve Ahmed Al-Obeidi, chef d'un petit parti arabe. Il est temps de transformer le baril de poudre en baril de miel. »

Guillaume Perrier



## NORTH TO QUIET KURDISTAN

SCOTT FONTAINE- THE NEWS TRIBUNE

**ON THE ROAD TO HABUR GATE, Iraq**  
A corrugated iron sheet leaned against sandbags at a security checkpoint. On it was painted the image of a blazing yellow sun above red, white and green bars – a symbol of independence that dates to the Ottoman Empire.

The message was clear: The map might still say Iraq, but Kurdistan is a totally different country. It's a place where roadside businesses remain open after dark, car dealerships boast sparkling new sedans, and trucks can drive north without a military escort.

About 75 percent of the Washington National Guard's 81st Brigade Combat Team runs convoy security, but only one unit has a mission like the one in Kurdistan.

The convoys begin under the dark of night in Mosul, Iraq's most dangerous city, and finish hours later at Habur Gate, a tiny outpost at the Turkish border. This is the heart of the semi-autonomous Kurdish region, known for its peacefulness and stunning scenery.

The checkpoint with the corrugated iron sign, about halfway between Mosul and Turkey, has become the unofficial border between Iraq and Kurdistan.

For the soldiers of Alpha Battery of the 2nd Battalion, 146th Field Artillery Regiment, their mission time south of the border is a period of vigilance and suspicion. North of the border, they relax.

Every roadside bomb the battery has discovered has been in or near Mosul, so crossing into Kurdistan late Thursday night gave platoon leader Lt. Steven Beecroft an excuse for some light-hearted drama.

"There it is," the Longview resident said, motioning toward the lights of a village on a nearby hillside. "That's the land of milk and honey."

### HISTORY CREATES TENSION

Tensions at Mosul were high entering Thursday's mission. Two days earlier, insurgents had launched 24 rockets that killed one U.S. soldier, a woman whose active-duty unit came from Texas.

The troops of Alpha Battery sat on wooden bleachers in a building near the convoy staging yard at Contingency Operating Site Marez. Their intelligence briefing ended with each soldier verifying his serial number and blood type.

They grabbed bags of jerky and trail mix and packages of Pop-Tarts. They loaded up on cans of sweet coffee to add to the ice chests full of Gatorade and energy drinks.

Then they climbed into their Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles (MRAPs) – sand-colored giants designed to withstand roadside bombs – and went through a last round of vehicle checks. Three scout vehicles left first, tasked with driving several miles ahead and investigating any potential bombs.

Minutes later, the convoy turned out of the staging yard and straight into Mosul, the largest city in northern Iraq.

Men in suits and women in veils stared at

the vehicles as the Guardsmen drove slowly down one of the city's main thoroughfares.

Spc. Zackery Scholl of Tacoma stood in the gunner's turret and kept Beecroft, sitting in the truck commander's seat, alert to groups of people and approaching vehicles. Scholl, 20, looked for telltale signs of trouble, like a car resting low on one side or an abandoned Iraqi police checkpoint. "When you're a gunner," Scholl said, "everyone and everything looks like an enemy."

The soldiers have seen improvement on Mosul's streets in recent weeks, including litter pickup and the installation of a piece of public art. But they can also point to the exact location where a bomb exploded under an MRAP on Feb. 23.

It was the only such attack on the platoon since it deployed in November, and it left a huge crater in the road.

Thursday night's convoy rolled through Mosul with little problem, and within four hours the convoy entered Zahko, the home of Habur Gate. Two mile-long lines of trucks sat waiting to enter Turkey. And in the distance sat Mount Ararat, with lights from excavation sites sparkling like faraway stars.

### A FAMILIAR DESTINATION

Peshmergas, the Kurdish militiamen, greeted the Americans as they entered Habur Gate, a four-story building that held a shopping mall until the 2003 invasion.

The Washington soldiers climbed the marble staircase to reach a large, open room with bunks for 30 people. Most dropped their bags – often on the same familiar bed where they sleep on every Kurdistan mission – and climbed another two flights to a small dining area, where they munched on personal pizzas, ice cream bars or cereal. Others went to the small gym on the ground floor.

"Everyone is kinda on his own schedule at this point," said battery commander Capt. Matt Braddock of Lacey.

After dinner, many settled around laptops and played online games, or chatted with families via Web connections. About 10 guys sat on couches and watched whatever the Armed Forces Network movie channel had to offer. And four soldiers gathered around a table and played hold 'em poker while waiting for their vehicle-guard shift to begin or the effects of the energy drinks to wear off.

"It's a cool way to just unwind and stay busy," said Pfc. Joseph Tominus, 20, of Lacey. "And it's made all of us pretty good players."

### 'HOW IT COULD BE'

A block away from Habur Gate, Turks and Kurds sipped tea and chain-smoked inside a restaurant. Few noticed when Spc. Isaac Micah Bale walked in and ordered lunch.

Hanging in view of the long wooden tables was a painting of Massoud Barzani, wearing a pseudo-militaristic outfit and headdress. Under it was written "The Leader of the Kurdish Nation, The Immortal Barzani."

It was noontime Friday, and the muezzin called residents of Zakho to prayers. But only one man was in the restaurant's nook, his head facing Mecca and touching the ground.

"This is how it could be if things settle down across the country," said Bale, a 26-year-old corrections officer from Aberdeen. "Me being here isn't a huge deal at all. We get treated just like all the customers. They don't really care we're American."

Spc. Che Arbizu of Yakima buys potatoes, flatbread and vegetables for barbecues back at Mosul from one of the restaurants. It beats anything he can buy on base, he said.

"I even asked if they could get me a plant," said Arbizu. 36. "And next time I came back, they had a potted plant for me. It was pretty cool. I still have it in my room. They're really good to do business with here."

### THE TRIP BACK

The MRAP trucks left Habur Gate during daylight hours, escorting dozens of fuel trucks back to Mosul.

About 1,000 commercial trucks, many carrying supplies for the U.S. military, enter Iraq from Turkey every day, according to the Christian Science Monitor. About 25 percent of all fuel for coalition forces enters Iraq through the Habur Gate crossing.

And as U.S. forces begin to draw down, military officials are strongly considering using Turkey as a main departure route, according to various news accounts.

The Washington Guardsmen seemed to relish a rare earlier start time; they waved at children who sprinted toward them from the small villages that dot both sides of the road.

As the convoy neared Mosul, though, the attitude turned serious. The soldiers inside the three scout trucks made their first stop. A garbage bag was dumped about five feet from the side of the road.

The lead MRAP's gunner shone a high-intensity spotlight on it, and the driver probed it with a large, wheeled apparatus attached to the front of the vehicle. Out spilled cans and crumpled paper.

"Just plain trash," a voice over the radio said. "Let's keep rolling."

A few minutes later, they saw a small cardboard box on the shoulder. Spc. Matthew Easton of Elma illuminated the area with the spotlight.

"No wires, no indicators," said Easton, 22. "Probably nothing to worry about."

The scouts stopped about another 10 times before re-entering Mosul. They slowed to a crawl, rolling past walls plastered with faded political posters from January's provincial elections.

As the convoy prepared to enter Marez, another supply convoy was leaving for Habur Gate. After the soldiers from Alpha Battery entered the gates of Marez, Staff Sgt. Jay Bogart of Rainier turned off his on-board computer and unbuckled his helmet strap. He and the crew made plans to grab midnight chow and possibly hit the gym before crashing for the night.

"Man, I'm glad to be back," Bogart said. "Don't get me wrong – I like Habur Gate. But it can get boring up there. It sure isn't Mosul."

☆☆☆

FINANCIAL TIMES

March 12, 2009

## Kurds look anxiously for reconciliation

By Roula Khalaf

As the US prepares to wind down its military presence in Iraq, the goal of national reconciliation, the only real guarantee of future stability, remains elusive, Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdish Regional Government, has warned.

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 delivered a life-long dream for the Kurdish community. Since the war, Kurds have enjoyed a long sought after autonomy in the north of the country and have avoided much of the sectarian bloodshed that tore apart the rest of Iraqi society.

But as the 63-year-old Mr Barzani acknowledges, the Kurds, who make up 20 per cent of Iraq's population, will have to fend for themselves. They will have to protect cherished gains and, most importantly, prevent simmering disputes with their Arab brethren from igniting a new chapter of sectarian violence.

"It was expected that the day will come for the Americans to leave and it's the job of Iraqis - Arabs and Kurds - to work together to put their house in order," says the Kurdish leader who struggled against Saddam Hussein's regime.

Violence in Iraq dramatically diminished as the number of US troops temporarily surged, Sunni Arab tribes turned against the extremists of al-Qaeda and the Shia-led government reined in radical militias.

But the gains remain fragile, as highlighted by this week's spate of suicide bombings. And Iraq's three main communities have yet to learn to co-exist successfully.

"We still have a way to go," he tells the Financial Times in an interview during a London visit. "It's not enough for us to talk about things on the surface. We need genuine reconciliation, a real government of power sharing based on partnership, and not to have whoever is there impose his will."

Even former Ba'athists - purged from the administration in the postwar era, many of them forced to leave the country - must be allowed back to Iraq, he says.

Yet a good part of the responsibility for reconciliation also lies with Kurds themselves. After all, the struggle for control of Iraq's oil resources and the fate of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, which Kurds claim as part of their region, are some of the most divisive issues facing the country.

Mr Barzani gives no hint of progress on either front, criticising the central government in Baghdad for its alleged intransigence, and taking none of the blame.

Oil legislation that would ensure a fair distribution of wealth - a key to the country's long-term stability - has been blocked, with Kurdish officials unwilling to give Baghdad veto power over the development of the industry within their territory and the central government insisting that it must

direct the oil industry's development throughout Iraq. The KRG has signed dozens of oil contracts, which the central government has refused to recognise.

For Mr Barzani, however, the problem lies in the failure of the oil ministry, which has made no progress in managing the industry in the rest of Iraq. "They haven't been able to do things so they don't want anyone else to do it," he says. The oil ministry has spent billions of dollars, he charges, yet it has failed to meet its promise of boosting production.

On the issue of Kirkuk, Mr Barzani says Kurds have already shown flexibility but would not renounce their claim to the city as part of their autonomous region. As Kurds populate Kirkuk, reversing the Arabisation policy of the previous regime, many Iraqis fear the town will be the flashpoint of renewed violence.

A census and referendum that were supposed to be completed by 2007 have been repeatedly postponed, amid concerns that Kurds and Arabs must first agree a political settlement to prevent a conflagration.

Mr Barzani says Kurds have compromised by agreeing to postpone the referendum. But they still want the population to decide on the identity of Kirkuk. "We are confident that it's part of Kurdistan. If they [other parties in Iraq] think the Kurds have to give up on it that will not happen," he says.



Pressure on Kurds, however, could rise as US political influence and its mediating power wanes. The results of the January provincial elections could also bring new constraints.

The poll strengthened the position of Nouri al-Maliki, the prime minister, and suggested that Iraqis favoured a strong central authority. Meanwhile, the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq, the main Shia party, which favours autonomy in southern provinces and has been an important Kurdish ally, took a battering.

Mr Barzani, however, disputes the assumption that the elections undermined the push for autonomy for Iraq's regions under a federal system.

He points out that no party list won throughout the country and that each community voted for its own leaders. "It [the election] was an indicator that the viable solution for Iraq is a federal system."

Rudaw.Net

March 12, 2009

## Talabani offers Nawshirwan 6 parliamentary

Rudaw, Erbil- Jalal Talabani, secretary general of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan is to meet with Nawshirwan Mustafa, president of Wisha Media Company and the former deputy secretary general of PUK, today to talk about the latest internal issues within PUK, sources told Rudaw.

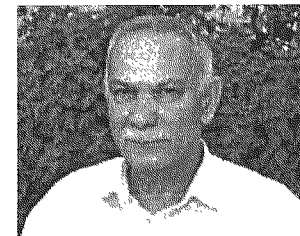
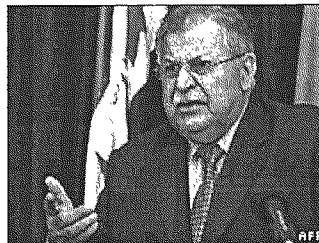
The sources also said that in the meeting Talabani would offer Nawshirwan to take six parliamentary seats of the share that PUK gets during the next elections in Iraqi Kurdistan. But Muhammad Tofiq, member of the management board of Wisha Company, told Rudaw that the company insists to form an election list and participate in the coming elections.

The date to hold the election is yet to be set as Kurdistan parliament has yet to pass the election law.

On March 5, Talabani arrived in Sulaimaniya to hold a series of meetings with PUK leaders in an attempt to resolve the issues that have recently challenged the party.

A source close to PUK politburo told Rudaw that since his return Talabani has met with politburo members several times, but that Omar Fatah, the former deputy prime minister of Kurdistan Regional Government, has not participated in the meetings. The source said that Fatah was angry with the party because he had not consulted before being removed from the post.

Already there have been many speculations about the meeting between Talabani and Nawshirwan Mustafa. Some people believe that Talabani would become the Marjaa (common in religious sects in which the leader can get highest religious authority) and that



Nawshirwan would become the secretary general of PUK.

But the source ruled out such a possibility saying that Talabani would offer Nawshirwan six seats on condition that Nawshirwan gives up the idea of forming a list to run for the coming election.

Another source told Rudaw that last week Talabani sent a letter to Nawshirwan. Tofiq confirmed the information and said that the content of the letter was nothing serious.

Tofiq told Rudaw that they are serious on forming a list to participate in the elections.

A source close to Wish Company told Rudaw that when Salar Aziz, member of the management board of Wisha Company, last week met with a group of youth from Kalar, (140 kms south of Sulaimaniya) he has said that he expects the list will win more than 15 parliamentary seats in the election.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. MARCH 10, 2009

## Turkey Begins Dig for Missing Kurds In Push for New State Accountability

By NICHOLAS BIRCH

**S**ILOPI, Turkey -- Excavators dug up bone fragments and clothing Monday from a field here that prosecutors say may hold Kurdish victims of state death squads from the 1980s and '90s, a step ahead in efforts to force the country's security establishment to come clean about past abuses.

State prosecutors have ordered the excavation of five sites in Silopi and elsewhere in this mountainous region near the border with Iraq, in a search for those who went missing during Turkey's 25-year conflict with the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK.

Families who have long sought to find missing relatives and see the prosecution of those responsible gained new hope in recent months after the unprecedented arrests of current and former members of Turkey's security services accused of attempting to force military intervention in the government.

Several of the leading suspects in the case are believed to be former members of Jitem, an arm of Turkey's military police that local residents in southeastern Turkey blame for many of the killings of Kurds.

A trial is now under way in Istanbul of 68 suspects who prosecutors say were part of an ultranationalist network known as Ergenekon that attempted to overthrow the West-leaning government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Turkey's ultranationalists oppose efforts by Mr. Erdogan and his government to pur-

sue membership of the European Union. To join the bloc, Turkey is expected to revamp its legal system and make its once-untouchable security forces more accountable, lending impetus to government efforts to resolve claims relating to Kurdish disappearances.

Official statistics show 1,412 unsolved murders in 1991 to 1995 as part of the Kurdish conflict. A representative of the Turkish Human Rights Foundation estimates at least 5,000 people were killed, of which 1,000 are missing and presumed dead.

The Turkish military denies the existence of Jitem, or any role related to the disappearance and extrajudicial murder of Kurds.

Nusirvan Elci, one of the lawyers representing families of the missing, said two bone fragments and some articles of clothing were found Monday in a search of three sections of an area of about 100 square meters in a field just outside Silopi. Mr. Elci said the findings had been sent to forensic experts. There was no indication about the identity of the remains.

The search has been aided by a information in a book published in 2004, by a former member of Jitem, Abdulkadir Aygan, that gave details of 28 murders and the locations of remains. Families of the missing also contributed information to aid the excavations.

Mr. Aygan, who now lives in Sweden, claimed a Jitem unit in the region's main city, Diyarbakir, where he worked from

1990-99, murdered around 600 Kurds.

The book and interviews Mr. Aygan gave to Turkish media helped three families find their relatives' remains, but officials resisted calls for a wider search for suspected mass graves until the recent arrests of some once-powerful figures in Turkey's security apparatus.

Getting convictions for murders committed by security personnel remains extremely difficult, says Tahir Elci, a human-rights lawyer. He says he recalls only one conviction -- a sergeant sentenced to life in 2007 for ordering the 1994 murder of a businessman.

In a breakthrough in February, a former minister said that 11 villagers burned to death in Silopi in 1996 were killed by the state, and not by the PKK as claimed at the time by the military.

Many locals here suspected this all along but the Turkish public has only recently begun to openly question official accounts.

Yakup Tanis, whose brother Serdar disappeared in 2001, calls it "a miracle" that retired Gen. Levent Ersoz was arrested in January as part of the Ergenekon probe. Mr. Tanis says his brother disappeared after filing a complaint with police against Mr. Ersoz -- then the senior military police officer in the area -- for threatening to kill him. The European Court of Human Rights ruled in 2005 that Turkey had failed to properly investigate Serdar's disappearance. Mr. Ersoz didn't turn up for a related court hearing in Ankara. ■

REUTERS

## Kurdish oil min expects to export crude soon

March 13, 2009 By Tom Bergin

- \* Oil deals in disputed territories criticised
- \* Oil from DNO fields to be exported soon, shares jump
- \* Baghdad's licensing round seen failing

**LONDON, March 13 (Reuters)** - The oil minister of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region warned foreign oil companies against signing deals with Baghdad on fields in territory the Kurds claim.

Ashti Hawrami also said Kurdistan would start exporting oil in the coming months.

Baghdad has invited international oil companies to bid for contracts on fields including some near the city of Kirkuk in northern Iraq, which the Kurds hope to incorporate into their autonomous area but which is administered by Baghdad.

Hawrami told Reuters in an interview Baghdad's failure to consult with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) on its licensing round meant any contracts on fields in disputed territories would be unenforceable.

"Oil companies must be crazy if they think they can go sign a contract with the ministry of oil and just get on and do the job. They can't, they need our co-operation," he said.

Western oil majors including Royal Dutch Shell Plc (RDSA.L: Quote, Profile, Research), Exxon Mobil Corp (XOM.N: Quote, Profile, Research) and BP Plc (BPL: Quote, Profile, Research) are assessing the fields on offer with a view to making bids in the licensing round.

Baghdad and the KRG have been haggling for years over a new oil law that would govern revenue sharing.

### PIPELINE

Despite this, Hawrami expects the Kurdish region to start exporting oil via Iraq's pipeline network in the coming months.

Norway's DNO International (DNO.OL: Quote, Profile, Research) is in the final stages of connecting its Tawke field to the network but investors fear disagreements with Baghdad could delay exports indefinitely. "We don't expect any real problem there despite our differences with Baghdad," he said of DNO. "From our point of view oil will flow the day it (the pipeline) is ready."

This can happen even without agreement between the two sides on an over-arching oil law. "We should not mix the two things," he said.

Hawrami said revenue from any sales of Kurdish oil would go to the finance ministry which should then pay DNO its share. The KRG is seeking no part of the revenue until an oil law is agreed, he said.

DNO's shares rose over 6 percent after Hawrami's comments, adding to earlier gains to close up 10.1 percent at 491 crowns, outperforming a 1.6 percent rise in the DJ Stoxx European oil and gas sector index.

Hawrami also predicted the Baghdad government's oil licensing round would be a failure.

"There is no model contract acceptable to the international oil companies," he said. "Number two, the Ministry of Oil has no legal authority to sign contracts".

The oil ministry hopes to award contracts in June, although most industry executives and analysts expect the timetable to slip a few months at least.

"If you're telling me that by August they will be signing contracts -- August which year?" Hawrami said.



14 March 2009

Interview by Ma'ad Fayad

## Asharq Al-Awsat Interviews Iraqi Kurdistan President Masud Barzani

# Barzani: the establishment of a Kurdish state is a legitimate ambition

**London, Asharq Al-Awsat-** *President of the Kurdistan Region Masud Barzani has said there is a limit to patience, in reference to the pending issues between the Arbil government and the Baghdad government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, which include the issues of Kirkuk, the disputed areas, the oil and gas law, and the oil resources issue.*

*Barzani renewed his warning against violation of the Iraqi constitution, affirming: "When we agreed to remain within Iraq and contribute to the political process, we did that with the view that we will have a constitution ... This constitution defined the identity of Iraq, which is a federal Iraq."*

*In an exclusive interview with Asharq Al-Awsat in London, where he arrived in the course of a European tour, Barzani said that the time when one person could rule Iraq had gone. However, he noted that the strength of the Kurds lies in staying within a federal Iraq. He said he would prefer death rather than exist with a dictatorial Iraq. Barzani noted that the Americans are extending assistance to central and southern Iraq but not to the Kurds. He said that the Kurdistan region existed before the Americans came to Iraq and it will continue to exist after they leave.*

*Regarding the establishment of a Kurdish state, Barzani said, "This is a legitimate ambition, but we deal with matters according to the existing realities." He affirmed that the Kurdistan Democratic Party [KDP], which he heads, does not exploit the problems facing its rival, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan [PUK] led by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, but is cooperating to solve them. Barzani affirmed, "We will be a true and faithful ally in their crisis under all circumstances."*

### THE FOLLOWING IS THE FULL TEXT OF THE INTERVIEW:

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** What is the nature and results of your European tour?

**[Barzani]** The tour is taking place at the invitation of Italy, Germany, and Britain. The purpose is to explain the situation in Iraq, in general, and in the Kurdistan Region, in particular, and to encourage them to invest in Iraq and in the Region, because the security situation is good and because the Region is the secure gate to all Iraq. We explained the developments of the situation and the future prospects. The tour is political, economic, and diplomatic.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Although several European countries, Turkey, and Iran opened consulates in the Kurdistan Region, why the Arab states have not done the same?

**[Barzani]** This is a good question, but I pose this question, through the Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper, to the Arab states. Why do they not open consulates in Arbil? The reason is not security. Everyone knows that the security situation in the Region is stable. Perhaps they have not reached a conviction yet, although during my recent visits to Kuwait and Qatar, we achieved much progress in the relations and in the understanding with the two states.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Are you considering hosting the Arab summit conference if Iraq decides to hold it on its territory as part of its protocol rights?

**[Barzani]** I cannot send invitations to host the Arab summit, but I can say that the Kurdistan Region would be very delighted to have this conference held in Arbil and to provide all the needs for its success, including the security, comfort, dialogue atmosphere, and everything the conference will demand. However, others and not I must send the invitations.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** You call the government in Baghdad "federal" and it insists on calling itself "central." How do you explain that?

**[Barzani]** We must understand that everything we accepted was because of the Constitution. When we accepted to remain within Iraq and contribute to the political process, we did that with the view that we will have a constitution. There was a referendum on this constitution, which defined the identity of Iraq as a federal country. The government is a federal government. If the central government means a single person ruling Iraq, this time has gone. If the purpose is to strengthen the role of the federal government with its constitutional institutions, decisions, and laws, we welcome that.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Do you think that there are violations of the Constitution?

**[Barzani]** Of course. Major and serious violations of the Constitution have taken place. We have differences with the federal government. We formed committees to study the issues and we hope that we would achieve results.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** How will you deal with the constitutional amendments demanded by the prime minister of the federal government?



**[Barzani]** Any constitutional amendment must be made based on the mechanism provided in the Constitution. No amendments to the Constitution can be made contrary to the mechanisms in it. We will not oppose any amendment that takes place according to the mechanism in the Constitution. But if this takes place contrary to this mechanism, this would torpedo the Constitution.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** There are pending issues between you and the government in Baghdad, such as the oil law, the Kirkuk issue, and Article 140 [of the Constitution].

**[Barzani]** We have tolerated a great deal because we cared about the interest of Iraq. We gave more time and chances to the officials, and lately we formed five committees to discuss these issues. We hope that the committees would achieve results on all these basic issues, which are the partnership, the security and the army, the oil and gas, Article 140, and foreign policy. We will exert efforts to energize these committees to give us a clear picture on the situation and the future prospects and the possibility of reaching a common understanding about these issues. Then, the other issues would become very simple. Let us wait and see what these committees will achieve.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** What are the limits of your patience?

**[Barzani]** Of course, there is a limit to patience (laughing). These issues must be resolved. Again, I say the Constitution is our arbiter. We reject temperamental decisions and accept any decision consistent with the Constitution, whether in our favor or not. Our relations are governed by this Constitution, and we will not accept any other decision or view.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Can you imagine Kurdistan Region without Kirkuk?

**[Barzani]** Kirkuk has been the cause of all the problems that the Kurds had with the Iraqi governments. Now we want a solution to the problem, and we do not want to make the problem worse. It is possible to solve this problem according to Article 140 of the Constitution. This is the best solution to the Kirkuk issue. We stress the importance of applying Article 140 to end this problem for good. There can be no stability in Iraq without a solution to the Kirkuk problem.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** What is your opinion about the proposal to divide the authority in Kirkuk and about another proposal to regard Kirkuk as an independent region?

**[Barzani]** We totally reject these circumventions of Article 140. Article 140 of the Constitution says: normalization, census, and referendum. The Kirkuk Governorate people are the ones to decide. If they decide that they want to be part of the Kurdistan Region, we must respect their opinion and choice. If they decide to join another region and if the Kirkuk people decide that their governorate should be independent, we will respect their decision. But, Article 140 must be implemented.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Do you know what the federal or central government wants from the Kurds?

**[Barzani]** It seems to me that some officials in Baghdad believe that the Kurdistan Region should be a governorate subordinate to Baghdad and that no institutions like the parliament and the ministries should exist. They want the Region to be subordinate to Baghdad and there should be no Kurdistan Region and no gains, rights, or anything.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Some in Iraq are talking about the demands of the Kurds becoming too high. What is your opinion about this?

**[Barzani]** This is not true. Our demands are less than the reality and cannot compare with the sacrifices we have made for Iraq and for Kurdistan. Our demands are Iraqi-Kurdish and not only Kurdish. When we emphasize democracy, this is a matter that interests every Iraqi citizen. When we talk about partnership, we do not mean Kurdish Arab partnership, but the partnership of the political forces in Iraq. Some forces have struggled and offered sacrifices. So how could we deprive them of participation in building the country? There are basic components in Iraq. So how could we marginalize them? The issue of partnership is not a Kurdish demand only. There are also the issues of the army, security, oil, and gas. All these are the property of the Iraqi people. How could one component unilaterally appoint officers in the Iraqi army and circumvent the Constitution and the parliament? The army is the army of the Iraqi people, and balance must exist in it. These issues do not affect the Kurds alone, but all Iraqis. We are defending the future of Iraq, democracy, and the Constitution in Iraq. We are defending so that Iraq would not face the same tragedy we faced in the past.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Are you disappointed with some Iraqi political forces, which

you embraced and sacrificed for since 1991?

**[Barzani]** I am very sorry to say that some have disappointed us by their positions towards our cause. We never expected such a position. We imagined that they, in our absence, would defend the Kurdish cause and the rights of the Kurds. We trusted them to this extent.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** In the last conference of the Iraqi opposition in London in 2002, an agreement was reached between the political forces that currently exist in Baghdad about the rights of the Kurds. What happened later?

**[Barzani]** These rights are entrenched even in the Constitution. The agreements reached at the London conference were almost all recorded in the Constitution in one form or another. Now, attempts are being made to circumvent the Constitution. How can we talk about agreements that took place in an opposition conference?

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Do you think that Khanaqin and Mandali are within the disputed areas?

**[Barzani]** Of course. If we use the recent provincial elections as a basis, we will find that the Kurdish list won the votes of all the citizens and won all the seats there.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Are measures taking place in Kirkuk and the rest of the disputed areas similar, in your opinion, to the measures carried out by the former regime, such as increasing the government forces and appointing a percentage of Arab officers higher than the other components?

**[Barzani]** Yes, this type of practices regrettably exists.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region Nechirvan Barzani has expressed the Region's fears if the United States withdrew its forces from Iraq. How do you explain these fears?

**[Barzani]** If the American forces withdrew before the political situation in Iraq stabilizes and before the political forces are ready to fill the vacuum, problems will definitely arise. There are dangers and there is a possibility that major problems would take place in Iraq between the Sunnis and Shi'is and between the Arabs and the Kurds. Everything is possible.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Do the fears include the possibility of a military confrontation between the central government and the Kurdistan Region?

**[Barzani]** We hope this will not happen. We are not thinking that matters would reach this point. There will be no repetition of this in Iraq, God willing. We all must use the weapon of the Constitution to resolve our problems and not think of another way, particularly the military way. We hope that we will not have to get to that point. Whoever uses the Constitution as the arbiter will ultimately win.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** What have the American forces provided to the Kurdistan Region?

**[Barzani]** Actually, the American forces have no presence in the Region. They had no presence and had not given us anything, even in term of aid. I say frankly that the US Administration has not given any aid to the Region. All expenditures took place in central and southern Iraq and not in Kurdistan. We had no security or administrative vacuum after the fall of the former regime. The Kurdistan Region existed before the arrival of the Americans, and it will continue to exist after they leave. But America's presence now protects Iraq against many threats. It also guarantees that no internal problems would take place.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Do you feel that you are alone working and struggling politically for the Kurdish cause?

**[Barzani]** No, Iraqi and Arab political forces are cooperating and maintaining solidarity with us. They agree with our views and policies. I have also noticed that there is much Arab interest in countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar and in Europe in our issues. We are not alone. Also, relations have recently improved with Turkey.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** What is the rate of progress in the relations between Kurdistan and Turkey?

**[Barzani]** Meetings are taking place with Turkey. There is good Turkish understanding and I can see very broad horizons for commercial cooperation with neighboring Turkey. There are more than 500 Turkish companies operating in the Kurdistan Region. I can say that we are very satisfied with the progress in our relations with Turkey.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Are you no longer afraid of any military threats from Turkey?

**[Barzani]** No, no. the course of the relations indicates that the situation is good.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** When some problems occurred in the PUK, your ally, some feared that the balances in the Region would collapse.

**[Barzani]** Regrettably, it is true that some internal problems took place in the PUK, but I am confident of the ability and wisdom of President Jalal Talabani and the PUK leadership to overcome and resolve these problems. We offered any assistance to allow the PUK to avoid such problems to safeguard the Region's balance and unity.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** How the PUK problems affecting your work or affecting the stability and balances in the Kurdistan Region?

**[Barzani]** The KDP is not exploiting these problems at all - on the contrary; we are cooperating with the PUK to solve these problems. This is a firm decision. We will be a true and faithful ally in their crisis under all circumstances. We will stand with the PUK to solve any crisis it could face.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** What will be your position in case independent lists run in the next parliamentary elections outside the Kurdistan Coalition?

**[Barzani]** Any person, party, or list has the right to run in the next parliamentary elections. This is their legitimate right.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Will that not upset the balance of your alliance with the PUK?

**[Barzani]** If this happens, the leaders of the two parties will study the situation. If the issue does not affect the organizations of the two parties, any citizen will be free to run. But if the candidate is from within the two parties and wanted to run in the elections outside the parties, we should study this matter.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Who will head the next government of the Kurdistan Region?

**[Barzani]** Based on the agreement with the PUK, they are entitled to head the next government.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Was this an agreement?

**[Barzani]** Yes, this was an agreement, and we will abide it.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani had worked on projects and programs, some of which at his personal initiative and by virtue of his relationships. Do you not think that if someone else assumes the premiership of the government, this could affect the current plans and achievements?

**[Barzani]** Government programs will definitely be affected, but this is a right for our ally and we cannot take it away from it. It is possible to discuss the issue, but let me repeat that this is their right. However, if they showed interest in the continuation of the work and the success of the government plans and if they raised another issue, we will discuss it. I will repeat for the third time: our ally is entitled to the premiership of the government.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** How do you describe the unity between the PUK and the KDP?

**[Barzani]** The unity is strong and strategic, and there is no way to forfeit it.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** But some said there would be problems between the two parties if the problems in the PUK persisted.

**[Barzani]** These are dreams.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** What is the relationship between the KDP and the government in the Kurdistan Region?

**[Barzani]** The party is a means and not an end for serving the people and creating an entity. Now we have reached the point of building constitutional institutions, state institutions. We have a government and parliament. The government is for all the citizens. The party supports the government, which must lead the Kurdistan Region. The task of the party is to support the government and not to interfere in its affairs. We are taking this course in all the political, economic, and security fields. The government is leading the Kurdistan Region and not the party.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Do you still have an ambition to establish a Kurdish state?

**[Barzani]** Yes, this is a legitimate ambition, but we are dealing with matters according to the existing realities.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Do you expect the situation of Iraqi Kurds to be better without Iraq?

**[Barzani]** No, of course not. The strength of the Kurds lies in a federal democratic Iraq, but I would prefer death rather than exist with a dictatorial Iraq.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** How do you confront the views of some extremist Arab nationalists and their positions towards the Kurdistan Region?

**[Barzani]** Some people have such views and must learn a lesson from the past. They must realize where this kind of thinking and approach had led Iraq. Do they want to repeat the failed and destructive experiment in Iraq? I do not think that they have any future. What they are suggesting are mere words and pose temporary obstacles in the way of democratic Iraq.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** When will you complete the unification of Kurdish government institutions, including the security services?

**[Barzani]** We would have completed it had it not been for the internal crisis that took place in the PUK. We suspended the issue until the PUK resolves its internal crisis. One of our priorities now is to assist the PUK in overcoming its crisis.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Will the cut in the budget affect the Region's projects?

**[Barzani]** Definitely.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Why your government is not permitted to produce and export oil to finance its projects?

**[Barzani]** Let me tell you something: The Oil Ministry has not provided any tangible service to Iraq. The Oil Ministry received \$8 billion to improve and develop the oil sector, but it did nothing. It did not develop any oilfield nor build or develop any oil refineries. Where did the money go? Was the Oil Ministry able to conclude a

reasonable and respectable oil agreement with any company in the world? They destroyed Iraq by their wrong policy, and they want us not to do anything. Regarding the issue of oil exports from the Region's fields, the Region can export 100,000 barrels of oil daily. We said we want to export oil through the oil pipeline between Kirkuk and the Turkish Ceyhan port. The revenues could go to the federal government, but we would take our share as stipulated in the Constitution, which is 17 per cent. The Oil Ministry did not agree, although Iraq currently exports less than its capacity and quota of oil. The oil is ready for export. The revenues would go to the Iraqi people, but the federal government is objecting.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** What is your opinion about the agreements and contracts that the Region's prime minister signed with international companies? What is their fate?

**[Barzani]** These agreements and contracts are valid and we will not go back on them or abandon them. We will work hard to reach an agreement about the oil and gas law and the oil revenues law. The law will be implemented. Based on this law, we will launch our projects. But if the Oil Ministry sticks to its wrong approach and failed policy, we will not pay attention to what the ministry does and we will continue with our projects. We are not doing this for the sake of the Kurdistan Region only, but for all the people of Iraq. We will not follow the wrong path taken by the Oil Ministry.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** What is the extent of your satisfaction with the prime minister of the Kurdistan Region?

**[Barzani]** There is no doubt that Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani has proven his high qualification and ability to run the government in the Kurdistan Region, as tes-

tified by everyone. To safeguard the supreme interests of the Region, he might be asked to continue to head the government - this is although I affirm that the PUK is entitled to this position. I am definitely very much satisfied with him. I love him and admire him. I do not want to praise him, because I regard him as part of me, which means that I would be praising myself. He is part of my life and the dearest person to me. This is from the personal standpoint, and from the practical standpoint, he has been successful, as testified by everyone.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Rumors are circulating in the Kurdistan Region about a hidden conflict between your eldest son, Masrur, and Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani about the latter's position. How true is this?

**[Barzani]** I assure you that these are the mere illusions and wishes of some simple people. I assure you that if Masrur felt there is a danger to Nechirvan, he would be ready to face the danger instead of Nechirvan. There is no competition and there will be no competition. There is strong and close unity between them and between the members of our family. There are persons in the family that I am not satisfied with. We have a big clan, and I am not responsible for the actions of everyone. But as far as the close family members are concerned, particularly the sons of my late brother Idris, they are dearer to me than my children are. This is from the family and personal standpoint. I know that my children are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the children of their uncle Idris.

**[Asharq Al-Awsat]** Are there attempts to divide the family?

**[Barzani]** Many have tried but failed.

☆☆☆

## THE IRISH TIMES

March 16, 2009

# Turkey's biggest Muslim group puts Kurds on map

*The Gulen movement is trying to win over Kurds in Diyarbakir*

NICHOLAS BIRCH in Istanbul

**TURKEY'S MOST** powerful Muslim movement has increased activities in the Kurdish southeast, as the country's Islamic-rooted AK Party government struggles to sideline secular Kurdish nationalists who have dominated the region for two decades.

Prime minister Tayyip Erdogan has made clear that his prime aim at local elections on March 29th is to win Diyarbakir, Turkey's biggest majority Kurdish city.

AK Party has gained ground in the region since 2002, thanks to a mixture of political reformism and economic policies aimed at alleviating widespread local poverty.

Last summer, the government announced a new regional development plan worth 8 billion. This January, state television launched a 24-hour Kurdish channel, a remarkable step in a country that denied Kurds existed until 1991.

But AK Party has a secret weapon too — the three million to five million followers of Turkey's most influential religious leader, Fethullah Gulen.

Openly supportive of the government, the Gulen movement is best known for the schools it has founded in Turkey and abroad.

In the past two years it has turned its attention to Kurds in Turkey and Iraq. The movement's first major moves in the region were in 2007, when affiliated charity organisations began distributing meat and clothes during Islamic holidays in Kurdish areas.

Almost every town in southeastern Turkey now has a fee-paying Gulen school. In Iraqi Kurdistan, there are 15, and a university opened last November.

It is simply the best education you can get, says Mazhar Bagli, an academic in Diyarbakir. People are falling over each other to get their kids into these schools.

Offering free afterschool classes for



children studying for exams, the 25 reading rooms that opened in Diyarbakir in the past two years are even more popular.

Teachers in a poor central Diyarbakir neighbourhood say 5,000 families applied for 250 places. Seven-hundred thousand people in Diyarbakir are younger than 18, and most are very poor, says Aziz Nart, head of a Gulen-linked business group that sponsored the reading rooms. This is something the state should be dealing with. We are just trying to fill the gaps.

Secularists have long worried the schools are a tool to educate a new generation of religious-minded Turks. The schools teach Turkey's secular curriculum. But critics point out that many are boarding schools and it is in the dormitories, they say, that the group tries to impose its ideology.

The AKP and Gulen share a common vision of how to solve the Kurdish problem, says Hakan Tahmaz, the left-leaning author of a recent book on the Kurds. Both use the rhetoric of a golden age when Turks and Kurds were united by their Muslim faith.

Conservative, though opposed to political Islam, the movement should thrive among traditionally devout Kurds. Yet it has

to overcome one major obstacle: its roots in Turkish nationalism. Until 2005, the movement's newspaper, Zaman, rarely used the word Kurd. One Turkey, a hugely popular series on Samanyolu TV, a private channel close to the movement, shows the same conservatism. The hero of the series is a Turkish teacher in a Kurdish village. He tries to modernise it, but it's tough: locals are ignorant traditionalists in the thrall of godless Kurdish separatist militants who kidnap the village imam and force-feed him pork.

The series doesn't ask why the villagers are sceptical of the newcomer, or why they support the PKK, says Serdar Yilmaz, a liberal Islamic intellectual in Diyarbakir, referring to the separatist group that has been fighting Turkey since 1984. It presents them as imbeciles who can only be saved by enlightened westerners.

The movement's main aim, Yilmaz adds, is to create moral, obedient citizens. It sees the Kurds as naughty children who need to be taught good manners.

Altan Tan, an Islamic-minded Kurdish intellectual who was one of 100 Turkish intellectuals to attend a Gulen-sponsored conference on living together in peace in Iraqi Kurdistan last month, warns against seeing the movement as homogenous.

Think of AKP: 367 deputies with views all the way from liberal to nationalist, he says. The movement is the same. Like all sections of Turkish society, its members are realising that the old mindset is unsuited to the realities of the country.

Businessman Aziz Nart sees himself as an agent of change. He describes one Istanbul factory owner his association hosted in Diyarbakir confessing that he had always avoided hiring Kurds.

"From now on, I'll go out of my way to employ them," the factory owner told him.

**Newsweek** March 14, 2009

## The Myth of Kurdistan

*Iraq's northern enclave used to be called a model for the rest of the country. Not anymore, say Kurds.*



Lennox Samuels / NEWSWEEK

Until the old man is out of the way, everyone else who hungers for power in Iraqi Kurdistan is on hold. It could be a long wait. Despite his chronic bad knee and a Mayo Clinic heart operation last August, 75-year-old Jalal Talabani, Iraq's president, is a survivor. At present, he and his longtime rival, Massoud Barzani (together with their families and their respective political machines), still control the largest part of what's worth controlling in the three northern Iraqi provinces that make up the autonomous region. Government ranks are filled with their relatives. Barzani himself is president of the Kurdistan Regional Government, while his nephew Nechirvan is its prime minister and his son Masrour is in charge of intelligence. Talabani's son Qubad is the Kurds' man in Washington, while a nephew heads counterintelligence. Backers once touted Kurdistan as the model for a democratic Iraq—perhaps even for a total makeover of the Middle East. But if anything, the place seems more and more like a stagnant, feudal principality.

Kurdistan used to be the Americans' favorite part of Iraq. Temperate and stable, pro-Western, mostly secular and gleefully capitalist, it was a haven from the chaos and bloodshed that engulfed the rest of the country. It was never perfect—then as now, corruption was endemic, human rights were patchy and civic life was dominated by the same two parties: Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Still, most Kurds could live with the flaws as long as the regional government defended their hard-won autonomy and kept away the suicide bombers.

But as the rest of Iraq keeps growing more open and democratic, the enclave remains stuck in its old ways—and ordinary Kurds are noticing. Businessmen grumble at having to form partnerships with government cronies; voters are demanding more choice. One recent survey in the region found that 83 percent of respondents say the

place needs to change. "We're fed up with a government that forgets about people," says Mousa Rasoul, 39, owner of a small business in the town of Sangasar. Those complaints are not to be ignored, a senior Kurdish official agrees. "If we don't respond, others will come and take over this place," he tells NEWSWEEK, asking not to be named on such a risky topic. "Whether it is the Islamists or someone else. We cannot count anymore on revolutionary rhetoric to justify our rule."

Such warnings may be wasted on Kurdistan's two great clans. Talabani created the PUK in 1975 as a leftist challenger to the "feudalist, tribalist, bourgeois, rightist and capitulationist" KDP of the Barzani family. Thousands on both sides are said to have died before the two parties signed a formal ceasefire in 1998 and carved up the region. They gave up their ideological differences long ago, and neither hides its desire for a piece of any action in sight—starting with the region's share of the national budget, which totaled about \$6 billion last year. Kurdish officials say each of the two parties takes as much as \$35 million per month off the top, although party leaders deny any knowledge of such sums.

Even the Kurdish budget is undisclosed. "We need a transparent [regional] budget," complains the senior Kurdish official. The vast majority of Kurds agree. In a February poll by the Erbil-based Kurdistan Institute for Political Issues, 94 percent of respondents said the regional government ought to make its budget public and specify where and how the money is spent.

Much has been made of Kurdistan's booming economy, but the region is littered with unfinished construction projects. Most foreign investors, daunted by red tape and confusion, are skittish. A former member of the PUK politburo says no oil company operates in Kurdistan without paying commissions to party or regional-government officials. NEWSWEEK was at a recent meeting where one local entrepreneur complained to top Kurdish officials that businessmen have to pay millions to party bureaucrats to win

contracts. The officials commiserated.

But neither party tolerates criticism especially well. Local journalists tell of beatings, death threats, even charges of treason. Dissidents are subject to far rougher treatment. "There have been widespread and credible allegations of torture and people being detained for years without a hint of due process," says Joseph Logan of Human Rights Watch. The U.S. State Department's latest Human Rights Report describes abusive practices in the regional government's jails, including electric shocks, beatings and "suspensions in stress positions."

Masrour Barzani says he's doing his best as intelligence and security chief to correct any problems in his jails. The idea, he says, is to build "a more world-standard institution that would be strong enough both to withstand challenges and at the same time be very modern and civilized in terms of protection of citizens and in terms of conduct of duty." Logan credits Masrour Barzani with giving good access to Human Rights Watch investigators, but he adds: "There's well-documented harassment of journalists who have expressed views critical of the political leadership. If the response to pointed criticism is to go after the critics ... then you can say that experiment [with openness] has not come to fruition."

Kurds hate seeing their political system falling behind that of other Iraqis. Across Iraq a January vote for provincial councils was an impressive show of wide-open democracy, in which several incumbents were tossed out of office. By contrast, the Kurds have yet to hold their own provincial elections, and the PUK and KDP have signaled their intent to field a joint "closed" list. Instead of offering a real choice, ballots will present a slate of candidates drawn from both dominant parties.

Officials from those parties insist their leaders are receptive to opposing views. "Jalal Talabani has been more willing than many others to listen and change," says a senior PUK official. The party has promised it will work toward more transparency and less control. A KDP Central Committee member says his party is also working toward opening up: "Massoud Barzani wants to be seen more as the president of Kurdistan than as carrying on the party agenda," he says. Peter Galbraith, a former U.S. ambassador to Croatia and a longtime supporter of Kurdistan, argues that conditions are improving there. "I think there has been a lot of progress," he says, although he concedes: "Periodically, there are things that one doesn't like to see." A Western defender of the Kurds, asking not to be named on such a sensitive topic, says Kurdistan's people have their own priorities. "The national issue is so important to Kurds that other issues, like democratization, take a back seat," he says.

Not all Kurds agree—and they say the parties need to start cleaning up fast. "You simply cannot go on justifying your rule based on what you did 20 years ago," says the senior Kurdish official. "We can either be a party of the past and end up like Fatah in Palestine, or regenerate ourselves like the Labour Party in the U.K." The time to decide is running out. ■





March 13, 2009

## Baghdad's New Security Steps In North Worry Kurds

by Charles Recknagel

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has already bolstered the central government's power through security operations in Baghdad and the south of the country, and is now turning his attention to northern regions where tensions are high between Arab Sunnis, Turcomans, and Kurds.

But as Maliki seeks to extend his control over hotspots like Mosul and Kirkuk, the Kurds are warning him not to go too far.

The two main Kurdish political parties are key members of the Iraqi political establishment in Baghdad, with one of the parties' leaders, Jalal Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), currently serving as Iraq's president.

But the Kurdish parties are at odds with the central government when it comes to any threat to self-rule in the three majority Kurdish provinces they control.

They also differ with Baghdad over how much of the mixed Kurdish-Arab-Turcoman provinces that border the Kurdish autonomous region should eventually be brought into it.

Particularly sensitive is the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, which many Kurds regard as their natural future political and economic capital. So, too, are disputed areas around the cities of Mosul near the Turkish border, and Khanaqin on the Iranian border.

Until recently, the Kurdish parties were the dominant power in these areas due to two factors. First, their fighters, the peshmerga, swept in as U.S. forces toppled Saddam Hussein and then stayed on as units of the new Iraqi Army. Second, the Sunni Arab boycott of the 2005 provincial elections assured there was only weak political opposition.

### CREEPING 'ARABIZATION'?

But now the Sunni Arabs are reasserting their claims in the mixed population areas. They returned in force to the provincial polls this year and were the biggest winner in Mosul. In Kirkuk, where the January poll was waived for fear of violence, Arab and Turcoman militias patrol their own neighborhoods even if the Kurds dominate the city's tripartite government.

The situation makes Maliki's efforts to build on his security successes in the south and Baghdad, by turning his attention northward, seem both urgent and risky.

So far, he has proceeded cautiously. He has focused on quietly changing the composition of the Iraqi Army forces in the disputed regions in an effort to reduce the peshmerga presence.

In Kirkuk, that has meant replacing the Iraqi Army's 4th Division with the 12th Division, but the move has drawn fierce protests from the Kurdish side.

Safeen Dizayee, head of international relations for the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), the other of the two main Kurdish parties, says the troop rotation is bringing in almost exclusively Arab soldiers.

Prior to the arrival of this [12th] division, there was the 4th Division in the Kirkuk region. And orders came for the 4th Division to be removed, which actually had a mixed composition of Kurds and non-Kurds, and it was sent to another part of the country and the 12th Division was brought in its place," Dizayee says. "The new division, the 12th Division, is mainly comprised of Arab officers, staff officers and high-ranking officers, right down to foot soldiers."

Kurdish officials also charge Maliki with moving away Kurdish officers in the two Iraqi army divisions in Ninevah province, whose capital city is Mosul.

Dizayee also says such moves sidestep long-standing efforts in Baghdad to negotiate the status of the disputed areas.

"There are certain areas which under the Constitution, Article 140, require a legal settlement [because] they are disputed areas between Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq," Dizayee says. "We feel that so long as these regions remain in dispute, any form of military movement would probably complicate the situation further and create unnecessary concern."

### REPLACING PESHMERGA

The Kurds have counted on a constitutionally mandated referendum, including in Kirkuk, to determine which areas join the Kurdish autonomous region. But the wrangling in Baghdad has gone on so long that the date for the referendum expired a year ago and, in a sign of the growing impasse, no new date has been set.



Kurdish representatives, like these parliamentarians in Iraqi Kurdistan, fear their objections will go unheard.

Still, if Maliki's effort to change the military composition in the disputed areas dismays Kurdish leaders, it has been hailed by local Sunni Arab parties.

"We needed to change the army because previously the soldiers in Mosul were in Iraqi army uniform but they were from the Kurdish militia -- and when I say Kurdish, I mean from the two parties [KDP and PUK]," Ezzedine al-Dora, a deputy to the national parliament from Mosul, says. "So we asked Baghdad to change the army, they tried more than once, and now they have changed about 70 percent so far. We want more."

Dora represents the party Al-Hadba (the Arabic name for Mosul), which took 49 percent of the vote in the Ninevah provincial election.

He says the remaining 30 percent of change he wants to see includes removing peshmerga units of the Iraqi army that continue to control areas outside Mosul, particularly along the border with the Kurdish autonomous region.

"So far, outside of Mosul, in some places like Al-Hamdaniyah, like Shaikhan, where the [Kurdish] parties exercise power, the Kurdish forces are still there," Dora says.

The Al-Hadba party is headed by Atheel Najafi, the scion of an old Mosul family that breeds Arabian horses and used to supply them to Saddam Hussein's sons, Uday and Qusai. It is regarded by the Kurds as not only fiercely Arab Sunni but also as having ties to former Baathists.

### THREAT OF VIOLENCE?

Al-Hadba, in turn, accuses the Kurdish forces of arbitrary arrest and torture of opponents.

So far, the efforts to change the military structure in the disputed areas have not led to open fighting.

"Up to now, I can say, 'no,'" Dora says. "Maybe sometimes it happens, but not openly and we have not heard or seen any of that -- for now."

But Kurdish leaders says Sunni Arab gunmen in Ninevah have killed some 2,000 Kurds and turned another 127,000 into refugees over the past six years. Most of the Kurds living west of the Tigris, the river which divides Mosul, have fled.

That means that in Mosul -- Iraq's third-largest city -- the Kurds are fighting a rear-guard action to remain in the majority Arab city. By contrast, the Kurds in Kirkuk are waging a battle to retain control of a city they hope to one day see as their capital.

How much further Maliki can go in changing the military structure in the north while still preserving his frequent alliance with the Kurds in Iraqi national politics is now a major question.

The war of words between the two sides keeps growing. Mas'ud Barzani, the president of the Kurdish self-rule region, has publicly suggested Maliki is drifting toward authoritarian rule.

That is not the first time someone has leveled that charge at Maliki, the Shi'ite Arab politician whose popular "State of Law" operations in Baghdad and Basra have bolstered his drive for a strong central government. But in the past the charge more often has been leveled by Iraq's Sunni Arabs, or rival Shi'ite-Arab parties, rather than by the Kurds.

## Kurdish president says Kurds "stronger with Iraq"

REUTERS

March 12, 2009 By Luke Baker

LONDON, March 12 (Reuters) - The president of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region expressed solidarity with the central government in Baghdad on Thursday, but warned deep differences with the Arab leadership still needed addressing.

Speaking to foreign policy experts in London, Masoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdish regional government, said Kurds were better off in partnership with Iraq as a whole, even if independence would always remain their ultimate aspiration.

"Kurds are stronger with Iraq, and Iraq is stronger with the Kurds," Barzani, the son of a Kurdish revolutionary leader, told the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

"So long as Iraq is covered by its constitution and the Kurds play a role within the framework of Iraq, they will continue to stay committed to that constitution."

But he added: "We believe that we have all the right as a nation to have the right to self determination.

"That is the aspiration of all the Kurds and it is a natural right ... absolutely that will not be done through violence and war. It will be done under circumstances where there is real dialogue and understanding, and I hope that will take place."

The Kurdish region of northern Iraq, made up of three provinces along the border with Iran and Turkey, already has a high degree of autonomy, with its own flag, its own international airport and its own powerful government.

While it has long been the desire of Kurds -- a non-Arab diaspora spread across eastern Syria, southeast Turkey, Iraq and western Iran -- to unite as a nation, an independent Kurdistan would be hugely



geopolitically destabilising and has long been opposed by the Kurds' allies, including the United States.

Instead, Kurdish leaders have sought to build as much autonomy as they can, and want to incorporate Iraqi cities such as Mosul and Kirkuk within the boundaries of the Kurdish region.

### KIRKUK ISSUE

The issue of Kirkuk is particularly sensitive as the city sits on some of the largest oil reserves in Iraq.

During Saddam Hussein's rule, tens of thousands of Kurds were driven out of the area around Kirkuk as part of a process known as "Arabisation". Since his overthrow, Kurds have moved back in large numbers, shifting the demographics again.

A referendum covering Kirkuk was due to be held in 2007 but has repeatedly been postponed. Barzani said the delay was one of five areas of profound disagreement with the largely Arab-led government in Baghdad.

Among the areas of disagreement are oil and gas ownership, foreign policy, the structure of the partnership in Baghdad, and what is known as Article 140, a clause in the constitution that ultimately governs the administration of Kirkuk.

Barzani said he expected Article 140, which requires the holding of a referendum, to be implemented soon.

"We have not lost hope yet," he said. "We will stay committed to that and hopefully won't reach a stage where people will not come forward in implementing it. We still have hope."

REUTERS

## Iraq's president to retire from office next

BAGHDAD, March 14, 2009 (Reuters)

IRAQ'S PRESIDENT Jalal Talabani is not likely to seek another term when his mandate expires at the end of this year, a senior official from his party said on Saturday.

But Talabani, who was born in 1933 and underwent heart surgery in the United States in August last year, will remain head of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan party, said Fouad Masoum, a senior parliamentarian from the Kurdish alliance.

"It doesn't mean he will give up his political life. It just means he will not go for the presidential post," he told Reuters. "He wants to take a rest."

Talabani, a Kurd, has been president since 2005. Although he does not wield executive power in Iraq, his role is seen as critical in maintaining the country's delicate ethnic balance.

His two vice presidents are a Shi'ite and a Sunni Arab.

Their mandates expire at the end of December, when Iraq holds parliamentary polls that could radically alter the power balance in Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's coalition government.

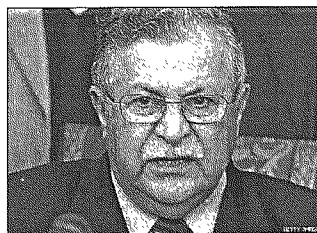
Parliament elects the three-member Presidency Council.

Masoum said Talabani's role as broker between Iraq's often fractious ethnic and sectarian groups had worn him out.

"That task is very tough ... working with all Iraqi parties and trying to bring together their diverse viewpoints," Masoum said, adding Talabani's decision was not final.

### NEXT PRESIDENT?

An end to the official role for the country's most powerful Kurd



comes at a delicate time for Iraq as rival parties vie for power and the United States prepares to pull out combat troops six years after the U.S.-led invasion to oust Saddam Hussein.

Relations between the Shi'ite Arab-led government in Baghdad and largely autonomous Kurdistan in the north have deteriorated over the last year and are likely to remain heated. Disputes over territory along the Kurdistan border and rights to vast oil reserves in disputed areas show no sign of being resolved.

It is not clear who might replace Talabani.

"It's too early to say ... but I believe the next president will not be an Islamist or a Kurd," said Usama al-Nujaifi, a Sunni Arab politician member of former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's secular party

"The Iraqi people want an Arab president ... not someone who came into power through the occupation."

One of Talabani's natural allies in the Kurdish alliance said they would not have a problem with that in principle.

"We know the Iraqi constitution does not say the president must be Kurd or Arab, Sunni, Shi'ite, Christian. We are not expecting the office to be occupied by a Kurd. For all we know, we (Kurds) might produce the next prime minister," said Kurdish alliance lawmaker Feriyad Rawanduzi.

Though Talabani has usually sought to stay out of Iraq's political wrangling, his council's veto has sometimes shot down legislation that would have been divisive.

In July last year, he blocked a provincial elections law that his fellow Kurds bitterly opposed because they feared it would set back their goal of controlling the oil-rich city of Kirkuk. The law was later redrafted to please all sides.

Le Monde  
Mardi 17 mars 2009

# Turquie, Syrie, Irak : les barrages de la discorde

## Reportage

Birecik (sud-est de la Turquie)  
Envoyé spécial

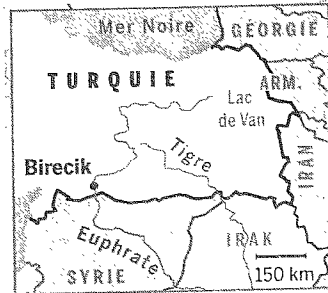
**A**u fond d'une vallée encaissée, sur les bords du mythique fleuve Euphrate, la petite ville de Halfeti meurt à petit feu. Les vieilles maisons en pierre sont quasiment toutes vides. Un bureau de poste, quelques cafés où l'on fait griller les énormes carpes du fleuve et une prison encore en activité sont les seules traces de vie. La construction, en aval, du barrage de Birecik a bouleversé la quiétude de cette région turque, proche de la frontière syrienne.

Trente et un mille habitants ont été évacués, avant l'inondation de la zone en 2000, pour être relogés dans des appartements neufs construits en haut de la colline, dans le « nouveau Halfeti ». Le village voisin, Savasan, n'est plus accessible qu'en bateau. Le minaret de la mosquée et un pylône électrique dépassent des eaux bleues du lac. Le reste est englouti. « *Nous passons au-dessus de mon école* », montre le capitaine du bateau. Zeugma, la cité antique du III<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C., découverte juste avant la mise en eau, a connu le même sort.

Le long de l'Euphrate, la Turquie a disposé cinq grands barrages comme celui-ci, destinés à l'irrigation ou à la production d'énergie. Deux autres sont en construction. Quelques kilomètres au sud de Birecik, celui de Karkamis a été dressé juste à la frontière avec la Syrie. Plus au nord, c'est le barrage Atatürk, ouvrage central du Plan pour l'Anatolie du Sud-Est (GAP), un projet de 22 barrages disséminés sur le Tigre et l'Euphrate et leurs affluents.

Ces retenues d'eau, qui régulent artificiellement le débit, sont dénoncées par les défenseurs de l'environnement, lesquels ont constitué, samedi 14 mars à Istanbul, un tribunal symbolique pour condamner trois projets de

Source de tensions sur l'ensemble du globe, le partage de l'eau est au cœur d'un forum mondial à Istanbul



barrages. Mais aussi par la Syrie et l'Irak, également traversés par les deux grands fleuves qui se rejoignent pour terminer leur course dans le Golfe persique. Depuis plus de quatre-vingts ans, les eaux de l'ancienne Mésopotamie sont l'objet d'une bataille diplomatique entre la Turquie, qui tient les sources, et ses voisins qui militent pour un statut « international » pour le Tigre et l'Euphrate.

A plusieurs reprises, l'ombre d'une guerre de l'eau a même plané sur la région ; dans les années 1970, entre la Syrie, qui construisait ses premiers barrages, et l'Irak. En 1990, c'est la Turquie qui provoque un incident en fermant les vannes du fleuve durant un mois, pour remplir le lac du barrage Atatürk. Plus tard, Ankara agitera la menace pour faire plier la Syrie, qui, jusqu'en 1999, protégeait le leader kurde Abdullah Öcalan.

« *Aujourd'hui, les choses vont mieux et ils se parlent, ce qui n'est déjà pas si mal*, constate Loïc Fauchon, le président du Conseil mondial de l'eau, qui organise, à Istanbul, son cinquième Forum mondial du 16 au 22 mars. *Il y a trois ans, à Mexico, j'ai installé les représentants des trois pays dans la même salle pour les obliger à discuter.* » Depuis peu, le ton a changé : « *Notre but est d'utiliser et de parta-*

*ger l'eau équitablement* », a récemment déclaré Veysel Eroglu, le ministre turc de l'environnement.

Un nouvel accord pourrait être conclu au cours de ce forum d'Istanbul auquel participe le président irakien, Jalal Talabani. « *Depuis trente ans, ils en ont déjà signé des dizaines*, observe, sceptique, Tahir Öngür, ingénieur turc et activiste anti-barrages. *Il est très difficile de trouver un compromis.* » En 2008, les trois pays étaient tombés d'accord pour ouvrir un Institut de l'eau, sur le barrage Atatürk, où des ingénieurs étudieraient le flux et les besoins en eau dans la région. Mais un an après son lancement prévu, le projet est en panne.

### Appauvrissement des sols

Le problème le plus urgent est l'appauvrissement des sols, selon Güven Eken, président de Doga Dernegi (Association Nature), une organisation non gouvernementale (ONG) d'Istanbul. « *Les barrages ne retiennent pas que l'eau, mais aussi les sédiments naturellement charriés par les fleuves*, explique-t-il. *Les terres agricoles sont moins fertiles et plus salées.* »

Si le débit à l'entrée en Syrie, fixé à 500 m<sup>3</sup>/s par le protocole de Damas de 1987, est à peu près respecté, l'Irak se montre plus inquiet. « *Le gaspillage et la mauvaise utilisation ont réduit le niveau de l'eau disponible par habitant* », a averti, en février, le ministre irakien de l'eau, Abdul Latif Rachid. Dans un Irak en reconstruction, la consommation devrait augmenter ces prochaines années, expliquent les organisateurs du Forum de l'eau. Déjà, les marais du sud irakien s'assèchent à vue d'œil. ■

Guillaume Perrier

LE FIGARO

16 mars 2009

## Le Tigre et l'Euphrate divisent la Turquie, la Syrie et l'Irak

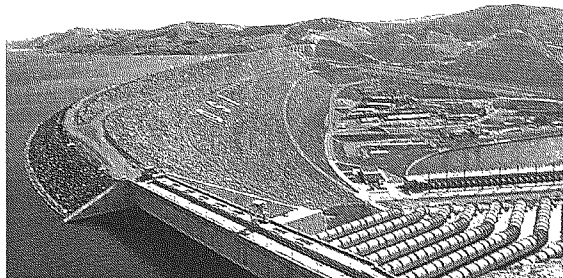
Laure Marchand (à Istanbul)

**L**e contrôle des eaux de ces deux fleuves, vitales pour l'agriculture et la population des trois pays, donne lieu à des tensions récurrentes.

Quand les Français et les Britanniques démembrent secrètement l'Empire ottoman, au cours des accords de Sykes-Picot, en 1916, la question du partage des eaux du Tigre et de l'Euphrate est déjà posée. Près d'un siècle plus tard, elle n'est toujours pas réglée.

Prenant leur source dans les montagnes turques, les deux grands fleuves du Moyen-Orient traversent ensuite la Syrie et l'Irak. Le contrôle de ces eaux, vitales pour l'agriculture et la population des trois pays, donne lieu à des tensions récurrentes.

Dans les années 1970,



Le barrage Atatürk. Lors de son remplissage, en 1990, la Turquie avait interrompu le débit de l'Euphrate pendant un mois. Crédits photo : JOBARD/SIPA

Bagdad et Damas ont même failli entrer en guerre à cause de la construction de barrages en Syrie. En 1976, la Turquie a lancé un vaste projet de développement de la région du sud-est, qui repose sur la réalisation de vingt-deux barrages. Onze ouvrages sont déjà en activité. Si l'ensemble est achevé, plusieurs

études montrent que le débit des deux fleuves pourrait décroître de 17 à 34 % à la sortie du territoire turc.

Les conséquences sur la qualité des eaux sont déjà visibles : l'usage des engrais et le développement de l'irrigation ont fortement augmenté la pollution et la salinité. Les écosystèmes sont

bouleversés.

«Ils n'ont aucun droit sur nos ressources en eau»

«Le château d'eau du Moyen-Orient» a longtemps fait fi des plaintes de ses voisins syrien et irakien. «Nous ne réclamons pas de partager leurs ressources en pétrole, ils n'ont aucun droit sur nos ressources en eau», avait tranché en 1992 Suleyman Demirel, premier ministre turc à l'époque. Lors du remplissage du grand barrage Atatürk en 1990, Ankara avait même interrompu le débit de l'Euphrate pendant un mois.

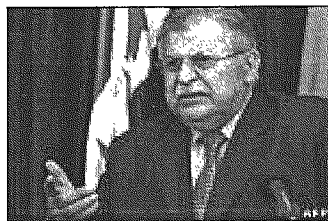
Mais, ces dernières années, les rapports entre les pays riverains se sont améliorés. La Turquie cherche à devenir un acteur régional incontournable et redéploie sa diplomatie vers le Moyen-Orient. Des discussions sur la répartition des eaux sont donc engagées entre les gouvernements. À défaut de régler tous leurs contentieux, les trois parties devraient montrer leur bonne volonté en signant un accord lors du Forum de l'eau.

Le Journal du Dimanche

16 mars 2009

## Talabani et le "rêve poétique"

DANS une interview parue lundi dans un journal turc, le président d'Irak, le Kurde Jalal Talabani, juge "impossible" l'accession du Kurdistan irakien à l'indépendance. Un Etat indépendant kurde en Irak ne pourrait survivre parce que ses voisins turc, iranien et syrien, qui abritent de fortes communautés kurdes, fermeraient leurs frontières, explique



Talabani au quotidien Sabah.

Soucieux d'apaiser la crainte de la Turquie face au séparatisme kurde, Talabani ajoute: "Je dis à mes frères turcs:

'N'ayez pas peur de l'indépendance kurde'. Rester au sein de l'Irak est dans l'intérêt du peuple kurde des points de vue économique, culturel et politique". Le président irakien assure traduire l'opinion des autorités autonomes du Kurdistan irakien, affirmant encore que l'aspiration des nationalistes kurdes à un grand Kurdistan n'est qu'un "rêve poétique."

La Turquie craint que l'avènement d'un Etat indépendant au Kurdistan irakien ne relance la guérilla séparatiste du Parti des travailleurs kurdes (PKK) sur son propre territoire.

AFP

## TALABANI ESPÈRE QUE LES REBELLES KURDES DU PKK VONT RENDRE LES ARMES

ISTANBUL, 18 mars 2009 (AFP)

DES PARTIS kurdes d'Irak, de Syrie, d'Iran, de Turquie et d'Europe vont lancer un appel commun au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), pour qu'il cesse la lutte armée contre la Turquie, a déclaré le président irakien Jalal Talabani, selon la presse turque.

Cet appel adressé à l'organisation rebelle kurde de Turquie sera lancé lors d'une convention qui se réunira fin avril ou début mai, probablement à Erbil, au Kurdistan irakien (nord de l'Irak), a déclaré M. Talabani, cité par le journal turc Radikal.

"Je crois que le PKK se pliera à la volonté de tous les partis kurdes, en déposant les armes et en mettant fin à l'action violente", a déclaré M. Talabani, qui est lui-même kurde, dans des propos rapportés par un autre quotidien turc, Sabah.

Il a précisé qu'une telle décision du PKK ne signifierait pas seulement un cessez-le-feu mais une "décision de principe de cesser la prétendue révolution armée".

Ankara, estime M. Talabani, devrait de son côté envisager une amnistie pour les

rebelles pour consolider les récentes mesures prises en faveur des Kurdes de Turquie, notamment dans le domaine des libertés culturelles.

Le PKK a commencé la lutte armée en 1984 dans le sud-est de la Turquie, pour obtenir l'indépendance de la région. Le conflit a fait environ 44.000 morts.

M. Talabani, qui se trouve à Istanbul pour le 5ème Forum mondial de l'eau, a cependant précisé à Sabah qu'il ne s'attend pas que les militants kurdes annoncent la dissolution du PKK.

"Je ne pense pas qu'ils soient prêts à cela pour l'instant", a-t-il dit.

Des centaines de militants du PKK sont installés dans le Kurdistan irakien, d'où ils lancent des attaques en territoire turc.

L'aviation turque lance régulièrement des raids contre ces bases arrière du PKK.

Ankara a souvent accusé les Kurdes irakiens, qui jouissent en Irak d'un statut d'autonomie vis-à-vis de Bagdad, de tolérer, voire d'aider le PKK. Mais les relations bilatérales se sont améliorées récemment, et les autorités kurdes d'Irak ont manifesté la volonté d'aider la Turquie à lutter contre le PKK.



## Irak: six ans de guerre et un avenir incertain

**S**ix ans après l'invasion de l'Irak par les Etats-Unis, la fin de la mission des forces américaines est en vue. Mais l'avenir du pays meurtri par la guerre, les attentats, et les rivalités intercommunautaires, est beaucoup plus incertain.

A la faveur d'une baisse significative des violences, la plupart des Irakiens se sentent aujourd'hui plus en sécurité qu'à quasiment tout autre moment depuis le début du conflit le 20 mars 2003 -le 19 mars aux Etats-Unis.

Mais "si les dirigeants irakiens ne se réconcilient pas et ne travaillent pas ensemble, la situation va se dégrader", prédit le député kurde Mahmoud Othman, pointant le manque d'"harmonie" entre les différents leaders.

En outre, la violence se maintient à des niveaux que la plupart des autres pays jugeraient alarmants. Certes, la majeure partie du territoire est calme, dont les trois provinces kurdes du nord, le sud chiite et la province d'Anbar sous domination sunnite, où les tribus locales se retournées contre Al-Qaïda. Mais la semaine dernière, deux attaques-suicide ont fait une soixantaine de morts au total dans la région de Bagdad.

Les combats font encore rage à Mossoul et dans d'autres régions du nord majoritairement sunnite. A la course pour le pouvoir et le contrôle des ressources entre groupes religieux et ethniques rivaux, viennent s'ajouter les luttes internes au sein des communautés sunnite et chiite, qui devraient s'intensifier à l'approche des élections nationales prévues cette année. Et si les affrontements entre sunnites et chiites se sont calmés, la véritable

réconciliation reste insaisissable.

Une évolution cependant semble acquise: les unités de combat américaines doivent avoir quitté l'Irak en septembre 2010, et l'ensemble des soldats américains leur emboîter le pas avant la fin de l'année suivante.

Les Etats-Unis comptent actuellement quelque 132.000 hommes en Irak, dont environ 12.000 doivent partir d'ici septembre prochain.

Dans l'ultime phase de la guerre, le défi pour eux sera d'empêcher que les rivalités entre groupes ethniques et communautaires n'atteignent les niveaux de violence qui avaient failli faire basculer le pays dans une guerre civile ouverte il y a deux ans.

Contrôler et prévenir les dommages est un objectif beaucoup moins ambitieux que celui visé par l'administration Bush lorsque l'invasion américaine débuta, par une frappe aérienne sur un secteur du sud de Bagdad, tentative ratée d'élimination de Saddam Hussein: manquer cette cible, en ouverture de conflit, aura donné le ton à ce qui est devenu une guerre de faux pas et de déceptions, avant le tournant de 2007.

La guerre a été lancée officiellement à cause d'armes de destruction massive irakiennes. Lorsque les événements ont prouvé que Saddam Hussein n'en disposait pas, l'objectif a changé: mettre en place une démocratie à l'occidentale au coeur du Moyen-Orient. Un objectif qui n'a été que partiellement atteint.

Aujourd'hui, les Etats-Unis espèrent quitter le pays sans qu'il ne sombre dans le chaos. Ils espèrent un Irak suffisamment fort pour pouvoir parer à l'ingérence de pays voisins - dont l'Iran- et se protéger d'Al-Qaïda.

Les chances d'un Irak raisonnablement stable sont certes plus nombreuses aujourd'hui qu'elles ne l'étaient avant le renforcement des forces américaines en 2007: à l'époque, des attentats à la voiture piégée ensanglantaient quotidiennement Bagdad et les milices chiites ou sunnites faisaient la loi.

Mais la stabilité est difficile à mesurer dans un pays où les retournements, querelles politiques, et changements d'alliance sont monnaie courante: des cheikhs autrefois fidèles de Saddam Hussein font désormais allégeance au gouvernement de Bagdad après avoir soutenu les groupes extrémistes, et nul ne sait de quel côté ils se trouveront demain.

En toile de fond, figure l'absence d'accord de partage de pouvoir entre sunnites, chiites et kurdes, jugé essentiel par les Etats-Unis pour assurer une stabilité durable.

Et la législation sur la distribution des richesses de l'industrie pétrolière, autre gros morceau, est dans l'impasse au Parlement depuis deux ans. Le gouvernement central et les Kurdes ont peu progressé pour ce qui est de résoudre leur querelle concernant les zones contestées du nord, dont la région riche en pétrole autour de Kirkouk. Pour certains responsables américains, il existe là un vrai risque de conflit armé.

Du côté irakien, l'avenir inquiète. "L'Irak va être confronté à des situations économiques difficiles pendant un long moment, le processus politique est encore à un carrefour", estime le vice-président chiite Adel Abdel-Mehdi. "La guerre n'est pas finie, elle vient seulement de commencer".

Robert H. Reid AP

## Des fosses communes découvertes en Turquie

Laure Marchand à Istanbul

**D**es fouilles en cours au Kurdistan pourraient apporter des éclaircissements sur le sort d'au moins 1 300 personnes disparues pendant les années 1990.

L'enquête sur «les puits de la mort», comme l'ont surnommée les médias turcs, semble avoir mérité cette macabre appellation. Depuis dix jours, la justice a entrepris des fouilles dans le sud-est de la Turquie pour rechercher des corps de victimes d'exécutions extrajudiciaires pendant la guerre civile entre l'armée et les séparatistes kurdes du PKK, dans les années 1990. Selon plusieurs témoignages, des corps auraient été jetés dans des cuves et dissous à



Pour les familles des disparus (ci-dessus, lors d'une marche silencieuse en 2007, Istanbul), ces fouilles repr sentent un espoir de savoir ce qu'il est advenu de leurs proches. Cr dits photo : AP

l'acide à cette époque.

La semaine dernière, dès les premiers coups de pelles, des os ont été retrouvés, à proximité

d'une base militaire. D'autres ont été découverts près d'un restaurant, non loin de la frontière irakienne. Et mardi, une ving-

taine de fragments humains ont été exhumés sur un terrain où s'entraînait le Hizbullah, un groupe islamiste turc qui était utilisé par les services de sécurité pour lutter contre le PKK. À la suite de ces excavations, cinq personnes ont été arrêtées. Plusieurs sont des «gardiens de villages», des miliciens kurdes rétribués par l'État.

Pour les familles des disparus, ces fouilles diligentées par les autorités représentent enfin un espoir de savoir ce qu'il est advenu de leurs proches. Selon les associations, entre 1 300 et 1 500 personnes, majoritairement kurdes, n'ont plus jamais donné signe de vie après avoir été en garde à vue. Le Jitem, un service non officiel de la gendarmerie, est soupçonné d'avoir procédé à des exécutions sommaires. Ankara n'a jamais

reconnu son rôle. Mais en janvier, le témoignage dans la presse d'un ancien membre de cette cellule a fait ressortir le dossier. Ces derniers mois, dans le cadre d'une enquête sur une tentative de renversement du gouvernement actuel, de nombreux officiers ont également été arrêtés. Nombre d'entre eux

étaient en poste dans la région kurde pendant les années de plomb.

#### Sérvices contre deux jeunes filles

Mardi, la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme a aussi condamné la Turquie mardi pour de «graves sérvices» infligés pen-

dant une garde à vue à deux jeunes filles soupçonnées d'appartenir au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit). Nazime Ceren Salmanoglu et Fatma Deniz Polattas n'avaient respectivement que 16 et 19 ans lorsqu'elles ont été arrêtées en 1999 dans le cadre d'une opération de police contre le PKK.

Toutes deux affirment avoir été frappées, avoir été victimes de harcèlement sexuel et avoir subi des tests de virginité pendant leur garde à vue. Aucune raison médicale ou juridique ne justifiait ces tests de virginité, qui constituent des «traitements discriminatoires et dégradants», ont déclaré les juges.



## Les Kurdes irakiens fêtent le Norouz en faisant une chaîne de flambeaux

AKRA (Irak), 21 mars 2009 (AFP) -

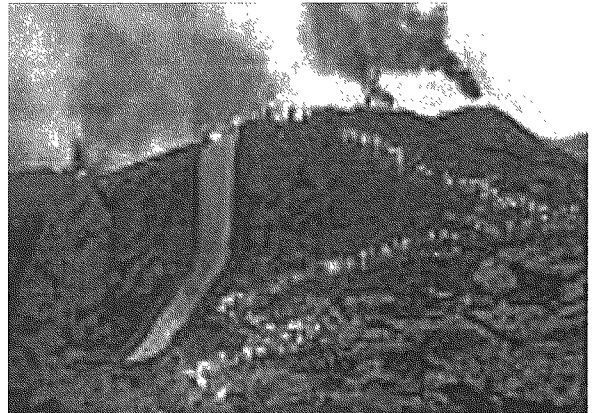
**LES KURDES** irakiens ont célébré samedi le Norouz, l'équinoxe de printemps, en allumant des flambeaux dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak.

Le Norouz, qui symbolise le début de la nouvelle année 2079 du calendrier kurde, est fêté notamment à Akra, près de Dohouk, capitale d'une des trois provinces formant le Kurdistan irakien (nord).

Dans la nuit, des milliers de Kurdes ont formé une longue chaîne d'Akra jusqu'au sommet de la montagne surplombant la ville. Puis ils ont allumé en même temps leur flambeau formant une ligne de feu courant sur plusieurs kilomètres.

Au pied de la montagne, un immense feu de joie est également allumé où les Kurdes dansent une partie de la nuit.

"Ces cérémonies viennent du nom de la ville, Akra, qui signifie +Feu+ en kurde", explique Ali Mohammed Charif, le directeur du centre culturel de la ville.



## Les Kurdes de Turquie fêtent paisiblement et librement Newruz

DIYARBAKIR -21 mars 2009 Reuters,

**DES CENTAINES** de milliers de membres de la minorité kurde de Turquie ont marqué samedi dans le calme Newruz, la fête du printemps, illustration de l'affirmation au grand jour de leur culture depuis qu'ils ont acquis de nouveaux droits.

A Diyarbakir, la plus grande ville du sud-est de la Turquie, où vivent l'essentiel des Kurdes du pays, les Kurdes ont chanté et dansé autour de feux de joie, à huit jours des élections locales du 29 mars.

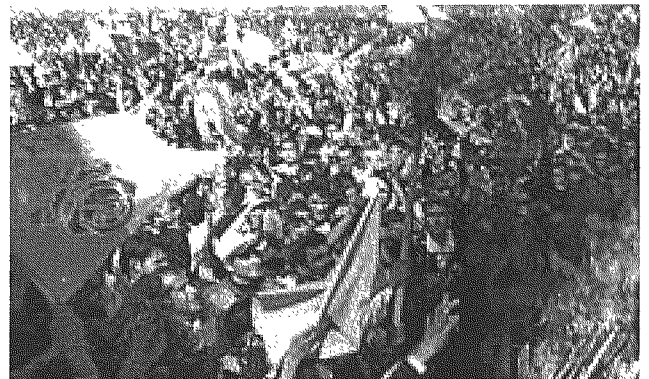
Par le passé, Newruz, qui marque le commencement de la nouvelle année selon le calendrier iranien et est appelé Nowruz en Iran, était entaché en Turquie d'actes de violence émanant de partisans des séparatistes du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, marxiste, hors-la-loi).

Les Kurdes de Turquie, qui sont 12 à 14 millions sur une population totale de 70 millions, disent souffrir de longue date de discrimination. Pendant des années, leur langue, indo-iranienne, a été interdite, et fêter Newruz était assimilé à un acte de séparatisme.

En vertu de réformes mises en oeuvre pour se concilier l'Union européenne et faciliter une adhésion future de la Turquie, le parti au pouvoir à Ankara, l'AKP, formation conservatrice issue de la mouvance islamique modérée, a octroyé à la minorité kurde certains droits culturels et politiques. Ainsi, une chaîne de télévision en kurde a-t-elle commencé à émettre et le Coran peut-il maintenant être publié librement en kurde.

Le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan, membre de l'AKP, a mené une campagne vigoureuse dans le Sud-Est, région naguère ignorée par les partis politiques nationaux, et s'est employé à détourner les électeurs des formations pro-kurdes à l'approche des élections de dimanche 29 mars.

Le Parti de la société démocratique, qui traditionnellement dominait la scène politique locale, estime que l'AKP cherche à s'attirer la sympathie des Kurdes pour progresser électoralement dans cette région



**Feu de joie dans la ville de Diyarbakir, dans le Kurdistan turc. Des centaines de milliers de membres de la minorité kurde de Turquie ont marqué samedi dans le calme Newruz, la fête du printemps, illustration de l'affirmation au grand jour de leur culture depuis qu'ils ont acquis de nouveaux droits. (Reuters/Umit Bektas)**

pauvre et toujours en proie à des troubles du fait de l'activisme du PKK.

Des véhicules de la municipalité ont conduit les habitants de Diyarbakir aux points où l'on faisait la fête, samedi dans le centre de la ville, sur fond de renforcement de la sécurité.

Malgré l'absence de violences pendant la journée de samedi, les tensions restent vives dans la région. L'armée turque continue de temps à autre à mener des offensives contre le PKK que ce soit en territoire turc ou dans le nord de l'Irak, où il dispose de bases arrière.

On estime que depuis le début de l'insurrection séparatiste du PKK, en 1984, 40.000 personnes ont péri dans les violences politiques.

The New York Times

March 15, 2009

## Iraqi President Sets Off Talk on Role of Iraqi Kurds

By ALISSA J. RUBIN

**B**AGHDAD President Jalal Talabani's office confirmed Saturday that he would not seek a second term, setting off speculation over a battle for his successor and whether the Kurds would retain the post of president, one of the three top jobs in the Iraqi government.

Mr. Talabani, 76, said he would leave office at the end of his current term in an interview broadcast Friday by Press TV, an Iranian television network, while he was visiting Tehran.

His office released a statement on Saturday night saying that he would relinquish a second term but continue to be active in the Kurdish political party he leads.

His term will end when a new president is chosen by the Iraqi Parliament, probably in spring 2010, after the next round of national elections.

The presidency is considered the second-highest-ranking position in government, after the prime minister, and Mr. Talabani, a Kurd, has used it to be a broker between ethnic and religious blocs within the government.

When he steps down there is all but certain to be sharp competition between Sunni Arabs and Kurds for the post. The post of prime minister is held by a Shiite, and it is likely to remain so. Shiites are a majority in Iraq.

Both Sunnis and Kurds have laid claim to the presidency.

Either it will go to an Arab Sunni, or if it stays in the hands of the Kurds, the two Kurdish parties will have to decide between them who will get it, said Mahmoud Othman, a Kurdish member of Parliament who is not allied with either of the two main Kurdish parties.

Although the news was not unexpected Mr. Talabani has a heart ailment and has often spoken casually of retiring his

party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, is in disarray, and it is deeply divided about who should be his successor.

The statement indicated that he would remain active in trying to help his party through this turbulent period. He is willing to relinquish a second term and to devote himself to his general political and party duties, the statement said.

In the television interview, he said that at the end of his term, I hope to retire, to go back home and to have time for writing my memoirs.

The presidency has limited powers, a conscious decision by the framers of the new Iraqi Constitution to ensure that no one again accrued the kind of power exercised by Saddam Hussein. The main power of the Presidency Council, which also includes two vice presidents, a Shiite and a Sunni, is to approve or veto legislation passed by Parliament.

Mr. Talabani has used the position to try to resolve disputes between various factions within the government and to reach out to foreign leaders, including some who have not been on good terms with Iraq in the past.

He is a regular visitor to Tehran, although there remains widespread antagonism in Iraq toward Iran because of the legacy of the Iran-Iraq war. He has reached out to Turkey, which has had a fraught relationship with Iraqi Kurdistan because the region has allowed Kurdish rebels who are fighting Turkey to live in the mountains of northern Iraq.

President Talabani really is a unique person who has a sort of national attitude rather than a Kurdish attitude, said Qassim Daoud, an independent Shiite member of Parliament who worked with him when both men were members of the exiled opposition to Mr. Hussein in the years before the American invasion. All sides work with him because everyone feels he is working for Iraq.



Ali Al-Saadi / Agence France-Presse — Getty Images  
President Jalal Talabani of Iraq said Friday that he did not want a second term.

Also on Saturday, insurgents fired rockets at the Green Zone in Baghdad and at an oil refinery. No casualties were reported.

In Salahuddin Province, gunmen killed six men who recently had been released by the Americans from the Camp Bucca detention center in southern Iraq.

REUTERS

## Kurdish independence just a dream, Talabani tells Turkey

ANKARA, March 16, 2009 (Reuters)

IRAQ'S PRESIDENT JALAL TALABANI has told a Turkish newspaper that an independent Kurdish state in Iraq was "impossible", in comments meant to calm Ankara's historical suspicion towards Kurdish separatism on its own soil.

Turkey, which has a large Kurdish minority and is fighting Kurdish separatist guerrillas, has traditionally feared that a Kurdish state in neighbouring Iraq would reignite independence in the southeast.

Talabani, a Kurd, told the Sabah daily in an interview published on Monday that an independent Kurdish state could not survive because neighbouring Turkey, Iran and Syria would close their borders. Iran and Syria also have a sizeable Kurdish minority.

"I tell this to my Turkish brothers: Don't be afraid of Kurdish inde-

pendence. To stay within Iraq is in the interest of the Kurdish people in an economic, cultural and political sense." Talabani, who is in Istanbul to attend a global forum on water, also said Kurdish nationalists' dream of a Great Kurdistan was "a dream in poems". He said his views were shared by Iraq's autonomous government.

After years of fraught relations, Turkey's government has improved its contacts with Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region.

The two administrations have held recent high-level meetings and share intelligence in the fight against rebels of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Talabani met Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan late on Sunday and both men discussed security issues, Anatolian state-run news agency said.

**TheNational**

March 17, 2009 / UAE

## New steps seen to end Turkish war on Kurds

Thomas Seibert, Foreign Correspondent

ISTANBUL / Amid speculation about new steps by Ankara to end a decades-old Kurdish rebellion, the presidents of Turkey and Iraq, Abdullah Gul and Jalal Talabani, are planning to meet on the sidelines of an international water conference in Istanbul that kicked off yesterday, with a long-awaited visit by Mr Gul to Baghdad expected in the coming days.

Mr Talabani, in Istanbul to attend the fifth World Water Forum, met the Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on Sunday evening. Together with Mr Gul, Mr Talabani attended yesterday's opening ceremony of the forum, a meeting of thousands of experts and government officials from around the world aimed at finding ways to save the world's water resources for future generations. The two presidents are to get together for bilateral talks in the coming days.

It is Mr Talabani's second visit to Turkey as Iraqi president. Mr Gul is expected to fly to Baghdad on Friday for the first visit of a Turkish head of state in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein, Turkish media reported.

Speculation has been growing that Turkey may soon take some new steps to end the war against Kurdish rebels in the south-east of the country. There have been efforts to improve co-operation between Turkey and Iraq in recent months to

get rebels of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, who have been hiding in the Kandil mountain range in northern Iraq, to lay down their arms. The PKK has been fighting for Kurdish autonomy from Ankara since 1984, in a conflict that has cost tens of thousands of lives.

Mr Gul told reporters last week that "there will be good things in the Kurdish question in the period ahead". There has been no official statement as to what Mr Gul may have had in mind, but Turkish media have been reporting that Ankara is preparing a new amnesty. The plan would allow most PKK fighters to return to Turkey from Iraq without the fear of prosecution and would give PKK leaders the chance to receive asylum in European countries in the event that the organisation ends its armed struggle, the reports said.

Last month, the Turkish foreign ministry confirmed that there were talks about "the issue of dissolving the PKK" within relevant Turkish institutions as well as between Turkey and other countries and the EU.

Relations between Turkey and Iraq have improved recently, the thaw ending a period of tension that began after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, when Ankara feared a break-up of its south-eastern neighbour and the emergence of an independent Kurdish state there.

In an interview with the Turkish daily newspaper Sabah published yesterday,

Mr Talabani sought to reassure the Turks that they did not have to fear such a development. "I tell my Turkish brothers: don't be afraid of Kurdistan declaring independence," Mr Talabani said. It was in the interest of Iraq's Kurds to stay inside the Iraqi state.

In an effort to drive the PKK out of the Kandil mountains, Ankara has not only intensified consultations with the central Iraqi government in Baghdad, but also established direct contact with the Kurdish administration of northern Iraq, which had formerly been ignored by Turkey.

Mr Talabani, who is himself a Kurdish leader from the north of Iraq, has stressed that he wants to help to convince the PKK to end the rebellion. "With the mediation of our Kurdish brothers, we will do everything we can to convince the people in the mountains to lay down their weapons and make sure they are given the chance to take part in a political process," Mr Talabani told the Turkish news channel CNNTurk in December.

According to press reports, a conference by Kurdish groups from Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran is planned to take place in Erbil next month.

At the same time, there has been a "change of mentality" towards the Kurdish question in Turkey itself, Fikret Bila wrote in a column in Milliyet, a daily newspaper, after Mr Gul predicted "good things" on the Kurdish issue. In recent years, Turkey introduced several reforms aimed at



improving the cultural rights of Kurds, the start of a state-run Kurdish language television channel in January marking the latest reform step. According to Bila, Mr Gul's message was that "at last, [Kurdish] issues are no longer viewed as a taboo, everything can be discussed".

Even the Turkish military has said the Kurdish conflict cannot be solved by arms alone. "We did not take economic steps, we were unable to integrate Kurds into the country from a cultural point of view, we tried to assimilate them," the former head of the Turkish navy, retired Adm Salim Dervisoglu, told the Yeni Safak newspaper about his time in the military leadership in the late 1990s.

Mr Gul's remarks were also welcomed by the PKK's jailed leader, Abdullah Ocalan. "This statement is important," Ocalan told his lawyers during a meeting last week on the prison island of Imrali near Istanbul, according to pro-Kurdish media. "I will do what my responsibility requires from me in this issue. I will be more careful in coming weeks."

## Turkey to translate Koran into Kurdish

REUTERS

ANKARA - March 18, 2009 - (Reuters) -

ISLAM'S holy book the Koran is to be translated into Kurdish as part of Turkey's efforts to boost the rights of Kurds and to meet European Union political standards, the state-run religious authority said Wednesday.

Turkey has some 12-14 million Kurds out of a total population of 70 million, but public use of the Kurdish language is still banned in certain areas, including giving political speeches and official correspondence.

Under reforms aimed at winning membership of the EU, Ankara has expanded cultural and political rights of the Kurdish minority, including launching a state-run Kurdish television.

"We didn't want to exclude Kurdish as we prepare translations of the Koran into other languages. Kurdish is widely spoken in Turkey," Mehmet Gormez, deputy head of Turkey's Religious Affairs Directorate, told state-run Anatolian.

Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan is courting the support of Kurds ahead of March 29 municipal elections and an official translation of the Koran into Kurdish would likely to be well received.

Previous governments viewed the Kurdish language as part of separatist propaganda. The state has fought a decades-long war with Kurdish guerrillas in the southeast, in which 40,000 people, mainly Kurds, have been killed.

The main pro-Kurdish DTP party, which is locked in a battle for votes with Erdogan's AK Party in the Kurdish southeast, has said recent overtures in Kurdish are aimed at winning votes.

STARS AND STRIPES

March 17, 2009

## U.S. aid slips by Kurds vener of success

*Frustration levels rise as projects go unfinished without American support*

By Heath Druzin, Stars and Stripes

**IRBIL, Iraq** — The tiled floors of Irbil's sprawling new police academy are spotless, as are the air-conditioned dormitories. Tucked into the rolling hills outside this regional capital, the manicured 37-acre campus even boasts a soccer field. One thing is missing, though: students.

Officials with the Kurdish Regional Government say the \$5 million in U.S. funds they expected to furnish the academy and hook it up to water and electricity is on hold.

The three-province Kurdish semi-autonomous zone, run largely by a regional government, has experienced a striking lack of violence since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Not a single American soldier has been killed in the area during the war.

But now many Kurds and U.S. soldiers stationed in the region say that very success means much-needed aid and military support is bypassing the area, headed for Iraq's poorer, more violent Arab-majority provinces.

Anyone strolling through downtown Irbil will notice a glut of new construction, residents in smart, modern clothing, new cars clogging the streets, and a distinct lack of U.S. firepower on display. Policemen even have time to hand out parking tickets.

Head out of Irbil's posh urban core, though, and it's not hard to find run-down villages in need of help. Drive farther into the mountains and that need turns to desperation, with refugees living in ramshackle homes with scant access to clean water and electricity. Add to that 600 miles of international border, including part of a heroin highway used to smuggle drugs through Turkey and on to Europe, and there is a great need for both humanitarian aid and security assistance.

### Shelved plans

High in the rugged, wind-raked mountains that cut the snowy border between Iran and Irbil province, Iranian truck drivers shiver as they wait to be processed. Iraqi border officials at the Haji Omaran point of entry talk proudly of new technology they will be getting to more quickly process visitors, but one problem remains: Many border guards can't tell cocaine from cocoa in an area that is a prime pipeline for opium.

Plans to train them just took a serious blow.

A program aimed at training border guards in drug interdiction is on hold after the U.S. government pulled a team of civilian contractors working with the Army border transition team responsible for the Kurdish region. Lt. Col. Michael Russell, commander of the 4100 Border Transition Team, said the program was to be a partnership with the contractors.

He also had to tell the Kurdish interior minister that it is unlikely the U.S. will provide boats for them to patrol their river

border with Syria — it's currently patrolled by one aging fishing boat. And then there's the issue of the police academy, which is supposed to provide training for 650 recruits at a time.

"We don't have any money to give the Kurds, we don't have any equipment to give the Kurds, but we're supposed to help them with their training," a clearly frustrated Russell said.

Kurdish Interior Minister Karim Sinjari said he feels the Kurds' loyalty to the U.S. has not been adequately rewarded.

"We are part of Iraq, but they didn't give us the share they should have," he said. "They think we're doing well here and other parts need it more."

Part of the problem is perception. Because there is almost no insurgent violence in the area, the thinking is that the Kurdish region has no major problems, said Russell.

"They think it's Eastern Europe and it's not," he said.

And so few in the U.S. military and government are familiar with the area, Russell said. When the brass visits it's usually for a few days of luncheons and meetings, tea, and little or no interaction with regular Kurds.

### Desperate refugees

On the outskirts of Soran, a swelling city ringed by snow-capped peaks a two-hour drive from Irbil, Othman Shekh Issa, his wife and their 11 children cram into a tiny, cinderblock home that gets occasional electricity. Like many farmers, he fled Turkish bombing and Iranian shelling in the nearby Candil mountains, a stronghold of the Kurdistan Worker's Party, a militant group responsible for bombings and other attacks in Turkey.

Now he's running out of money and will soon be unable to afford rent.

Many other refugees squat in makeshift structures made of refuse. Soran is unable to keep up with the deluge of people displaced by the bombing and those returning from Iran after fleeing Saddam Hussein's regime.

"We don't have any salary, we don't have any job here, we just want to go back to our village," Issa said.

He says he doesn't want money or housing, just a stop to the bombardment.

U.S. Army Maj. Jim Lawson hangs his head at that request — it's one thing he certainly can't stop.

"I will do my best to help you," he said.

A local group is working to place the refugees, estimated at around 20,000, but the group's director says they cannot keep up. Lawson is working with the United Nations to get help, but right now they are making do without international assistance.

### 'Very hard for us'

Kurdish officials say their own government is also leaving them short. Members of the Kurdish security forces are paid by Iraq's central government but families of

soldiers who have died while working in



Othman Shekh Issa, foreground, stands with his family outside his ramshackle home in Soran, a city in the mountains of Irbil Province. Issa, like many Kurdish farmers, was chased from his home deep in the Candil mountains by Turkish bombing and Iranian artillery aimed at militants from the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), labeled a terrorist group by the United States. Issa, his wife, and eleven children now live in the cramped three-room home.

the security services say they have been unable to get their death benefit from Baghdad.

Fikri Muhammad said his brother died from a brain disease five years ago while working as a border guard, and Baghdad still has not paid his family. Muhammad now cares for his own five children, his aging parents and his brother's 4-year-old son, who is seriously ill and has required two brain operations.

"Life has been very hard for us," Muhammad said.

It's a story repeated by several families and Kurdish military officials. Mohammad says Arab-Kurd tensions are to blame and he worries that in the future Kurds will find harsher treatment.

"It's because we are Kurdish," he said. "If there were no Americans around there will be no difference between the new Iraqi government and Saddam."

There are apparent inconsistencies, however. While Kurdish officials fret over lack of assistance, they proudly show off Irbil International Airport's sparkling \$350 million dollar airport terminal, set to open in May, with granite flooring imported from China and South Africa and gate chairs made in Spain.

Many Kurds quietly grumble about rampant corruption in a regional government essentially run by two families.

Asked if there will be enough passengers willing to travel to a war-ravaged country to justify the expense, Sarwat Karim, the Kurdistan Regional Government's manager of strategic projects, shrugs.

"We hope so," he says.



**TODAYS ZAMAN** March 19, 2009

## Iraqi President Talabani tells PKK to lay down

**TODAY'S ZAMAN**

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani urged the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which launches attacks on Turkish targets from its Iraqi bases, to lay down its arms – a message also expected to emerge from an international conference of Kurdish groups to be held in the coming months.

In a televised interview after meetings in Istanbul with President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Talabani said the era of armed conflict has come to an end. "It is the time of political struggle. There should be efforts within parliamentary democracy for rights. Armed activities are considered terrorist activities," Talabani told private CNN Türk late on Tuesday. His remarks came ahead of a planned visit by President Gül to Iraq, which is expected to take place this month but the exact date of which has not been announced. Turkish-Iraqi efforts to fight the PKK are expected to be a top item on the agenda of the talks.

Talabani has said on different occasions that a conference of Kurdish representatives from Turkey, the Middle East and Europe, which is planned to convene in April or May, will issue a call for the PKK to lay down its arms. Also, it is likely the conference will call on Turkey to issue an amnesty for members of the terrorist group. "I expect the PKK will respond to the call from all the Kurdish parties in the world," Talabani said in remarks published yesterday in daily Sabah. "I hope that Turkey will then take some measures to convince them," he added. In recent remarks President Gül said there will be "good developments" on the Kurdish issue, without elaborating further.

When asked about the prospects for amnesty, Foreign Minister Ali Babacan said there were discussions with the Iraqi Kurds and the Baghdad administration but suggested that a new amnesty might not



be announced. "There are significant provisions in the existing laws. The laws include provisions that can be useful, provided that good will exists," he said at a joint press conference with Philippine Foreign Minister Alberto Romulo in Ankara.

The pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) is also invited for the international conference. Talabani said, however, he did not know if a DTP delegation would attend. He said the PKK was amicable toward the conference. The Iraqi leader also told Sabah that the PKK has said that it would hand over its arms to the US forces in Iraq if Turkey agrees to issue an amnesty for its members.

On Tuesday Talabani also had talks with DTP Chairman Ahmet Türk, known as a moderate within the pro-Kurdish party, and deputy Sırrı Sakık at Istanbul's Swissotel The Bosphorus. Speaking to reporters after the one-hour meeting, Türk backed the conference, saying it was aimed at securing peace and resolving problems. "I expect this will be discussed more seriously after the elections," he said, referring to the local elections in Turkey slated for March 29.

Asked to comment on a possible amnesty for the PKK, Türk said he did not know the government's plans. "To be frank, we are as curious as you. Discussions and negotiations are going on, but we

don't know what will happen," he said. Türk appeared to regret that the discussions were being held with US and Iraqi officials rather than at home. "I wish we could discuss it here first and lay the groundwork. I wish we could come to a common understanding on the proposed solutions," said Türk.

Türk also said he had invited Talabani to Diyarbakır to attend the Nevruz celebrations on March 21, but that Talabani would not make it because of health and other reasons.

### Barzani visiti

On Tuesday, Talabani met with a group of senior Turkish journalists over lunch. Cengiz Çandar and İlnur Çevik, two journalists who attended the meeting, said Talabani stated that Massoud Barzani, leader of the autonomous Kurdish region, was expected to visit Turkey after the March 29 elections. Barzani has long been viewed with suspicion in Turkey for tolerating the PKK presence in northern Iraq, but in a sign of a thaw, the government initiated low-level dialogue with the Kurdish leader last month.

When asked about a possible visit by Barzani, Babacan was evasive. "There is no such plan, there is nothing like that on the agenda. But there is no reason why such a visit should not take place, either," he told reporters.

In interviews with the Turkish media Talabani stressed that Iraq attached a great deal of importance to good ties with Turkey and eased Ankara's concerns once again that the Iraqi Kurds, who run northern Iraq, will not seek independence. The Iraqi president, an ethnic Kurd, left Istanbul on Wednesday morning. He arrived on Sunday to attend a mini summit of leaders held during the Fifth World Water Forum, which opened on Monday.

## Iraqi chemical attack recalled at UN ceremony

**AP** Associated Press

March 16, 2009; By EDITH M. LEDERER

The Associated Press

**UNITED NATIONS** -- Iraq's U.N. ambassador on Monday urged the United Nations to commemorate yearly the anniversary of a chemical weapons attack by Saddam Hussein's government that he called the largest against civilians in history.

Saddam ordered the attack on the city of Halabja on March 16, 1988, as part of a scorched-earth campaign to crush a Kurdish rebellion in the north, which was seen as aiding Iran in the final months of its war with Iraq.

An estimated 5,600 people were killed – the vast majority of them Kurds – in the nerve and mustard gas attacks. Many survivors still suffer from the aftereffects.

"Today, more than 20 years later, we remember the innocent victims of Halabja chemical attacks with the hope that the continual efforts at progress of the world community will ensure that atrocities like these will not be committed again," Iraq's U.N. Ambassador Hamid Al Bayati told a U.N. commemoration of the 21st anniversary of the attack.

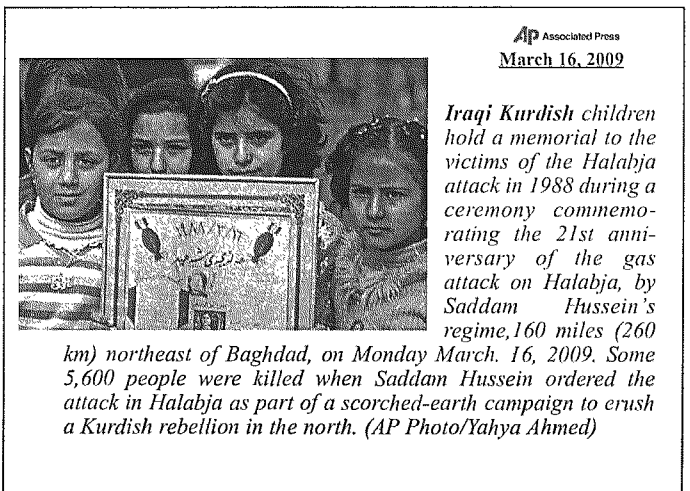
Al Bayati said there are worries the attack may have a lasting genetic impact on the Kurds.

"The rate of cancers, and miscarriages and birth defects has increased in Halabja compared with the rest of Kurdistan or the rest of Iraqi areas," he said.

"I will call on the international community, especially the U.N., to commemorate this day every year to make it the day of genocide, the

day of chemical weapons used against the people of Kurdistan – and to remind the world every year that such kind of attack by chemical and other kind of gases should be studied to see the effect of these kind of weapons," Al Bayati said.

He said the effects of chemical weapons should be studied not only in people but in animals, plants and in the soil "because I think it will be contaminated for a long time to come."



**AP** Associated Press  
March 16, 2009

*Iraqi Kurdish children hold a memorial to the victims of the Halabja attack in 1988 during a ceremony commemorating the 21st anniversary of the gas attack on Halabja, by Saddam Hussein's regime, 160 miles (260*

*km) northeast of Baghdad, on Monday March 16, 2009. Some 5,600 people were killed when Saddam Hussein ordered the attack in Halabja as part of a scorched-earth campaign to crush a Kurdish rebellion in the north. (AP Photo/Yahya Ahmed)*



The Washington Post March 20, 2009

## Iraq's Al-Maliki seeks alliance with anti-U.S. leader

By Anthony Shadid /The Washington Post

**B**AGHDAD — Six weeks after provincial elections, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has allied himself with an outspoken Sunni leader in several provinces, suggesting the emergence of a new axis of power in Iraq centered on a strong central government and nationalism.

Negotiations are under way in most provinces, distrust remains entrenched among nearly all the players and agreements could crumble. But the jockeying after the Jan. 31 elections indicates politicians are assembling coalitions that cross the sectarian divide ahead of parliamentary elections later this year, a vote that will shape the country as the U.S. military withdraws.

"There is a new political map," said Anwar al-Luheibi, a Sunni adviser to al-Maliki, who is a Shiite. "And I anticipate this map will be far better than the one we had before."

The negotiations and deal-making mark a departure from politics that have hewed almost exclusively to ethnic and sectarian lines, fomenting the discord that brought Iraq to the precipice of civil war in 2006 and 2007. They represent the first round of a game that may resolve a question unanswered since Saddam Hussein's fall in 2003: What coalition of interests will find the formula to wield power in Iraq from Baghdad?

With his strong performance in the provincial elections, al-Maliki is the front-runner in forging such an alliance, a remarkable ascent for a lawmaker considered weak when he was put forward as a consensus candidate for prime minister three years ago.

Forgoing the slogans of his Islamist past for a platform of law and order, his party won a majority of seats on the council in Basra, Iraq's second-largest city, and emerged as the single biggest bloc in Baghdad and four other provinces in the south, which has a Shiite Muslim majority. In most provinces, though, his party must make coalitions if it hopes to help deter-

mine who will fill the governorship and other key provincial positions.

Saleh al-Mutlaq, a leading secular Sunni Arab politician known for his nationalism and strident opposition to the U.S. occupation, said his supporters would ally with al-Maliki in four provinces: Diyala, Salahuddin, Baghdad and Babil.

Al-Mutlaq heads the Iraqi National Dialogue Front, but his supporters ran under different labels in provincial contests. Al-Mutlaq said Ayad Allawi, a former prime minister who led a secular list in the campaign, would also join the alliances.

This time, some coalitions seem to be based on ideology: a strong central government that al-Maliki, along with secular candidates such as Allawi and al-Mutlaq, have endorsed, and opposition to the kind of federalism espoused by al-Maliki's Shiite rivals, who favor a Shiite-ruled zone in the south, and Kurdish parties that control an autonomous region in northern Iraq.

Al-Mutlaq said he told al-Maliki in a meeting two months ago that "there was a time when you stood against me ... 'You should be happy I changed,' he told me." Al-Mutlaq joked that first the prime minister "stole the government from us, and now he's trying to steal our political speech from us."

The Washington Post March 21, 2009

## Iraq's Kurds Find Prosperity Breeds Distrust

*Tensions Churn Over Who Benefits In Economy Dominated by Parties*

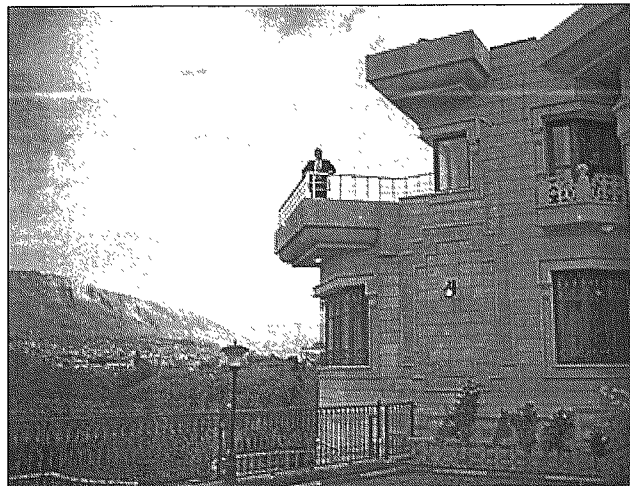
By Sudarsan Raghavan / Washington Post

**AKRA, Iraq** -- On a hilltop overlooking this small Kurdish town, a sleek \$28 million hospital rises like a cutting-edge sculpture. Inside, builder Sabah Melhem admired a European medical scanner gleaming under white fluorescent light. Virtually every room contains state-of-the-art equipment, unlike anywhere else in Iraq. "I hope in every city I can build a hospital like this," Melhem declared. "This is my dream."

Two floors down, it is apparent who helps to turn such dreams into reality: a larger-than-life photo of Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani looms over the entrance, a reminder of how much patronage still prevails in one of Iraq's most stable and developed regions.

Melhem is part of a generation of entrepreneurs driving the economic transformation of Kurdistan, as northern Iraq's Kurdish autonomous region is known. Many Iraqis say that a strong economy that allows sects and ethnic groups to share in the country's wealth is a vital path to stability. But below the surface of Kurdistan's prosperity, tensions are churning over who is benefiting from economic growth. The two ruling Kurdish political parties, America's staunchest allies in Iraq, dominate virtually every aspect of the regional economy, spawning conflicts of interest and corruption, according to Kurdish and U.S. officials.

"They are interfering," said Noshirwan



Sabah Melhem is among a new generation of entrepreneurs who are rebuilding Iraqi Kurdistan, representing the hope and the pitfalls for a nation teetering between chaos and normality.

Mustafa, a senior leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the political party led by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani. Investors, Mustafa said, are expected to provide the parties with stakes in businesses. "If you want to contract with the government or with a ministry, you should give a share to the parties," he said.

Mustafa, who recently had a falling out with Talabani, said the PUK and the rival Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), led by Barzani, each receive \$35 million a month as part of the funds transferred to the

Kurdistan Regional Government by the central government in Baghdad. "Nobody knows how they spend the money," Mustafa said.

Iraq's minister of planning, Ali Baban, said the central government does not monitor how Kurdish authorities spent the 17 percent share of the national budget that Kurdistan receives each year. When asked about Mustafa's assertion that some of the funds go to political parties, Baban said, "If that is true, it would be a violation and a breach of the regulations governing the

spending of public funds, but such breaches do exist in most provinces of the country."

According to the 2009 draft budget, the Kurdistan Regional Government will receive roughly \$6.2 billion from the central government. The region has two audit boards, each affiliated with one of the two main parties, but Abdulbasit Turki Saeed, the head of the central government's Board of Supreme Audit, said he was discussing with Kurdish authorities how to monitor the funds this year. "Legally, every dinar that was not spent properly concerns us," Saeed said. "But from what actually happens, nothing surprises me. Since the occupation until now we have seen everything."

Kurdish officials denied that the parties receive monthly allocations of central government funds, but they conceded that corruption is a major concern.

"Corruption in Iraq is an old problem. But in Kurdistan it is much less than in other parts of Iraq," said Mullah Baktiar, a PUK spokesman. Falah Mustafa Bakir, a top KDP official, said the regional government's budget is transparent: "We do not deny that there are things happening that should not happen, but we are determined to correct this."

Critics assert that senior leaders of both parties hide their ownership of large companies by funneling tens of millions of dollars through mid-level party members or reliable entrepreneurs.

"The big problem is Talabani's family and Barzani's family," said Kamal Rahim, the editor of Hawlati, the region's largest independent newspaper. "Both families have small groups that they trust. They are running everything for them and dealing for them. Some of the businessmen, they are not even members of the parties."

Mustafa said the PUK owns Nokan, a conglomerate in Sulaymaniyah, the hub of eastern Kurdistan, with interests in construction, trade and food. "Every political party has the right to invest and work to finance themselves. But they are using the PUK influence," he said, referring to Nokan. Mustafa himself owns a media company.

Azad Jundiani, head of PUK's media office in Sulaymaniyah, said that the Patriotic Union does not own Nokan but that it was "close to the party."

Bakir, of the KDP, said there was no harm in the relatives of politicians engaging in business. "If any member of Barzani's family owns a company, if they don't have government positions or connections to politics, is that a crime?" he said.

Rahim, the editor, said the United States has overlooked corruption by the two main parties "because Talabani and Barzani made Kurdistan a model of stability for the rest of the country. But they used this to their advantage."

"In Kurdistan, there is no opposition," Rahim said. "Talabani and Barzani -- they have a deal between themselves to handle the situation. So they are not afraid of the people. They have no opposition from the Americans because they are allies. And they are not afraid of the central government because it is weak."

A senior U.S. Embassy official in Baghdad said the commercial activities of politicians and parties were a necessary part of building the new Iraq. "It is not necessarily done to steal the money. It is to spend and to invest. We might qualify this

as corruption or certainly conflict of interest, but in an emerging economy, corruption is just unofficial fees and taxes," said the U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the topic's sensitivity. "At a certain point, that line has to become darker. The government has to get out of business."

Many Kurds argue that Kurdistan is like other parts of the Middle East, where leaders' wealth derives from patronage and the mixing of government and business.

"If you visit any Gulf state, like Dubai, you find these families," said Iyad Abdul Halim, chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Dahuk, a city in the Kurdish region. "Democracy in the Middle East is not like democracy in Sweden or the United States."

Melhem, a jovial man with an oval face, pear-shaped body and a taste for expensive suits, says he does not belong to any party. He said the Kurdish Democratic Party does not "interfere" in his companies and that he doesn't give a share of his companies to the party.

But Melhem said he is a partner in Salahaddin Co., which he said owns 50 percent of the Middle East Co., a conglomerate involved in reconstruction projects that is funded in part by the Kurdish regional government. Two of his three partners, he added, are economic advisers to Nechirvan Barzani, the Kurdistan Regional Government prime minister and Massoud Barzani's nephew.

Salahaddin projects include two hotels in Irbil, a residential complex of 1,000 villas called Dream City, a soft-drink factory and a project to revitalize Irbil's downtown. Melhem also owns several other companies.

"Building a country is not easy," he said.

After high school, Melhem worked as a photographer and in a factory. He was often unemployed. "Those were hard days," he recalled. He refused to join Saddam Hussein's Baath Party and was not allowed to attend university, he said. In 1991, when Hussein cracked down on Kurds after the Persian Gulf War, Melhem fled to Turkey. He later settled in Dahuk and with a friend started a trading company bringing in Turkish goods. As his business grew, so did his connections with officials in Dahuk, controlled by the KDP.

After the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, Melhem decided to start a construction company, even though he had no experience in that field. Within months, he got his first contract -- the hospital in Akra. "It was with help of friends in the government," Melhem said in his Dahuk mansion, which has a swimming pool and flower garden. He sat on an exquisite Turkish-made sofa, clutching his 4-year-old daughter, who wore a massive gold chain.

"Sabah built his relationship with the government because of his work, not through relatives," said Abdul Halim, the chairman of the Dahuk chamber. "His work gave him the opportunity to get close to the leadership of the KDP."

In the past five years, Melhem said he has received eight government contracts, and he is building another hospital in Barzan, the ancestral homeland of Barzani.

One of Melhem's biggest supporters is Dahuk's governor, Tamar Fattah, who used to run the KDP intelligence agency. Recently, the governor selected Melhem to

accompany him on a trip to Pennsylvania and Washington to meet U.S. officials and potential investors.

In an interview, Fattah said Melhem does not get preferential treatment. "He's neither KDP nor PUK. He's still independent," he said. "If you ask me, of course, I want the contract to go to someone from KDP. But in a legal way."

Jawharideen al-Harki, the secretary general of the Kurdish Freedom and Justice Party, an opposition group, described Melhem as "a partner of Nechirvan Barzani."

"There is a common saying in Kurdistan -- if you buy a kiosk in the street, make sure half of it belongs to Barzani or Talabani," said Harki, who leads one of Dahuk's largest tribes. "Otherwise, don't get the kiosk."

Bakir, of the KDP, denied that the younger Barzani profited from business relationships. "If the prime minister wanted to do business, he would leave office to do business," Mustafa said.

In Dahuk, Melhem walked through Zaryland, his sprawling residential complex, named after a Kurdish folk hero. He said the regional government had given him the land and provided \$100 million to subsidize apartments for government employees. "I was able to help the city, and, of course, I'll get benefit from this," Melhem said. "This is the first step to be like other developed countries."

Melhem is concerned about growing tensions between Kurdish leaders and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and about America's waning influence in Iraq. If U.S. troops leave too quickly, he predicts instability. "Now we are building and developing," he said. "All that will be delayed."

Without investment by Americans, he fears Kurdistan will hit an economic ceiling. "Why don't they have the confidence to invest here? It is safe here," he said.

The senior U.S. official provided an answer: "You will need to have a more transparent system before you see a lot of American investment," the official said.

In downtown Irbil, the main city of the Kurdish region, Iraq's past clashes with its future. For two years, Melhem has tried to persuade thousands of shop owners to sell their roadside stalls and move into a new mall. The plan is to raze 20,000 old shops, extend the mall and build parks and parking lots. Melhem wants to create a new downtown, like those in modern cities such as Dubai and Beirut.

But the vast majority of the shopkeepers refuse to move. Some say their stores are part of the city's history and need to be preserved. Most, though, fear that corruption will hurt their chances of getting a prime position in the mall.

"People say the mall belongs to Nechirvan Barzani," said Abu Jasim Sadiq, 39, whose family has operated its stall for more than five decades. "They will give the shops on the first floor only to their relatives and their friends."

As he stared out at the massive construction site and large cranes, and the thousands of old shops around it, Melhem said: "To dream is beautiful. But to reach it is not easy in Iraq."

TODAYS ZAMAN

22 March 2009

## Kurdish conference stirs hot debate

AYSE KARABAT

Although Iraqi President Jalal Talabani claims that a Kurdish conference with the participation of various Kurdish groups will be held in April or May in Iraqi Kurdistan to urge the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) to lay down its arms, it is not clear if the conference will ever be able to gather steam since there are many disagreements among the Kurds.

The PKK is also dragging its feet, trying to establish preconditions for the conference.

PKK-affiliated publishing and broadcasting agencies are claiming that the organization wanted to be present at the conference, a demand not much welcomed by the Iraqi Kurds. The same sources also underline that the PKK tends to see the conference as an attempt to "liquidate the PKK." It is also not clear yet if the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) will attend the conference, although its leader, Ahmet Türk, is known for his moderate ideas and support for the conference. On the other hand there is another contingent of the DTP that shares the PKK's point of view on the gathering.

If the conference is held, it will be organized under the auspices of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) with the participation of Kurds from Iraq, Syria, Iran, Turkey and Europe in order to create a road map for the solution of the Kurdish problem in Turkey.

Presumably, the conference would produce suggestions for several measures to be taken by both Turkey and the PKK, and it would monitor the implementation of these measures.

It would be the first assembly of all international Kurdish groups, and northern Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani would increase his regional government's international influence. But Turkey is known for its firm stand against internationalizing the Kurdish problem and differentiating between the Kurdish question and PKK terrorism.

The idea of organizing an international conference came about during a visit by DTP deputies to northern Iraq in December of last year. Türk and other DTP members met with Barzani, Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and deputies from the regional Kurdish parliament.

At these meetings, the northern Iraqi Kurds emphasized that they would not enter into an armed struggle against the PKK. Nechirvan Barzani said to the DTP delegation, "If everybody has red lines, Kurds do too, and this red line is not spilling Kurdish blood by Kurdish hands."

But the Kurdish leaders also acknowledged that the PKK should lay down its arms and that Turkey should take steps to solve the Kurdish problem. During these meetings, the Kurdish leaders asked the DTP to urge the PKK to declare a cease-fire, but the DTP delegation said the PKK would not listen to them.

They said there were no clear steps for solving the Kurdish problem and that under these conditions the PKK would pay no heed to the calls for a new cease-fire if it comes from the DTP. Then the idea of an "international conference" came to the

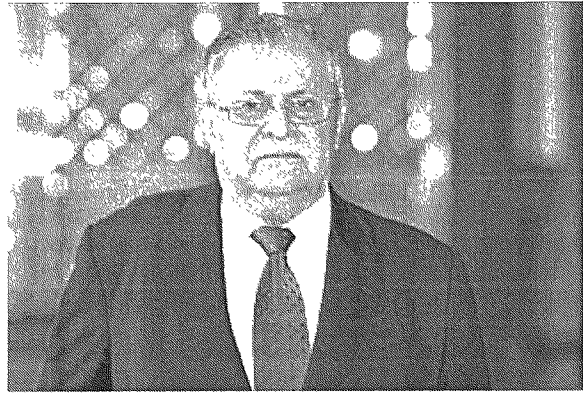


table. At first, the DTP suggested that the PKK should be one of the participants because it would mean a stronger commitment to the conference's decisions and any outlined solutions, but the others dissuaded the DTP, claiming that the PKK is one of the topics of the conference itself.

### PKK tries to set preconditions

Discussion about the PKK's participation has become heated, and the organization has outlined some preconditions to the meeting, including the clear distinction made between the conditions of peace and war and the unification of all Kurdish groups against what are called "exploiting countries." The PKK is claiming that the conference could be a historic opportunity if it takes the "correct" course of action, but there is a huge possibility that the KRG will increase its influence at the expense of the PKK.

It alleges that the KRG will attempt to liquidate the PKK and will give up its resolve to control the oil-rich Iraqi city of Kirkuk in return for recognition as a loose federal structure and improved relations with its neighbors. The leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, who is serving a life sentence on Imralı Island in the Marmara Sea, claimed that the conference should bring to the table the idea of turning the PKK into "self defense brigades" such as the peshmerga in northern Iraq instead of completely disarming the militants.

### Barzani not in hurry

Hasim Hasimi, a prominent Kurdish politician who is also known for his good relations with the Barzani family and is aware of the developments about the conference, pointed out that KRG will not be in a hurry to organize such a meeting.

"If the ground is not ready, if the infrastructure is not solid, I think President Barzani will not be in a hurry, organizing the conference is not a must," he said.

Hasimi also recalled that some possible international participants in the conference feel that in order to hold such a conference, the political situation in Turkey should be taken into account and that it should be considered as to whether or not Turkey is willing to make some constitutional amendments and efforts at a general amnesty.

Kurdish politician and writer Ibrahim Güçlü points out some other difficulties, suggesting that "as always" Talabani was very optimistic in giving statements about holding such a conference in April or May.

"First of all the preparations committee is supposed to be chaired by Barzani himself, but he is ill and in Europe -- plus there have been no preparations. Nobody has been invited yet," he says, adding that apart from the practical obstacles, there are huge political divides among the possible participants.

According to Güçlü the Kurds from Europe, Syria and Iran are insisting that the subject of such a conference should not be limited only to the PKK and Turkey's Kurdish question, but should serve to develop a common strategy for all Kurds who are living under the sovereignty of different countries.

Güçlü points out that even if the practical obstacles are overcome, the attitude of the PKK will remain an obstruction to organizing a conference.

"It is frequently said that a conference should be gathered within the framework defined by the PKK. All its leaders in their statements are challenging the KRG and the conference," Güçlü emphasized.

"If PKK cannot dominate, then it tries to make it ineffective"

Under these conditions, and because of the deep disagreements among Kurdish groups, the possibility of holding such a conference is not that high, but Kurdish intellectual Ümit Firat suggests that just because Talabani and Barzani suggested the gathering, doesn't mean it will actually be held.

According to Firat a conference that ends without results could even serve the self-interests of the Kurdish groups: "The PKK is a destabilizing element for Iraqi Kurdistan. But its leaders cannot openly act against it. After the conference the leaders of the region can say that 'we did everything to make the PKK lay down its arms; what more can we do' On the other hand the PKK has always followed this strategy: If they cannot be a dominant force where they want to dominate -- this time, this conference -- they try to prevent it. If they cannot prevent it completely, then they set conditions and without rejecting it outright, they make it ineffective. They can pursue the same tactic for this conference, too."

## Bloodied by history, Kurds fret over an uncertain future

By Heath Druzin,  
Stars and Stripes

**IRBIL, Iraq** — Storm clouds gathered, spitting rain, as workers hoisted the sun-burst-punctuated Kurdish flag over this regional capital's parliament building. The late winter storm reflected the dour mood rippling through Iraq's Kurdish community.

After years of relative peace, a U.S. withdrawal is in sight, and this time there won't be a no-fly zone as a buffer between the three provinces in northeast Iraq that make up Kurdistan and "The South," as many Kurds call the Arab-majority provinces.

Under the placid veneer of Kurdistan's modern cities and mountain villages, Kurds are racked with fear of enemies — foreign and domestic — and an uncertain future, and worries that two prominent families are twisting the region's burgeoning democracy into a corrupt oligarchy.

"I don't feel that Kurds will one day have a bright future," said Abbas Aula Omer, a microbiologist who works for the Kurdish Regional Government's Ministry of Health.

Most Kurds are quick to point out how different Kurdistan is from the rest of Iraq. For starters, the region enjoys a large degree of autonomy and is run largely by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). But Kurds are also ethnically distinct from their Arab neighbors, speak a different language and have a very different culture that tends to be more westernized. Even the landscape is different, with soaring, snow-capped mountains and rolling green farmland cutting through much of the area.

They also have a uniquely blood-soaked recent history that has left many Kurds constantly worried of a repeat of past atrocities. Up to 180,000 Kurds were killed in Saddam Hussein's genocidal Anfal campaign in 1988, which included chemical weapons, and stories of imprisonment and torture are rampant among Kurds.

"History should feel guilty about what it did to us," said Kirmanj Aizat Suliman, mayor of the city of Soran, in Irbil province.

An anomaly in the Muslim world, many Kurds openly identify with the Jewish state of Israel, a fact often used against them by Arabs in the region.

"The [U.S.'s] biggest allies in the Middle East will be Israel and the Kurds," Suliman said.

Many Iraqi Arabs, though, say Kurds also share the anti-Arab feelings of many Israelis, and say Kurdish forces commit their own abuses against Arabs, including harassing them at checkpoints. Kurdish officials disavow the claims but don't hide their distrust of their Arab neighbors.

### Want U.S. to stay

Unlike most of Iraq, where sentiment is heavily against continued U.S. troop presence, many Kurds not only want the United States to stay, they want a large base built in Kurdistan as well as a U.S. Consulate. With an American presence, they say, no one will dare repeat the abuses of the past.

Nowhere in Iraq do U.S. forces receive a warmer welcome than Kurdistan, which

includes Dohuk, Irbil and Sulaymaniyah provinces. Members of the U.S. Army 4100 Border Transition Team, who are responsible for the entire region, mostly roll in sport utility vehicles and often walk the streets of Irbil without body armor.

There is even a monument to a U.S. soldier who worked in Kurdistan before she was killed in action (Kurds are quick to note she was killed in Mosul, not Kurdistan).

The U.S. military devotes few resources to Kurdistan, largely because there has been so little violence there. Fewer than 100 troops, not counting Special Forces, are stationed in the three province area.

Raouf Maulud, a border police major in Irbil province, said the Kurds can rely on a very short list of allies.

"We are looking to God first, America second," he said, a statement echoed in several other interviews.

Being in that lofty company worries people like U.S. Army Lt. Col. Michael Russell, who oversees much of the U.S. mission in Kurdistan. Unless something drastic happens, American troops are leaving by the end of 2011, as outlined in the status of forces agreement ratified by both Iraq and the U.S.

"One of their biggest issues is they've placed their whole future on the United States," he said.

While the U.S. has been busy quelling violence between Sunni and Shiite Arabs, animosity between Arabs and Kurds has grown and experts as well as Iraqis of all ethnicities worry about the possibility of violence, or even civil war. Much of the ill will stems from disputed territories with mixed Arab-Kurdish populations in Diyala, Kirkuk and Ninevah provinces, including the oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

Both the Kurdish and central governments claim the areas as their own and a long-delayed referendum to decide the issue is still in limbo.

Underlying these tensions is the Kurds' deep-seated desire for independence. Iraqi Kurds often consider themselves Kurds first and Iraqi a distant second, if at all.

But Kurdistan, in the Kurds' minds, is an arc of land that includes not only northern Iraq, but also parts of Syria, Turkey and Iran, all of which have their own restive Kurdish minorities. Any declaration of independence could potentially trigger a regional war — Turkey has already made several military incursions into Iraq to battle a militant Kurdish group — and put the United States in an unenviable spot between Turkey, its greatest regional ally, and the Kurds, its most supportive Iraqi allies.

Experts disagree on the likelihood of Kurds declaring independence, but most agree such a move would be fraught with problems.

Quil Lawrence, who wrote "Invisible Nation: How the Kurd's Quest for Statehood is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East," said the Kurds have no plan to declare independence "in our lifetime."

"They know it's geopolitical suicide since none of the neighbors would allow it, fearing for their own Kurdish regions," said Lawrence, who has covered Iraq for the BBC and Public Radio International for the past eight years. "Kurdish politicians all want



Men play dominoes at one of Irbil's ubiquitous tea shops, many abuzz with political chatter. Many Kurds say they are deeply concerned about their future and are critical of both the Arab-dominated central government and Kurdistan's semi-autonomous regional government.

their own country in their hearts, and they often end up caught between Arabs in the south who suspect their loyalty to Baghdad and their own Kurdish population in the north, which is sometimes more nationalist than realist."

### Part of Iraq, for now

Independence is a long-term goal, but Kurdistan will be part of Iraq for the near future, KRG Interior Minister Karim Sinjari said. But when asked what he thought of how Baghdad treats the Kurdish zone, the otherwise chatty Sinjari paused and gave a wry smile. He declined to answer, saying he did not want to offend the central government.

"It is sensitive — they see that tomorrow and they [will] Long use it against me," he said.

On the street, Kurds are generally supportive of independence but doubt it will happen soon.

"Everyone's dream is to be independent, but the reality is we can't do that because we are a part of Iraq and we will stay a part of Iraq," said Sinjari.

For decades, Kurdish politics have been dominated by the Barzanis and Talabanis, families who have fought for Kurdish autonomy and led their people into a bloody civil war in the 1990s. KRG President Masoud Barzani and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani are at peace for now, Barzani leading the Kurdistan Democratic Party and Talabani leading the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

Barzani is both hailed as a freedom fighter and reviled as a traitor for joining forces with Saddam Hussein, easily the most hated man in Kurdistan, during the Kurdish civil war.

While Kurds enjoy wealth and safety relative to the rest of the country, they complain that electricity is still intermittent, even in urban centers like Irbil and Sulaymaniyah, and much of the countryside suffers from poverty and a growing refugee crisis as Kurds who fled the Hussein regime return home.

Omer, the government microbiologist, said the families running Kurdistan are plundering the people with impunity.

"It's not corruption, it's stealing," he said while sipping tea in an Irbil cafe popular with academics. "Corruption is something done in secret." ■



**TIME**  
MAGAZINE  
March 24, 2009

## Arabs-Kurd Tensions Could Threaten Iraq's Peace

By Rania Abouzeid / Mosul

Even as Iraq's ruptured Sunni-Shi'ite divide appears to be tenuously mending, another seam in the country's patchwork multi-ethnic and sectarian society is on the verge of unraveling. Territorial disputes between Arabs and Kurds in the provinces of Nineveh, Kirkuk and Diyala now pose a serious risk of violence.

In recent months, longstanding hostility between the two communities has escalated, whipped up by resurgent Arab secular nationalism. At the federal level, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has repeatedly said he wants to strengthen Baghdad's hand at the expense of Iraq's 18 provinces, including Kurdistan—the semi-autonomous three-province Kurdish region in the north much to the chagrin of the federalist-minded Kurds. At the provincial level, newly empowered hard-line Sunni groups like Al-Hadba in Mosul, Nineveh's capital, are readying to expand their political clout. (See a photographer's diary of the Iraq conflict.)

Al-Hadba won 19 of the provincial council's 37 seats during elections in January, running on an anti-Kurdish platform in the volatile, still-violent, mixed but predominantly Sunni province. Its victory was a realignment of power away from the minority Kurds who held disproportionate sway due to a Sunni electoral boycott in 2005. However, it has also set the stage for a showdown between the two groups. (Read an analysis of Iraq's future.)

At stake is the control of disputed territories. Kurds say they are reclaiming areas like the oil-rich city of Kirkuk that was theirs until Saddam Hussein forcibly removed them from it. Arabs say the land wasn't Kurdish to begin with. In the meantime, Kurdish Peshmerga militia forces, which operate independently of Baghdad and are answerable to Kurdistan's regional government, have steadily pushed south of their United Nations-delineated border into contested zones.

In Nineveh, Al-Hadba has vowed to push them back. "We reject the presence of the Peshmerga," says Atheel Nujaifi, the party's leader and the presumptive governor of Nineveh. "We want the only force in Nineveh province to be a legitimate, government force that follows the command of the Iraqi security forces." Top U.S. military commanders in Nineveh say Nujaifi's stance is just electoral bluster. But he insists he is being serious. Nujaifi says that as soon as he is sworn in and the new government seated, he will request that Baghdad formally ask the Kurdish regional government in Erbil to withdraw its Peshmerga from Nineveh.

"These forces can't be pulled out just because Atheel Nujaifi says so in the media," says Fryad Rwandzi, a Kurdish member of parliament and spokesman for



Newly graduated anti-riot police officers hold the Iraqi (front) and Kurdish (back) flags during a commencement ceremony in Sulaimaniyah. Shwan Mohammed / AFP / Getty

the 58-strong Kurdish bloc in the national parliament. "We, as Kurds, have the authority to defend our people; 172,000 Kurdish people were driven away from Mosul [during Saddam's Arabization period]. These forces [the Peshmerga] are to protect the Kurdish people." (See a story about the prosperous state of Iraqi Kurdistan.)

It can all go very wrong very quickly. Last summer, Iraqi security forces and Peshmerga almost came to blows in the disputed area of Khanaqin, in Diyala province, after Iraqi troops tried to enter the mixed town. There are dozens of similarly contested zones in Nineveh. "It would be an ugly fight," says Colonel Brian Vines, the U.S. army liaison to the Nineveh Operations Command, which oversees the province's local and national police, as well as army units. "I think that in some places they're going to have to forcibly move them [Kurds] out of these disputed zones."

There are risks other than an all-out confrontation. The fledgling Iraqi security forces could fracture along ethnic or sectarian lines. A Kurdish battalion commander and 200 of his Kurdish soldiers stationed in Nineveh deserted en masse last summer during the Khanaqin standoff, taking their weapons with them into Erbil, says Colonel Vines. At the same time, a Kurdish brigade stationed in Diyala also refused orders from the central government, according to other sources.

Kurds say that Maliki has allegedly been quietly rotating senior Kurdish officers out of army units stationed in volatile provinces including Nineveh and replacing them with Arabs. That's disputed by Maj. Gen. Hassan Kareem Abbas, the Shi'ite commander of the Nineveh Operations Command. Kurdish officers have been replaced, the general says, but by other Kurds, a view supported

privately by senior U.S. officers in Mosul.

The U.S. is increasingly caught in the middle even as it continues its military mission against die-hard insurgents in places like Mosul, mindful of the fast-approaching deadline to withdraw American forces from Iraqi cities by the end of June, ahead of a complete pullout by 2011. "I don't know if I'm a mediator," says Col. Gary Volesky, brigade commander of the 3rd Heavy Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division stationed in Mosul, adding that his mission was to rout out insurgents. Still, Kurdish leaders, including Nechirvan Barzani, Prime Minister of Iraqi Kurdistan, have said they want the U.S. to stay not only in the cities, but in Iraq, until it helps resolve outstanding Kurdish-Arab issues including disputed territories. That's unlikely, unless the land rivalry can be resolved in the next two years.

What is clear is that there's a new order in Iraq, an invigorated Arab nationalism that is increasingly pushing back against federalist-minded groups like the country's Kurds. Will the Kurds concede that they may not be in a position to get everything that they want, especially regarding territory? Or will they respond militarily? "It's not a simple issue," says Rwandzi, the Kurdish member of parliament, "it's very sensitive and needs to be dealt with seriously." That much at least, Iraq's Arabs and Kurds can agree on.

## Suicide bomber strikes Kurdish funeral, killing 23 8 more people killed by bomb near bus stop

AP Associated Press

By Robert H. Reid, Associated Press | March 24, 2009

**BAGHDAD** - A suicide bomber struck a tent filled yesterday with Kurdish funeral mourners, unleashing a huge fireball that killed at least 23 people in a northern town where Kurds and Arabs are competing for power.

Also yesterday, Turkey's visiting president pressed the Iraqi government to crack down on Kurdish rebels who stage cross-border raids into Turkish territory from sanctuaries in northern Iraq.

The provincial security office said 23 people were killed and 34 were wounded in the suicide attack in the town of Jalula, about 80 miles northeast of Baghdad.

A member of the provincial security committee, Amir Rifaat, said 24 people were killed and 28 were wounded.

Elsewhere, eight people were killed and 10 were wounded in a bombing near a bus stop west of Baghdad, and a policeman died and eight people were wounded in a suicide blast at a market in the northern town of Tal Afar.

A series of high-profile bombings this month has raised concern that insurgents may be regrouping as the United States begins to scale back combat operations and hand over security responsibility to the Iraqis ahead of a planned American troop withdrawal by the end of 2011.

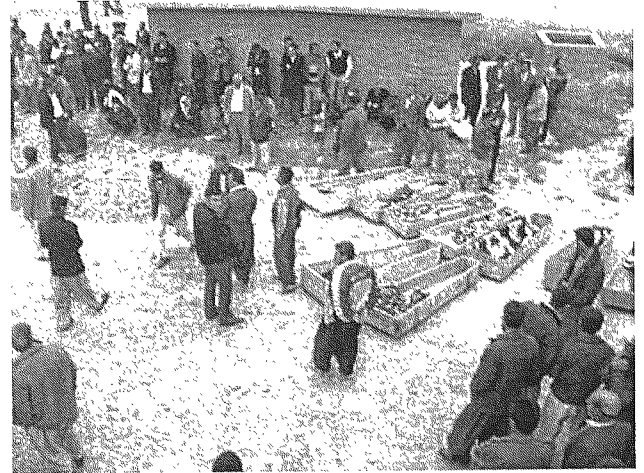
The attack in Jalula was noteworthy because it points to rising tension in the north between Kurds and Arabs over control of a swath of territory that the Kurds want to incorporate into their self-ruled region.

US officials believe Kurdish-Arab tension is among the major flashpoint issues threatening Iraqi stability now that the threat posed by Sunni and Shi'ite insurgents has been diminished.

Last August a suicide bomber killed 25 people, mostly police volunteers, in Jalula, a predominantly Arab town where the Iraqi army forced out Kurdish fighters of the self-ruled Kurdish government last year after a standoff that US officials feared would lead to armed conflict.

A Jalula resident who was wounded in yesterday's blast blamed Al Qaeda in Iraq, a Sunni Arab organization that typically carries out suicide bombings. He identified himself only by his nickname, Abu Holman.

"Al Qaeda is targeting the Kurds because it believes that we are involved in the political process and collaborating with the Americans," Abu Holman



said from his hospital bed. "There are still many Al Qaeda hotbeds in our area."

Kurdish issues were at the forefront of talks in Baghdad between Iraqi officials and Turkish President Abdullah Gul, who arrived yesterday for the first visit here by a Turkish head of state in more than 30 years.

Gul urged the Iraqis to close down the Kurdistan Worker's Party, or PKK, which launches attacks in southeastern Turkey from sanctuaries in northern Iraq. "The time has come to remove the element that is a source of trouble," Gul said during a joint news conference with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, himself a Kurd.

"We need to engage in a joint struggle to completely eradicate terrorism," Gul said. "A comprehensive cooperation is required. There is no doubt that a greater role falls to the [place] where the terrorist organization's leadership and camps are based."

For his part, Talabani said the removal of the PKK rebels was in Iraq's interest as well and called on the rebels to lay down their arms. The rebels have been fighting for autonomy in Turkey's southeast since 1984.

REUTERS

## Disarm or leave, Iraq's Talabani tells PKK

March 24, 2009 By Paul de Bearn (Reuters) -

**BAGHDAD** - Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, himself a Kurd, said on Monday the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Turkish separatist guerrilla group, must lay down its arms or quit Iraq.

Talabani's remarks were some of the toughest made recently by any Iraqi leader against the PKK, whose guerrillas have used northern Iraq as a base from which to launch attacks in Turkey, straining ties between Baghdad and Ankara.

"Either it lays down its arms or it leaves our territory," Talabani told a news conference alongside Turkey's visiting president, Abdullah Gul. He was speaking through an interpreter.

Gul, making the first visit to Iraq by a Turkish head of state in more than three decades, said the time had come "to end all these problems which hinder relations between Turkey and Iraq."

"A thorough operation must be carried out (against the PKK) and this is the responsibility of all of us," he said.

Turkey has accused Iraq in the past of not doing enough to crack down on the PKK, considered a terrorist organisation by Washington and the European Union.

Turkey regularly shells PKK targets in Iraq. This month it killed at least four PKK guerrillas, who have been fighting for an independent Kurdish homeland in southeast Turkey since 1984.

### CONCILIATORY TONE

Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan visited Baghdad last year, a milestone in Iraq's efforts to end the regional isolation it had suffered since U.S.-



Turkey's President Abdullah Gul (2nd L) and his wife Hayrunnisa Gul (R) meet with Iraq's President's Jalal Talabani and his wife Hero Ibrahim Ahmed (L) at Salam Palace in Baghdad March 23, 2009.

led forces toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003.

In a rare sign of growing Turkish acceptance of Iraq's largely autonomous Kurdish region, Gul referred to the "Kurdistan regional administration" — a phrase normally unusable among Turkish politicians mindful of reigniting Kurdish hopes of statehood on Turkish soil.

Turkey has long feared that a Kurdish state in Iraq would bolster calls for Kurdish independence in southeast Turkey.

Asked to clarify his remark, he told reporters travelling with him: "That's the term they use and it's in the Iraqi constitution".

A spokesman for the Kurdish Regional Government told Reuters Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani would meet Gul on Tuesday, and that security issues would be high on the agenda.

A PKK leader said Gul's visit changed nothing.



"For us in the PKK we don't have any fears from this visit, and we believe it will have no affect on us," said Haval Roze, a PKK leader.

The Kurdish issue has gained momentum in Turkey as the AK Party government tries to win Kurdish votes in southeast Turkey ahead of March 29 municipal elections.

The government has also launched a series of initiatives aimed at improving the rights of Kurds, who have long complained of discrimination by the state.

Gul was conciliatory towards Iraq's Kurdish leaders, who he said were organising a security conference in April.

"They (northern Iraq administration) see that winning over Turkey is an advantage and it is the first time I see them doing something ... We are in a new era now," he said.

In January Turkey, Iraq and the United States agreed to set up a joint command centre in northern Iraq to gather intelligence to fight the PKK. Ankara blames the PKK for 40,000 deaths since 1984, when the group took up arms.

Turkey and Iraq are major trading partners, and some 400,000 barrels of Iraqi oil a day -- more than a fifth of its exports -- are piped through the Turkish port of Ceyhan.

AP Associated Press

## Rebel Kurds reject call to lay down arms in Iraq

March 24, 2009 By SINAN SALAHEDDIN The Associated Press

**BAGHDAD** Kurdish rebels on Tuesday rejected calls by Iraq's president to stop fighting against Turkey and leave Iraqi territory as the visiting Turkish president stepped up pressure on the Baghdad government to act against the group.

President Jalal Talabani made the call Monday during a press conference with visiting Turkish President Abdullah Gul. Talabani, who is a Kurd, said it was in Iraq's interest to remove fighters of the Kurdistan Workers' Part, or PKK, from Iraqi soil.

Talabani also called on the rebels to lay down their arms, but he has made similar calls in the past that have been ignored and the government announced no imminent plans to take action against the rebel group.

The central government has frequently denounced the PKK as terrorists, but it is limited in its ability to act against the rebels, who are based in semiautonomous Kurdish territory in northern Iraq. Baghdad also has been preoccupied with fighting violence elsewhere in Iraq.

"Jalal Talabani doesn't have the authority or the will to utter such words, and we don't take orders from him," PKK spokesman Ahmed Deniz said.

"We are publicly warning Talabani that such statements will lead to grave consequences and much of the achievements of (Iraq's) Kurds will be lost," Deniz told The Associated Press in a telephone interview. He did not elaborate.

PKK rebels, who stage cross-border raids into Turkish territory from sanctuaries in northern Iraq, have been fighting for autonomy in Turkey's southeast since 1984. The conflict has killed tens of thousands of people.

Gul, who arrived Monday on the first trip to Iraq by a Turkish head of state in 33 years, met with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki on Tuesday, according to a government statement. A day earlier, he urged Iraqis to crack down on Kurdish rebels.

"The time has come to remove the element that is a source of trouble," Gul said during Monday's press conference. "We need to engage in a joint struggle to completely eradicate terrorism."

Turkey has carried out several cross border airstrikes against rebel targets and is pressing Baghdad and the Kurdish regional government to step up efforts against the Kurdish rebels from their side.

Tensions escalated last year after the rebels killed about two dozen Turkish soldiers in attacks in October.

The areas where the PKK operates are under control of the Iraqi Kurdish regional administration rather than the Arab-dominated central government in Baghdad.

Iraqi police, meanwhile, raised the death toll to 27 in a suicide bombing Monday against a Kurdish funeral in Jalula, a northern town where Kurds and Arabs are competing for power.

U.S. officials believe Kurdish-Arab tension is among the major flash-point issues threatening Iraqi stability now that the danger posed by Sunni and Shiite insurgents has been diminished.

REUTERS

## Kurds holding back oil from Iraq network - oil min

March 25, 2009 / (Reuters)

\* Oil minister says KRG objects to handing over oil

\* Says KRG deals involves "fourth or fifth" level firms

**BAGHDAD, March 25 (Reuters)** - Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region will not allow oil from its territory to be piped through Iraq's national oil network, the country's oil minister said, throwing into doubt exports from the area.

Hussain al-Shahristani said the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), which controls three provinces in Iraq's north, would hold back oil because the companies it invited to develop oil in its territory must be rewarded.

Shahristani has rejected deals signed by the KRG and foreign oil firms, saying they were not put to tender to allow competition and they give firms a share of the oil produced, a deal structure the government in Baghdad rejects.

"Work is continuing to connect the (northern oil fields) to the Iraqi network. But there are objections from the KRG to handing over the oil, claiming that companies that developed the oilfields should be rewarded," Shahristani said in an interview published in Wednesday's pan-Arab Asharq al-Awsat newspaper.

The KRG could not immediately be reached for comment, but his comments contradict those made late on Tuesday by Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, who told reporters, "If they

(in Baghdad) are ready to accept exporting, we are ready."

Several oil firms have deals with the KRG, and Norway's DNO International (DNO.OL: Quote, Profile, Research) is in the final stages of connecting its Tawke field to the national oil network.

Shahristani's comments could mean exports are delayed.

In the interview, Shahristani goes on to say the deals between the KRG and oil firms could be reviewed to comply with central government standards, but adds that the firms involved were "fourth or fifth" level companies.

Baghdad and the KRG have been haggling for years over a new oil law that would govern revenue sharing, one of several disputes between the two sides that also include a row over control of the northern oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

Iraq, whose revenues are almost exclusively derived from its vast oil reserves, desperately needs to rehabilitate its dilapidated oil infrastructure and attract foreign investment.

"Shahristani's policy is a failure and was the reason for the oil industry deterioration. He spent \$8 billion to increase Iraqi oil production but the result is production has retreated," Barzani said on Tuesday.

Earlier this month, KRG Oil Minister Ashti Hawrami warned foreign oil companies against signing deals with Baghdad on fields in territory Kurds claim.



# En Irak, l'après-guerre commence

## Six ans après l'invasion, le niveau de la violence a baissé

Alors que six ans se sont écoulés depuis l'invasion américaine en Irak, une amélioration apparaît enfin. Les autorités irakiennes prennent de plus en plus en charge les tâches de sécurité. La population semble retrouver un certain optimisme.

### Comment évolue le niveau de la violence ?

En 2007, au maximum de l'effort militaire, plus de 160 000 soldats américains étaient déployés en Irak. Cette année-là, 17 430 Irakiens (militaires, policiers et civils) avaient péri dans les violences, essentiellement confessionnelles. En 2008, ce bilan a chuté à 6 772. Et les deux premiers mois de 2009, avec 449 morts irakiens, ramènent les violences au niveau de 2003, quand le régime de Saddam Hussein était tombé et que les violences confessionnelles n'avaient pas encore éclaté.

Mais deux attentats-suicides, début mars, à Bagdad et Abou Ghraïb, ont jeté une ombre sur la capacité de l'armée et de la police à faire durer les progrès accomplis ces douze derniers mois. « Ces attaques représentent une sérieuse détérioration de la sécurité et « une nouvelle stratégie doit être élaborée contre Al-Qaida et les groupes insurgés encore actifs », s'est inquiété le vice-président Tarek Al Hachemi.

À la veille de l'anniversaire de l'invasion, le chef présumé de la branche irakienne d'Al-Qaida, Abou Omar Al Baghdadi, avait appelé à de nouvelles attaques. De son côté, le porte-parole du Pentagone, Geoff Morrell, se garde de tout triomphalisme. « Je pense que les progrès sont évidents. C'est indéniable », estimait-il, décrivant toutefois la situation dans le pays comme « fragile », notamment en raison des incidents fréquents à Mossoul et dans la province de Diyala.

### Quelle tactique a-t-on utilisé pour faire baisser la violence ?

Six ans après l'invasion américaine, les Irakiens se sont vu transférer des prérogatives élargies qui leur donnent une plus grande souveraineté sur leur propre pays. Cette tactique a été mise en place à l'époque de George W. Bush. Elle est aujourd'hui poussée jusqu'à son terme, qui sera le retrait américain, prévu d'ici à fin 2011.

Au 1<sup>er</sup> janvier de cette année, les Américains ont donc transmis aux Irakiens le contrôle des opérations de sécurité. D'autre part, la totalité des 100 000 miliciens,

appelés les « fils d'Irak » ou *sahwa* (« réveils », en arabe) luttant contre Al-Qaida, financés jusque-là par l'armée américaine, sera passée au 1<sup>er</sup> avril sous le contrôle des forces irakiennes de sécurité.

Dans le cadre d'un processus engagé le 1<sup>er</sup> octobre, 81 773 miliciens sont déjà passés sous le contrôle des Irakiens dans huit provinces du pays. Les derniers miliciens concernés par ce transfert sont ceux de la province de Salaheddine, au nord de Bagdad. En janvier, les 9 000 miliciens de la province de Diyala, l'une des plus dangereuses d'Irak, étaient passés sous le contrôle des forces irakiennes. Au 1<sup>er</sup> mars, ceux de la province de Kirkouk et de la province de Ninive, dont la capitale, Mossoul, demeure un bastion d'Al-Qaida, leur avaient emboîté le pas.

Les *sahwa* sont apparus dès la fin de l'été 2006 dans la province d'Al-Anbar, à l'initiative des chefs locaux de tribus encouragés par l'armée américaine. Ces Irakiens sunnites, souvent des insurgés, ont retourné leurs armes contre leurs anciens compagnons et contre le réseau Al-Qaida. Les Américains les ont largement utilisés dans le cadre de leur nouvelle stratégie de contre-insurrection. Financés par l'armée américaine, ils ont ainsi fortement contribué à la baisse des violences en Irak, amorcée au se-

cond semestre 2007. Le gouvernement du premier ministre Nouri Al Maliki avait annoncé qu'il intégrerait 20 % seulement des *sahwa* dans les forces de sécurité, provoquant la colère des miliciens. Les autorités ont promis que les 80 % restants intégreraient la fonction publique en général.

### Comment les Irakiens perçoivent-ils les changements ?

Les Irakiens sont plus optimistes pour l'avenir de leur pays et moins inquiets du niveau de la violence qu'à aucun moment depuis le début de la guerre, selon un sondage commandé par des médias britanniques. Dans un autre, réalisé pour les chaînes de télévision britannique BBC, américaine ABC News et japonaise NHK, 65 % des Irakiens estiment mener une bonne vie, voire très bonne; 60 % pensent qu'elle sera encore meilleure dans un an, avec l'amélioration de l'approvisionnement en électricité ou en carburant. Ce sondage suggère également que les conditions matérielles se sont en partie améliorées: 37 % sont d'avis que l'approvisionnement en électricité est fiable, contre 12 % un an plus tôt; 67 % estiment que l'accès au carburant est bon ou très bon.

AGNÈS ROTIVEL

**Le Monde**  
26 mars 2009

## Abdullah Gül a effectué la première visite d'un chef d'Etat Turc en Irak depuis 34 ans

Il a exigé le désarmement des combattants du Parti des travailleurs kurdes, qui mènent des attaques en Turquie à partir du Nord irakien

**L**e président turc, Abdullah Gül, qui concluait, mardi 24 mars, une visite de 48 heures à Bagdad – la première d'un chef d'Etat turc en Irak depuis 34 ans – semble avoir obtenu ce qu'il était venu chercher, à savoir un engagement ferme des autorités irakiennes d'aider dorénavant Ankara à lutter contre les rebelles kurdes du PKK repliés dans les montagnes du Kurdistan irakien.

Le Parti des travailleurs kurdes (PKK) qui combat depuis 25 ans pour l'autonomie du Sud-Est turc, la région frontalière du nord irakien majoritairement peuplée de Kurdes, dispose de trois à cinq mille combattants dans les montagnes d'Irak, lesquels sont régulièrement accusés par Ankara de lancer des raids meurtriers en Turquie avant de se replier sur les hauteurs irakiennes. La Turquie bombarde sporadiquement cette région pour essayer, en vain jusqu'ici, d'annihiler la rébellion.

« *Le PKK a deux choix possibles* », a dit, en présence de son hôte turc, Jalal Talabani, chef de l'Etat irakien et ancien combattant kurde lui-même : « *Déposer les armes ou quitter l'Irak.* » L'ultimatum a immédiatement été rejeté par Ahmed Denis, un porte-parole du PKK, qui a « *mis publiquement en garde* » M. Talabani contre « *les graves conséquences que ce genre de déclarations pourrait avoir, notamment sur les acquis des Kurdes [d'Irak] qui pourraient être perdus* ».

Ces derniers jouissent effectivement, depuis 1991 et grâce aux Etats-Unis, d'une large autonomie, avec leur propre Parlement, armée et gouvernement, dans les trois provinces du Nord irakien. « *Il faut* », a ajouté M. Talabani qui est aussi le chef d'un des deux grands partis kurdes d'Irak, « *que le PKK se lance dans la vie politique et parle-*



*mentaire et cesse d'user des armes, car cela fait du tort aux Kurdes comme aux Irakiens. Notre Constitution, a-t-il ajouté, interdit les groupes armés, le PKK comme les autres.* »

### Un atout majeur : l'eau

Ce n'est pas la première fois que les autorités irakiennes promettent à la Turquie de désarmer le PKK. Le problème est que ses repaires sont situés dans la zone autonome du Kurdistan irakien et que l'armée nationale dirigée par Bagdad ne peut y pénétrer sans l'accord du gouvernement autonome local. Lequel, dirigé par Massoud Barzani, un vieil adversaire politique de M. Talabani, se fait tirer l'oreille depuis des années pour agir efficacement contre « les frères kurdes » de Turquie qui veulent, au fond, la même autonomie que ceux d'Irak.

Régulièrement invités par Ankara à agir eux aussi contre le PKK, les Américains, qui ne sont les bienvenus en Irak que dans sa partie kurde, se sont jusqu'ici abstenus de toute opération d'envergure, se contentant de fournir aux Turcs

des informations pour cibler leurs bombardements.

Le réchauffement sensible des relations turco-irakiennes peut-il changer la donne ? Ce n'est pas impossible, car Ankara dispose, pour obtenir ce qu'il veut, d'un atout majeur : l'eau. La presse irakienne du 24 mars le soulignait à l'envi : « *L'aggravation de la crise de l'eau, en raison du très bas niveau d'écoulement du Tigre et de l'Euphrate dans notre pays, ce qui prive l'Irak de ses droits naturels, notait As-Sabah, quotidien pro-gouvernemental, devient une question essentielle pour la reconstruction du pays.* » La Turquie, où les deux grands fleuves qui arrosent l'Irak prennent leur source, a construit ces dernières années des barrages importants qui réduisent considérablement le débit dans le pays voisin. L'eau contre la paix ? Recevant à Bagdad le chef du gouvernement autonome du Kurdistan, Abdullah Gül a été on ne peut plus clair : « *Une fois que le PKK sera éliminé, tout sera possible entre nous, car vous êtes nos voisins et nos cousins.* » ■

Patrice Claude

AFP

## ATTENTAT LORS DE FUNÉRAILLES LUNDI EN IRAK: 27 MORTS

JALAWLA (Irak), 24 mars 2009 (AFP) --

L'ATTENTAT suicide perpétré lundi lors d'une cérémonie de condoléances au nord-est de Bagdad a fait 27 morts et 50 blessés, essentiellement des Kurdes, selon un nouveau bilan donné mardi par le gouverneur de la province de Diyala.

"Vingt-sept personnes ont été tuées et 50 blessées, dont Hamid Khoudadat et deux de ses frères", a déclaré à l'AFP Ibrahim Hassan, le gouverneur de Diyala, une région ethniquement mélangée où le réseau Al-Qaïda est toujours implanté.

Hamid Khoudadat, un communiste membre de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) qui venait de perdre son père, recevait avec sa famille les condoléances dans une immense tente soufflée par la puissante explosion à Jalawla, à 130 km au nord-est de Bagdad.

"La majorité des victimes sont des Kurdes de Jalawla et de Kalar", localités peuplées de Kurdes chiites et d'Arabes sunnites.

Un précédent bilan faisait état de 25 morts.

Les victimes ont été enterrées en présence de hauts responsables kurdes au milieu d'importantes mesures de sécurité.

L'attentat, l'un des plus meurtriers ces trois derniers mois en Irak, a été perpétré par un kamikaze qui a actionné sa ceinture d'explosifs au milieu des personnes présentant leurs condoléances.



"J'ai soudain senti une forte explosion qui m'a projeté en arrière. J'ai rampé au sol puis essayé de me relever, mais je n'ai pas réussi parce qu'il me manquait mes deux jambes", a déclaré à l'AFP Sardar al-Jaf, un membre de la famille Khoudadat et père de cinq enfants.

Le mode opératoire de l'attaque -un attentat suicide- rappelle celui de la branche irakienne d'Al-Qaïda. Le commandement américain estime que le réseau, même affaibli, conserve la capacité de monter des opérations complexes.

AFP

## TALABANI AUX KURDES DU PKK: "DÉPOSEZ LES ARMES OU QUITTEZ L'IRAK"

BAGDAD, 23 mars 2009 (AFP) -

LE PRÉSIDENT irakien Jalal Talabani a lancé lundi un ultimatum aux séparatistes kurdes du PKK, leur ordonnant de déposer les armes ou de quitter l'Irak lors d'une visite historique à Bagdad de son homologue turc Abdullah Gül.

"Le PKK a deux choix: déposer les armes ou quitter l'Irak", a déclaré M. Talabani.

"Il faut que le PKK se lance dans la vie politique et parlementaire au lieu de se servir de ses armes car l'utilisation des armes fait du tort aux Kurdes et aux Irakiens", a estimé le président irakien, lui-même kurde.

"La Constitution irakienne interdit les groupes armés, le PKK comme les autres, et actuellement nous travaillons avec cet objectif par le biais du comité tripartite" turco-américano-irakien, a ajouté le chef de l'Etat irakien.

L'Irak, les Etats-Unis et la Turquie avaient créé en novembre 2008 un comité conjoint pour combattre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) sur le territoire irakien à proximité de la frontière avec la Turquie.

"Il y a une nouvelle réalité, c'est que les terroristes sont dans le nord de l'Irak. Il est temps d'en finir avec ces problèmes parce qu'ils entravent les relations entre nos deux pays", a déclaré Abdullah Gül.

"Il faut des actions communes et totales pour éliminer le terrorisme", a martelé M. Gül, soulignant qu'à ses yeux la responsabilité en incombait aux "responsables des régions où sont implantés ces terroristes", soit les autorités du Kurdistan irakien.

Joint par téléphone, le chargé des relations extérieures du PKK, Ahmed Deniss, a fustigé la visite du président turc qui vise à "liquider le PKK".

"La Turquie et les Etats-Unis ont un plan pour désarmer le PKK et le liquider. Ils veulent aussi obtenir la complicité du gouvernement kurde irakien", a dit M. Deniss.

Interrogé sur l'ultimatum de Jalal Talabani, le responsable du PKK a indiqué n'avoir "rien à ajouter" aux déclarations de son leader, Abdullah Ocalan, qui aurait annoncé en guise de boutade, selon M. Deniss, être prêt à déposer les armes si les Kurdes irakiens remettaient les leurs aux Américains.

Ankara accuse les Kurdes irakiens, qui jouissent d'un statut d'autonomie vis-à-vis de Bagdad, de tolérer, voire d'aider le PKK. Mais les relations bilatérales se sont améliorées récemment, et les autorités kurdes d'Irak ont manifesté la volonté d'aider la Turquie à lutter contre le PKK.

Des centaines de militants du PKK sont installés dans les montagnes du Kurdistan



Le président irakien Jalal Talabani a lancé lundi un ultimatum aux séparatistes kurdes du PKK, leur ordonnant de déposer les armes ou de quitter l'Irak lors d'une visite historique à Bagdad de son homologue turc Abdullah Gül.  
Photo: Mohammed Jali/AFP

irakien, d'où ils font des incursions en territoire turc. L'aviation turque mène régulièrement des raids contre ces bases.

La semaine dernière, le président irakien avait indiqué que des partis kurdes d'Irak, de Syrie, d'Iran, de Turquie et d'Europe appelleraient le PKK à cesser la lutte armée.

Le PKK a commencé sa guérilla en 1984 dans le sud-est de la Turquie, pour obtenir l'indépendance et le conflit a fait environ 44.000 morts.

Abdullah Gül était arrivé dans la journée à Bagdad pour la première visite d'un chef de l'Etat turc en Irak depuis 1976. Il doit repartir mardi.

Il a été accueilli par M. Talabani dans sa résidence à Bagdad et geste rare, les responsables turcs et kurdes se sont donnés l'accolade et embrassés.

Les deux hommes avaient prévu de discuter du PKK, de la question de l'eau et des relations économiques.

La construction par les autorités turques de barrages sur le Tigre et l'Euphrate réduit considérablement leur débit en Irak.

Les responsables turcs et irakiens ont évoqué le quadruplement des échanges commerciaux qui se montent actuellement à 5 milliards de dollars.

## Irak: Gare aux Kurdes!

Par le colonel Jean-Louis Dufour

*Notre consultant militaire est officier de carrière dans l'Armée française, ex-attaché militaire au Liban, chef de corps du 1er Régiment d'infanterie de marine. Il a aussi poursuivi des activités de recherche: études de crises internationales, rédacteur en chef de la revue Défense... et auteur de livres de référence sur le sujet, dont «La guerre au XXe siècle» (Hachette 2003), «Les crises internationales, de Pékin à Bagdad» (Editions Complexe, 2004)*

**J**alal Talabani est le président de l'Irak. Ce Kurde de soixante-seize ans vient d'annoncer qu'il ne cherchera pas à être réélu à l'expiration de son mandat, en décembre prochain. Il a dit avoir l'intention de renoncer à toute activité politique. Le président Talabani venant d'être opéré du cœur, sa santé est manifestement la cause de son probable retrait.

Certes, du temps demeure pour ménager une transition paisible. Bien des observateurs, toutefois, redoutent ce moment. On ne voit pas quel autre homme aurait l'autorité suffisante pour arbitrer les rivalités internes aux Kurdes, celles entre Kurdes et Arabes et entre diverses factions régionales. La population de l'Irak est divisée en trois communautés d'inégale importance, réparties, grossièrement, les Kurdes au nord du pays, les sunnites au centre, les chiites au sud. Au moment où, rassurée par la persistance d'une relative sécurité, l'Amérique désire rapatrier ses troupes, une menace bien connue pointe à l'horizon mais dont on s'efforçait de ne pas trop parler pour mieux, sans doute, en exorciser le danger.

Talabani n'est pas seulement le premier chef d'Etat de l'ère post-Saddam, il préside aux destinées de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK). Celle-ci contrôle le sud-est du Kurdistan irakien tandis que le nord-ouest est sous la coupe du Parti démocratique kurde (PDK), dont le leader est Massoud Barzani, 62 ans, vieux rival de Talabani. Profitant de l'invasion de l'Irak en 2003 par les USA, ces frères ennemis avaient conclu une alliance politique et créé un «Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan irakien» (GRK), conçu pour protéger les intérêts du peuple kurde, maintes fois victime sous Saddam Hussein d'exactions sans nom. Or un Kurdistan irakien uni est loin d'être la norme. Les tribus kurdes se partagent un territoire qui mord sur quatre Etats, Irak, Turquie, Iran, Syrie. La région est montagneuse, cloisonnée, difficilement accessible, offrant autant d'avantages que d'inconvénients. D'un côté, ces montagnes permettent de mieux se protéger, de l'autre, elles favorisent toutes sortes d'oppositions faites de différences ethniques, tribales et même culturelles, les dialectes variant souvent d'une vallée à l'autre. Au Kurdistan irakien, la guerre civile est une fâcheuse tradition...

Avec des Irakiens arabes, sunnites et chiites, au sud, des Turcs au nord, des Syriens à l'ouest, des Iraniens à l'est, le Kurdistan est encadré par quatre Etats qui partagent un

même objectif: empêcher l'émergence d'un Etat kurde qui empièterait sur leurs territoires respectifs. Cependant, les rivalités des Kurdes irakiens sont si profondes qu'on a vu souvent l'UPK ou le PDK, s'allier avec un de leurs ennemis communs, l'Irak (de Saddam), l'Iran, la Turquie, pour mieux éliminer l'autre parti. A Bagdad comme à Téhéran ou à Ankara, on profite toujours de ces querelles pour asseoir sa domination sur ses Kurdes à soi. De plus, lors du conflit Iran-Irak, ces deux pays ont utilisé les milices kurdes -les peshmergas- en guise de troupes par procuration. Les Kurdes iraniens, stipendiés par Saddam, étaient invités à combattre Téhéran tandis que les Kurdes irakiens devaient agir contre Bagdad pour le compte des ayatollahs.

### Une possible guerre civile

Ces mauvais souvenirs n'ont pas empêché les Kurdes irakiens de vivre en paix six années durant. Leur entente retrouvée remplissait de joie l'état-major US sensible à l'apparence d'un pays en ordre, policé, presque prospère, assez pacifié pour qu'un ministère kurde du Tourisme soit créé à l'été 2008.

Les divisions, pourtant, subsistent. Le PDK de Massoud Barzani prône l'autonomie la plus large contre Jalal Talabani, qui du fait de sa position à la tête de l'Etat irakien, privilégie plutôt l'unité nationale. Une fois Talabani retiré des affaires, la rivalité entre les deux camps pourrait conduire à des affrontements armés, au grand déplaisir du protecteur américain.

Ceci est d'autant plus vraisemblable que l'UPK montre des signes manifestes de division. La maladie de Jalal Talabani a nourri les ambitions. Son fils, Qubad, devait lui succéder, mais de longs séjours aux Etats-Unis ont compromis sa légitimité. D'autres candidats existent, dont un conseiller proche de Talabani, ami des Américains, Bahram Salih. Mais celui-ci n'a ni le charisme, ni l'autorité de son mentor.

Les deux partis rivaux sont eux-mêmes menacés par l'émergence au nord du Kurdistan d'une troisième formation, islamiste celle-là, et qui pourrait tirer profit de la rivalité des deux premières. Il s'agit du Parti Islamique du Kurdistan (PIK), et d'une de ses fractions, Ansar-al-Islam, plus ou moins affiliée à Al Qaïda, et qui se bat contre l'UPK depuis 2001.

Enfin, les sempiternelles querelles qui opposent, en Irak, Kurdes et Arabes, ne sont nullement réglées. D'emblée, le GRK a dû marcher sur des œufs avec un gouvernement à Bagdad dominé par les chiites. Or aujourd'hui ceux-ci ont trouvé le moyen de s'entendre avec les sunnites. D'où l'existence en Irak d'un front arabe décidé à contenir les Kurdes à l'intérieur de limites précises.

Il s'agit surtout de les empêcher d'absorber la ville de Kirkuk et ses champs de pétrole (13% des réserves irakiennes). Si ce pétrole revenait aux Kurdes, ceux-ci auraient les moyens d'établir un Etat économiquement viable. Bagdad refuse pareille évolution. Il y a trois mois, le Premier ministre al-Maliki a ordonné à la 12e division de se déployer au nord de Kirkuk. Sa mission: empêcher les milices kurdes d'occuper la ville. Majoritaire

au sein de son gouvernement, al-Maliki est de plus soutenu par la Turquie, peu désireuse de voir naître à ses frontières un Etat kurde, viable et irrédentiste.

Après avoir été un havre de paix pour militaires américains et investisseurs étrangers, le Kurdistan irakien risque d'être supplanté dans ce rôle par le reste de l'Irak. Washington en est conscient. Déjà, le président Obama a ralenti le retour des boys à la maison après que ses généraux lui aient montré combien un départ précipité risquerait de mettre le feu aux poudres. Une guerre civile entre Kurdes et Arabes, compliquée par de violentes querelles entre Kurdes, n'est pas certaine mais elle demeure une éventualité.

Joint à des difficultés croissantes en Afghanistan, un retour des affrontements en Irak ruinerait d'un coup les espoirs qu'avait pu faire naître dans le monde entier l'entrée de Barack Obama à la Maison-Blanche.

### KURDES ET KURDISTAN

#### • Un peuple fragmenté

Au cœur du Proche-Orient, les Kurdes constituent un peuple de 25 millions d'habitants, écartelé entre la Turquie, l'Iran, l'Irak et la Syrie, mais on en trouve aussi en Géorgie, en Arménie, au Liban... Victime de la partition de l'Empire ottoman et de la création des Etats modernes de la région après le 1er conflit mondial, le peuple kurde s'est réfugié dans une région de hautes montagnes, appelée le Kurdistan.

Ces hautes terres s'étendent sur 530.000 km<sup>2</sup>, au nord-ouest de l'Irak, au nord-est de l'Irak et à l'est de la Turquie, au sud du mont Ararat. Bien que partagés entre plusieurs Etats, les Kurdes sont restés concentrés dans leur Kurdistan ancestral, à cheval sur quatre frontières.

On comptait en 1999, 5 millions de Kurdes en Irak, soit 20% de la population, 14 millions en Turquie (24%), 9 millions en Iran (12%), 800.000 en Syrie (8%), 300.000 en Géorgie, Azerbaïdjan et Arménie, 300.000 au Liban. 700.000 Kurdes vivent en Europe.

#### • Des langues kurdes

Conséquence du fractionnement politique des Kurdes, la langue kurde n'est pas unifiée mais fragmentée en plusieurs variétés dialectales dont le kurmançî et le soranî, les deux principales, puis le zazaî, le lorî, le bakhtyarî et le goranî. Les écritures varient, cyrillique pour la Géorgie et l'Arménie, latin en Turquie, arabe ou arabo-persan en Syrie, en Irak, en Iran.

#### • Une religion commune

Les Kurdes sont davantage unifiés par la religion, étant presque tous des musulmans sunnites.





## Les grandes manoeuvres diplomatiques d'Ankara au Proche-Orient

par Monique Mas

A Bagdad, où il a été accueilli par son homologue irakien, le Kurde Jalal Talabani, le président turc Abdullah Gül était également attendu par le Premier ministre de la province autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Nechirvan Barzani. Désavouant la lutte armée conduite par les séparatistes turcs du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (le PKK) qui opèrent depuis le Kurdistan irakien, les deux politiciens kurdes d'Irak ont fait des promesses de collaboration renforcée avec la Turquie qui souhaite maintenir une coopération bilatérale dynamique avec l'Irak mais aussi plus largement tenir un rang diplomatique de premier plan dans son environnement moyen-oriental.

Faisant fi d'une solidarité kurde dont l'affichage n'est visiblement plus de mise dans la région et surtout pas dans un Irak qui récupère lentement sa souveraineté, le Premier ministre du Kurdistan autonome, Nechirvan Barzani promet au président turc que les autorités kurdes de la province irakienne autonome « agiront de concert avec la Turquie » contre les séparatistes du PKK et que désormais « aucune attaque ne sera menée depuis [leur] territoire ». La veille, en présence de son homologue turc, le président irakien Djalal Talabani avait de son côté sommé le PKK de « rendre les armes ou de quitter l'Irak ».

Certes, le président Jalal Talabani précise que les autorités irakiennes « ne croient pas que seules les mesures musclées peuvent permettre de régler la question kurde ». « Il faut trouver des alternatives », ajoute-t-il. Mais il est clair que dans un proche avenir, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, le PKK turc va devoir se trouver d'autres bases arrière opérationnelles. Car même s'il paraît inexpugnable des contreforts rocheux d'Irak où il s'incruste, les divergences d'intérêt du PKK avec Bagdad - et même Erbil, la métropole du Kurdistan irakien -, menacent la cause séparatiste pour laquelle les Kurdes turcs sont en lutte armée depuis 1984, au risque de se voir inscrits sur la liste des organisations terroristes des Nations unies et de l'Union européenne.

### Une nouvelle réalité émerge en Irak selon Gül

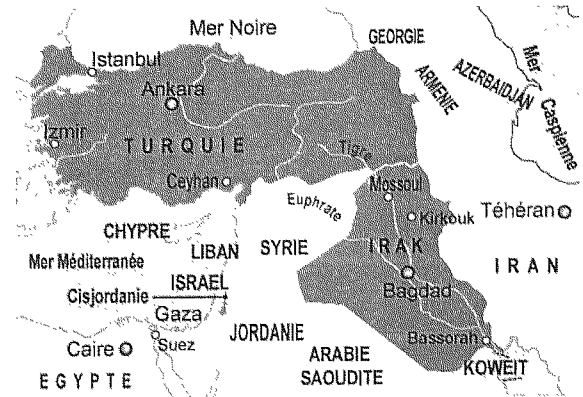
« Il faut des actions communes pour éliminer le terrorisme » avait martelé Abdullah Gül dès son arrivée à Bagdad à l'occasion de cette visite qui constitue une première pour un dignitaire turc de son rang en ces trois décennies qui ont vu l'Irak sous occupation américaine, après une épreuve de force ravageuse contre le monde entier en 1990-1991 et une guerre sanglante et destructrice avec l'Iran dix ans plus tôt. Mais aujourd'hui, alors qu'en Irak les partisans locaux de la nébuleuse terroriste d'al-Qaïda paraissent réduits à la portion congrue, la présence rebelle dans le Kurdistan irakien fait plus que jamais tâche, comme le président turc n'a pas manqué de le relever.

« Il y a une nouvelle réalité, c'est que les terroristes sont dans le nord de l'Irak » et cela témoigne d'une défaillance sinon d'une complicité des « responsables des régions où sont implantés ces terroristes », lance Abdullah Gül en appelant ses partenaires irakiens, et en particulier les autorités du Kurdistan autonome, à « en finir avec ces problèmes qui entravent les relations entre les deux pays ». Jalal Talabani en convient, qui suggère au PKK turc de se « lancer dans la vie politique et parlementaire au lieu de se servir de ses armes ». Si Talabani est un vétéran de la cause kurde, ce qui lui avait du reste valu d'être associé à la composante chiite du pouvoir irakien instauré par l'administration Bush, le chef de l'Etat irakien repousse aujourd'hui les sirènes séparatistes.

### L'Irak se veut unitaire

La lutte armée des séparatistes kurdes de Turquie « fait du tort aux Kurdes et aux Irakiens », explique le président Talabani qui n'ignore pas qu'une telle perspective en Irak ferait immédiatement sortir la Turquie de ses gonds, mais aussi les autres voisins de l'Irak abritant une communauté kurde (l'Iran et la Syrie). Du reste, l'Irak a choisi l'option unitaire comme l'ont démontré début 2009 les élections provinciales qui ont conforté sur cette base la stature d'homme politique du Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki. Quant aux ambitions pétrolières et territoriales du Kurdistan irakien, concernant Kirkouk notamment, les Irakiens ont sagement préféré renvoyer toute décision à plus tard.

« La Constitution irakienne interdit les milices armées, le PKK comme les autres » rappelle Talabani en faisant valoir le comité tripartite créé en novem-



bre 2008 par l'Irak, les Etats-Unis et la Turquie pour combattre le PKK sur le territoire irakien. De son côté, le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) de Massoud Barzani, le président de la province autonome irakienne renchérit et annonce sans grand frais une conférence inter-kurdes pour avril prochain. Des partis kurdes d'Irak, de Syrie, d'Iran, de Turquie et d'Europe devraient alors appeler le PKK à cesser la lutte armée et l'aider « à trouver une solution pacifique à la question kurde dans toutes les parties du Kurdistan » virtuel.

### Solution militaire et diplomatie régionale

Pour sa part, l'armée turque ne renonce pas encore à l'idée d'une solution militaire à force de raids contre les bases arrière du PKK dans le Kurdistan irakien. Elle les a multipliés ces derniers mois, avec une nouvelle incursion terrestre officiellement admise en février dernier. Mais si la question kurde revêt pour Ankara une importance toute particulière, la stabilité régionale n'en reste pas moins au premier plan de la stratégie diplomatique turque, surtout quand cette dernière autorise des relations bilatérales dynamiques et riches en retombées commerciales.

Entreprise en 2007 et rendue publique en 2008 seulement, une médiation turque se poursuit entre Israël et la Syrie qui réclame la restitution du plateau du Golan à l'Etat hébreu, ce dernier demandant en échange à Damas de rompre avec les islamistes libanais et palestiniens du Hezbollah et du Hamas. En la matière, il n'est sûrement pas indifférent de savoir que depuis 2004, Ankara abreuve ses bonnes relations avec Israël avec un contrat sur vingt ans organisant la livraison annuelle par la Turquie de quelque 50 millions de mètres cubes d'eau.

### Un croissant fertile très attractif

En Irak, le président Gül a également été saisi sur la question du tarissement de l'eau du Tigre et de l'Euphrate qui prennent leur source en Turquie avant d'arroser le « croissant fertile ». Une problématique cruciale sur le partage des eaux de la région au moment où devrait véritablement démarrer la reconstruction de l'économie de l'Irak. En la matière, Bagdad reproche à la Turquie la construction de trop nombreux barrages sur les deux fleuves nourriciers. Dans le domaine des hydrocarbures en revanche, des arrangements bilatéraux très bien huilés voient par exemple des entreprises turques pallier le déficit en raffinage irakien moyennant l'importation de brut irakien réexporté en Irak après raffinage en Turquie. Le terminal pétrolier du port turc de Ceyran est par ailleurs un débouché méditerranéen tout naturel pour le pétrole irakien.

La reconnaissance internationale de la bonne tenue du scrutin de janvier dernier a finalement consacré la normalisation politique et sécuritaire revendiquée haut et fort par le Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki. A l'instar de Paris par exemple qui a vu le président Nicolas Sarkozy faire escale à Bagdad pour manifester son intérêt dans la reconstruction irakienne, la Turquie a visiblement choisi de faire son retour à Bagdad à un moment clef. Ankara attend le nouveau président américain les 6 et 7 avril prochain. Cette visite d'Etat du président américain constitue « un résultat naturel du rôle croissant de la Turquie dans la région » selon le ministre turc des Affaires étrangères Ali Babacan. Et l'Irak sera aussi au menu puisque la Turquie vient d'annoncer qu'elle laisserait transiter sur son sol les troupes américaines qui doivent avoir quitté l'Irak d'ici deux ans.



**24 heures**

24 mars 2009

## Turquie: deuxième inculpation dans l'affaire des "puits de la mort"

**DIYARBAKIR, TURQUIE** | Un ancien maire a été inculpé de meurtre mardi dans le cadre de l'enquête sur les "puits de la mort", l'assassinat présumé d'un nombre indéterminé de Kurdes dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a-t-on appris de source judiciaire.

Un tribunal de Diyarbakir (sud-est) a inculpé Kamil Atak, l'ancien maire de Cizre, dans la province de Sirmak, pour meurtre et appartenance à une organisation interdite, selon la même source.

Le prévenu, qui a été placé en détention provisoire, est le second suspect inculpé dans cette affaire, après l'inculpation de son fils, à la suite de la découverte lors de fouilles de près de 20 restes humains, la semaine dernière dans un village près de Cizre.

Les fouilles ont été entreprises sur ordre de la justice en février après la publication dans la presse de déclarations d'un repentir du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, organisation armée interdite), selon lequel plusieurs personnes ont été tuées par les forces de sécurité dans les années 1990, jetées dans des puits, et recouvertes d'acide.

D'autres corps auraient été enterrés le long de la route entre Cizre et Silopi.

Des fouilles à deux endroits différents de Silopi ont révélé des fragments d'os, des restes de cheveux et de vêtements.

Lundi, la police a arrêté un colonel, commandant de la gendarmerie à Kayseri (centre), qui était basé à Silopi en 1990.

Atak et son fils ont été mis en cause après qu'un témoin eut déclaré à la justice que l'ancien maire avait livré plusieurs personnes soupçonnées d'aider le PKK à un autre mouvement, le Hizbullah, qui les avaient tués.

Le Hizbullah turc, qui n'a pas de liens connus avec le Hezbollah libanais, a été créé au début des années 1990 et aurait été utilisé par le



© AFP | Photo le 11 mars 2009 du site de recherche de restes humains dans la province de Sirmak

gouvernement turc pour contrer le PKK.

Le PKK a pris les armes en 1984 pour l'indépendance des régions kurdes, et le conflit a fait environ 44.000 morts.

Les fouilles ont été entreprises sur ordre de la justice en février après la publication dans la presse de déclarations d'un repentir du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, organisation armée interdite), selon lequel plusieurs personnes ont été tuées par les forces de sécurité dans les années 1990, jetées dans des puits, et recouvertes d'acide. (AFP)

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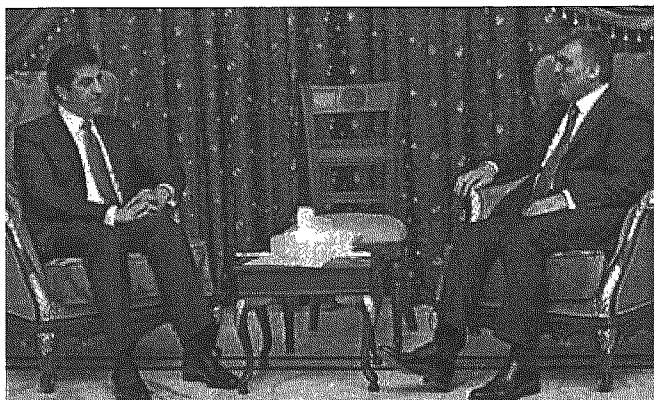
## Gül exige une position claire du Kurdistan

**REUTERS** 📡

24 mars, 2009 / Paul de Bendern / Reuters

**LE PRÉSIDENT turc a demandé au chef du gouvernement du Kurdistan autonome irakien de prendre clairement position contre les séparatistes kurdes de Turquie, qui utilisent le nord de l'Irak comme base de repli.**

Abdullah Gül a rencontré le Premier ministre kurde Nechirvan Barzani pour des entretiens à Bagdad. C'est la première fois qu'un dirigeant turc accepte de rencontrer formellement un responsable du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan, qui jouit d'une autonomie de fait depuis la guerre du Golfe de 1991.



Reuters - Mardi 24 mars 2009

**Le président turc Abdullah Gül (à droite) et le Premier ministre du Kurdistan irakien, Nechirvan Barzani, à Bagdad.**

"Je lui ai dit explicitement : l'organisation terroriste du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) et ses camps se trouvent (...) dans votre région et il faut prendre clairement position contre eux. Une fois que le PKK sera éliminé, tout sera possible: vous êtes nos voisins et nos cousins'," a dit Gül.

Le voyage d'Abdullah Gül est le premier d'un président turc en Irak depuis 33 ans. Son Premier ministre, Tayyip Erdogan, avait marqué l'an dernier le début de ce rapprochement par une visite à Bagdad.

"Je crois nous sommes entrés dans une ère nouvelle de bonnes relations qui, je l'espère, portera ses fruits", a déclaré Gül après son entretien avec Nechirvan Barzani.

Ce dernier a estimé que les discussions avaient contribué à une meilleure compréhension entre son gouvernement et la Turquie, qui a toujours considéré avec méfiance l'autonomie du Kurdistan irakien, par crainte d'un effet de contagion sur son propre territoire.

Il a toutefois assuré soutenir les appels à une amnistie pour les combattants du PKK, idée que la Turquie n'a guère prise en compte jusqu'ici.

Gül a ensuite rencontré le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al Maliki.

Lundi, après une entrevue avec Gül, le président irakien Djalal Talabani, qui est kurde, avait tenu des propos très durs contre les activistes du PKK, en les sommant de désarmer ou de partir.

Un dirigeant du PKK, Haval Roze, a accusé mardi Talabani de "faire une faveur aux ennemis du peuple kurde".

"Nul n'est en droit de dire aux combattants du PKK de déposer les armes ou de quitter le territoire du Kurdistan", a-t-il déclaré par téléphone à Reuters d'un lieu secret du Kurdistan.

# Signs of discontent in Iraqi Awakening movement

By Rod Nordland and Alissa J. Rubin

**BAGHDAD:** The U.S. military marked another milestone the other day in the initiative perhaps most responsible for taming the violence in Iraq: Most of the 94,000-strong Awakening movement — many of them former Sunni insurgents who agreed to switch sides — had been turned over to the control of the Iraqi military.

But Awakening members themselves were not celebrating.

One group of fighters, north of Baghdad, announced the same day that they were resigning en masse from their Awakening Council. And in Salman Pak, councils from throughout

the southern part of Baghdad and its suburbs met to denounce the Iraqi efforts to integrate them.

These are among the signs that the fighters' patience is fraying badly at a difficult moment: After months of promises from a suspicious Shiite-led government, only 5,000 Awakening members have been given permanent jobs in the security forces. Those promises were made last year when Iraq was flush with oil money. Now with its budget battered by falling oil prices, the government is having trouble paying even its current employees.

In interviews with leaders from a dozen local Awakening Councils, nearly all complained about the lack of permanent jobs, that their pay was in arrears and that many members were being arrested despite promises of amnesty.

Perhaps most ominously, several worried that their problems might drive some followers back to Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia at a time when both Iraqi and U.S. military commanders say that it seems to be making gains, small but worrisome, around Baghdad.

"Until now, promises are all we've gotten," said Adil al-Mashhadani, a leader of the Awakening Council in the Fadhil neighborhood in Baghdad, where 12 of the 180 members have been able to join the police. "When the government does not even pay them enough to stay alive, Qaeda and armed

groups are ready to pay them generously."

Abu Ghazwan, leader of the council in Buhruz, in troubled Diyala Province, said delayed salaries and suspicion from the Iraqi Army had alienated his fighters. Mr. Ghazwan said, "There is no border to stop them from going back to Al Qaeda."

Maj. Gen. Mike Ferriter, deputy operations commander of coalition

forces, gave a news briefing at Camp Victory on Saturday at which he declared the Awakening Councils "the leading edge of reconciliation." He added, "I predict success."

At the same time, he conceded that in the past year, only 5,000 fighters had been enlisted in the Iraqi security forces, mostly the police. That is just over 5 percent, well short of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's pledge to bring 20 percent of them into the police.

Mr. Maliki also pledged that the other 80 percent would get jobs in other government ministries. More than half a billion dollars has been spent or budgeted for the program through the end of 2009, and nearly everyone agrees that it has been a tremendous success in turning insurgents and sympathizers away from the more extreme elements of the insurgency, especially Al Qaeda.

Coinciding with the U.S. military's surge, the Awakening movement helped quell most of the violence in Sunni communities. The program was never meant to be permanent, however. The idea was to find them jobs and bring Sunnis into the Shiite dominated security services and government.

General Ferriter said he was not concerned about the apparently low number integrated so far, and he predicted that all 94,000 registered Awakening members would have government positions by the end of the year. He said that so far 3,000 jobs had been promised by the Health Ministry, 10,000 by the Education Ministry and 500 by the Oil Ministry. Others ministries would come around, he said, when they understand that if they give jobs to former insur-

gents, the money will come out of the Awakening budget, not their own.

But a U.S. military official knowledgeable about the program was not so optimistic. "Do we really think the Iraqi government is going to bring a hundred thousand new employees in at a time when their revenue stream is taking a nosedive?" The official did not want to be identified because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

No one doubted that many of the recipients of the U.S. money had been Iraqi insurgents, some aligned with Al Qaeda at one time. Essentially, they were paid to change sides, though many of them also had become disenchanted with the extremists. They have paid a big price, with more than 500 of them killed in the fighting that ousted Al Qaeda from their neighborhoods and villages.

They continue to be the victims of assassinations, most recently Monday, when an Awakening leader in Abu Ghraib was killed with some of his fam-



Jehad Nga for The New York Times

Members of an Awakening group waiting to be paid in Mahmudiya. The movement has about 94,000 members.

ily members by a large bomb planted near his home.

The Awakening members willingness to lose their lives fighting Al Qaeda gradually persuaded those around Maliki to overcome their distrust of the movement and recognize the need to bring the fighters into the fold. Many of the Awakening leaders praised Maliki, but said other factions in the government were undercutting his efforts.

"The Iraqi Army considers us members of Al Qaeda, not Awakening Council leaders," said Sheik Awad al-Harbousi, who lost a son, his father and four other close relatives to Al Qaeda, and who still leads the council in Taji, just north of Baghdad. "We sacrificed to kick out Al Qaeda and this is their thank-you?"

He said his group voted to resign from the Awakening movement Saturday, though they would still maintain their posts. "This is a message to the prime minister," he said, suggesting that the resignation was only symbolic so far.

Also Saturday, Awakening Council leaders from 10 communities met in Salman Pak to complain about the lack of jobs and problems with the army, said Mustafa Kamil Hamad, leader of the 3,000-member group in the Dora area of south Baghdad.

Only 10 of his men have gotten police jobs, Mr. Hamad said. "They have no respect for us," he said.

When two Iraqi soldiers were killed by a bomb in the western Baghdad neighborhood of Ghazaliya last week, the Awakening members at the nearest checkpoint were all arrested, said a man who would identify himself only as Dhiyaa, a leader of the group there. "We're always blamed for any security breaches," he said.

The U.S. military says that only 164 Awakening Council members been arrested in the past year, "many of them for good reason," said Col. Jeffrey Kullmayer, who runs the program under General Ferriter.

But Awakening members said that the real number was much higher, and that there were many outstanding arrest warrants for them.

Mahmood Abdullah al-Jbouri, security chief for the Awakening committee in Madaen, said there were arrest warrants out for hundreds of its members in just that one district — "including me." He was reached by telephone, in hiding.

FINANCIAL TIMES March 24 2009

## Turkish election offers hope for Kurds

By Delphine Strauss and Funja Guler in Diyarbakir

**D**iyarbakir- Plumes of smoke rose above the fields around Diyarbakir, in Turkey's Kurdish south-east, from fires lit to mark the traditional festival of Newruz. Under spring sunshine, families picnicked and dancers stamped in circles as Kurdish singers took the stage before a crowd of hundreds of thousands.

The peaceful celebration shows how far the region has come since the early 1990s, when violence between the army and the separatist Kurdistan Workers party (PKK) was at its height and Newruz was a flashpoint for clashes between demonstrators and security forces.

Diyarbakir has become one of Turkey's hottest electoral battlegrounds. The ruling Justice and Development party (AKP) is fighting to dislodge the Kurdish Democratic Society party (DTP) mayor in municipal polls this weekend. Both sides say the result could accelerate efforts to end the conflict.

Turkey's on the right route ... but it's following it slowly, says Galip Ensarioglu, chairman of Diyarbakir's chamber of commerce.

In recent months, Turkish state television has begun broadcasting in the once-banned Kurdish language, an important step for a minority that accounts for almost a fifth of Turkey's 70m population.

The AKP has pledged to pump money into the south-east's thread-



bare economy. The PKK is fighting a rearguard action from hideouts in the Qandil mountains of Northern Iraq. There has been no violence inside Turkey for three months.

Warming relations with Iraq could lead to a breakthrough. Abdullah Gul, the first Turkish president to visit Baghdad in more than 30 years, this week broke a taboo in referring to the Kurdistan regional administration in northern Iraq.

Jalal Talabani, the Iraqi president and himself a Kurd, called for the rebels to disarm or leave Iraq. Iraqi Kurdish leaders will soon convene a security conference that could call for an amnesty and an end to the PKK's armed struggle.

But first, Turkey's government will have to persuade Kurds that it can protect their rights better than the insurgents, while reassuring

other voters it is not caving in to terrorism.

The municipal campaign in the south-east is being fought for higher stakes than just city services. AKP victories in the south-east could increase the chances for Ankara to ... clarify its intentions, especially on the timing and scope of an amnesty for PKK members, says Yavuz Baydar, a commentator.

But the DTP looks set to hold on to its strongholds. Many in Diyarbakir are frustrated that the AKP, wary of provoking opponents, has not used its majority in parliament to make constitutional changes that would allow minorities greater rights and make it easier for Kurdish deputies to win seats.

What are they waiting for? They don't need anyone's support, said Sezgin Tanrikulu, a human rights

lawyer.

Yet a convincing DTP win could strengthen the party, under threat of closure for links to the PKK, as a political alternative to violence. Osman Baydemir, Diyarbakir's mayor, said it would force other politicians to take DTP deputies, ostracised since their election to parliament in 2007, more seriously.

But the DTP looks neither willing nor able to press the PKK rebels to abandon their fight for an ethnic homeland.

Leyla Zana, who spent years in jail for her firebrand speeches, won cheers from Saturday's crowds when she reproached Mr Talabani for suggesting disarmament and said an amnesty should be the last stage in the process.

In Ankara, politicians in suits leapt awkwardly over Nevruz fires to signal official acceptance of a festival once considered subversive. But in Diyarbakir, the local AKP candidate, Kutbettin Arzu, has an uphill task to win voters. Men in a smoke-filled teahouse on the city outskirts are adamant in their support for the DTP.

We won't vote for any other party, said Abidin, whose village survived the army's scorched earth tactics in the 1990s. They make little secret of their sympathy for the PKK fighters. If you go to Qandil mountains, says the waiter, say hello to our friends. ■

REUTERS

## Kurd voters stress on identity frustrates Turkish PM

March 30, 2009 By Alexandra Hudson (Reuters)

**DIYARBAKIR, Turkey** - Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's ruling AK Party failed to conquer the Kurdish bastion of Diyarbakir in Sunday's local polls because they misjudged decades-old grievances by minority Kurds.

Jubilant Kurds took to the streets of Diyarbakir, the biggest city of the Kurdish southeast, to celebrate the victory of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) over the AK Party, which campaigned on a message of improving services in the impoverished region rather than stressing Kurdish identity.

The southeast has been torn by separatist violence since the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) took up arms against the state 25 years ago. Some 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict and ending it is seen as key to boosting Turkey's security.

Turkish President Abdullah Gul stressed the point in Baghdad last week, calling on Iraqi Kurdish officials to do more to prevent the PKK from using Iraq as a base to attack Turkey. He also recognised the Kurdistan government in northern Iraq, a move expected to improve ties between the state and Kurds.

Erdogan's Islamist-rooted party had hoped to dislodge the DTP from Diyarbakir and other local administration in the southeast after it swept the region in a 2007 general election.

But the DTP won 67 percent of the vote in Diyarbakir, pummeling the AK Party which took 31 percent of the vote.

The result was a big disappointment for Erdogan, who had worked hard to win the support of Turkey's 12 million minority Kurds, telling them all Turkish citizens were equal and granting more rights to Kurds under pressure from the European Union.

Launching a Kurdish-language state television channel and handing free washing machines to locals did not convince them that the AK Party was best placed to run their cities. However the government is expected to continue pushing for reform.

DTP officials had accused the government of granting some rights to Kurds only to win votes and had pointed out the many restrictions that still exist on the Kurdish language.

"We are so happy that the DTP won. It is our party and this is our victory," said 21-year old student Pelin Altun.

"Only old, religious people voted for the AK Party. The young voted for the DTP because we are most concerned about our identity and the future and not about religion," he said.

"We are not barbarians here we just want our identity," said Yilmaz 34, a caretaker.

Dogu Ergil, an Ankara-based expert on Kurds, said the results had sent the message to Erdogan that "the road to Europe passes through Diyarbakir". The EU has long pressed Ankara to expand more cultural and political rights to Kurds.

"Kurds don't want to be given rights by the government. They say it is their own rights and they want to exercise them because they belong to them," Ergil said.

The Turkish state has long feared that easing restrictions for minorities will lead to the carving up of the country founded on the ashes

of the Ottoman Empire. In recent months the military has made conciliatory gestures, saying force might alone will not defeat the separatists.

DTP leader Ahmet Turk, whose party faces closure by the Constitutional Court on charges it has links to Kurdish separatist rebels, said the results were a success for Kurds.

"The people gave a lesson to the government. We got our votes back. Governments are temporary, people are always there."

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## Feud delays Iraq committee Kirkuk recommendations

REUTERS

March 29, 2009 By Mustafa Mahmoud (Reuters)

**KIRKUK, Iraq** - Iraqi politicians from rival Arab, Kurd and Turkman ethnic groups will delay until June recommendations on the disputed city of Kirkuk, as they have failed to resolve a feud over the issue, they said on Sunday.

Minority Kurds see oil-rich Kirkuk as their ancient capital and want it to be part of their semi-autonomous region in Iraq's north, an idea rejected by the city's Turkmen and Arabs.

U.S. officials say the dispute between Arabs and Kurds over territory and oil has overtaken sectarian tensions as the leading threat to Iraq's long term stability.

So sensitive is the issue that officials were forced to exempt Kirkuk from Iraq's provincial elections on Jan. 31 because rival lawmakers could not agree on how to treat it.

A committee of seven legislators representing Iraq's different ethnic groups -- two Arabs, two Kurds, two Turkmen and an Assyrian Christian -- and another made up of Kirkuk councillors were due to draft recommendations on how to resolve the dispute at the end of this month.

"Both committees have agreed to extend the period of work by two months to secure enough time to reach a compromise," Hassan Toran, a Turkman councillor involved in the draft, told Reuters.

"It's too difficult to reach common ground now. More time is definitely needed to solve such contentious issues."

The struggle over Kirkuk highlights a wider divide across Iraq between Arabs and Kurds nearly six years after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003 that ousted Saddam Hussein. Kurds are alarmed at Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's call for a strong, central government, which they fear threatens their hard-won autonomy.

The Kurds want to reverse Saddam's policy of "Arabisation" in Kirkuk, which involved expelling thousands of Kurds, but the city's Arabs now complain the pendulum has swung the other way, with

the Kurdish government deliberately stacking the city with Kurds and intimidating its Arab minority.

"The Kurds have hampered efforts to reach an urgent solution to the problem of Kirkuk," said Mohammed Jubouri, an Arab councillor. "It's very clear that their final target is to impose full control over Kirkuk. We will never accept that."

But Awat Mohammed, a Kurdish council member, was hopeful.

"There is fundamental agreement between all sides ... The difference is the mechanics how to implement it," he said.

The United Nations is scheduled to deliver recommendations of its own for how to handle Kirkuk some time after mid-April.

The U.N. report on territory disputes between Iraq's Kurds and other communities, primarily in Kirkuk, was originally supposed to be published by October last year, but it was postponed because of the sensitivity of the subject.

A senior U.N. official dismissed what he called speculation in the media over the contents of the report -- which he said were "not finished ... very much work in progress".

One report, quoting diplomats in Kirkuk close to the process, said the U.N. would recommend a power-sharing deal between both Iraq's central government and the Kurdish government in Arbil giving them joint jurisdiction over Kirkuk.

The other option would recommend making Kirkuk autonomous but reliant on Baghdad for its budget, it said.

"I don't know precisely which options will be in the final version and which will not, and certainly not how we will formulate them," the senior U.N. official said.

"We are continually working on new drafts so my telling what may or may not have been in an earlier one, before any senior officials had reviewed it or approved it would serve no purpose whatsoever -- except raising tensions higher," he said.

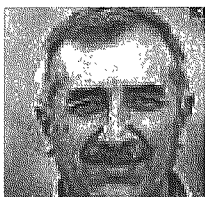
(Writing and additional reporting by Tim Cocks; Editing by Louise Ireland)

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## Karaylan: PKK will not abandon its arms

(KurdishMedia.com) 30 March 2009:



**IN AN** exclusive statement to Kurdish Hawlati, Murat Karaylan, the number-one man of Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), stressed that his party will not abandon its arms, stressing that the real issue is the "the identity of the [Kurdish] nation."

Mr. Karaylan also stressed that the

presence of PKK militants in the mountains forced the Turkish President to convene with the Kurdish leaders of Iraq.

He also ruled out the possibility of the outbreak of civil war between PKK and the Kurdish Peshmergas, stressing they have learned their lessons from the wars in 1990s.

Regarding the request [by Jalal Talabani from Turkey] to declare a general amnesty for PKK militants, Mr. Karaylan said that "the problem isn't about a general amnesty or our militants; it is about the lack of a plan to solve the Kurdish issue," stressing they [PKK] aren't criminals to need a pardon from Turkey.

He said if Turkey pardons us, then who would pardon Turkey for killing Kurds?

Regarding, the visit of the Iraqi President Jalal Talabani to Turkey, Karaylan said that the visit has in the interest of the ruling Justice and Development Party.

## Iraqi general's presence in Kirkuk stirs dark memories

Maj. Gen. Abdul Amir Zaidi laughs about rumors, but Kurds say they have reason to be nervous about the Arab-led division sent to their region in northern Iraq to oust Kurdish fighters.

By Ned Parker

The general with the easy smile has been here before. A little over a decade ago, Saddam Hussein dispatched him to this province where the oil wells belch orange flames day and night.

Now another Iraqi Arab leader has sent him north, in a battle of wills over Kirkuk that has awakened the past and raised fear of new fighting in the territory that the Kurds consider their Jerusalem. Already, one of his units has confiscated some Kurdish farmland for a base, stirring memories of Hussein's attempts to uproot the Kurdish population and settle Arabs.

Maj. Gen. Abdul Amir Zaidi laughs at the rumors about him swirling in Kirkuk province, especially the one about him being related to Prime Minister Nouri Maliki, who ordered Zaidi here to head a new Arab-led army division after he pulled out the Kurdish-led 4th division in July.

Zaidi is firm about what the government intends to do -- remove Kurdish forces, known as the peshmerga, from this bitterly disputed province, which is home to as much as 13% of Iraq's oil reserves and borders the semiautonomous Kurdistan region.

He makes it clear that the time has come for the peshmerga to leave Kirkuk province's northern areas, though he insists that their departure will be the result of negotiations.

"What's the point of the [peshmerga] going outside the boundaries of Kurdistan? When they do this, they are a militia carrying weapons," he says.

Under Maliki's orders, Zaidi's division has begun dismantling the Kurds' careful efforts since Hussein was ousted in 2003 to annex the province through a monopoly of local govern-

ment power and mastery of the area's security branches. Maliki's government is finally asserting Baghdad's authority, but the Kurds cannot forget how similar nationalist ambitions have ended in tragedy for them.

Kurds headed the old division, but Zaidi's 13,000-man force is 75% Arab.

In its eight months in Kirkuk, the Iraqi army has begun scouting roads in northern districts of the province, which had been considered the peshmerga's domain.

All of this has come with no sign of a negotiated resolution of Kirkuk's status between the Kurdish regional government and Baghdad. The province's future is being debated in two national committees and awaits the suggestions of a United Nations report to be released next month. But most of those involved believe that the chance of a solution before the scheduled withdrawal of U.S. combat troops by August 2010 is wishful thinking.

The brinkmanship risks sparking a new Kurdish-Arab conflict if no solution is found by then -- and could do so sooner.

Aware of the dangers, the U.S. military has increased its presence from one battalion to a combat brigade in hope of putting Kirkuk on the right path.

Since the 12th Iraqi army division's arrival, the Americans have already been called in to mediate confrontations that risked tipping over into violence.

The American commander in northern Iraq, Maj. Gen. Robert Caslen, says his soldiers have been able to cool tempers and establish communication channels between the sides. Despite such strides, he says there is still the risk that one side will open fire on the other.

"This situation right here is the most dangerous course of action for Iraq in the near future," Caslen said. "It's very important that Iraq gets it right. If we don't, a lot of the

change we've had over the last couple of years could go in a heartbeat as a result of something going wrong in those particular areas."

For the Kurds, Zaidi is a symbol of all that has soured in their relationship with Prime Minister Maliki. In his black beret and olive fatigues, Zaidi represents the old regime to them, a figure intimately involved in northern Iraq's history of struggle between Kurds and Arabs.

In turn, Arab leaders have rallied to the general, seeing him as a counterbalance to the peshmerga. The Americans have praised Zaidi for moving cautiously as he expands the army's role in Kurdish areas.

"He realizes every step he takes is something that has to be negotiated," Caslen said.

On a recent night, the general slouched in an armchair and smoked several cigarettes in his office on the edge of the region's flat gray oil fields.

He lets out a loud laugh at the rumors. Kurds say he was imprisoned by the Americans after the war, then released. Others say he participated in the 1980s Anfal campaign against the Kurds as a young officer, which he denies. He especially likes the one about being related to the prime minister.

"It would be an honor for me to be related to Maliki," Zaidi says with zest. He swats away the allegations about jail time with another laugh and eases his massive frame back into his chair.

Even as he professes bonhomie and thrusts his ring finger to make a point, his words reveal strains between him and the Kurds. He reiterates that Kurdish forces should not be active in Kirkuk's northern districts, which border Kurdistan: "This is outside their jurisdiction."

## Kurd sees 'very bad signals' from Baghdad

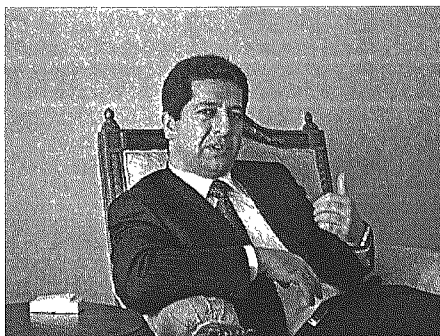
Masrour Barzani, the Kurdish region's security chief, criticizes the failure so far to implement an article of the Iraq Constitution concerning control of oil-rich Kirkuk.

By Ned Parker

Masrour Barzani, the head of the Kurdistan regional government's intelligence service and internal security agency in northern Iraq, rarely speaks in public. He is the powerful son of Massoud Barzani, the region's president, and is seen as one of the next generation of Kurdish leaders expected to defend the autonomy Iraqi Kurds gained after years of war and instability.

As tensions deepen between the Shiite Muslim-dominated government in Baghdad and the Kurds in the north, Masrour Barzani is a key player in the conflict over land in northern Iraq, including the oil-rich region of Kirkuk.

The Kurds are struggling with how to respond to an ascendant Baghdad, which is



reluctant to accede to Kurdish wishes on holding a referendum to settle the fate of the disputed territories. Article 140 of the Iraq Constitution called for such a referendum to be held by December 2007, but the vote was

never held. The 40-year-old leader recently spoke with The Times about the impasse, the chances of an Arab-Kurdish conflict and America's obligation to both Iraq and the Kurds. How do you view the status of Article 140 and efforts by the Iraqi government to replace Kurdish officers with Arab leadership in the Iraqi army in the disputed territories?

Are we ready to go ahead and implement the constitution as it is and not be selective in the articles that serve our purpose and those articles we don't like? . . . We all have compromised to have reached that constitution, which we believe is the best way to help all of Iraq, from Kurdistan all the way to Baghdad and the south and the west. We don't see the same intention by some people in Baghdad. President Massoud Barzani suggested recently to the Los Angeles Times that Prime



Minister Nouri Maliki was acting in an authoritarian manner. Why do you think Maliki is not implementing Article 140?

We respect Mr. Maliki as prime minister. He is as an old ally, an old friend. It is not against him. It is against the entire approach of how to deal with the new Iraq. This [political] system is lacking a mechanism of following the constitution. There are things happening in Baghdad that are unconstitutional but still they get away with it -- the creation of different institutions and different, let's say, offices, alternative to other official government bodies. These things are happening, and no one is really complaining about it. And now we have an article [140] that is constitutional and people are refraining from doing it. . . . That sends very bad signals to even the Kurdish people. If Kurds are part of this country, why treat them differently. . . . So now I don't think it's only one prime minister who is doing this. It's the entire approach of not really believing in the new Iraq. And this is the new

Iraq that we have sacrificed for. This is the new Iraq that we have promised to defend and be part of. But if the constitution is not respected, if the Kurds are treated differently then, I don't think the Kurds should be the ones to be blamed for whatever consequences . . . might appear. Is there the potential, if things continue on the same path, for a Kurdish-Arab conflict to erupt?

There is already a Kurdish unrest or unhappiness with the decisions that the Kurdish politicians make in this regard because they [the Kurdish people] think the Kurdish leadership has been very soft and very compromising because they have all the rights to defend their constitutional rights, yet the delay and postponement of implementing those rights is becoming unacceptable to the public. I think there will be a time when the people might not listen to the solutions proposed by the leadership. So once they are fed up, you never know how they will react. Do you think it's realistic that these issues will be sol-

ved by August 2010, when U.S. combat forces are scheduled to withdraw?

Once you agree on solving these issues on a political level, and once you have the intention of solving these things, the rest of it is easy. Finding a mechanism and implementing it is all easy. It's the intention, it's the political solution to the problem. I think the Americans could do that. It's not difficult. It's very realistic. Are the Americans engaging enough to solve the problem of Kirkuk?

I don't know. What I could tell you would be the perceptions that most of the Kurds have, which is they don't think that the Americans or any of the coalition forces are coming forward and fulfilling the promise they gave. Whether that's true or not, I think American officials might be in a better position to answer that. What do you think? What is your analysis?

**Hürriyet**

March 28, 2009



## Opinion

# The Kurdistan debate is a political boldness issue

Picture this. You wrote a detailed article about the importance of President Abdullah Gül's uttering "Kurdistan." Before your article is published in the newspaper, you learn that Mr. President, upon his return to Ankara, says, "I did not use such a word."

Do you think your piece will turn null and void?

This is not important. What is important is that President Gül's breakthrough is clogged; steps to be taken for the solution of the Kurdish issue are blocked because the word "Kurdistan" is not a debate over semantics. It is directly about finding a political solution to the issue.

I previously gave the results in-depth. It is needless to repeat them here.

This is what I am interested in.

★★★

After saying, "I did not use such an expression," Gül clarified what actually he meant as follows:

"Inside Iraq there is a regional Kurdish administration in the north of Iraq, according to the Iraqi Constitution. This is what I said. I met their prime minister as well. This is normal.

Various debates occur on such issues. We are dealing with quite difficult matters. So we all should be very careful in the subjects especially as we make progress in struggles with terror, such meaningless and harmful discussions are unnecessary."

That's fine, Mr. Gül, but don't you encourage unnecessary discussions the minute you remarked, "I did not say it," although it is normal for you to talk about such matters?

We know that you uttered the expression. How do we know?

We know this through the notes Erdal ?afak of the Sabah daily, Mustafa Karaaliolu of the Star daily and Murat Yetkin of the Radikal daily took in the plane on our way to Baghdad.

Then, does it mean that they are all wrong?

Besides, your remarks, "According to the Iraqi Constitution, inside

Iraq there is a regional Kurdish administration in the north of Iraq. This is what I said," are incorrect.

Why? Because the "Kurdistan region" is uttered in the articles 4, 117 and 141 of the Iraqi constitution. In Article 141, the word "Kurdistan" is repeated three times and there is no expression of "a regional Kurdish administration in the north of Iraq" stated in the article. Only, the "regional Kurdish administration" is used in Article 141.

That is to say, if you want to say what you want to say by referring to the Iraqi constitution, the text reveals that you are talking about the "regional Kurdish administration."

In a country where Kurds couldn't be called "Kurds" for years or where the word "Kurdistan" couldn't be pronounced but people were satisfied to say "Kurds" only, you cannot refer to a regional administration as though you are talking about a municipality. So don't you see that by acting so could in fact mean the continuation of sequestering the "difficult issues" into dissolution?

This is the heart of the matter. Therefore this is not a discussion of semantics or "unnecessary discussions."

★★★

If nothing else is required for the solution of the Kurdish issue, political "boldness" is certainly necessary. Without "political courage," without showing, or could not showing "political chivalry" to solve this deep multi-dimensional problem and to make any progress in this direction is almost impossible.

The reason is that solution of the Kurdish issue requires the generation of hard-to-digest results, ability to make compromises and the merit to come up with new ideas.

"Political will" only is not enough. "Sine quo none" requires political boldness.

To do all is difficult, quite difficult indeed, but once this is achieved a terrific "award" we all will have.

With the "national consensus" to spread over its influence to the entire region and even to the international community and with self-reconciliation of the Republic inside, Turkey will fly high.

For all these reasons, discussions over "Kurdistan" are necessary. This is not about the semantics at all. For the solution of the Kurdish issue, "political boldness" is vital.



AP Associated Press

## UN suggests power-sharing for Kirkuk

March 29, 2009 / By LARA JAKES, (AP)

**KIRKUK, Iraq** — Seeking to head off an explosion of ethnic violence, the United Nations will call for a power-sharing system of government for Iraq's deeply divided region of Kirkuk in the oil-rich north.

A draft U.N. plan, outlined to The Associated Press by two Western officials, aims to defuse dangerous tensions. Kurds, a majority in the region, have been trying to wrest control from Arabs, Turkomen and other rival ethnic groups. If open warfare breaks out, it could jeopardize the U.S. goal of stability across Iraq before elections at year's end.

Peaceful elections are critical to reducing the U.S. presence in Iraq, promised by President Barack Obama.

The U.N. has played only a minor role in Iraq since 2003, when its Baghdad headquarters was destroyed by a truck bomb. Now, officials in Kirkuk say the U.N. efforts may be the last chance for a peaceful outcome.

Without a resolution, "I think Kirkuk will be like a TNT barrel and explode and burn everybody," Iraqi parliament lawmaker Mohammed Mahdi Amin al-Bayati, a Turkoman, said in an interview this week.

Deputy Gov. Rakan Saeed al-Jubouri, a Sunni Arab, agreed.

"Violence is very easy to start in Iraq," he said in a separate interview.

Slightly larger than Connecticut and dubbed by Saddam Hussein as Tamin province, Kirkuk is a land dotted with flaring smoke stacks on its oil fields and bustling markets. Its future hinges on whether its 1.3 million people will be run by Baghdad or by Irbil, the capital of the politically autonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq.

Kurds make up an estimated 52 percent of Kirkuk's population. Arabs represent 35 percent. Turkomen, ethnic Turks with close ties to Turkey, make up about 12 percent. About 12,000 Christians live in Kirkuk.

Kurds want the province to be wrapped into Kurdistan. Arabs and Turkomen vehemently oppose this.

"You cannot give up the opinion of the majority and give a small group of people what they want just because they ask for it," said Sartep Mohammad Hussein Kakai, a Kurdish member of the Iraqi parliament.

Deep suspicions among ethnic groups in Kirkuk are partially rooted in its past under Saddam Hussein. Tens of thousands of Kurds were killed, and more than 1,100 of their villages razed, under his Arabization program.

Last December, a suicide bomber killed at least 55 people in a packed restaurant near Kirkuk where Kurdish and Arab leaders were trying to reconcile differences.

The long-awaited U.N. report on Kirkuk will outline options for compromise, but "we are not pushing them into any particular direction," said spokeswoman Randa Jamal.

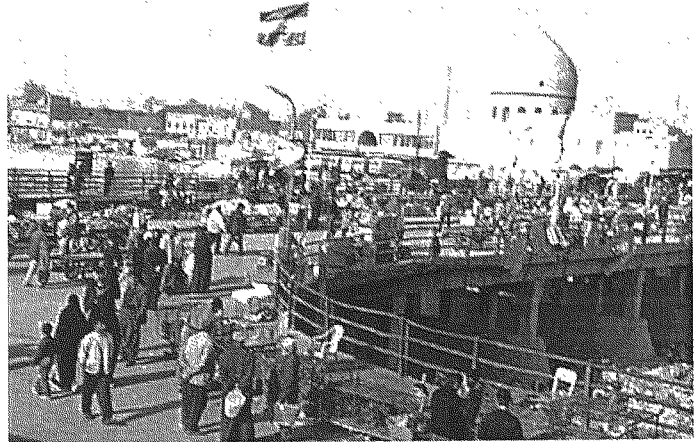
A draft of the U.N. plan, according to two Western officials who have read it, offers five options. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because the report has not been finalized and they are not authorized to speak publicly about it.

Three of the options in the draft likely will be dismissed immediately as too extreme or unworkable, the officials said. The remaining two are:

— Making Kirkuk a "special status" province where both Iraq's Shiite-led central government and the Kurdish government in Irbil could have power. Final decisions would be left to provincial officials. The special status would likely last between three and 10 years, giving officials more time to figure out Kirkuk's final status.

None of Iraq's 17 other provinces, including the three that make up Kurdistan, currently has such an agreement.

Making Kirkuk politically autonomous but still somewhat reliant on Baghdad for funding. This plan, favored by the Turkomen with political ties to Turkey, also would allow Kirkuk to collect revenue from federally owned North Oil Corp. refineries in the province.



People shop at a market in central Kirkuk, 290 kilometers (180 miles) north of Baghdad, Iraq, Thursday, March 26, 2009. Seeking to head off a wave of ethnic violence, the United Nations will call for a new and risky power-sharing system of government in the northern region Kirkuk, according to officials in one of Iraq's most deeply divided provinces. Turkomen are one of several minority ethnic groups in Kirkuk. (AP Photo/Yahya Ahmed)

Details of the formulas are still being negotiated. Remaining sticking points include how jobs will be divided among each group, and when, and who can be counted as a legal resident among the 400,000 Kurds who moved to Kirkuk after Saddam's ouster. Arabs and Turkomen call them illegal squatters.

"Ultimately, they need to come together to resolve this issue, because it's not going to get any prettier with time," said Howard Kecgan, the State Department's top envoy in Kirkuk.

Smoking Marlboros at his desk at the government building in downtown Kirkuk, Province Council chairman Rizgar Ali said he could accept a special status for Kirkuk but still tied to Kurdistan. He accused Arabs and Turkomen of stalling on an agreement.

"You can't go on like this," Ali said. "This kind of thing killed Iraq."

Saeed, the top-ranking Arab in Kirkuk, signaled he could support making Kirkuk autonomous. Anything connecting Kirkuk to Kurdistan would be rejected, however.

"We will resist that by all means, because this will erase our identity," Saeed said.

Ultimately, the dispute may be solved only if Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani personally agree to compromise.

The U.S. has encouraged power-sharing in a country where Shiites dominate in the south, Sunnis in the west and Kurds in the far north. Bitter sectarian fighting and ethnic cleansing have deepened mistrust.

In recent weeks Barzani has alleged that al-Maliki is drifting toward authoritarian rule. Al-Maliki says Iraq's central government is too weak, and that granting provinces too much power risks de-facto partition that would invite foreign meddling.

Gen. Ray Odierno, the top U.S. military leader in Iraq, said in a recent AP interview that "ultimately they have to solve this problem in Baghdad." And in a January visit to Kirkuk, Vice President Joe Biden told local leaders they had a year to show significant success in settling the dispute or potentially face it alone.

"The Americans should understand we cannot guarantee there will not be a civil war when they leave," said Turkoman councilman Hassan Toran.

# Deux généraux turcs sont accusés d'avoir fomenté quatre putschs

La justice vient d'inculper 56 personnes pour participation au complot Ergenekon

Istanbul  
Correspondance

Cinquante-six personnes, dont deux généraux quatre étoiles à la retraite, comparaitront à leur tour, à partir de juillet, dans le procès de la nébuleuse Ergenekon, du nom de l'organisation secrète ultranationaliste soupçonnée d'avoir comploté contre le gouvernement. Le deuxième acte d'accusation, rendu public par le procureur spécial, mercredi 25 mars, précise que les douze principaux accusés de cette organisation illégale risquent la prison à vie.

Cette nouvelle liste de militaires, journalistes, universitaires ou hommes politiques vient s'ajouter à une première série de suspects jugés depuis octobre 2008 : 86 accusés sont sur le banc du tribunal de Silivri, dans la banlieue d'Istanbul, pour appartenance à un réseau illégal planifiant des attentats, des assassinats et des coups d'Etat.

Cette fois, les généraux Sener Eruygur, l'ancien chef de la gendarmerie, et Hursit Tolon, qui risquent la perpétuité, sont clairement désignés comme les cerveaux de quatre tentatives de putschs entre 2003 et 2007. Les deux premiers coups d'Etat manqués, révélés par la publication des carnets d'un général et baptisés « Fille blonde » et « Clair de lune », projetaient de renverser le gouvernement islamo-conservateur de Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Le parquet met aussi en évidence le rôle du général Eruygur, président de l'Association pour la pensée d'Atatürk (le père de la Turquie moderne), dans l'organisation des manifestations « laïques » géantes

organisées en 2007 pour empêcher l'élection d'Abdullah Gül à la présidence de la République.

Depuis la découverte, l'été 2007, d'une cache d'armes à Istanbul, et le démantèlement d'un premier groupe, les vagues d'arrestations et les révélations se

sont succédé à un rythme effréné. Début mars, la presse publiait des extraits de l'agenda d'un rédacteur en chef du quotidien *Cumhuriyet*, lui aussi sur la dernière liste d'accusés. Ces notes confirmeraient les projets de coups d'Etat en 2004 et les profondes divisions à l'époque au sein de l'institution militaire.

## Une cellule secrète

L'enquête Ergenekon est décriée pour ses lourdeurs, ses imprécisions et pour sa partialité, selon des opposants. Mais elle aborde des pages sombres de l'histoire récente de la Turquie : parmi les militaires qui seront jugés, figurent, par exemple, plusieurs anciens responsables du Jitem, une cellule secrète de la gendarmerie chargée de la lutte antiterroriste dans le Sud-Est de la Turquie et

soupçonnée des meurtres de plusieurs milliers de Kurdes depuis 1988. L'ex-général Veli Küçük, fondateur du Jitem, avait menacé de mort le journaliste turco-arménien Hrant Dink (assassiné à Istanbul en 2007).

Les commentateurs estiment que ce coup de balai marque un affaiblissement de l'armée, contrainte de se soumettre à la procédure judiciaire. Ses divisions s'étaient désormais au grand jour. Deux anciens chefs d'état-major ont déclaré qu'ils accepteraient de témoigner au procès Ergenekon si on le leur demandait. ■

Guillaume Perrier



31 MARS 2009

Turquie ♦ Premier recul électoral du parti au pouvoir, lors des municipales.

## La résistible ascension des islamistes de l'AKP

C'est un échec, même si l'AKP, le parti islamo-conservateur au pouvoir depuis 2002, reste de loin la première force politique turque à l'issue des élections municipales de dimanche. « Je ne suis pas satisfait car le résultat aurait dû être meilleur, mais le peuple a parlé, et il faudra en tirer les leçons », a reconnu le Premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, manifestement déçu.

**Electroménagers.** Malgré une intense campagne et des distributions massives d'aides ou de « cadeaux » électroménagers aux plus pauvres, l'AKP n'a pas réussi à conquérir Diyarbakir, la capitale du Sud-Est à majorité kurde, ni Izmir, place forte du CHP (Parti républicain du peuple), la principale force de l'opposition laïque. Cette dernière engrange de bons résultats à Istanbul et Ankara, bien que les deux plus grandes villes du pays restent aux mains de l'AKP.

Sur fond de crise économique, ce scrutin était devenu un réfé-

rendum sur l'AKP un an et demi après son triomphe aux législatives de juillet 2007, où il avait remporté 47% des voix. Peu après, la justice ouvrait une procédure d'interdiction contre ce parti pour activités antilaïques, qui avait finalement échoué en juillet.

Erdogan voulait un signal clair des électeurs. Avec à peine 39% des suffrages, selon des résultats non encore définitifs, ce parti connaît son premier recul électoral depuis son arrivée au pouvoir. A la veille du vote, le Premier ministre clamait qu'un résultat inférieur à celui des législatives serait « un échec ».

« L'usure du pouvoir subie par l'AKP ne s'était pas traduite dans les urnes ces deux dernières années à cause de la tension avec le camp laïc et l'armée, qui a galvanisé leur électoral, mais maintenant elle apparaît dans toute son évidence », analyse l'économiste

et politologue Ahmet Insel. La montée du chômage, qui dépasse désormais 13,9%, et la panne de la croissance pénalisent le parti au pouvoir, déjà

« C'est la fin d'une époque, et il ne sera pas simple pour Erdogan d'enrayer le déclin électoral. »

Rusen Çakir, spécialiste de l'islam politique turc

éclaboussé par plusieurs affaires de corruption.

« Déclin ». « C'est la fin d'une époque, et il ne sera pas simple pour Erdogan d'enrayer le déclin électoral », souligne pour sa part Rusen Çakir, spécialiste de l'islam politique turc. Inquiet, voire paniqué, par ce premier recul de sa jeune histoire, l'AKP risque bien une nouvelle fois de repousser à des temps meilleurs les nouvelles réformes, dont celle de la Constitution, souhaitées par Bruxelles dans le cadre des négociations d'adhésion.

♦ MARC SEMO



## BAGDAD ET ERBIL ONT DÉCIDÉ DE NORMALISER LEURS RELATIONS

**ERBIL (Irak), 25 mars 2009 (AFP) -**

LE GOUVERNEMENT irakien et les autorités locales kurdes ont décidé de normaliser leurs relations après des mois de tensions, a affirmé le Premier ministre du Kurdistan Nechirvan Barzani.

"Nous avons décidé de normaliser nos relations et nous attendons la venue prochaine d'une délégation de Bagdad pour régler nos différends", a déclaré le responsable kurde à son retour mardi soir à Erbil et dont les propos sont rapportés par la presse locale.

M. Barzani a indiqué que cette décision avait été prise lors de sa rencontre mardi avec le Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki à l'occasion de la visite du président turc Abdullah Gül.

Les tensions entre Bagdad et les Kurdes ont pris de l'ampleur ces derniers

temps avec le désir de M. Maliki d'aller vers un Etat plus centralisé.

Les Kurdes sont exaspérés par la décision de M. Maliki de constituer des "Comités de soutien" tribaux qui visent, selon eux, à les empêcher d'agrandir leur région autonome.

La question de la répartition du pétrole exacerbe ces tensions. En août 2007, le parlement de la région autonome du Kurdistan avait voté une loi sur le pétrole puis signé 18 accords de prospection.

Mais le ministre irakien du Pétrole, Hussein Chahristani, a rétorqué que ces accords n'étaient pas valides.

En outre, Bagdad et Erbil sont en désaccord sur le règlement de la question des territoires disputés, dont Kirkouk, à la suite de la politique d'arabisation menée sous Saddam Hussein.

Concentré des défis et problèmes irakiens, Kirkouk, à 255 km au nord de Bagdad, est une province riche en pétrole où vivent Turcomans, Kurdes, chrétiens et Arabes.



## INAUGURATION D'UNE NOUVELLE PRISON DE SÉCURITÉ DANS LE NORD DE L'IRAK

**BAGDAD, 29 mars 2009 (AFP) -**

L'ARMÉE américaine et des responsables irakiens ont inauguré dimanche, dans le nord de l'Irak, une prison pouvant accueillir jusqu'à 3.000 détenus.

Le Corps des ingénieurs militaires américains a construit en deux ans et pour un montant de 27 millions de dollars ce centre de détention situé à Chamchamal, au Kurdistan irakien, a indiqué l'armée américaine dans un communiqué.

Cette prison fédérale, située à 70 km au sud de Souleimaniyeh, existait déjà à l'époque de Saddam Hussein.

"Les plans ont été redessinés et la prison construite selon les standards internationaux et les normes visant à traiter humainement les prisonniers", souligne l'armée américaine.

Ce centre emploiera 1.200 personnes, dont un grand nombre de gardiens. La majorité sera recrutée localement.

La région compte une autre prison fédérale, Fort Suze, à 20 km au nord-ouest de Souleimaniyeh, qui accueille 1.500 détenus, dont 260 étrangers.

La majorité des prisonniers sont accusés "de crimes terroristes et d'entrée illégale en Irak".



## IRAK: TALABANI INCAPABLE DE JOUER UN RÔLE POSITIF DANS L'AFFAIRE KURDE

**MONTS QANDIL (Irak), 29 mars 2009 (AFP)**

LES REBELLES kurdes du PKK ont vivement critiqué dimanche le président irakien Jalal Talabani qui leur avait demandé lundi lors de la visite du président turc Abdullah Gül de déposer leurs armes ou de quitter l'Irak.

"Talabani fait plaisir aux généraux turcs et nous avons perdu l'espoir de le voir jouer un rôle positif dans la solution du problème kurde", a déclaré à des journalistes, dont celui de l'AFP, un des hauts responsables du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), Mourad Korailane.

"Personne ne peut nous expulser des montagnes où nous nous trouvons et les

dernières batailles le prouvent. Nous suggérons un rapprochement et une entente interkurde au lieu de céder aux pressions des pays voisins", a-t-il souligné faisant allusion à la Turquie.

Plusieurs centaines de militants du PKK sont installés dans les montagnes du Kurdistan irakien, d'où ils font des incursions en territoire turc. L'aviation turque mène régulièrement des raids contre ces bases.

"Ce qui est pour le moins étrange, c'est qu'Ankara arme 90.000 mercenaires kurdes (qui combattent contre le PKK, ndr) et dans le même temps il veut nous désarmer", a-t-il dit.

"Nous n'accepterons jamais un dialogue qui pose comme préalable notre désarmement", a-t-il assuré.

Le président Talabani, un vétéran de la lutte kurde, avait lancé lundi un ultimatum aux combattants du PKK, leur ordonnant de déposer les armes ou de quitter l'Irak.



## SYRIE: PEINES DE PRISON POUR QUATRE KURDES MEMBRES D'UN PARTI INTERDIT

**DAMAS, 30 mars 2009 (AFP)**

LA HAUTE cour de sûreté de l'Etat, un tribunal d'exception en Syrie, a condamné quatre Kurdes membres d'un parti interdit à des peines de prison, a annoncé lundi la Ligue syrienne de défense des droits de l'homme (LSDDH).

Ils ont été condamnés pour "appartenance à un groupe politique interdit qui vise à amputer une partie du territoire syrien pour l'annexer à un Etat étranger".

Jihad Saleh Abdo (42 ans) et Abdel Qader Ben Sido Ahmad (35 ans) ont été condamnés dimanche à cinq ans de prison. Il sont également accusés d'avoir "affaibli le sentiment national et incité à des dissensions raciales".

Saleh ben Mohammad Abdo (32 ans) et Hussein ben Hamid Mohammad (29

ans) se sont vus infliger eux quatre ans d'emprisonnement, a indiqué l'organisation dans un communiqué.

Membres du parti Azadi kurde (interdit), les quatre hommes avaient été arrêtés en septembre 2007 à Ifrine dans le gouvernorat d'Alep (nord) et incarcérés dans la prison de Saydnaya près de Damas.

La Haute Cour de sûreté de l'Etat dont les jugements sont sans appel a été créée en 1968. Elle a repris récemment ses travaux après une suspension de sept mois due probablement aux troubles intervenus dans la prison de Saydnaya dont la plupart des détenus sont jugés par ce tribunal d'exception, a déclaré le président de la LSDDH, Abdel Karim Rihaoui à l'AFP.

"La Haute cour de sûreté de l'Etat qui ne permet pas aux détenus de faire appel, représente une violation du droit à un procès juste. Nous appelons le gouvernement syrien à sa suppression, à l'annulation de tous ses jugements et à prendre des mesures rapides pour faire respecter tous les droits", a indiqué cette organisation des droits de l'Homme.

## Abdullah Gül : "Le PKK, le Hamas n'ont absolument rien à voir"



Président de la République de Turquie, Abdullah Gül est l'une des figures les plus importantes de la nouvelle vague d'hommes politiques turques de l'AKP. Son rôle de chef de l'Etat ne l'empêche pas de s'occuper de politique internationale, lui l'ex-ministre des Affaires étrangères. La politique internationale reste donc importante à ses yeux, surtout quand il s'agit de défendre les intérêts de son pays en Europe et au Proche-Orient.

**Sergio Cantone, euronews :**

"Mr Abdullah Gül, président de la République de Turquie, bienvenue sur euronews. Merci de nous avoir accordé cet interview. Le rôle croissant de la Turquie au sein de l'OTAN pourrait amener la Turquie à jouer un rôle plus important, même quand il s'agira des décisions qui devront être adoptées au sein de l'Alliance atlantique. Qu'en pensez-vous?"

**Abdullah Gül :**

"Je voudrais commencer par dire que l'OTAN est une organisation de sécurité importante et la Turquie en est membre depuis le début, à savoir depuis les années 1950 [ndlr: 1952]. Mais dans le contexte d'un monde qui change, les questions de sécurité ont évolué vers de nouveaux concepts. Alors qu'auparavant la sécurité concernait seulement les Etats, aujourd'hui elle se rapporte également à de nombreuses organisations illégales. Le terrorisme est devenu une question centrale dans le monde. Dans ces conditions, évidemment, l'OTAN a reçu de nouvelles missions et l'OTAN est aujourd'hui devenu une institution importante dans la lutte contre le terrorisme".

**Sergio Cantone, euronews :**

"Il y a du nouveau en ce qui concerne la question kurde, surtout lorsqu'il s'agit de l'Irak du Nord. Qu'est-ce que la Turquie est prête à concéder?"

**Abdullah Gül :**

"Pour pouvoir éradiquer les organisations terroristes, il convient d'appliquer des programmes et des plans complexes et multiples et c'est ce que fait la Turquie. Parfois c'est fait publiquement, clairement, et parfois pas. Mais pour ceux qui refusent d'abandonner les armes et veulent se battre jusqu'au bout, on doit les combattre militairement jusqu'au bout. Il faut que je le dise. Mais il y a aussi de nombreuses personnes qui se sont trompées et se retrouvent finalement mêlées, sans le savoir, à des affaires terroristes. Ces personnes-là il faut sans le moindre doute les récupérer. Jusqu'à présent, le gouvernement régional kurde dans le Nord de l'Irak refusait malheureusement de faire le nécessaire, mais je suis content aujourd'hui de vous dire que suite à nos rencontres communes durant ces derniers mois, ils ont aussi compris que l'organisation terroriste leur nuit à eux aussi".

**Sergio Cantone, euronews :**

"Vous êtes très proches d'un pays, disons d'un point de vue des relations internationales, des relations entre les Etats, qui s'appelle Israël. Celui-ci considère le Hamas comme une organisation terroriste. Est-ce que vous le considérez comme une organisation terroriste au même titre, par exemple, que le PKK ? Parce que vos relations avec le Hamas sont un peu différentes..."

**Abdullah Gül :**

"Le PKK, le Hamas et la question palestinienne n'ont absolument rien à voir. Parce que les Palestiniens, ou le Hamas... il existe bien sûr beaucoup d'organisations là-bas. Certaines commettent des attentats-suicides, des actes terroristes parmi les Palestiniens, nous ne les soutenons jamais, je tiens à le dire. Mais, l'un milite pour sauver ses propres terres et son propre pays au sein des terres palestiniennes et veut créer son propre pays, l'autre pratique le terro-

risme depuis l'extérieur contre la Turquie. Il n'y a pas de discrimination entre les Turcs et les Kurdes en Turquie. En Turquie, l'identité ethnique, de qui que ce soit, n'a pas d'importance pour nous".

**Sergio Cantone, euronews :**

"Monsieur le président, d'accord, mais la question n'était pas un jugement implicite de la valeur morale du PKK ou du Hamas, la question était simplement : est-ce que la Turquie, qui a un mauvais rapport avec le PKK, le considère comme un groupe terroriste et Israël, qui de son côté, a le même rapport avec Hamas, il le considère un groupe terroriste ? Je ne voudrais pas les mettre sur le même plan, mais quand même, c'est un peu contradictoire, c'est à dire que ce sont deux mouvements qui luttent pour une terre".

**Abdullah Gül :**

"La Palestine est un Etat sous occupation et elle milite pour se sauver de cette occupation. Même d'après les Nations unies, la Palestine est sous occupation. D'après les Nations unies, donc..."

**Sergio Cantone, euronews :**

"Non, non. Excusez-moi, parce que peut-être..."

**Abdullah Gül :**

"Un instant. Je dois expliquer car c'est un sujet important. C'est pourquoi lorsque le Hamas accomplit une activité terroriste, nous la condamnons. Mais n'oubliez pas ce qu'Israël a fait à Gaza, le fait qu'il ait tué 1.300 à 1.800 personnes, c'est inacceptable. Donc si vous faites un lien entre le PKK et le Hamas, vous commettez une grosse erreur".

**Sergio Cantone, euronews :**

"A propos des relations, en revanche, avec l'UE, où en sont les négociations?"

"Pour le moment le processus de négociation se poursuit mais de temps en temps certaines petites choses de politique intérieure nous causent quelques petits problèmes inutiles, je dois l'avouer".

**Sergio Cantone, euronews :**

"Quelles sont ces petites choses?"

**Abdullah Gül :**

"Oui, la question chypriote par exemple. Malheureusement, la question chypriote est un sujet important comme vous le savez. De temps en temps, pendant ces négociations, ce sujet provoque des problèmes politiques et parfois cela cause des situations contraires aux intérêts du peuple européen".

**Sergio Cantone, euronews :**

"Le pays membre dont vous parlez c'est Chypre, mais apparemment il n'est pas reconnu par la Turquie et les Chypriotes voudraient bien emmener leurs bateaux dans les ports turcs, mais ils n'y ont pas accès. Ca c'est un problème commercial pour un Etat membre de l'UE tel que Chypre, vous ne pensez pas?"

**Abdullah Gül :**

"Je dois dire une chose par rapport aux Chypriotes grecs : nous ne leur demandons pas de visa. Beaucoup de gens ne le savent pas. Mais personne ne peut nier ce problème. Il existe un problème à Chypre : il y a deux parties, un Chypre grec et un Chypre turc. Pourquoi les Nations unies ont-elles proposé un accord de paix ? Pourquoi l'Europe a-t-elle fait sienne cette proposition de paix des Nations unies ? Pourquoi ce plan de paix a-t-il été soumis à referendum en 2004 aux deux parties ? Lors de ce referendum, les Turcs ont accepté le plan de paix et les Chypriotes grecs l'ont refusé".

**Sergio Cantone, euronews :**

"Monsieur le président, vous ne pensez pas que de toute façon pour faciliter l'acceptation de la part des Chypriotes grecs du plan de paix Annan, du plan de paix des Nations unies, comme vous dites justement appuyé par l'UE, peut-être que la Turquie devrait donner des signes, comme retirer une bonne partie des soldats turcs présents à Chypre, il y en a selon une estimation 40.000, et en plus réduire le flux d'immigration de l'Anatolie vers Chypre?"

**Abdullah Gül :**

"Je vais tout de suite vous dire qu'il n'y a aucune émigration d'Anatolie vers Chypre. Si ce plan avait été accepté lors du referendum de 2004, si les Chypriotes grecs n'avaient pas rejeté le plan de paix, aujourd'hui les soldats turcs stationnés sur l'île auraient été retirés. Tout le monde le sait, y-compris l'Union européenne. Nous ne sommes pas opposés à une solution".

## US-allied Sunnis alarmed at Baghdad crackdown

AP Associated Press

March 30, 2009 / By ROBERT H. REID, AP

**BAGHDAD** -Leaders of U.S.-backed Sunni paramilitary organizations said Monday they feared that a crackdown against one of their groups in Baghdad may be part of a purge of their ranks by the Shiite-led government before American troops pull out of Iraq.

U.S.-backed Iraqi soldiers regained control of a central Baghdad slum Sunday and disarmed a government-allied paramilitary group that launched a two-day uprising to protest the arrest of their leader. At least four people were killed and 21 wounded in the two days of fighting.

The leader of Sunni paramilitaries in Diyala province, a lawless area at the northeastern gates of the capital, threatened Monday to stop security cooperation with U.S. and Iraqi forces if the jailed leader were not freed.

U.S. and Iraqi officials sought to downplay fears that the move in the Fadhil district of the capital was aimed at suppressing the Awakening Councils - Sunnis who turned against al-Qaida and now help Iraqi forces provide security in areas that were once in the grip of insurgents.

Promoting the councils, which the U.S. calls Sons of Iraq, are one of the main pillars of the American strategy for stabilizing Iraq.

U.S. commanders believe the Awakening Councils were the key to turning the tide against Sunni insurgents in 2007. There have been fears that some fighters may return to the insurgency if they feel threatened by the government.

That could undermine U.S. plans to remove all combat troops from Baghdad and other cities by the end of June and end the U.S. combat role in Iraq by September 2010.

A U.S. statement said the Fadhil leader, Adel al-Mashhadani, was arrested Saturday on a December 2008 warrant charging him with a number of offenses, including planting roadside bombs, extortion, robbery and links to al-Qaida.

An Iraqi spokesman also alleged he had formed a secret cell loyal to Saddam Hussein's disbanded political party.

Those allegations were received with skepticism by some Awakening Council leaders.

"I wonder why these accusations against Adel Al-Mashhadani were raised at this time when they depended on him before," said Sabbar al-Mashhadani, leader of a north Baghdad Awakening group and no relation to the commander in Fadhil.

"I think there are other motives by the same sides that put up obstacles" against the councils, he said - a veiled reference to Shiite religious parties that have never fully trusted the Sunni groups.

The leader of the Sunni councils in Diyala, Nazar al-Daghestani, demanded the government release al-Mashhadani and pull troops out of Fadhil or his followers would stop manning checkpoints and assisting U.S. and Iraqi forces with security patrols.



(AP Photo/Karim Kadim)

Iraqi soldiers detain a suspect in the Sunni dominated neighborhood of Fadhil in Baghdad, Iraq, Monday, March 30, 2009. Iraqi troops launched a house-to-house search in the area after a week-end uprising, according to residents who spoke on condition of anonymity because they feared for their safety.

Such a move would force the government to send more police and soldiers to Diyala, where Sunni and Shiite militants still operate.

The leader of the Awakening Councils in the Diyala provincial capital of Baqouba, Khaled Khodeir al-Luhaibi, said the crackdown in Fadhil was an "Iranian request."

"The government is loyal to Iran. When you end the Awakenings, then Iran can do as it pleases in Iraq," he said. "We are worried and we cannot hide it. When the Americans leave, we will be caught between the Iraqi government that is pursuing us and al-Qaida which wants to take revenge on us."

Shogaa al-Aazami, an Awakening Council commander in west Baghdad, said the crackdown in Fadhil followed the arrest two days before of a council leader in the city's Ghazaliyah district.

"I informed the American soldiers and they are following the matter," he said without elaboration.

The U.S. military had been paying the Awakening Councils until last October, when responsibility was transferred to the Iraqi government. Many council members complain of delays in pay, which U.S. and Iraqi officials blame on red tape.

Also Monday, two people were killed and seven injured when a bomb hidden in a bicycle exploded northeast of Baghdad in Baqouba, provincial police reported.

An Iraqi soldier was killed and two others were wounded when a roadside bomb exploded alongside their patrol in the western part of Mosul, police said. A member of Iraq's largest Sunni party was assassinated in Mosul, police and his Iraqi Islamic Party announced Monday.

The party is locked in power struggles with various groups in Mosul ahead of national elections at the end of the year.

AP Associated Press

## Kurdish rebel leader in Iraq vows not to disarm

By Yahya Barzanji, Associated Press Writer | March 28, 2009

**SULAIMANIYAH, Iraq** --The military chief of Kurdish rebels launching attacks into Turkey from hideouts in Iraq said his group will not lay down its arms until there is a political settlement between the Turkish government and the militants, according to an audio tape released Saturday.

Murat Karayilan's audio recording, sent to Iraqi Kurdish journalists, came less than a week after Iraqi President Jalal Talabani called on the Kurdish Workers Party, or PKK, stop fighting or leave Iraq.

"Our weapons are necessary because we are not dealing with a state that believes in democracy," Karayilan said in the tape. "We are dealing with a state ruled by military generals. To abandon our arms without a political solution to our issues means suicide."

Karayilan spoke in response to written questions submitted by the journalists, who are familiar with the Kurdish rebel leader's voice.

He urged the Turkish government to begin a dialogue with the PKK to

resolve Kurdish issues.

"If the Turkish government wants to solve our issue seriously, they should release 4,000 of our leaders who are in the Turkish custody," he said. "They should be freed as a goodwill gesture, then a cease-fire, sit down for negotiations to spell out our national rights within the Turkish state."

The Iraqi central government has frequently denounced the PKK as terrorists, but it is limited in its ability to act against the rebels, who are based in semiautonomous Kurdish territory in northern Iraq.

Karayilan is believed to have taken effective control of the PKK since the 1999 arrest of the movement's charismatic leader Abdullah Ocalan.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed since the PKK rebels took up arms in 1984 to demand self-rule in southeastern Turkey.

Turkey has carried out several cross border airstrikes against rebel targets and has been pressing Baghdad and the Kurdish regional government to step up efforts against the Kurdish rebels from their side.



## The US exit from Iraq: how to steer clear of danger

The strategy must focus less on elections and more on political bargains that promote a new Iraqi national compact.

By Joost Hiltermann

Istanbul, Turkey - President Obama's announcement that he intends to withdraw most US troops from Iraq by August 2010 is most welcome, heralding the end of the Bush administration's disastrous war. Relieved as we may be about the looming exit, however, we should be concerned about the design of the exit strategy. Just as the invasion was a momentous event for Iraq and the region — liberating to many but devastating to many others — so will be a US departure. Danger lurks in a pullout done in haste that prioritizes military over political considerations, fails to consult a broad range of Iraqis and Iraq's neighbors, and is heedless of Iraq's enduring fragility.

On this point, Obama has said all the right things. In his speech at Camp Lejeune, N.C., on Feb. 27 he spoke of a three-part strategy involving the responsible removal of combat brigades, sustained diplomacy to secure a more peaceful and prosperous Iraq, and comprehensive US engagement across the region. Specifically, he mentioned aiding the United Nations to support national elections, brokering agreements on basic issues dividing Iraqis, and building the capacity of Iraqi institutions.

In the same tenor, US military commanders, from Lt. Gen. Ray Odierno on down, have warned that if the withdrawal is not thought through and implemented carefully, the gains of the past two years may yet be undone.

Despite such oratory, there appears to be a disconcerting focus on Iraq's upcoming parliamentary elections as decisive proof of the country's successful recovery and the main precondition for a withdrawal. In my discussions with administration officials earlier this month, for example, it was clear that many saw the elections as a critical test of Iraq's ability to sustain

itself beyond a US departure.

This singular focus on the parliamentary elections is ill-conceived and dangerous. First, despite reports that elections will take place in December, they have not yet been scheduled, pending necessary legislation. If the past is any guide, negotiations over an elections law may be protracted given the stakes. Under the constitution, the polls should be held by the end of January 2010. But the provincial elections, which took place this past January, suffered a four-month delay due to political wrangling. Even if things go according to schedule, forming a new government will take time. In 2005 it took four months; six in 2006. There is no reason to believe it will be any swifter now. This will leave little wiggle room if most troops must leave by August 2010.

More important, the elections will probably prove very little. At most, they will illustrate that as long as Washington insists on them and provides a protective environment, they will take place; there is no guarantee that an Iraq free of US forces will resort to democratic exercises to decide who rules. And while elections should be encouraged as an important indicator of political progress, they are not what will make or break Iraq.

As violence has abated, politics remains highly dysfunctional. Fundamental conflicts over power (how to divide it), territory (how to allocate disputed areas, especially oil-rich Kirkuk) and resources (how to manage them and share oil income) simmer without prospect of early resolution and will determine what happens to Iraq when the US leaves. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki may have surprised friend and foe by profiling himself as a national statesman seeking to restore a national Iraqi, rather than an ethnic or sectarian, identity, but in so doing he is alienating

one of his main governing allies, the Kurds. Thus, as sectarianism recedes, it is increasingly replaced by a struggle between Kurdish and Arab nationalism, which could turn violent.

If the Obama administration wishes to leave Iraq and not be forced to either maintain a significant military presence or, worse, return if the country disintegrates, it will need to craft an exit strategy that hinges not on parliamentary elections but on helping Iraqis fashion a series of political bargains that will provide all key actors with a stake in the new order. These deals concern a federal hydrocarbons law, a settlement over Kirkuk, and agreement over the division of powers that jointly would pave the way for consensus on amending the constitution.

To accomplish this, the US should support UN efforts to bring together a broad range of Iraqis and help them forge what would amount to a new national compact. This could be done via a big-tent exercise, such as the one being organized on Afghanistan, and would require close coordination with Iraq's neighbors, whose abiding interests in the country's future are matched by a troubling ability to throw a spanner in the wheels.

Whatever the terms of the needed deals, foregoing them is not an option. Absent the glue that US troops have provided, Iraq's political actors are likely to fight, emboldened by a sense they can prevail, if necessary with outside help. Obama should make sure that the peace he leaves behind is sustainable, lest Bush's war of choice turn into his war of necessity.

*Joost Hiltermann is the International Crisis Group's deputy program director for the Middle East and North Africa.*

## Turkey's rulers prevail, but cracks show

ISTANBUL

BY SEBNEM ARSU

Turkey's governing Justice and Development Party confirmed its broad popularity in local elections but lost its untarnished image after losing several cities to opposition parties, according to unofficial preliminary results.

By late Monday, the NTV news channel was reporting that the Islamic inspired government of Tayyip Erdogan held its majority with 38.87 percent of the national vote.

The main opposition, the Republican the Republican People's Party, took 23.12 percent, and the nationalist People's Action Party got 16.10 percent.

In a boisterous general election Sunday, marked by rallies, banners and sound trucks, more than 48 million people in Turkey cast votes to elect their mayors and municipal assemblies in 81 provinces.

Eight people died and more than 100 were wounded in skirmishes at election stations in remote areas mainly in east-

ern Turkey, making the election this year the most deadly in recent Turkish history, NTV reported.

Although local administrators have no say in central government activities and are obliged to act free of a political agenda in delivering city services, party chairmen became just as involved in campaigning as local candidates in the race, which were seen as a proxy for general elections.

With nationwide popularity at stake, the competition produced a wide variety of campaign programs in recent weeks.

Free refrigerators, washing machines and other household goods were distributed by the AKP appointed governor's offices across the country as part of a regular aid program.

But given the timing, the handouts were labeled as political bribery by the opposition and canceled by the Senior Electoral Board.

In Tunceli alone, a predominantly Kurdish town in eastern Turkey where the AKP could not elect a single deputy in the 2007 parliamentary elections, the governor's office reportedly spent at

least \$3 million campaigning — and again failed to seat a candidate.

The pro-Kurdish Democratic People's Party held the mayoral seat in Diyarbakir, the largest Kurdish city in the southeast, and won back Van and Siirt, cities in Turkish east, which Mr. Erdogan called a bitter surprise.

"We are going to analyze what we missed, or did wrong," Mr. Erdogan said in a televised press conference early Monday.

Local elections in Turkey's underdeveloped southeast where Kurds have been oppressed militarily, politically and culturally for many years, is largely seen as a litmus test for the government's success in furthering democratization and economic growth.

The AKP government, in efforts to win regional support, started a Kurdish public television station early this year and challenged the Turkish Army, which has been locked in conflict with Kurdish separatists for more than 30 years, by allowing a court case to question claims of extrajudicial killings of large numbers of Kurds in 1990s.



Guardian

31 March 2009

## The US is failing Iraq's Kurds

They have been the US's staunchest ally, but as Iraq's situation improves its Kurdish minority is becoming dispensable



Ranj Alaaldin

**TENSIONS** between Baghdad and Kurdistan are on the rise. An attack on a Kurdish funeral that killed 30 in the disputed territory of Khanaqin provided a stark reminder to President Obama that all will not be well until the US plays peacemaker between age-old enemies, Arab Baghdad and the Kurdish north.

When Kurdistan's regional president Masoud Barzani visited the UK, his message was simple: democracy, the rule of law and respect for Iraq's constitutional integrity are the order of the day.

Such has been the brutality of Middle East geopolitics for them, that one would expect Iraq's Kurds to be the last to place their trust in law and democracy. Enemies, external and internal, have historically sought their obliteration; they have been victims of genocide and mass expulsion, and have been sacrificed to convenience by western and regional powers, with disastrous consequences.

With the US withdrawal now imminent, a chain of events suggests the Kurds will end up losers once again. They face a post-election resurgent Prime Minister Maliki who seeks greater power for Baghdad and less for Kurdistan, while tensions are increasing over Kirkuk and the distribution of oil. The US still refuses to meddle in Iraq's internal affairs beyond security and stabilisation – despite Maliki's continued use of Iraqi forces to undermine Kurdish authority with, perhaps, the long-term goal of coercing the Kurds into submission over outstanding issues.

The Kurds have supported Iraq since 2003 and carried out everything asked of them by the UN, US and allies. In the north, the Kurds have eliminated terrorist bases; in the south, they have marched the dangerous streets of Arab Iraq to assist with the battle against al-Qaida and the insurgency. Kurdistan has been indispensable in Iraq's fight for stability and the west's wider battle against terrorism.

It is, however, only the crying baby that gets the milk – the Kurds may turn out to be victims of their own goodwill. At the pre-war negotiating table, the political stage – helped by Turkey's refusal to grant access to US forces – was set for them to go all out with their demands: Kirkuk and even independence were there for the taking.

Kurdish compromise has been met with hostility and dithering. Conversely, the Sunnis, who did "cry" and then launch deadly attacks, have been accommodated and rewarded. US appeasement of the Sunnis is based on ensuring they remain a force for stability. For Maliki, the Sunnis, along with the Sadrists, give him a "coalition of the unlikely" that is united in cause – they all seek a recentralised Iraq – but different in ideology.

Kurdistan's pro-federalism ally ISCI's losses in the provincial elections were a wake-up call for the party. The national elections in December might force them to forge necessary alliances elsewhere, to the detriment of the Kurds.

Kurdistan is thus quickly losing her friends. In the US, it is open season for Kurd-bashing. Newsweek and the Washington Post have launched attacks on the lack of transparency and corruption within Kurdistan. The articles repeat previously published commentary and are devoid of analysis. As Iraq's situation improves, the Kurds are gradually being rendered dispensable.

Unlike many parts of the Middle East, in Kurdistan government is held accountable and issues such as transparency and corruption are highlighted in everyday life and within parliamentary debates. In Kurdistan, the rule of law provides for the operation of political parties and women's rights continue to grow stronger. It is Kurdistan that Iraq's Christians flock to for shelter from the attacks they face elsewhere.

Kurdistan is secular, pluralistic, and has a high regional standard for democracy; its democratic shortcomings do not in any case put into disrepute its international standing. Abramoff, Conway, and lobbying Lords show that the US and UK are still blighted by the same problems; centuries of democratic development, rather than decades as in Kurdistan's case, have failed to create an unblemished democratic record.

The question is where next for Kurdistan? The future of Kurdistan in Iraq is intertwined with the future of Iraq's constitution, approved by four out of five Iraqis and validated by the UN. It is support for Iraqi federalism and the framework it provides for Iraq's myriad of ethnic and religious groups to co-exist that preserves Iraq's territorial integrity.

The US, under Obama, has three main options as it prepares to withdraw: first, it can ensure conformity to and implementation of the Iraqi constitution. This requires pushing for implementation of Article 140 to resolve the status of Kirkuk. It requires encouraging Maliki to disband ambitions to recentralise Iraq, since Kurdistan will veto any weakening of its powers. Alternatively, the US can prolong its presence in the country for at least another five years to mediate these issues. Or, finally, the US can take up the invitation to build military bases in Kurdistan.

The US can withdraw from Iraq responsibly and without leaving their most supportive ally, the Kurds, high and dry, as explained by Professor Brendan O'Leary's blueprint for a withdrawal. The Kurds have fought battle after battle, dictatorship after dictatorship, and have come out bruised but still fighting. Kurdistan overcame genocide and emerged as a quasi-state surrounded by brutal authoritarianism but that still nurtured respectable civil and social institutions. Kurdistan is now an internationally recognised federal state. Failing the Kurds equates with failing Iraq and the often dismissed notion of a united Iraq comprised of a united peoples. Betraying the Kurds once again will be abhorrent. But based on the trajectory of the Kurdish struggle in Iraq, it may constitute the opportunity that gives birth to an internationally recognised independent Kurdistan.

Le Monde  
31 mars 2009

# Victoire en demi-teinte pour le parti au pouvoir aux municipales en Turquie

## Reportage

Istanbul  
Correspondance

Même s'il maintient ses principales positions dans le pays, le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), le parti islamo-conservateur au pouvoir en Turquie, est en recul : il n'a obtenu que 39 % des suffrages aux élections municipales du 29 mars, contre 41,6 % en 2004 et 46,6 % aux législatives de 2007. « C'est insuffisant », a reconnu, dès l'annonce des résultats, le premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Nous allons en tirer les leçons. »

M. Erdogan souhaitait voir son parti sortir renforcé du scrutin afin de mieux mener à bien les réformes nécessaires pour se rapprocher de l'Union européenne. Mais, au terme d'une campagne émaillée de violences qui ont fait cinq morts et une centaine de blessés, il s'est vu adresser une « mise en garde », selon l'expression d'un chroniqueur du journal libéral *Milliyet*, qui parle même de « carton jaune » brandi par l'électorat. Surtout, dans le sud-est du pays, où le parti au pouvoir a subi un cinglant désaveu de sa politique kurde : écrasé à Diyarbakir par ses rivaux kurdes du DTP, il perd la ville de Van.

Le Parti républicain du peuple (CHP, kémaliste), crédité de 23,3 % au niveau national, reste, lui, majoritaire dans les régions de l'Ouest, tandis que les ultranationalistes du MHP obtiennent 16,1 %.

A Istanbul et Ankara, deux mairies âprement disputées par la gauche, les sortants de l'AKP, Kadir Topbas et Meli Gökçek, ont été reconduits, mais, là aussi, l'avertissement a été de taille. Kemal Kiliçdaroglu a patienté jusqu'à 2 heures du matin pour constater sa défaite, après avoir entrevu la victoire. Le candidat du Parti républicain du peuple (CHP) à la mairie d'Istanbul s'est finalement incliné avec 36,8 %, contre 44,3 % au maire sortant, Kadir Topbas, du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP).

Sa défaite sonne pourtant comme une victoire. Discret député de 60 ans cultivant son allure de modeste bureaucrate, inconnu du grand public il y a encore un an, cet

Le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) a failli perdre la mairie d'Istanbul



Le 22 mars, à Istanbul, des supporters manifestaient leur soutien à M. Kiliçdaroglu (CHP), candidat opposé au maire, Kadir Topbas (AKP), finalement réélu. MURAD SEZER/AP

ancien inspecteur financier est parvenu à faire vaciller la machine électorale de l'AKP, en menant campagne contre la corruption. « C'est par Istanbul que commencera le déclin de l'AKP, car c'est Istanbul qui tient tout le système », affirmait-il dimanche.

Le « chevalier blanc », investi par la gauche kémaliste pour conquérir Istanbul, est intarissable sur la gestion opaque de la municipalité par l'AKP. « La mairie est à la tête de vingt-trois compagnies semi-publiques. Mais aucun bilan financier détaillé n'est publié », dit-il.

## Dans le Sud-Est, l'AKP a subi un cinglant désaveu de sa politique kurde

Ces sociétés qui opèrent dans la construction, les parcs de stationnement, les transports, dissimulent, selon lui, des pratiques frauduleuses : 3,5 millions d'euros détournés et des emplois fictifs à Isfah, la société de construction de routes. Un exemple ? « Un homme d'affaires proche de l'AKP, raconte-t-il, a obtenu le marché de l'organisation de la Conférence mondiale des mai-

res à Istanbul. Il a reçu 2 millions d'euros, mais un dixième de la somme a été dépensé. »

A Istanbul, ville de 12 millions d'habitants, dont Recep Tayyip Erdogan s'est servi comme tremplin national entre 1994 et 1999 avant de la confier à un proche, Kadir Topbas, les dossiers ne manquent pas. « Ils se sont noyés dans la corruption », dit encore Kiliçdaroglu. Les hommes du parti du premier ministre, originaire du quartier populaire de Kasimpacha, verrouillent les instances locales et se partagent le gâteau. « Les maires des grandes villes comme Istanbul et Ankara se comportent aujourd'hui comme des oligarques », soulignait dimanche le sociologue Tanil Bora pour expliquer les résultats mitigés de l'AKP, confronté à l'usure du pouvoir après six années à la tête du pays.

Armé de ses dossiers, Kemal Kiliçdaroglu a déjà accroché plusieurs adversaires à son tableau de chasse. En 2008, le député AKP Saban Disli était poussé à la démission après la révélation d'une revente immobilière frauduleuse. Même sanction pour le ministre Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat. Et le maire d'Ankara, Meli Gökçek, acculé après un débat télévisé, a dû rembourser les

habitants de la capitale pour avoir surfacturé l'installation de compteurs de gaz.

L'argument anticorruption a failli faire mouche. « J'ai voté pour lui alors que c'est la première fois que je vote pour le CHP, mais Topbas est un voleur qui fait des affaires avec ses amis », accusait Damla, une électrice à la sortie du bureau de vote.

Les écarts du mouvement islamo-conservateur l'éloignent lentement de ses racines populaires, qui lui assuraient des victoires confortables aux dernières élections. En temps de crise, les banlieues grondent. Avec ses petites lunettes rondes et ses costumes stricts, Kiliçdaroglu s'est engouffré dans la brèche. Il a sillonné l'agglomération, à la rencontre du petit peuple. « Le soutien des banlieues à l'AKP s'effrite », assure-t-il.

Renouant avec un discours de gauche abandonné par son parti, il s'est tourné vers les femmes, les jeunes, les minorités et les ouvriers, et a promis de s'attaquer à « la pauvreté urbaine ». « Kiliçdaroglu remplit un vide politique en Turquie, estime Tanju Tosun, de l'université Egée. Il pourrait résoudre le problème de représentation du CHP. » ■

Guillaume Perrier