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NINIVE : DES MINORITES RELIGIEUSES RECLAMENT LEUR RATTACHEMENT AU KURDISTAN D'IRAK

Le 4 novembre, les députés irakiens ont finalement décidé de réserver six sièges aux groupes minoritaires dans les Conseils provinciaux, revenant sur l'abrogation de l'article 50 qui garantissait cette représentation. Sur les 150 députés présents, 106 ont donc approuvé les nouvelles dispositions donnant trois sièges aux chrétiens et trois autres à répartir entre différents groupes religieux. Les chrétiens obtiennent ainsi un siège à Bagdad, un à Ninive et un autre

à Basra, sur un total de 440 sièges pour tous les conseils provinciaux du pays. Un siège revient aux Yézidis pour Ninive, un autre aux Sabéens à Bagdad.

Les modifications de la loi électorale n'ont cependant pas apaisé le mécontentement des chrétiens, qui rappellent que l'envoyé spécial de l'ONU en Irak recommandait d'accorder douze sièges pour les minorités du pays.

Dès le lendemain de l'adoption

de la loi, le 5 novembre, Shlemon Warduni, le vicaire du patriarche chaldéen de Bagdad, jugeait que cette disposition ne prenait pas réellement en compte « les droits des chrétiens d'Irak » et n'allait pas contre la « marginalisation de la communauté chrétienne » : « Le gouvernement avait promis qu'il réintroduirait l'article 50 dans la loi électorale, lequel donnait quinze sièges aux minorités, dont treize pour les chrétiens. » Pour monseigneur Warduni, cette loi n'aura pour effet que de renouveler, sans changement, la composition actuelle des Conseils provinciaux, sans que les minorités ne se voient davan-

tage protégées ni même représentées. Il dénonce aussi l'inertie ou l'indifférence des Nations Unies et de la communauté internationale.

Cela n'a pas empêché la loi d'être ratifiée par le Conseil de présidence, composé du président de l'Irak, le Kurde Jalal Talabani et de ses deux adjoints arabes, Tariq al Hachemi, un sunnite, et Adel Abdul Madhi, un chiïte. Ce même conseil avait une première fois refusé de signer le projet voté par l'assemblée nationale irakienne en juillet dernier, jugeant certaines de ses dispositions « anti-constitutionnelles ».

Les tensions interethniques et religieuses, si elles sont subies et non souhaitées par la plupart des habitants de Mossoul, sont attisées par des groupes politiques ou religieux qui agissent à peu près librement, devant un gouvernement central indifférent comme accusent plusieurs groupes persécutés. Mais la tenue des futures élections prévues pour début 2009 peut être aussi à l'origine des regains de violences et d'intimidations contre les minorités. Le 2 novembre, une radio nouvellement lancée à Mossoul a été fermée par les autorités locales pour avoir incité à la « sédition » et avoir « attisé les tensions » entre les Kurdes et les Arabes de la ville, comme le rapporte Ismaïl Goran, un Kurde siégeant au Conseil provincial. Il est intéressant de relever que cette radio est liée au député arabe sunnite Osama al-Nudjaïfi, qui avait, dès septembre dernier, lancé de virulentes et peu vérifiables accusations contre les Kurdes, en les accusant d'être à l'origine des meurtres de chrétiens, ce que ces derniers ont toujours nié, ainsi que le Gouvernement kurde. Le député irakien n'a donc pas

manqué de dénoncer la fermeture de la station comme une « mesure pour imposer silence aux voix patriotiques et pour contenter les officiels kurdes qui veulent se débarrasser de tout rival dans les élections provinciales à venir. » Selon Al-Nudjaïfi, la radio devait en effet relayer la campagne électorale d'un groupe politique sunnite arabe, qui avait pour but de s'opposer aux Kurdes dans les circonscriptions de Mossoul.

Actuellement, les conseils provinciaux de Ninive, dont celui de Mossoul, comportent une majorité de Kurdes, en raison du boycott des arabes sunnites lors des élections de 2005. Ils sont politiquement alliés aux chrétiens et aux autres minorités de la région, ce qui rend donc très improbable, comme l'avait souligné le Premier ministre kurde Nêçirvan Barzani, les allégations d'une certaine presse arabe au sujet des menées anti-chrétiennes des Kurdes de Mossoul. Par contre, une épuration religieuse à Ninive peut affaiblir la coalition des partis kurdes et chrétiens au profit des groupes politiques arabes sunnites les plus radicaux œuvrant dans la région. Ainsi, les sunnites s'opposent vigoureusement à la demande des Kurdes qui réclament un quota de représentation dans les conseils pour les minorités de Ninive. Car l'alliance politique probable des chrétiens (et des autres groupes religieux) avec les Kurdes ne peut qu'inquiéter tous les partis politiques hostiles au fédéralisme. Il en va de même de l'actuel Premier ministre, Nouri Al-Maliki, qui tente depuis six mois de renforcer son pouvoir personnel au sein du pays et appelle ouvertement à un Etat fédéral fort, ce que les Kurdes traduisent par une volonté de recentralisation, vieux démon de la

politique irakienne depuis la fondation de l'Etat.

La crainte du gouvernement central d'une alliance entre les Kurdes et les minorités peut se trouver confirmée par les voix de plus en plus nombreuses, au sein de ces mêmes minorités, qui réclament leur rattachement à la Région du Kurdistan. Les Shabaks sont une secte religieuse dont les croyances ne sont pas très éloignées des Alévis, et dont la langue, proche du kurde, comporte de nombreux emprunts au turc, au persan et à l'arabe. Si, au cours de l'histoire, leurs rapports ne furent pas sans tensions avec les musulmans, qu'ils soient kurdes ou arabes, les récentes persécutions dont ils font l'objet, ainsi que les Yézidis et les chrétiens de Mossoul, les incitent à opter pour la « kurdicité ». Ils ont ainsi manifesté le 2 novembre dans les rues de Ninive, pour leur réintégration au sein du Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan : « Aujourd'hui, des centaines de Shabaks ont organisé une manifestation pacifique appelant à leur intégration dans la Région du Kurdistan, pour le motif qu'ils sont Kurdes et non Arabes » a déclaré, sur la radio nationale irakienne, le chef du district de Bashiqa à Ninive, Thanoun Younis.

Il en va de même des Kurdes yézidis, résolus à ne plus dépendre de Bagdad, même si au cours des siècles précédents, les rapports avec leurs compatriotes musulmans étaient plutôt distants. « Nous espérons que la terre sur laquelle nous vivons actuellement rejoindra la Région kurde », a déclaré leur leader et représentant, le prince Tahsin Beg à l'Associated Press. « Cela dépendra du référendum, mais nos terres doivent retourner dans leur patrie originelle. »

TURQUIE : DURCISSEMENT DE L'AKP SUR LA QUESTION KURDE

A lors que le gouvernement de l'AKP, et l'armée turque semblent s'être entendus pour entamer un processus de reconnaissance du Gouvernement kurde d'Erbil, les positions d'Ankara concernant la question kurde en Turquie semblent se durcir, tant dans l'attitude du Premier ministre que dans une série de faits et de décisions judiciaires qui ne vont pas dans le sens de l'apaisement.

La récente visite de Recep Tayyip Erdogan à Diyarbakir, contraste ainsi singulièrement avec la tournée qu'il avait effectuée au Kurdistan de Turquie en 2005 où dans cette même ville de Diyarbakir, il avait brisé un tabou en reconnaissant l'existence d'une « question kurde » en Turquie. Cette fois-ci, la teneur de ses propos était d'une stricte orthodoxie kémaliste, résumée ainsi par le chef de gouvernement : « Qu'avons-nous à dire ? Ce que nous avons à dire c'est : une nation, un drapeau, une patrie et un Etat. » Et d'ajouter que ceux qui ne souscrivaient pas à ce principe n'avaient qu'à quitter le pays, ce qui est la reprise, quasiment à l'identique, du slogan des Loups gris ultranationalistes : « Ya sev, ya terket ».

La réaction des habitants de Diyarbakir, même parmi les plus modérés, témoigne d'une désillusion croissante envers les véritables intentions de l'AKP, et du sentiment de n'avoir aucune issue possible à la guerre. Mehmet Kaya, le président de la Chambre de commerce et d'industrie de la ville, commente ainsi les propos de Recep Tayyip Erdogan : « Bien sûr, je n'ai aucune objection à ce qu'il y

ait un drapeau et un Etat. Mais je suis kurde – et qu'a-t-il voulu dire par « une nation » ?

Un chauffeur de taxi confie ainsi au journal Bianet : « D'un côté, il y a l'organisation [le PKK], de l'autre, le Premier ministre qui nous rejette. Qu'allons-nous devenir ? Nous avons l'habitude d'être rejetés, mais c'est notre patrie ici et nous resterons. »

Malgré l'impact causé par ces propos, et qui ont surpris même des membres de son propre parti, Erdoğan, les a répétés dans la ville d'Erzurum : « Nous avons toujours été contre tout nationalisme régional ou ethnique. Nous n'avons jamais usé de discrimination sur la base d'une dénomination ou d'une religion. Nous nous tenons à distance égale de toutes les religions. »

Le parti kurde du DTP, sur qui pèse la menace d'une interdiction, a qualifié ces propos de « racistes » et exige des excuses. Le Premier ministre a répliqué dans une conférence de presse en accusant le DTP d'être directement instigateur et responsable des émeutes kurdes qui ont secoué la Turquie au cours du mois d'octobre et au début de novembre, et du mauvais accueil qui lui a été fait durant sa visite dans les villes du Kurdistan de Turquie. Il a ainsi accusé le DTP de Van d'avoir menacé les commerçants afin qu'ils ferment boutique le jour où Erdogan s'y rendait, ainsi que la municipalité de Hakkari de n'avoir rien fait » pour améliorer les services de la ville depuis son dernier passage. Affirmant que les supporters du PKK s'en étaient pris à la presse lors des émeutes, le chef du gou-

vernement turc a attaqué également, et de façon paradoxale, cette même presse, en affirmant qu'elle donnait trop d'importance à ce mouvement dans sa couverture médiatique, alors que les journalistes n'auraient pas relayé suffisamment sa tournée dans les régions kurdes, ses discours et ses inaugurations d'écoles et d'hôpitaux. Ces derniers propos du Premier ministre à l'encontre des médias illustrent aussi les rapports de plus en plus aigris entre Recep Tayyip Erdogan et la presse turque dans son ensemble. Ainsi, il aurait très mal pris un éditorial de Feri Kuru, dans les pages du journal Yeni Şafak qui, faisant un parallèle avec les élections américaines, a écrit que le leader de l'AKP se changeait en un George Bush, alors qu'il avait été élu en tant que Barack Obama. » Cette critique visait directement le durcissement apparent du gouvernement sur la question kurde.

Mais d'autres journaux turcs ont fait remarquer que le revirement du gouvernement s'inscrit plus dans une fatalité propre à la vie politique en Turquie, dès qu'il s'agit de la question kurde. Hasan Cemal, de Milliyet, trace un parallèle avec la trajectoire de l'ancien président Süleyman Demirel et de l'ancien Premier ministre Tansu Çiller. Ainsi, en 1991, Demirel avait, lui aussi, admis l'existence d'une « réalité kurde » en Turquie, dès son accession à la présidence et avait promis une constitution démocratique ; promesses qu'il s'était empressé d'oublier après avoir reçu les « avertissements » du pouvoir militaire. De même Tansu Çiller avait commencé par promouvoir la démocratie et même envisagé, en 1993, une autonomie pour les régions kurdes similaire au modèle basque, avant de changer à son

tour de politique, là encore sous la pression de l'armée.

Le malaise semble avoir gagné le propre parti de Recep tayyip Erdogan. Ainsi, le vice-président de l'AKP, le Kurde Dengir Mir Mehemt Firat, a démissionné brutalement de ses fonctions, officiellement pour raisons de santé. Mais la personnalité de celui qui le remplace en tant qu'adjoint à la présidence du parti s'inscrit dans cette nouvelle ligne « dure ». Abdülkadir Aksu, ancien ministre de l'Intérieur dans le gouvernement précédent de l'AKP, est bien connu pour son attitude intransigeante sur la question kurde, bien qu'étant lui-même d'origine kurde et qualifié de ce fait de « janissaire ».

Cette nouvelle prise de fonctions et le départ de Firat sont donc perçus comme le signe d'un changement radical de la politique kurde de l'AKP. Ce qui est corroboré par des sources proches de Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat, faisant état de la « déception » que lui auraient causé les discours du Premier ministre au Kurdistan. Il exerçait jusqu'ici une grande influence sur les députés kurdes de l'AKP et nul ne sait si Abdülkadir Aksu pourra exercer la même influence, même si, étant originaire de Diyarbakir, la direction de l'AKP peut envisager de le faire se présenter aux prochaines élections municipales, afin d'en déloger le populaire Osman Paydemir, le maire actuel.

sécurité et cela empêcherait toute agression du Kurdistan à l'avenir », confirme Rebwar Mohammad, un étudiant de l'université de Salahaddin d'Erbil au journal Gulf News. Bashdar Amin, du ministère de l'Éducation du Kurdistan est encore plus explicite : « La présence de bases américaines permanentes dans la Région préviendra toute attaque future de la part d'un gouvernement central « imprudent ».

Tenant sans doute d'apaiser l'agitation de la classe politique irakienne après les déclarations des Kurdes, Jalal Talabani a, de façon plus conciliante, répondu que les troupes des USA s'installeraient dans la Région du Kurdistan seulement après approbation de Bagdad : « Il est impossible aux troupes américaines de rester au Kurdistan sans l'approbation du gouvernement central » a-t-il déclaré lors d'une intervention télévisée, sur la chaîne Al-Iraqiya. « Le Kurdistan est une partie de l'Irak, et toutes les lois constitutionnelles du pays s'y appliquent. »

L'administration Bush a, dans le même temps, reconnu avoir accepté quelques amendements réclamés en dernière minute par les Irakiens, mais ajouté qu'en ce qui la concernait, elle considérait la période de négociations comme « terminée » et que le texte qu'elle considérait comme final avait été remis au Premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki. Ce dernier a appelé alors les députés irakiens à approuver le texte, en le présentant à son tour comme la meilleure option possible pour « garantir la souveraineté de l'Irak et le départ de tous les soldats étrangers : « Cet accord nous donnera la possibilité de construire notre pays, de mener à bien des réformes

BAGDAD : LE SOFA FINALEMENT ADOPTÉ PAR LE PARLEMENT IRAKIEN

A lors que les difficiles pourparlers américano-irakiens se poursuivaient autour de l'adoption du SOFA, le président du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, qui venait tout juste de rencontrer l'équipe gouvernementale de la Maison Blanche à Washington, a déclaré le 1^{er} novembre qu'en cas d'échec de l'accord, la Région du Kurdistan était disposée à accueillir, de sa propre initiative, une base militaire américaine sur son sol.

« Si les Etats-Unis le demandent, je suis certain que le Parlement régional du Kurdistan et le peuple de la Région du Kurdistan... les accueilleraient volontiers » a déclaré le président kurde, lors de sa réception au Centre des Etudes internationales et stratégiques de Washington. Massoud Barzani a cependant espéré que l'Irak et les USA parviendraient à s'entendre sur l'accord du maintien temporaire des forces américaines après expiration du man-

dat onusien, soit le 31 décembre prochain. Mais faisant état de son scepticisme sur le vote futur du Parlement de Bagdad, il a tenu malgré tout à réaffirmer avec conviction son soutien au SOFA, qu'il estime comme étant le meilleur possible en l'état.

Le président du Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan, en faisant allusion à une décision unilatérale du Parlement d'Erbil d'accueillir des troupes américaines, sans passer par l'assemblée nationale irakienne, s'il ne pouvait être qu'averti des réactions hostiles prévisibles de la part du monde arabe, a pris en revanche peu de risque concernant sa propre opinion publique. Car les habitants de la Région kurde voient dans cette éventualité une garantie politique à long terme de la paix et de l'autonomie dont ils jouissent, ainsi que d'un moyen de dissuasion contre les velléités bellicistes des Etats voisins. « Avec des bases américaines dans la Région, je me sentirais plus en

internes, de constituer des forces de sécurité et une politique loin de tout défi sectaire. » a-t-il déclaré lors d'une conférence de presse dans sa capitale. Nouri Al-Maliki a aussi averti les élus irakiens qu'un rejet du SOFA pouvait entraîner une prolongation du mandat de l'ONU autorisant l'armée américaine à rester en Irak, mais dans les conditions d'occupation actuellement en vigueur, qu'il qualifie de « situation douloureuse ».

Les milices sadristes ont appelé, au contraire, à des manifestations de masse contre le pacte militaire, et ont défilé en nombre à Bagdad. Mais l'opposition farouche du leader chiite Moqtata As-Sadr ne pouvait infléchir le vote parlementaire de façon significative, puisqu'il ne dispose à l'assemblée que de 30 sièges.

Les débats précédant l'adoption au Parlement irakien ont été vifs et les séances ont connu plusieurs interruptions. Un des adversaires les plus virulents de l'accord était naturellement Moqtata as-Sadr, radicalement opposé, par principe, à tout « accord avec l'occupant ». Mais l'Alliance chiite pour un Irak uni, la plus grande coalition politique au Parlement, forte de 85 sièges sur 275 a voté pour, ainsi que l'Alliance kurde qui détient 58 sièges. La majorité simple requise pour l'adoption était de 138 voix. Le président

du groupe de l'Alliance chiite, Ali Al-Adib, s'est dit satisfait de ce que les négociateurs irakiens aient tenu compte des « craintes » des députés. Par contre, le président du Parlement, s'exprimant au nom de son groupe, le Front de la concorde sunnite, a fait part de ses réserves concernant le texte et a indiqué avoir fait parvenir au gouvernement des demandes de modifications, notamment sur la libération des prisonniers.

Mais les députés irakiens ne votant pas systématiquement en fonction des directives de leur parti, le résultat ne pouvait découler forcément des prises de position des chefs de groupe parlementaires. Par ailleurs, le Grand Ayatollah Ali Hussein Al-Sistani, l'autorité religieuse chiite la plus éminente en Irak, a condamné sévèrement ses députés coreligionnaires qui s'étaient absentés des débats et du vote pour se rendre au Pèlerinage à La Mecque. Un responsable de son bureau a ainsi fait part à l'AFP de la colère du grand Ayatollah envers les « parlementaires qui sont partis pour le Pèlerinage et ont ignoré l'appel du Guide à assumer leurs responsabilités historiques et nationales, en donnant franchement leur opinion sur l'accord. » Al-Sistani, qui ne s'exprime quasiment que par l'intermédiaire de ses conseillers, avait fait part de son opposition à tout accord qui nuirait à la souveraineté irakienne, mais avait jugé que la déci-

sion finale devait revenir au gouvernement en place.

Le 16 novembre, le Parlement irakien a donc approuvé l'accord, par 148 voix pour sur 198 députés présents, avec 35 voix contre et 86 absents. Les forces américaines (près de 150 000 soldats) commenceront un retrait des villes irakiennes en juin 2009 mais resteront sur place pour d'éventuelles opérations militaires. Leur départ définitif aura lieu à la fin de 2011. Le texte stipule notamment que « le territoire irakien, ainsi que son espace aérien et ses eaux, ne pourront être utilisés comme point de départ ou de passage pour des attaques contre d'autres pays ».

Un référendum sera tenu dans tout l'Irak, en juin 2009, pour approuver l'accord, à la demande des députés sunnites, qui ont obtenu cette concession en échange de leurs voix, ainsi qu'une amnistie pour les prisonniers dont on n'a pu prouver la participation réelle dans les violences liées à l'insurrection. Les sunnites avaient également demandé l'arrêt du processus de « débaathification » mais seule une révision et un adoucissement des dispositions légales empêchant les anciens membres du parti Baath d'occuper des postes publics sont envisagés. Ils ont aussi réclamé un rééquilibrage des pouvoirs en leur faveur au sein du gouvernement.

KIRKUK : POLEMIQUE CONSTITUTIONNELLE AUTOUR DES MILICES GOUVERNEMENTALES



près la crise de Khanaqin qui avait failli voir s'affronter les Peshmergas kurdes et l'armée irakienne venue reprendre possession de la région, de nouvelles tensions se font jour entre le gouvernement central de Bagdad et celui de

la Région du Kurdistan.

Il ne s'agit plus, cette fois, de la question des élections provinciales ni du référendum, mais de la mise en place de milices locales, dépendantes du gouvernement central, que les Kurdes voient surtout comme des sup-

plétifs recrutés parmi les tribus arabes à seule fin de contrôler Kirkouk et d'empêcher son retour éventuel dans la Région kurde.

Connues sous le nom de « Sahwa » (Réveil), l'implantation de ces groupes armés pro-gouvernementaux a été encouragée depuis deux ans par les Etats-Unis, qui les ont utilisées pour

neutraliser, dans la province sunnite d'Anbar, les combattants insurgés. Mais ces milices, appelées aussi « conseils de soutien » sont accueillies avec méfiance par les Kurdes et les chiïtes, qui y voient surtout le mauvais souvenir d'une force armée uniquement au service du pouvoir central. Aussi les deux principaux partis kurdes, le PDK, dirigé par le président du Kurdistan Massoud Barzani et l'UPK, dirigé par le président de l'Irak Jalal Talabani, ont déclaré, dans un communiqué commun, que la formation de tels groupes était anticonstitutionnelle car contrevenant à la loi sur le désarmement des milices armées en Irak : « Nous nous opposons fermement à la constitution de quelque groupe armé que ce soit, pour quelque raison que ce soit en Irak et au Kurdistan, et en particulier dans les régions disputées. »

Face à ce refus, le Premier ministre de l'Irak a d'abord exprimé sa « tristesse » en défendant l'instauration de ces « conseils » : « Il était nécessaire de créer ces groupes pour assurer la loi et l'ordre dans les provinces qui ont connu l'insécurité avant le retour des forces armées venues rétablir la stabilité. » Mais pour Massoud Barzani, ces groupes censés maintenir la sécurité, notamment en vue des futures élections provinciales, ne sont d'aucune utilité dans les régions du Kurdistan ou dans celles contrôlées par les Peshmegas. Leur présence dans les territoires devant être soumis à référendum en vue de leur rattachement au Kurdistan ne peut même qu'attiser les conflits : « Les Kurdes refusent la formation de ces « conseils » là où ils sont majoritaires. S'ils sont justifiés dans certaines régions, ils ne sont pas nécessaires ailleurs. Ils n'ont aucune raison d'être au

Kurdistan et dans les régions disputées. C'est jouer avec le feu. »

De son côté, Rizgar Ali, un Kurde qui dirige le Conseil provincial de Kirkouk, a déclaré avoir informé personnellement Nouri Al-Maliki que sa « province n'avait pas besoin de ces milices », et que les forces de sécurité qui œuvrent actuellement à Kirkouk sont efficaces pour y assurer la sécurité. Rizgar Ali a également invité le gouvernement irakien à utiliser l'argent prévu pour entretenir les milices dans la reconstruction et la rénovation de Kirkouk et de ses infrastructures, lesquelles sont dramatiquement vétustes dans plusieurs secteurs.

Le ton a vite monté, passant de la « tristesse » aux accusations plus directes. Répondant, le 8 novembre, dans une conférence de presse, à la déclaration commune des partis kurdes, Nouri Al Maliki a accusé à son tour le gouvernement kurde d'agissements anticonstitutionnels, notamment sur la signature des contrats pétroliers entre le GRK et des compagnies étrangères. Il a surtout réclamé la révision de la constitution irakienne, approuvée par référendum en octobre 2005, dans le sens d'un pouvoir plus grand accordé au gouvernement central, au détriment du fédéralisme : « Cette constitution a été écrite de façon hâtive, et dans des conditions qui sortaient de l'ordinaire. Elle limite les pouvoirs du gouvernement central et fait craindre que le fédéralisme n'handicape le pays. »

Cette demande de révision a naturellement été rejetée par les Kurdes, qui ont, dès avant l'intervention américaine en Irak, posé le fédéralisme comme condition de la réintégration du Kurdistan dans ce pays. Aussi la réaction des milieux politiques

kurdes a été très vive, certains allant même jusqu'à considérer que le Premier ministre chiïte, en s'opposant ainsi à la constitution irakienne, avait « perdu toute légitimité » dans sa fonction.

« Si nous voulons renforcer l'Irak, cela ne pourra se faire qu'en renforçant les régions et les provinces, estime Falah Mustafa Bakir, le ministre des relations internationales pour la Région du Kurdistan, « ce qui va tout à fait à l'encontre des projets d'Al-Maliki. Les Kurdes sont d'accord pour amender la constitution irakienne, mais selon des mécanismes spécifiés dans la constitution elle-même, et à condition que de tels amendements contribuent à faire progresser les libertés concernant les droits des ethnies et des religions, tout en garantissant la supériorité de la loi. L'expérience politique du Kurdistan d'Irak est un exemple de succès pour le système fédéral en Irak. »

Le député Nassih Abdulghafur, du groupe de l'Alliance kurde au parlement de Bagdad, ne voit pas non plus d'opportunité à la révision constitutionnelle, et réfute les accusations de rédaction « hâtive » lancées par Nouri Al-Maliki : « La constitution irakienne a été rédigée durant une période de trois ans, ce qui est un délai convenable pour une rédaction, et bénéficie du consensus de toutes les parties. » Le député rappelle aussi que « 80% des Irakiens ont voté pour cette constitution. Ce qu'Al-Maliki demande à présent va à l'encontre de la loi et de la constitution elle-même. » Un autre député de l'Alliance kurde, Khalid Sawani, renchérit : « La constitution détermine la forme du système de gouvernement en Irak, et a été votée par 12 millions d'Irakiens. Ce n'est pas la première fois qu'Al-Malili fait de telles déclarations, en cherchant

à établir un gouvernement central fort sur l'Irak. Sur une période d'environ 80 ans, jusqu'en 2003, l'Irak a été dominé par un gouvernement central, et de nombreux crimes et violations des droits de l'homme ont été commis dans toutes les provinces irakiennes durant tout ce temps. Après avoir voté pour la constitution actuelle, nous n'accepterons pas d'être à nouveau dominés par de tels gouvernements. L'Etat est à présent un Etat de droit, un Etat constitutionnel, et Al-Maliki se trompe s'il croit que l'Etat peut imposer son pouvoir par la force. »

La confrontation a pris un tour plus ethnique avec les manifestations de soutien au Premier ministre chiïte, organisées dans plusieurs villes d'Irak pour protester contre les déclarations du gouvernement kurde.

Ainsi à Takrit, ancien fief de Saddam Hussein, les manifestants hostiles au fédéralisme, chiïtes et sunnites ont défilé pour réclamer un « Irak unifié », en clamant « Kirkouk, Mossoul et Diyala sont irakiens ! » Farhan

Al-Awd, député et conseiller de la province explique que « les tribus irakiennes soutiennent les positions nationales de Maliki pour préserver l'unité de l'Irak, en instaurant la loi et en réécrivant la constitution. Il n'y a pas de régions disputées, il n'y a qu'un pays. » Ahmad Al-Dulaymi, membre de ces conseils controversés de soutien pour la province sunnite de Salahaddine, accuse les Kurdes : « Ceux qui s'opposent au projet de Maliki veut un Irak affaibli et poursuivent le projet de le diviser. » Dans la province de Kirkouk, des milliers d'Arabes se sont également rassemblés dans le stade de football de Hawijah pour soutenir le Premier ministre et son projet de milices.

Mais en dehors des provinces arabes sunnites, le soutien a été moindre. Ainsi la ville chiïte de Karbala n'a pu réunir que quelques centaines de manifestants. En mars dernier, de violents combats avaient opposé ces mêmes villes chiïtes à l'armée irakienne venue pour imposer le désarmement des milices locales.

ERBIL : CAMPAGNE GOUVERNEMENTALE ET LOIS EN FAVEUR DES FEMMES

Après le vote d'une loi limitant fortement le recours à la polygamie, le Parlement kurde a également fait voter une loi interdisant la pratique de l'excision, en usage dans certaines régions du Kurdistan d'Irak, tandis que le chef du gouvernement d'Erbil a lancé lui-même une campagne en faveur de l'égalité et de la protection des femmes.

Début novembre, une commission nommée par le gouvernement kurde et présidée par le Premier ministre Nêçirvan Barzani, s'est réunie pour discu-

ter et évaluer les dernières mesures prises par la Région du Kurdistan, étudier les recommandations d'Amnesty International à ce sujet et débattre des moyens judiciaires et législatifs pour prévenir les violences et les crimes contre les femmes.

« Notre Région doit devenir le meilleur modèle pour l'Irak » a déclaré le Premier ministre, en prônant une coopération entre tous les ministères pour un meilleur résultat.

La commission a notamment approuvé que le gouvernement

ait décidé, depuis l'année dernière, de célébrer le 25 novembre comme Journée internationale pour l'élimination de la violence contre les femmes. Autre mesure reconnue comme ayant donné des résultats satisfaisants, la mise en place de services devant former et sensibiliser la police aux cas de violence contre les femmes. Ce tutorat de formation a contribué à améliorer la prise en charge des victimes dans les trois gouvernorats, Suleïmanieh, Duhok, Erbil et l'on a pu enregistrer une augmentation des plaintes déposées dans les commissariats par des femmes victimes de violence. Des mesures ont été également mises en place pour la protection des plaignantes qui se sentaient menacées. De façon générale, les campagnes de sensibilisation font leur chemin dans l'opinion publique et il a été noté que les peines prononcées dans les tribunaux se font plus lourdes contre les agresseurs, allant même jusqu'à des peines capitales dans le cas des crimes dit « d'honneur ».

Au sujet des recommandations émises par Amnesty International, Nêçirvan Barzani s'est félicité de ce que l'ONG ait noté les efforts faits par son propre gouvernement dans ce domaine. Plusieurs dispositions ont été ainsi prises pour renforcer la législation réprimant les crimes d'honneur et une formation a été dispensée aux juges comme aux enquêteurs. Un ancien procureur américain, expérimenté dans ce domaine, a même été embauché comme consultant et a travaillé directement avec la police et les procureurs kurdes. Le GRK a également demandé une étude à l'université de Bristol, au département de criminologie pour analyser la violence et les crimes d'honneur à la fois au Kurdistan

d'Irak mais aussi dans les communautés kurdes de Grande-Bretagne.

En ce qui concerne les réformes législatives, elles reçoivent un accueil mitigé selon les dispositions votées. Ainsi, le fait que la polygamie n'ait pas été interdite par le Parlement laisse insatisfaits des groupes militants féministes au Kurdistan qui ont manifesté par centaines à Suleïmanieh, mais d'autres femmes expriment le sentiment qu'il s'agit d'un début permettant une future abolition. Pour l'une d'elles, Suzan Muhammad Aref, la nouvelle loi est « un pas positif pour les femmes. Nous ne pouvons changer soudainement toute une société. La différence entre le nombre des votes en faveur de l'interdiction de la polygamie et ceux ne réclamant que sa limitation était si minime, qu'elle peut être déjà considéré comme un grand succès pour les femmes. » Refusant de présenter le problème comme un clivage masculin féminin dans la société kurde, Suzan Aref précise que la réforme doit aussi passer dans l'esprit des femmes : « Nous devons réaliser qu'il y a des femmes qui croient important de se conformer à la Charia islamique et pour cela de ne pas interdire la polygamie. » D'autres, comme Kazibouh Ali, une employée interrogée par la Voix de l'Irak, expliquent qu'une interdiction totale de la polygamie pousserait des hommes à divorcer de leur première épouse en cas de stérilité, ce qui pose un sérieux problème de ressources dans un pays où la plupart des femmes ne travaillent pas. Par ailleurs, rien n'empêche un habitant de la Région du Kurdistan de se marier dans les autres régions d'Irak où la polygamie est toujours légale, comme le confirme Abdul Rahman Hadji Zebarî, un

homme de loi : « La constitution irakienne donne le droit au parlement kurde de voter ses lois, mais elles n'ont force que dans la Région. »

La députée Pakhshkan Zanka, s'exprimant sur la radio nationale irakienne, présente aussi cette limitation comme une avancée positive pour les femmes kurdes, qui accélérera le déclin de cette pratique.

La seconde loi votée sous le feu des médias kurdes est celle visant à interdire totalement la pratique de l'excision dans certaines régions du Kurdistan et, cette fois-ci, n'ayant pas rencontré de fortes oppositions religieuses ou sociales, l'abolition a pu être votée.

Selon les chiffres donnés par le ministre de la Santé du GRK, 60% des fillettes âgées de 4 à 14 ans ont subi une excision, et ce en dépit des campagnes gouvernementales avertissant des dangers de cette pratique. Zaryan Abdel Rahman s'exprimait lors d'une conférence de trois jours, donnée à Erbil, portant sur les violences commises à l'égard des femmes en général. Il s'appuyait sur le travail d'une ONG allemande, Wadj, qui a prospecté 201 villages dans les trois régions ainsi qu'à Kirkouk. Son rapport indique que sur 5 628 femmes et filles examinées, 3502 avaient été excisées.

Le ministre des Affaires religieuses va demander aux imams de se prononcer ouvertement contre cette mutilation lors des sermons du Vendredi. Le ministre de l'Éducation, a, pour sa part, prévu qu'un programme de prévention et d'information soit instauré dans les écoles, « pour encourager les filles à ne pas se soumettre aux choix de leurs parents. » Coutume venue d'Afrique et

touchant aussi bien, dans ce continent, les populations musulmane, chrétienne ou animiste, l'excision est très peu pratiquée au Moyen-Orient et les Kurdes d'Irak eux-mêmes sont dans l'incapacité de dire à quand remonte son introduction dans leur société. Interrogé par l'AFP, le sheikh Sayyed Ahmad Abdel Wahab al-Panjawini, imam de la mosquée Hajj Jamal d'Erbil, confirme que « c'est une vieille coutume, mais cela n'a rien à voir avec l'islam. Aucun texte religieux ne mentionne cette pratique. C'est une coutume que certains ont introduit dans le mode de pensée des musulmans. » Dans le journal Hawlati, la Secrétaire générale de l'Union islamique des femmes s'élève elle aussi contre l'excision et nie son caractère religieux : « Les mutilations génitales féminines ne sont pas des pratiques musulmanes. Beaucoup des problèmes auxquels ont à faire face les femmes résultent de traditions erronées, et ce n'est pas l'islam qui est à blâmer. La Charia n'a rien à voir avec de telles pratiques, et l'excision existe parce que certaines personnes ont interprété le Coran de façon fautive. »

L'excision n'est pas pratiquée dans le reste de l'Irak, pas plus qu'au Kurdistan de Turquie, de Syrie, mais elle existe dans des zones du Kurdistan d'Iran attenante aux régions kurdes d'Irak. Les motifs invoqués sont à la fois d'ordre religieux et hygiénique, certains juristes chaféites (courant juridique auxquels appartient en majorité le sunnisme kurde) ayant considéré que le terme *sinat* (circoncision) s'appliquait tout autant à l'excision féminine.

Un groupe de députées au parlement d'Erbil a donc présenté à l'assemblée un projet de loi

visant à criminaliser l'excision, en plus de celle condamnant les violences contre les femmes, comme l'a exposé la députée Hala Suheil : « Le parlement kurde se penche actuellement sur le phénomène de la violence exercée contre les femmes, aussi nous préparons deux projets de loi en ce sens : l'un pour interdire et criminaliser l'excision, tandis que l'autre sera contre la violence perpétrée en générale contre les femmes. » Pour la députée, « cette pratique est si ancienne dans la région que nous n'avons aucune idée de

comment elle est apparue. Mais les anciens la justifient en disant que cela préserve la chasteté des filles », explique le docteur Suheil, députée au parlement d'Erbil, qui indique, au contraire du ministre de la Santé, qu'aucun chiffre précis ne peut être donné pour fiable concernant son ampleur, mais dénonce les conditions dans lesquelles elle est pratiquée : « Les vieilles femmes excisent les fillettes avec des lames de rasoir et parfois des tessons de verre, causant souvent de terribles hémorragies et parfois la mort. »

accuse d'être plus marxiste et pro-kurde qu'alévie. D'autres associations et mouvements alévis réclament, à défaut de la suppression de la Diyanet, la création d'un bureau spécialement tenu par et pour les alévis à l'intérieur de l'institution. Cela permettrait une reconnaissance, même partielle, de la spécificité du culte alévi, et surtout permettrait de faire rémunérer par l'Etat les *dede* (religieux alévis) tout comme le sont les imams musulmans ; de même la reconnaissance officielle de leurs lieux de culte les ferait bénéficier de subventions pour leur entretien.

TURQUIE : LES ALEVIS MECONTENTES DEFILENT A ANKARA

Le 9 novembre, une vaste manifestation a rassemblé plus de 50 000 alévis à Ankara, venus de toute la Turquie. Si leurs revendications ne sont pas neuves, l'ampleur de cette protestation (opportunément appuyés par les partis d'opposition comme le CHP) est une première dans le pays.

Les Alévis réclament depuis des décennies être reconnus comme une minorité religieuse, ce qui permettrait à leurs enfants de ne plus être soumis aux cours obligatoires de religion islamique à l'école, que leurs lieux de culte, les *cemevi*, soient réellement reconnus comme tels et surtout, ne plus être régis par la *Diyanet*, la Direction des Affaires religieuses. Les manifestants réclamaient aussi que l'hôtel Madimak, à Sivas, dans lequel 37 intellectuels alévis avaient périés en 1993 après un incendie criminel soit changé en mémorial-musée.

Bien que les Alévis, turcs ou kurdes, votent traditionnellement pour des partis laïcs ou de gauche, un certain nombre d'entre eux avaient voté AKP aux dernières élections, surtout en raison des prises de position intolérantes et sectaires adoptées par le leader du

parti de gauche CHP, Deniz Baykal, et aussi parce que la montée du nationalisme d'extrême-droite en Turquie s'accompagne invariablement d'agressions envers toutes les minorités religieuses, surtout les chrétiens et les alévis. Mais en ce domaine comme en bien d'autres, l'AKP a déçu un électorat qui espérait du gouvernement des réformes significatives et une modernisation de la gestion des minorités, qu'elles soient ethniques ou religieuses. La présence du Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan au dîner de rupture du jeûne alévi en janvier 2008 n'a visiblement pas apaisé la colère des alévis, qui seraient entre 10 et 12 millions en Turquie, et au sujet duquel l'Union européenne ne cesse de rappeler à l'Etat turc qu'il faudrait enfin leur accorder les droits culturels et religieux qu'ils réclament, en admettant enfin que l'alévisme n'est pas une « branche de l'islam », même chiite, comme le veut le credo officiel.

Mais les Alévis eux-mêmes, d'origines et de convictions politiques très diverses, ne sont pas unanimes dans leurs revendications. La manifestation d'Ankara a été organisée par la Fédération Alevi Bektashi, qu'Izzetin Dogan

Cette position de compromis est cependant dénoncée par les mouvements alévis qui refusent d'être assimilés à des musulmans. Les alévis qui se revendiquent ouvertement pro-kurdes ou bien de sensibilité d'extrême-gauche sont souvent en dissonance avec les sympathisants kémalistes, tel le président de la fondation Cem, Izzetin Dogan, qui souhaite que les Alévis ne quittent pas la Diyanet, ce qui amène des opposants à l'accuser d'ambitionner tout simplement la poste de direction du Bureau alévi dans les Affaires religieuses.

La suppression de la Direction des Affaires religieuses et des cours d'islam à l'école a été de toute façon écartée par le ministre d'Etat, Mustafa Said Yazıcıoğlu, comme une prise de position « extrémiste », à laquelle il n'accorde aucun crédit. Précisant sa pensée, il rappelle que la Direction des Affaires religieuses est une des plus importantes créations d'Atatürk, un héritage original de l'Etat kémaliste que le ministre affirme être un modèle pour le reste du monde islamique : « Des délégations de tout le monde islamique [...] viennent en Turquie pour étudier le système de cette direction », afin de créer des institutions similaires. »

IRAN : REPRESSION ET COUVRE-FEU A SANANDAJ

La répression, loin de faiblir, se durcit encore à Sanandaj, capitale de la province du Kurdistan d'Iran. Yasser Goli, Secrétaire général de l'Union des étudiants kurdes, a été arrêté il y a treize mois et détenu par les services secrets de Sanandaj. La Seconde Chambre de la Cour islamique révolutionnaire de Sanandaj vient de le condamner à 15 ans de prison, à la grande indignation de son avocat, Nemat Ahmadi : « La sentence rendue par la cour fait seulement dix lignes ! Cette décision de la cour, censée être fondée sur l'article 168 du code pénal islamique ne se réfère à aucune preuve ni fait établis contre mon client, Yasser Goli. A aucun moment, dans aucun interrogatoire, ni dans les comparutions au tribunal, il a reconnu être coupable de quoi que ce soit. »

Actuellement, on dénombre 15

étudiants emprisonnés en Iran, dont un condamné à mort et trois à des peines allant de 6 à 16 ans de prison. Toujours à Sanandaj, la Haute Cour révolutionnaire islamique a confirmé la condamnation de Khazur Rasoul Morut à 3 ans de prison. Khazur Rasoul Morut étudiait la littérature à l'université de la ville et enseignait aussi la langue kurde. Un autre étudiant, Werya Moruti, a été arrêté à son domicile et emmené dans un lieu de détention inconnu. Âgé de 25 ans, il étudiait à l'université de Peyame Nour. Deux autres jeunes Kurdes, Pejman Zafari et Peyman Hosseini, arrêtés quelques mois auparavant ont été libérés contre une caution de 30 millions de tomans. Deux étudiants kurdes, cette fois détenus dans la prison d'Evin à Téhéran, et qui ont entamé une grève de la faim, ont été placés en cellules d'isolement et sont continuellement interrogés depuis plus de 3

semaines.

En plus des étudiants, les journalistes kurdes continuent d'être harcelés, arrêtés et emprisonnés. Bahman Tutunchi a été arrêté à son domicile à Sanandaj sans que les raisons de cette arrestation soient connues. « Les officiers sont restés silencieux sur les raisons de son arrestation et sur le lieu de sa détention. Ils ne l'ont même pas laissé quitté son pyjama pour s'habiller ni prendre ses lunettes » raconte un proche, qui a assisté à la scène. Bahman Tutunchi est un journaliste indépendant qui a notamment collaboré à l'hebdomadaire Karaftou, interdit l'année dernière.

Par ailleurs, depuis le 19 novembre un couvre-feu a été décrété dans la ville, tandis que dès 20 heures les milices paramilitaires du Bassidj patrouillent de nuit le centre ville, ses quartiers et ses rues les plus fréquentées et contrôlent les habitants.

CINEMA : UN FILM KURDE PRIME AUX USA, UN AUTRE CENSURE EN SUISSE

Le cinéaste kurde Jamil Rostami a reçu le prix du « meilleur réalisateur international » au festival de Boston pour son fil « Jani Gal ».

Jamil Rostami est né en 1971 dans la ville de Sanandaj, la capitale de la province du Kurdistan en Iran. Tout en poursuivant des études de chimie, il évolue dans l'univers du cinéma depuis l'âge de 16 ans, que ce soit au sein d'une équipe de tournage ou dans la réalisation. En 2002, il réalise son premier court-métrage, « Le problème d'être un garçon », tourné en langue kurde, qui est projeté dans plusieurs festivals, locaux et internationaux, et qui obtient plusieurs récompenses. Son pre-

mier long-métrage, « Requiem dans la neige », a été réalisé en 2005. Fariborz Latchini, un des meilleurs compositeurs de musique de film en Iran en a écrit la musique. Le directeur de la photographie est Morteza Poursamadi, un photographe iranien renommé. Film produit à la fois par l'Irak et l'Iran, « Requiem dans la neige » a représenté l'Irak aux Oscars pour les films étrangers.

Jani Gal, son dernier film, également tourné en kurde, est inspiré d'un roman de l'écrivain et homme politique kurde Ibrahim Ahmad, beau-père de l'actuel président d'Irak Jalal Talabani. L'histoire se déroule à Suleïmanieh, dans les années 1940. Jwamer est tout juste libéré

de prison, après avoir été arrêté et emprisonné des années par erreur. Sa femme Kaley étant sur le point d'accoucher, il a été pris par hasard dans une manifestation politique alors qu'il était à la recherche d'une sage-femme. Arrêté et emmené par la police, qui l'a pris pour un des meneurs, il a été condamné à dix ans de prison. Une fois libre, il se lance à la recherche de sa femme et de son fils, dont il n'a plus de nouvelles. Mais il est aussi amené à choisir entre reprendre sa vie telle qu'elle était auparavant ou rejoindre les Peshmergas.

Si le cinéma kurde est primé à Boston, il est aussi censuré de façon plus inattendue en Suisse, dans un festival financé pour

moitié cette année par le ministère turc de la Culture, qui a menacé de mettre fin à toutes ses subventions si « Gitmek » (My Marlon and My Brando) du cinéaste Hüseyin Karabey était projeté, comme cela été prévu. Les organisateurs de « CultureScape », qui avait pour 2008 la Turquie en invité d'honneur et partenaire, ont donc été contraints de modifier le programme à la dernière minute. Jurriaan Cooman, patron du festival, ne nie pas les

pressions : « Peut-être n'aurais-je pas dû transiger, reconnaît-il, mais je voulais sauver le festival. Sans les 400. 000 euros de la Turquie, il n'aurait pas pu avoir lieu. »

Jurriaan Cooman a averti le représentant du ministère turc que cette exigence ferait plus de mal que de bien pour l'image du pays. Il juge aussi que l'ordre de censure ne vient pas du sommet de l'Etat et souligne la « nervosité » politique et sécuritaire observable actuellement dans ce

pays. L'ambassade de Turquie à Berne a pris position vendredi en indiquant ne pas partager la critique de « certains cercles » à l'égard du programme du festival et avoir tenté de servir d'intermédiaire.

« Gitmek » raconte l'histoire d'une Turque tombant amoureuse d'un Kurde dans le Nord de l'Irak. Des exploitants de salles à Bâle, Zurich et Berne ont décidé d'eux-mêmes de le projeter en dehors du festival.



L'influence iranienne perturbe Washington

Pour préserver leurs intérêts, les Etats-Unis doivent signer un accord avec Bagdad tout en ménageant les Kurdes et le gouvernement central. Sans oublier Téhéran.

AL-HAYAT
Londres

Pour les Américains, il était fondamental de réconcilier les Kurdes avec le gouvernement de Nouri Al-Maliki à Bagdad. Ils craignaient en effet que l'accumulation de désaccords entre les deux parties dégénère en affrontement armé, ce qui aurait empêché la signature de l'accord de coopération militaire américano-irakien [qui continue à soulever une vive opposition en Irak]. De même, cela risquait de contraindre les forces américaines à rester plus longtemps encore en Irak, alors que Washington considère de plus en plus cette présence comme un poids. A ce propos, les journaux israéliens ont signalé que les Américains avaient demandé à Tel-Aviv de ne pas lancer d'attaques contre les installations nucléaires iraniennes tant que leurs troupes seraient stationnées en Irak.

LES PRO-IRANIENS, PRINCIPALE FORCE POLITIQUE AU PARLEMENT

L'Amérique souhaite combler le plus rapidement possible le fossé entre les Kurdes et le gouvernement Maliki. L'ambassadeur des Etats-Unis à Bagdad, Ryan Crocker, a fait de nombreuses visites à Erbil, siège du gouvernement fédéral kurde, et le vice-ministre des Affaires étrangères, John Negroponte, est allé à Erbil et à Souleymanieh afin de convaincre le président du Kurdistan irakien Massoud Barzani de rencontrer le Premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki. Par ailleurs, les Américains ont demandé au président irakien Jalal Talabani [qui est lui-même kurde] d'interrompre son séjour pour soins médicaux à l'étranger et de revenir rapidement à Bagdad pour couper court aux rumeurs selon lesquelles il se serait retranché à Souleymanieh [au Kurdistan irakien] pour protester contre les positions extrémistes du gouvernement Maliki sur Kirkouk.

Les Etats-Unis voudraient préserver le Kurdistan des tensions qui affectent le reste de l'Irak et plus généralement l'ensemble de la région, parce qu'il constitue à leurs yeux un excellent modèle politique, administratif et économique. Dans le même temps, ils



ne veulent pas non plus sacrifier le gouvernement Maliki au moment où celui-ci vient d'obtenir quelques succès sur le plan de la sécurité et commence à coopérer avec les Arabes sunnites. Néanmoins, ce n'est pas l'avenir du Kurdistan ou du gouvernement de Maliki qui motive les initiatives diplomatiques américaines. Leur principal objectif reste l'accord de coopération militaire, qu'ils sont de plus en plus impatients à signer.

Il y a environ deux semaines, Washington a accusé l'Irak d'exercer sur l'Irak des pressions visant à l'empêcher de signer ce document. Les Américains sont convaincus, sans le dire, que Maliki a cédé à ces pressions.

Un des moyens de faire traîner la signature de cet accord jusqu'à l'expiration du mandat de Bush a été de provoquer des tensions avec les Kurdes, un autre de demander l'ajout d'un article par lequel Washington s'engagerait sur le maintien de l'unité et de la souveraineté du pays. En effet, Maliki pense que les Kurdes cherchent à faire exploser l'Irak et à créer leur propre Etat avec le soutien des Américains.

Etant donné que les pro-Iraniens constituent la principale force politique au Parlement et au Conseil des ministres, cet accord continuera probablement à faire l'objet de discussions pendant

encore au moins six mois. L'Irak estime en effet qu'il est dans son intérêt de maintenir les troupes américaines dans le bourbier irakien jusqu'à l'arrivée au pouvoir de Barack Obama. Or Téhéran est convaincu que celui-ci apportera des modifications substantielles à la politique étrangère américaine.

Oubliant qu'il y a des constantes dans la politique de Washington, le gouvernement iranien pense que cela lui permettra de poursuivre son programme nucléaire et de renforcer son emprise sur l'Irak, sur l'Afghanistan et sur le Liban, tout en infligeant une défaite à la politique moyen-orientale des Etats-Unis.

Reste à savoir si les Américains peuvent convaincre Bagdad de résoudre ses différends avec les Kurdes par des moyens politiques conformes à la Constitution. **Sami Shawrash**

AFP

IRAN : UN MILITANT KURDE CONDAMNÉ À 11 ANS DE PRISON EN APPEL (AVOCAT)

TEHERAN, 1 nov 2008 (AFP)

LA JUSTICE iranienne a confirmé en appel une peine de 11 ans de prison contre un militant des droits de l'homme et journaliste kurde, Mohammad Sadigh Kaboudvand, pour atteinte à la sécurité nationale, a déclaré samedi à l'AFP son avocate Nasrin Sotoudeh.

M. Kaboudvand, qui a fondé il y a trois ans l'Organisation des droits de l'homme du Kurdistan, est détenu à la prison d'Evine depuis juin 2007.

Mme Sotoudeh a été informée de la décision de la cour d'appel le 18 octobre et n'a pas été autorisée depuis cette à rencontrer son client qui a besoin de soins médicaux.

"Ce verdict est inhabituel pour un militant des droits de l'homme (...) C'est un signal d'alarme pour les autres militants", a ajouté l'avocate.

Elle a dit qu'elle comptait faire appel auprès du chef de l'Autorité judiciaire, l'ayatollah Mahmoud Hachémi Shahrudi.

M. Kaboudvand avait été condamné à onze ans de prison en juin en première instance pour atteinte à la sécurité nationale.

Il a aussi été condamné dans un autre dossier en 2005 à une peine de 18 mois de prison pour ses activités militantes et son journal "Payam-e Mardom-e Kordestan" (message du peuple du Kurdistan) a été interdit. Mais sa peine a été ramenée à six mois de prison et l'interdiction de son journal été levée, selon son avocate.

Par ailleurs, selon le quotidien modéré Kargozaran, un enseignant kurde, Ali Pasbar, a été condamné à deux ans de prison ferme et quatre ans de prison avec sursis pour "action contre la sécurité nationale et collaboration avec un parti illégal".

2 novembre 2008

LeMatin

turquie: manifestation pro-kurde et violences contre la venue d'erdogan

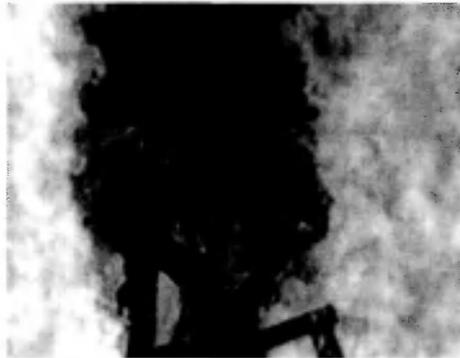
DIYARBAKIR (AFP) De nouvelles violences ont éclaté dimanche dans l'est de la Turquie au cours d'une manifestation de plusieurs milliers de Kurdes qui protestaient contre la venue du Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan dans cette région à majorité kurde.

Les affrontements ont débuté quand quelque 3.000 manifestants, pour la plupart des sympathisants du principal parti kurde, le Parti de la société démocratique (DTP), ont tenté d'organiser une marche dans la ville de Yuksekova, ignorant les ordres de dispersion de la police, a indiqué à l'AFP une source de sécurité locale.

Les policiers anti-émeutes ont tiré en l'air et fait usage de gaz lacrymogène et de canons à eau contre les protestataires, qui lançaient des pierres sur les forces de l'ordre, selon cette source.

Ces violences ont éclaté alors que M. Erdogan plaidait pour l'unité du pays lors de l'inauguration d'un hôpital à Yuksekova. "Protégeons notre paix et soyons unis. Si nous accroissons notre solidarité, nous accroîtrons aussi notre développement", a-t-il dit.

Il a souligné que son gouvernement allait poursuivre les changements pour obtenir l'intégration de la Turquie à l'Union européenne, qui se sont traduits par des libertés culturelles accrues pour les Kurdes.



Par ailleurs, le bureau du gouverneur de la région a annoncé que des troupes paramilitaires avaient saisi une grande quantité d'explosifs et d'armes, dont 20 kilos de TNT et 20 grenades, dans un village situé à 60 kilomètre au sud de Yuksekova.

Selon le bureau du gouverneur, qui n'a pas précisé la date de la saisie, cet arsenal aurait dû être utilisé par des rebelles kurdes qui comptaient attaquer les forces de sécurité et les civils dimanche.

Après Yuksekova, M. Erdogan s'est rendu dans la ville voisine d'Hakkari pour y rencontrer des responsables locaux et participer à une réunion de son parti.

Dans cette ville, des manifestants ont jeté

des pierres sur un convoi d'officiels du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), au pouvoir, et de journalistes, sans faire de blessés. Le Premier ministre est arrivé en hélicoptère.

La police a aussi réprimé de petites manifestations en ville, où les boutiques ont gardé porte close, une façon traditionnelle pour les Kurdes de protester contre le gouvernement. Des membres du DTP ont tenté de faire un sit-in dans le quartier central de Beyoglu mais la police a fait usage de gaz lacrymogène pour les disperser et a procédé à 27 interpellations, selon un photographe de l'AFP.

Samedi, des affrontements avaient déjà opposé dans la localité de Van la police à des centaines de Kurdes qui protestaient contre la visite du Premier ministre, arrivé sur place le jour même.

Une explosion, probablement d'origine criminelle, et qui visait les locaux de l'AKP à Hakkari, avait fait également deux blessés.

Les Kurdes sont de plus de plus mécontents de l'intensification des opérations de l'armée contre les rebelles kurdes et des mauvais traitements que subit selon eux dans sa prison le chef de la rébellion, Abdullah Öcalan, condamné à la détention perpétuelle.

M. Erdogan a fermement démenti ces affirmations dimanche. "Il n'y a pas de mauvais traitements. C'est un mensonge... Ils inventent des prétextes à l'approche des élections", a-t-il déclaré.

AFP

SYRIE: ARRESTATION DE DIZAINES DE KURDES LORS D'UNE MANIFESTATION

DAMAS, 2 nov 2008 (AFP)

LES AUTORITES syriennes ont dispersé dimanche un sit-in organisé par des partis kurdes à Damas et arrêté des dizaines de personnes, a annoncé l'Organisation nationale des droits de l'Homme en Syrie (ONDHS).

"Des partis kurdes ont organisé un sit-in à Damas pour protester contre un décret interdisant la vente sans autorisation préalable de terrains et de propriétés dans les régions frontalières", a indiqué l'ONDHS dans un communiqué.

"La police a dispersé les manifestants et arrêté des dizaines d'entre eux, qui ont été amenés vers une destination inconnue", a ajouté le communiqué.

L'ONDHS a fourni les noms de 18 des Kurdes arrêtés. La plupart sont des dirigeants de partis, notamment du parti Yakiti, du Parti de la gauche kurde, du Parti démocrate kurde, du Courant du futur kurde et du parti Azadi kurde.

L'ONDHS a appelé à "la libération des manifestants qui ont exercé leur droit au sit-in, stipulé par la Constitution".

Communauté d'environ 1,5 million de personnes, les Kurdes de Syrie représentent environ 9% de la population du pays. Ils réclament la reconnaissance de leur langue et de leur culture.

Installés essentiellement dans le nord, à la frontière avec la Turquie et l'Irak, ils se défendent de toutes visées sécessionnistes.

LE FIGARO Dans la forteresse américaine au cœur de Bagdad et alentour...

3 novembre 2008

Paradoxalement, la présence de 150 000 soldats américains reste la garantie de la précaire cohésion du pays. Mais aucun parti irakien ne veut le reconnaître ouvertement.

De notre envoyé spécial à Bagdad

ON RESPIRE un peu à Bagdad. Dans la zone verte, leur forteresse au cœur de la ville, les militaires américains ont enlevé leurs casques et leurs gilets pare-balles. Les roquettes ont cessé de pleuvoir sur la cité interdite, et les attentats ont cessé dans les rues de la capitale irakienne. Mais dans les salles dalées de marbre de l'ancien palais

« Ici, le débat sur le futur accord de sécurité entre les États-Unis et l'Irak passionne plus que l'élection américaine »

présidentiel de Saddam Hussein, ou dans les pièces surprotégées de la nouvelle ambassade construite sur les bords du Tigre, les diplomates américains s'affairent.

Le 31 décembre prochain à minuit prend fin le semblant de légalité de la présence internationale (essentiellement américaine) en Irak, accordé en 2004 par le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU. Et les négociations sur le Sofa (Status of Force Agreement), l'acronyme qui désigne le futur accord de sécurité entre les Américains et l'Irak, piétinent depuis des mois.

« Cet accord est important pour restaurer la complète souveraineté irakienne, tout en autorisant les forces américaines à continuer temporairement d'assister les forces de sécurité irakiennes », a déclaré l'ambassadeur américain en Irak, Ryan Crocker. Mais les Irakiens

carbures, jusqu'à la gestion de l'espace aérien irakien. Le porte-parole de l'armée américaine a décrit la semaine dernière le rôle de la présence américaine comme un « pilier » nécessaire au fonctionnement de l'État irakien.

Mais aucun parti irakien ne veut le reconnaître ouvertement, et apparaît comme acceptant l'occupation.

« C'est la pagaille »

Le grand ayatollah al-Sistani, dont les fatwas constituent des mots d'ordre pour la majorité des Irakiens, chiïtes, a rejeté en juillet dernier le projet d'accord, au nom de la souveraineté irakienne, et réclame que l'assemblée irakienne vote à la majorité des deux tiers le projet. Depuis, aucun responsable politique chiïte, à commencer par Maliki, ne peut plus sans risques

veulent que l'accord comporte une date précise du retrait des troupes étrangères. Ils refusent aussi l'immunité accordée jusqu'à présent aux troupes américaines en Irak, ainsi qu'aux compagnies de

sécurité étrangères, véritables armées privées ne relevant d'aucune juridiction.

Paradoxalement, la présence de 150 000 soldats américains reste la garantie de la fragile accalmie dans les guerres qui déchirent le pays depuis l'invasion de 2003, et de la précaire cohésion du pays. Ils assurent aussi des dizaines de tâches vitales, depuis la protection des installations pétrolières, veine jugulaire d'un pays dépendant à 80 % de ses exportations d'hydro-

accepter un accord qui le ferait passer pour un agent des Américains aux yeux de son électorat.

« Le véritable enjeu est politique », explique un diplomate américain. L'alliance entre chiïtes et Kurdes, sur laquelle reposaient depuis 2004 les nouvelles institutions irakiennes, a volé en éclats cet été. « Depuis, c'est la pagaille », dit-il. « Les sunnites ne veulent plus nous voir partir, par crainte des chiïtes et d'al-Qaïda. Les Kurdes ont à présent peur du gouvernement central et comptent sur nous pour protéger leur autonomie. Les chiïtes sont divisés entre eux, et les nombreux adversaires du premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki veulent utiliser la question du Sofa pour le faire tomber. »



Des soldats américains patrouillent pour maintenir l'ordre dans le quartier de al-Harthyia, à proximité de la zone verte de la capitale irakienne. A. Cilbertson/Aurora

Dans les divers quartiers de la capitale, le débat sur le SOFA passionne plus les Irakiens que l'élection américaine et le nom du prochain successeur de George Bush.

À Sadr-City, l'immense Suburbe chiïte, bastion de l'Armée du Mahdi de Moqtada al-Sadr, la rue reste hostile à l'occupation. Moqtada est invisible depuis des mois, réfugié en Iran selon les Américains. Mais ses partisans continuent de réclamer le départ des forces étrangères.

Un semblant de sécurité

Après la grande prière du vendredi, organisé devant le quartier général du mouvement de Moqta-

da, mais sous étroite surveillance de l'armée irakienne, on brûle joyeusement des drapeaux américains. « Nous voulons la fin de l'occupation et le départ de toutes les troupes étrangères », dit Sheikh Jassem al-Mouteiry, le représentant de Moqtada al-Sadr. « Si Obama retire ses soldats, alors son élection sera une bonne chose », admet-il du bout des lèvres.

À Adhamiyah, quartier sunnite enclavé en pleine zone chiïte, sur la rive gauche du Tigre, on pense exactement l'inverse. Les sunnites craignent pour l'avenir en cas de retrait américain. Cet ancien bastion d'al-Qaïda et des insurgés sunnites est entouré de hauts murs de

béton. Le pont sur le Tigre, qui le relie à Khazamia, quartier chiite de la rive droite, reste fermé, et ce sont les milices d'al-Sahouah, le Mouvement du réveil, levé et payé par les Américains au début de l'année, qui maintiennent l'ordre.

Mais depuis le 1^{er} octobre, les milices ont été placées sous les ordres du gouvernement irakien. La solde des miliciens, qui dépend à présent du ministère de la Défense irakien, n'a toujours pas été versée, et les promesses d'intégrer une partie des miliciens à l'armée sont restées lettre morte.

« Nous avons plus confiance dans les Américains que dans notre propre gouvernement », dit le chef de la milice, Hadj Barakat, dans son uniforme américain. « On espère que les Américains vont rester en Irak, sinon l'Iran va les remplacer. Les Iraniens contrôlent notre gouvernement. Ils veulent se débarrasser de nous. »

À Karada, quartier bourgeois du centre-ville, on goûte le semblant de sécurité retrouvée, après les terribles années 2006-2007, date de la guerre confessionnelle qui a fait rage dans Bagdad, entre

escadrons de la mort chiites et insurgés sunnites épaulés par les assassins d'al-Qaida. Les magasins sont ouverts le soir, on fait du shopping dans les boutiques éclairées, ou l'on boit du thé aux terrasses. Les soldats irakiens sont partout, même s'ils ont décoré les blocs de béton de leurs points de contrôle avec des fleurs en plastique. Mais la situation reste fragile.

Le départ des Américains ne se fera pas du jour au lendemain. Le corps expéditionnaire a construit plus d'une centaine de bases en Irak, dont vingt immenses forteres-

ses dotées de tout le confort nécessaire. Mais surtout, les Irakiens restent divisés sur la question de leur retrait.

« Ils attendent que quelqu'un prenne la décision pour eux », dit le diplomate américain. « Le point positif est que le débat sur notre présence s'est à présent transféré sur la scène politique. Mais le problème est que personne en Irak n'est encore capable de penser en termes d'intérêt national. Chacun voit son intérêt personnel ou communautaire. »

A. J.

Le Monde

Mardi 4 novembre 2008

Les Irakiens veulent juste le départ des « Amrikis »

BAGDAD.
ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL

'Abou Ali, le « roi du kebab », se « moque » de l'identité du futur hôte de la Maison Blanche. Tout ce qu'il veut, comme la plupart des musulmans chiites d'Irak, c'est « que les "Amrikis" partent au plus vite ». S'il pouvait, il voterait pour Barack Obama, plus pressé de rapatrier une partie des « boys ».

Keffieh à damier, longue *dishdasha* grise (la djellaba locale), Abou Ali, ou plutôt ses fils qui ont repris l'affaire, est une légende du district d'Hurriyah. Le restaurant, six tables en formica face à une cuisine ouverte où s'échinent deux employés en sueur dans les vapeurs d'huile, est le plus célèbre de ce quartier chiite de Bagdad.

Abou Ali est le meilleur kebab « depuis cinquante ans à l'ouest du Tigre ». Mais il ne « connaît rien » aux « sales jeux » de la politique qui ont vidé, ces deux dernières années, la salle de tous ses clients sunnites. Ici comme ailleurs dans

les 9 « districts » divisés en 89 « quartiers » à Bagdad, les populations, bon gré mal gré, sont devenues homogènes. La guerre civile entre chiites et sunnites est peut-être terminée, mais la confiance est loin d'être rétablie.

« Il faudra au moins une génération et c'est la faute des "Amrikis" », nous dit Saad Yassine, qui travaille à l'aéroport et vit à Karada, au centre-ville. Lui, pourtant, est plus averti des programmes en présence. Parce qu'il est chi-

té et craint que Barack Obama et les siens « retirent trop vite leurs troupes avant que nos propres soldats soient prêts à assurer la sécurité dans tout le pays », il préfère John McCain.

Curieusement, Ahmed Saleh Al-Obeidi, rencontré dans le district sunnite d'Adhamiyeh, est du même avis. Ahmed a 33 ans, une grosse moustache, une casquette de base-ball sur le crâne et un pisto-

let à crosse nacrée à la ceinture. C'est un « fils de l'Irak » comme disent les Américains, c'est-à-dire un milicien membre d'un de ces « comités du réveil » qui, selon le Pentagone, « ont fortement contribué » à la très forte diminution des attentats et des attaques quotidiennes en Irak depuis plus d'un an.

Alimed et son jeune comparse

Gaylan Abou Mohammed, 22 ans, ont combattu naguère « les occupants » pour le compte d'une unité clandestine liée à Al-Qaida en Irak. Et puis ils ont compris que la minorité sunnite à laquelle ils apparten-

ent avait perdu la guerre. Et qu'il était temps de penser à l'avenir. Les « Amrikis » payent mieux que les djihadistes... « Et ils sont contre l'Iran, qui contrôle notre gouvernement. » Alors va pour les Amrikis... « Je ne connais pas les candidats, dit Ahmed, mais je soutiens celui qui veut rester en Irak

pour casser l'Iran... » McCain encore. McCain toujours pour la plupart des Kurdes, qui représentent 20 % des 28 millions d'Irakiens et craignent beaucoup, à l'avenir, le tête-à-tête avec « les Arabes », chiites et sunnites, qui se méfient de leurs rêves d'indépendance. En général, et hors la « zone verte » où vivent et travaillent les ministres et hauts fonctionnaires, les Irakiens ne se passionnent pas pour les élections américaines. Ils savent, par les dizaines de journaux et télévisions, que « la guerre de Bush », comme on la nomme ici, n'est plus la priorité de la campagne. Pour beaucoup, Obama ou McCain, « les "Amrikis" veulent rester en Irak le plus longtemps possible ». Un sondage, réalisé cet été à la demande du Pentagone, montre que plus des trois quarts de la population « n'aiment pas » les GI et rêvent de les voir partir dès que possible. C'est sur la date de ce « possible » qu'ils se divisent... ■

PATRICE CLAUDE

Selon un sondage, plus des trois quarts de la population « n'aiment pas » les GI et rêvent de les voir partir

November 2, 2008

Chicago Tribune

Iraqis keep an eye on US vote, but security pact has full attention

By SAMEER N. YACOUB

BAGHDAD (AP) -- Iraqis are following this week's U.S. election, but the big news here is the effort to forge a new security agreement that would keep American troops here for most of the new president's first term.

The contest between Barack Obama and John McCain has attracted most attention in Kurdistan, the three provinces of northern Iraq where the Kurds have enjoyed self-rule since 1991.

Several Kurdish newspapers have dedicated full pages to the U.S. campaign. Most papers say they fear Obama would pay less attention to the Kurds, who have used their close ties to the U.S. to bolster their political clout in Iraq.

Elsewhere, many Iraqis appear less concerned, despite striking differences between Obama and McCain over the war.

Obama opposed the conflict from the start and promises to end it. McCain was a strong supporter of the 2003 invasion as well as the troop surge. He promises to pursue the war to victory.

But many Iraqis say they believe the new president will look at Iraq differently once the votes are in. They can't imagine a U.S. president anxious to leave a country with such oil wealth and strategic position in the Middle East.

Haider Abdul-Muhsin, a 35-year-old Shiite bus driver in Baghdad, said he's seen American presidents come and go but "we saw no difference in their dealings with Iraq."

"I don't care who wins the U.S. elections because it

is the institutions, not individuals, that decide U.S. long-term policies," he said.

Outside of Kurdistan, that seeming indifference has been reflected in newspaper and broadcast coverage.

"Our coverage of the U.S. election is not heavy because we believe that the result of the elections will not have a direct impact on the future of Iraq," said Ahmed Abdul-Majid, chief editor of Azzaman, a major Baghdad newspaper.

"There is no difference between McCain and Obama because both of them will follow the strategic policies drawn up by decision-making circles," he said.

Abdul-Halim Saleh, senior editor at the government-owned newspaper Al-Sabah, offered a similar view: "In the end, strategic policies made in the United States will not be affected by the changing of the administrations."

The idea that institutions and not presidents determine U.S. policy helps explain why the security agreement commands so much attention. The agreement, under negotiation for months, would keep American troops in Iraq for three more years but give Iraqis a greater role in deciding U.S. military operations.

It would also take U.S. troops off the streets of Baghdad and other major cities by next summer, giving Iraqi soldiers and police a greater role.

But critics believe gives Iraqis too little control of their own country. The government has asked the U.S. to agree to changes in the draft before submit-

ting it to parliament, which must approve it by Dec. 31 when the U.N. mandate expires.

Iraqi officials say they expect a U.S. response only after Tuesday's election.

Despite modest campaign coverage, the government television station plans live reports from Washington on Tuesday. And, naturally, Iraqis have their favorites in the race.

Those who favor a quick departure for the Americans tend to favor Obama; those who want the U.S. to stay longer are rooting for McCain.

Farid Asasard, director of the Center of the Strategic Studies in Kurdistan, said Kurdish politicians believe McCain will maintain the special relationship that began in 1991 when the U.S. and Britain protected the Kurdish breakaway region from Saddam Hussein.

"I don't think that the Democrats will support the Kurds in Iraq," said Sardar Mohammed, 42, a teacher in Kurdistan. "They declared that they would reduce their presence in Iraq to concentrate more on Afghanistan in contrast to the Republicans."

Walid Khalid, a 21-year-old Sunni college student from Baghdad, said he hopes Obama will win because he is more likely to withdraw U.S. troops quickly.

"I think he will take a more reasonable attitude toward my country than the Republicans who were behind the invasion and destruction of Iraq," he said.



November 2, 2008 - 08:28:53

Iraq's Shabak community demands Incorporation into Kurdistan

NINEWA / Aswat al-Iraq: Hundreds of Iraq's Shabak people on Sunday took to the streets in Ninewa calling to include them in Iraq's Kurdistan region, according to a local official.

"Today, hundreds of Shabak people staged a peaceful demonstration, calling to incorporate them into the Kurdistan region on the basis that they are Kurds, not Arabs," the head of Ninewa's Basheeqa district, Thanoun Younis, told Aswat al-Iraq.

The Shabak people are an ethnic group that lives primarily in the province of Ninewa in Iraq. Their language, Shabaki, is a Zaza-Gorani dialect, similar to Kurdish, with many borrowings from Turkish, Persian, and Arabic. According to another source, they speak a dialect of Kurdish with borrowings from Arabic and Turkish. They are scattered throughout 35 villages located in the east of Mosul. While Kurds considered the Shabak

ethnically Kurds, they identified themselves as Shiites and a separate ethnic group.

Mosul, the capital city of Ninewa, lies 405 km north of Baghdad. The original city of Mosul stands on the west bank of the Tigris River, opposite the ancient biblical city of Nineveh on the east bank, but the metropolitan area has now grown to encompass substantial areas on both banks, with five bridges linking the two sides. Despite having an amount of Kurdish population, it does not form part of the area controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). There are different communities in Mosul like Christians, Shiites and Kurds along with a Sunni majority. The city is also a historic center for the Nestorian Christianity of the Assyrians, containing the tombs of several Old Testament prophets such as Jonah, Yunus in Arabic, and Nahum.

GULF NEWS

November 04, 2008

Many Kurds support US military bases in Arbil

By Basil Adas, Correspondent

Arbil: Many Kurds in Arbil have supported the recent invitation from regional President Massoud Barzani to establish permanent US military bases in the Kurdistan region if the security agreement between the US and Iraq fails to pass parliament.

"Having US bases in the region makes me feel safer and would prevent aggression towards Kurdistan in the future," Ribwar Mohammad, a student at the University of Salahuddin in Arbil told Gulf News.

But in Baghdad, Barzani's statement angered many Iraqi parliamentarians who described the invitation to US troops as a violation of the Iraqi constitution, which does not grant regional governments the jurisdiction to act alone regarding issues of such stature.

Preventing attacks

"The presence of permanent US military bases in the region will prevent any future attacks by a 'reckless' central government," Bashdar Ameen, a Kurdish official in the Ministry of Education said.

NOVEMBER 02, 2008



ALJAZEERA.NET

Al Jazeera

Turkish PM's visit angers Kurds

A second day of protests have erupted across southeastern Turkey over a visit by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish prime minister, to the mainly Kurdish region.

Demonstrators clashed with police on Sunday in the city of Yuksekova as protestors loyal to the Democratic Society Party (DTP), Turkey's main Kurdish party.

Erdogan arrived in the Kurdish region on Saturday a day after a suspected bomb blast rocked the headquarters of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).

Kurdish politicians had warned Erdogan that he should stay away from the region because of tensions triggered by a surge in clashes between Kurdish fighters and Turkish troops.

Erdogan has promised to carry on with a reform drive to earn European Union membership for Turkey, which has resulted in broader Kurdish cultural freedoms.

"Let us not stand against those who want to sow

discord among us ... Let us protect our peace and stand united. If we increase our solidarity, we will also increase our development," he said.

"We have made significant progress on human rights and the government is pursuing EU membership with determination. We will undertake many more reforms."

Series of protests

A series of Kurdish demonstrations have taken place across Turkey since October as the military increased its operations against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

The PKK, blacklisted as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the US and the EU, picked up arms for self-rule in the country's east and southeast in 1984.

Kurds have been outraged over allegations that Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK leader, was mistreated and threatened with death in prison where he is serving a life sentence in solitary confinement.

However, Erdogan denied the allegations

and dismissed them as a ploy to drain support from the ruling party before local elections next year.

"There is no mistreatment, it is all a lie ... They are making up excuses as the elections draw near," he said.

Eye on victory

The AKP, which won a re-election to power last year, has now set its sight on winning local administrations in the southeast, which are held by the DTP.

Erdogan has publicly accused the DTP of failing to provide services in the Kurdish-majority provinces it holds and has also criticised the party for failing to condemn PKK violence.

The DTP is currently facing a possible ban by the constitutional court for links with PKK fighters.

The party, which urges a peaceful resolution to the violent conflict in the southeast, denies the allegations.

United Press International

Iraqi Kurdistan welcomes UNAMI officials

November 4, 2008 Erbil-Hewler, Kurdistan region "Iraq", —

THE VICE president of the Kurdistan National Assembly welcomed U.N. officials to Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan's capital to discuss disputed Kurdish territories in Iraq.

Kurdish Parliament Vice President Kamal Kirkuki welcomed Mark Rutgers, the head of the U.N. Assistance Mission in Iraq station in Erbil, to discuss implementation of Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, the Kurdish Parliament said.

In an effort to alter the demographics of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein launched a campaign in the late 1980s to drive Kurdish, Assyrian and Turkomen families from the region Article 140 considers whether enough Kurds have returned to the area to consider it Kurdish.

The areas under consideration include parts, if not all, of the provinces of Diyala, Kirkuk, Mosul and Salah ad Din.

Kirkuki told the UNAMI delegation that not implementing Article 140 violated the principles of a democratic Iraq. Failure to commit to Article 140, he added, only made the relationship with Baghdad "more complex," the Parliament



statement said.

The people of Iraqi Kurdistan play a vital role in Iraq, the vice president said, and the democratic ideals in the country should support all of its people.

Kirkuk city is historically a Kurdish city and it lies just south border of the Kurdistan autonomous region, the population is a mix of majority Kurds and minority of Arabs, Christians and Turkmen. lies 250 km northeast of Baghdad. Kurds have a strong cultural and emotional attachment to Kirkuk, which they call "the Kurdish Jerusalem."

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is related to the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk city and other disputed areas.

The article also calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province.

The former regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had forced over 250,000 Kurdish residents to give up their homes to Arabs in the 1970s, to "Arabize" the city and the region's oil industry.

United Press International

Muslim Scholars blast Kurdish SOFA support

BAGHDAD, : November 04, 2008 (UPI) —

THE Association of Muslim Scholars in Iraq Tuesday chided a decision by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan to back the Status of Forces Agreement with Washington.

"The statements of Kurdish officials neither have value nor reflect the realities at the ground; however, it just increases their aggressive intentions," the group said in a statement.

The AMSI said the expressions by Kurdish politicians were indicative of their "destructive role" in Iraq, which the influential clerical group says moves against the interests of unity for the country.

The Kurdish statements do not reflect the will of the Iraqi people or the teachings of Islam and echo their "illegitimate ambitions" of self-interest,

the statement read.

Baghdad and Washington are said to be waiting for the results of the U.S. presidential elections Tuesday before moving ahead with any decisions on the bilateral Status of Forces Agreement, which is set to replace the expiring U.N. mandate for Iraq.

In the statement, the AMSI accused Kurdish officials of collaborating with the "foreign usurper" by backing measures in the SOFA, which the group says will permit the establishment of permanent U.S. military bases in the north.

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Al Jazeera
NOVEMBER 04, 2008

Talabani dismisses US base offer

Iraq's president has dismissed Kurdish leader Massud Barzani's invitation to the US to set up military bases in the Kurdish region if a proposed security pact with Baghdad fails.

Jalal Talabani, himself a Kurd, said Washington could set up bases in the country - even in the Kurdish region - only with Baghdad's approval.

"It is not possible for US troops to stay in Kurdistan without the approval of the central government," Talabani said in an interview with state television Al-Iraqiya late on Sunday.

"Kurdistan is part of Iraq, and all of the country's constitutional laws apply to it."

'Warm welcome'

Barzani, who heads the Kurdish administration in the country's north, had offered his region as an alternative for US military bases if the status of forces agreement being negotiated between Washington and Baghdad fell through.

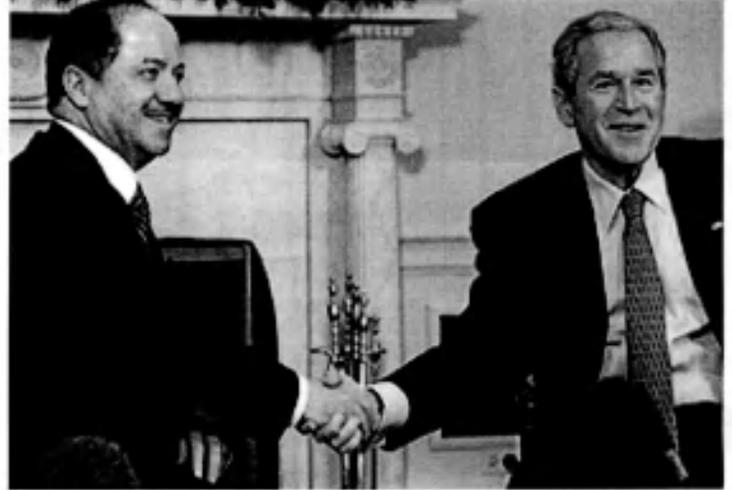
Iraqi newspaper Khabat quoted Barzani, who has strongly backed the controversial proposal, as saying during a recent visit to Washington that his regional government would "welcome" the setting up of US military bases.

"All the attempts are going right now to sign the pact, but if the pact is not signed and if US asked to keep their troops in Kurdistan, I think the parliament, the people and government of Kurdistan will welcome this warmly," he said at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

Supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr, a Shia leader, criticised Barzani for his comments.

"We reject the statement by Massud Barzani," Sheikh Saleh al-Obeidi, a spokesman for the group, told the AFP news agency.

"This position reminds us that Kurds want to separate ... There is a constitution in this country and they have to respect it."



Barzani, left, said Kurdistan's people and government would welcome US military bases [AFP]

Proposed changes

The US government - after initially balking at making any changes demanded by the Iraqi government in the draft pact - is now expected to respond in the next few days.

The agreement is supposed to outline the framework under which US forces will stay in Iraq beyond 2008.

The signing of the pact was delayed after the Iraqi cabinet sought key changes, including greater legal jurisdiction over US troops and guarantees that US soldiers would not launch attacks on other countries from Iraq.

The pact is unpopular among Arab Iraqis who have seen the bulk of violence and destruction since the US-led invasion in 2003, and who see

the pact as nothing more than another form of occupation.

Al Jazeera's Hoda Abdel Hamid reporting from the Kurdish city of Irbil, said that Kurds felt safer having US troops around given the distrust between the Kurds and the Arabs

Kurds have also been spared the worst of the violence since 2003 and many actually feel that their lives have improved over the last five years, with foreign investments and a flourishing local economy, our correspondent said.

The final draft of the proposed pact must be endorsed by the Iraqi parliament after the amendments are finalised by both Washington and Baghdad.

TODAYS ZAMAN November 5, 2008

DTP leader defends his party amidst tension

TODAY'S ZAMAN

Pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) leader Ahmet Türk yesterday defended his party amidst recent tension caused by protests over the weekend organized in the Southeast by DTP supporters against visiting Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Türk, addressing his party's parliamentary group meeting on Tuesday, said his party's main purpose was to ensure the existence of an environment in which all of Turkey's peoples embrace one another with love.

He also said Turkey's flag is "a common value of us all" and noted: "We created this flag with our common values. We do not have a problem with this flag. We have always emphasized solutions that have Turkey's integrity at the center. Our purpose is to ensure the existence of an environment in which all peoples embrace one another with love. Turkey is a state, a republic where various cultures live together in a mosaic," he said, adding that Turkey's diversity was



a characteristic of the country which should be celebrated.

"We are making efforts to ensure that this mentality working for the continuation of this diversity remains dominant," he said and criticized Prime Minister Erdoğan, who said on Monday

that his government's motto was "one flag, one country, one nation," found inflammatory by the country's Kurds, as the word "one nation" is usually used in Turkey to refer to Turks only.

"Instead of the mentality of one nation, a mentality that considers differences as richness is necessary. This is a necessity of pluralism and democracy. This is how we should see it," he said. Türk then called on President Abdullah Gül to step in and pave the way for constructive dialogue.

He further criticized Prime Minister Erdoğan for defending an Istanbul resident who fired a pump rifle on pro-Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) demonstrators over the weekend, saying his situation resembled a cleric who issues a "license to kill." He said, "The prime minister says they have run out of patience, he says our death is necessary." Türk further stressed that these were attempts to turn the DTP into a party to be lynched. "We will continue our efforts to develop a peaceful and democratic process

without being affected by the recent developments," Türk said. Some press members walked out of yesterday's parliamentary DTP meeting, in protest of attacks by PKK and DTP supporters on press vehicles following the prime minister's visit to Hakkari on Sunday.

DTP İstanbul leaders arrested over demonstration

Fifty-nine out of 61 detained last Sunday in protests against the alleged maltreatment of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in prison were released yesterday pending trial. Five others, including DTP İstanbul branch chairman Halil Aksoy and DTP Fatih district branch President Mehdi Tanrikulu were arrested by the court they were remanded to yesterday. Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal also criticized the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) yesterday. Baykal accused the prime minister of having tolerated terrorism during the time his party has been in power. "Your duty is to render ineffective those who commit crimes. You cannot tell people to just leave when you fail to do your own job," he

said, referring to Prime Minister Erdoğan's angry words on Sunday when he told PKK supporters to just "pick up and leave" Turkey if they are against living under "one flag." He also criticized the prime minister for defending an İstanbul resident's pump rifle attack on demonstrators. "Should the people defend themselves? What are you there for? What is your job? This is impossible to understand."

Journalists protest DTP for violent attacks

Reporters at the Democratic Society Party's (DTP) parliamentary group meeting on Tuesday left the meeting room immediately after DTP leader Ahmet Türk started speaking as sign of protest against violent attacks against members of the press by DTP supporters in Hakkari last Sunday.

As Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan arrived in the province, DTP supporters protested violently, clashing with police, throwing stones and burning four vehicles. The protestors also attacked press vehicles and stoned buses belonging to Kanal A, the Cihan news agency, NTV and the Zaman newspaper. On their way out, the victims warned vehicles belonging to the

Doğan news agency and the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) station that were driving into town. Members of the press were stranded close to seven kilometers outside the city throughout much of the day.

Following the reporters, cameramen and photo-journalists also left the DTP meeting. Only the cameraman for Parliament's television station, TBMM TV, remained in the meeting room. Türk condemned the attacks against members of the press, saying his party supports freedom of the press.

In the meantime, the G-9 Journalists Platform released a written statement yesterday condemning the attacks against journalists in Hakkari.

"Members of the press were prevented from performing their jobs as a result of attacks and the use of violent force. Such attacks, which violate the public's right to access information, can never be approved. We protest all those who attacked the members of the press and their vehicles in Hakkari," read the platform's statement.

İstanbul Today's Zaman

Chicago Tribune November 6, 2008

Iraqis weigh Obama's future

Many said they don't expect immediate changes in policy, but they do know they will come.

By Ryan Lucas Associated Press

BAGHDAD - Many in Iraq said yesterday that they did not expect an immediate shift in U.S. policy toward their country when Barack Obama takes over as president, despite his calls for a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops within 16 months.

But top Iraqi officials said they did recognize that Obama's perspective on the war differed greatly from that of President Bush.

"We don't expect any change to happen overnight or any hasty change in U.S. policy and commitment toward Iraq," Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari told Al-Arahiyah TV moments after Obama claimed victory over Republican John McCain.

But he acknowledged that Obama "will not have the same enthusiasm and momentum for this situation" in Iraq as Bush.

The foreign minister said Obama told Iraqi leaders earlier this year during meetings in Baghdad and Washington that "any decision that concerns Iraq would be taken after thorough discussions with the Iraqi government and field military leaders."

Salim Abdullah, spokesman for the largest Sunni parliamentary bloc, agreed. "We are not concerned that he will take a unilateral decision to move troops quickly from Iraq," Abdullah said.

Some Iraqis are eager to see an end to a U.S. military presence they consider foreign occupation. American officials insist the troops are here to protect the Iraqi people.

Salah al-Obeidi, spokesman of the anti-American Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, said yesterday that with Obama's victory, "we

expect that big changes will take place." The Sadrist are among the most outspoken opponents of the U.S. military presence in Iraq.

Wali Mohammed, 22, a college student in Baqubah, said he wanted Obama to stand pat on his campaign pledge to pull the 151,000 U.S. troops out of Iraq. "We hope Obama will stick to his word," he said.

Other Iraqis fear that their leaders and security forces are not ready to take over and do not want the Americans to leave too soon.

U.S. exit polls from Tuesday's election showed that only one in 10 American voters called the Iraq war their top concern when making their presidential choice, reflecting expectations Obama will focus more on domestic issues and the economy once he takes over.

Obama's election win comes as U.S. and Iraqi officials scramble to reach a deal on a new security agreement that would end the U.S. military presence in the country by 2012 and give Iraqis a greater role in managing combat operations.

Violence has dropped sharply in the country since Iraqi security forces and the U.S. military gained the upper hand against extremists this spring. But a string of bombings in Baghdad this week has killed more than 30 people, underscoring that insurgents still pose a threat. And U.S. commanders warn that any security gains are reversible.

It remains unclear what impact Obama's victory will have on negotiations over the security agreement, but Iyad Jamal-Aldin, a lawmaker from the Iraqiya List group, said



he did not expect it "will speed up the signing of the pact."

Opinions in the run-up to Tuesday's vote differed somewhat in Kurdistan, the generally peaceful area of three northern provinces where Kurds have enjoyed self-rule since 1991 and have used their ties to Washington to defend their autonomy.

Some Kurdish officials expressed concern that Obama might not continue the close relationship.

Kurdish lawmaker Mahmoud Othman said he thought the Democrat's administration would usher in a fresh approach from Washington toward the Middle East.

"I think that it's a natural change to take place after a long period with the Republicans in office," said Othman, who praised the Democrat's idea of holding talks with Iraq's neighbor Iran.

AFP

IRAK: BARZANI D'ACCORD POUR DES BASES AMÉRICAINES AU KURDISTAN (PARTI)

ERBIL (Irak), 2 nov 2008 (AFP) –

LE PRÉSIDENT du Kurdistan irakien s'est déclaré en faveur de l'installation de bases militaires américaines dans cette région autonome du nord de l'Irak si les négociations de l'accord de sécurité entre Bagdad et Washington échouaient, a rapporté dimanche son parti.

"Tous les efforts actuellement visent à aboutir à la signature de l'accord mais si cela échoue et que les Etats-unis nous demandent de maintenir des troupes au Kurdistan, je pense que le Parlement, le peuple et le gouvernement du Kurdistan accueilleront chaudement cette requête", a déclaré Massoud Barzani, lors d'une conférence à Washington.

Ces propos ont été tenus vendredi au Centre d'études internationales et stratégiques et rapportés par Khabat, l'organe du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) de Massoud Barzani.

Américains et Irakiens peinent depuis des mois à finaliser le texte de l'accord dit de Sofa (Status of forces agreement) donnant une base juridique à la présence militaire américaine après l'expiration du mandat de l'ONU au 31 décembre.

Le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki a présenté à Washington un texte remanié après les cinq amendements apportés par ses ministres. La Maison Blanche, de son côté, a exprimé de fortes réticences à l'idée de renégocier cet accord.

Les dirigeants kurdes sont totalement favorables à l'accord et considèrent depuis 1991 les Etats-unis comme leur meilleur allié et leur protecteur.

M. Barzani se trouve actuellement à Washington pour une série d'entretiens avec l'administration américaine.

AFP

TURQUIE: EXPLOSION ET VOITURES INCENDIÉES À ISTANBUL

ISTANBUL, 3 nov 2008 (AFP)

UNE EXPLOSION s'est produite dans la nuit de dimanche à lundi dans le centre d'Istanbul, sans faire de blessés mais provoquant des dégâts, tandis que trois voitures ont été incendiées dans la métropole par des inconnus, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Ces incidents surviennent alors que la Turquie traverse une nouvelle période de tension avec sa communauté kurde.

Deux hommes cagoulés en motocyclette ont lancé un engin vraisemblablement artisanal à l'entrée d'une ruelle du quartier très fréquenté de Beyoglu, provoquant des dégâts matériels à des immeubles avoisinants, selon l'agence.

La police recherche ces deux hommes.

Par ailleurs, dans ce même secteur des inconnus ont incendié trois voitures avant de prendre la fuite, ajoute l'agence.

Les Kurdes sont de plus en plus mécontents de l'intensification des opérations de l'armée contre les rebelles kurdes et des mauvais traitements que subit selon eux dans sa prison le chef de la rébellion, Abdullah Öcalan, condamné à la détention perpétuelle.

Les dirigeants turcs ont démenti ces affirmations.

Tout au long du week-end, des violences ont opposé des manifestants aux forces de l'ordre dans le sud-est peuplé majoritairement de kurdes où le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan a effectué une visite.

LEFIGARO 4 novembre 2008

Confidentiel : Air France, cap sur le Kurdistan irakien ?

Air France pourrait mettre le cap sur le Kurdistan irakien

AIR FRANCE est en négociation pour ouvrir, d'ici à la fin de l'année, une liaison aérienne avec Erbil, la principale ville des provinces kurdes du nord de l'Irak. Une délégation de la compagnie nationale s'est rendue récemment

au Kurdistan. Air France ne dessert plus l'Irak depuis l'invasion du Koweït par Saddam Hussein en 1990. Mais, ces dernières années, plusieurs de ses concurrents européens ont ouvert une liaison avec les régions kurdes,

épargnées par les violences et en plein «boom» économique. Bernard Kouchner, le ministre des Affaires étrangères, encourage vivement les entreprises françaises à investir chez ses amis kurdes.

AFP

IRAK: PAS DE BASES AMÉRICAINES AU KURDISTAN SANS L'ACCORD DE BAGDAD (TALABANI)

ERBIL (Irak), 3 nov 2008 (AFP) –

LE PRÉSIDENT irakien Jalal Talabani, qui est également l'un des plus puissants chefs kurdes, a affirmé qu'il était "impossible" que des troupes américaines stationnent au Kurdistan irakien sans l'accord du gouvernement central.

"Les troupes américaines ne peuvent stationner au Kurdistan sans l'accord du gouvernement central car le Kurdistan fait partie de l'Irak et est soumis aux lois constitutionnelles du pays", a-t-il dit sur la télévision officielle Iraquiya, à l'occasion d'un entretien dimanche soir.

Cette prise de position tranche avec celle de son rival, le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, qui s'était déclaré en faveur de l'installation de bases militaires américaines dans cette région du nord de l'Irak si les négociations sur l'accord de sécurité entre Bagdad et Washington échouaient.

Le mouvement du chef chiite radical Moqtada Sadr s'est également opposé à cette proposition. "Nous rejetons les déclarations de Massoud Barzani. Cette



position nous rappelle que les Kurdes demandent souvent la séparation (de l'Irak) et ces propos suscitent notre peur", a affirmé à l'AFP le porte-parole du mouvement Salah el-Obeidi.

"Il y a une Constitution en vigueur dans le pays et ils doivent la respecter", a-t-il ajouté.

M. Barzani a déclaré lors d'une conférence à Washington: "tous les efforts visent actuellement à aboutir à la signature de l'accord mais si cela échoue et que les Etats-unis nous demandent de maintenir des troupes au Kurdistan, je pense que le Parlement, le peuple et le gouvernement du Kurdistan accueilleront chaudement cette requête".

Ces propos, tenus vendredi au Centre d'études internationales et stratégiques, ont été rapportés dimanche par Khabat, l'organe du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) de Massoud Barzani.

Américains et Irakiens peinent depuis des mois à finaliser le texte de l'accord dit de Sofa (Status of forces agreement) donnant une base juridique à la présence militaire américaine après l'expiration du mandat de l'ONU au 31 décembre.

A Bagdad, les miliciens du « Réveil » redoutent le retrait des Américains

BAGDAD

ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL

Il y a seulement deux ans, l'élégant jeune homme en uniforme qui nous parle n'aurait pas hésité à tuer n'importe quel GI américain. Aujourd'hui, il est salarié de l'« US Army ». Il ne jure que par elle, ne « parle qu'à elle », n'a « confiance qu'en elle » et, comme une forte majorité de la minorité arabe sunnite irakienne à laquelle il appartient, Ali Abdel Jabbar Mahmoud, dit « Abou Sejjad » dans son quartier d'Adhamiyah, redoute avant tout son retrait.

Dans l'ancien café Internet qu'il exploitait naguère et qu'il a reconverti en poste de commandement, à 500 m de la célèbre mosquée Abou-Hanifa où des dizaines de « moudjahidins arabes » étrangers, tués au combat contre « l'envahisseur infidèle », sont enterrés, Abou Sejjad n'en finit pas de pester contre « ce gouvernement d'injustice » auquel il doit désormais rendre compte. Un accord irako-américain a en effet été signé le 1^{er} octobre : désormais, les 49 381 miliciens de Bagdad, en grande majorité sunnites, appartenant à ces « comités du Réveil » embauchés par les Américains pour « maintenir l'ordre dans leurs quartiers », cesser de tirer sur les patrouilles et aider, après avoir le plus souvent changé de camp, au démantèlement des réseaux djihadistes plus ou moins liés à Al-Qaïda, sont placés sous la responsabilité du ministère irakien de la défense. C'est lui, en principe, qui réglera leur solde – 300 dollars par homme et par mois – dès la fin octobre. Progressivement, les 50 000 autres « fils d'Irak », comme les Américains les ont rebaptisés à travers le pays, passeront, eux aussi, sous le contrôle de Bagdad.

Problème : beaucoup rechignent, et les officiers supérieurs américains eux-mêmes émettent des doutes quant à la volonté d'un gouvernement dominé par la majorité chiite d'intégrer, comme promis, au moins 20 % de supplétifs sunnites dans l'armée et la police locale. Fin septembre, 3 400 Bagdadis seulement, soit 6,5 % des

effectifs, l'avaient été. Le colonel Adel Abdel Salam, qui commande la 42^e brigade de l'armée irakienne, désormais en charge des 2 050 « fils d'Irak » à Adhamiyah, se plaint devant nous que les Américains, « contrairement à l'accord conclu », ne lui aient « toujours pas transmis » les dossiers personnels de chacun de leurs supplétifs.

Anonymement, un officier californien explique qu'il traîne les pieds « parce qu'ils ont tendance à les arrêter, ce qui est extrêmement dangereux ». Abou Sejjad, le fringant trentenaire qui nous reçoit à Adhamiyah et qui commande 67 « fils d'Irak », rêve « depuis toujours » d'entrer dans l'armée. Mais il est « certain » que, finalement, il sera, lui aussi emprisonné. « Des militaires sont venus récemment dans ce bureau : j'étais absent. Ils ont expliqué à mes hommes que j'étais un meurtrier et un kidnappeur. Notre ancien chef, Abou Abed, qui a fondé les comités à Bagdad, a été obligé de fuir en Jordanie. » De fait, l'homme qui symbolisait le phénomène dans la capitale est aujourd'hui accusé par le pouvoir d'avoir commandité des « dizaines » d'assassinats. On a trouvé trois corps enterrés sous l'un de ses bureaux à Amriya.

« Double jeu »

« En fait, nous assure le colonel Abdel Salam, il jouait double jeu ; il continuait de travailler pour Al-Qaïda contre nous. » Sous le nez des Américains qui l'ont décodé ? « Je continue d'avoir une foi absolue en lui », confiait récemment au *Los Angeles Times*, le capitaine Eric Cospers, qui était son « agent traitant » à Bagdad.

Une chose est sûre : nombre de politiciens chiites, alliés de Nouri Al-Maliki, le premier ministre, se méfient des « fils » sunnites et n'en veulent pas dans les forces de l'ordre. Sous leur pression, dit-on, M. Maliki vient de mettre en sommeil le comité irako-américain chargé d'étudier les dossiers d'intégration. « Nous pensons que le seuil critique est franchi », dit Ali Al-Dabbagh, son porte-parole. En clair, la crainte d'une révolte armée des supplétifs

en déshérence contre le pouvoir légitime des chiites se dissiperait.

Abou Sejjad, qui a fondé son « comité » en août 2007 pour « protéger » les 40 000 habitants de son quartier, n'en est pas si sûr. Dans l'accord de sécurité actuellement discuté avec acharnement entre Bagdad et Washington, il est prévu que toutes les « forces de combat » américaines devront avoir quitté les villes et villages irakiens d'ici au 30 juin 2009. « Si le gouvernement ne change pas son attitude à notre égard d'ici là, certains de mes hommes qui travaillaient avant pour Al-Qaïda retourneront au combat », prédit-il. Deux d'entre eux, kalachnikov au poing et tenues disparates, approuvent silencieusement.

Dehors, le flot des voitures s'écoule tranquillement. L'atmosphère est calme. Seule différence apparente avec les quartiers chiites : à Adhamiyah comme dans toutes les zones sunnites du pays, accroché aux réverbères ou hissé sur les casemates des check-points, c'est l'ancien drapeau national tricolore, désormais interdit parce que frappé des trois étoiles de l'ancien régime – « Unité, Liberté, Socialisme » – qui claque au vent. C'est ici précisément, le 9 avril 2003, que Saddam Hussein, sous les vivats, avait pris son dernier bain de foule en tant que président de la République arabe et socialiste d'Irak... ■

PATRICE CLAUDE

Les Kurdes de Turquie dénoncent les conditions de détention d'Abdullah Öcalan

Le dirigeant historique du PKK, qui purge une peine de prison à vie sur une île de la mer de Marmara, est devenu un prisonnier encombrant pour Ankara

ISTANBUL
CORRESPONDANCE

Il a suffi d'une rumeur pour mettre le feu aux poudres. Le 17 octobre, les avocats du leader historique du Parti des travailleurs kurdes (PKK), Abdullah Öcalan, dénonçaient de mauvais traitements infligés à leur client. L'unique pensionnaire de l'île-prison d'Imrali aurait été maltraité par ses gardiens, rapportaient-ils, après lui avoir rendu visite. « Deux gardiens l'ont attrapé par les bras et un troisième l'a poussé vers l'avant. C'est la première agression physique. Jusqu'ici il n'avait subi que des menaces de mort et des insultes », raconte Hatice Korkut, une avocate d'Öcalan.

Bousculé ? Torturé ? La nouvelle, démentie par les autorités turques, a immédiatement provoqué des manifestations de colère dans les villes kurdes. Depuis plus de deux semaines, pas une journée ne passe sans de nouvelles émeutes. A Van ou Diyarbakir, des dizaines de

voitures ont été brûlées et des groupes d'adolescents attaquent les véhicules blindés à coups de pierres. Ces scènes de guérilla urbaine surviennent même dans les cités sans histoire et s'étendent aux quartiers populaires d'Istanbul.

A Bruxelles, Strasbourg ou Beyrouth, les partisans du PKK se sont également fait entendre. Et dimanche 2 novembre, la tension est encore montée d'un cran. A Hakkari,

le siège local de l'AKP, le parti au pouvoir, a été soufflé par une explosion, à la veille de la visite du premier ministre Erdogan. A Diyarbakir, un sit-in de deux jours a été organisé par les élus kurdes du DTP (parti de la société démocratique), à côté de la base militaire de la ville, pour protester contre la politique du gouvernement et soutenir Abdullah Öcalan. Enfin, à Istanbul, un rassemblement sur la place Taksim a été interdit. Vingt-sept manifestants ont été arrêtés, alors que le quartier était quadrillé par la police anti-émeutes.

En tournée dans le Sud-Est, Recep Tayyip Erdogan a répliqué vivement à cette campagne menée, selon lui, par le parti kurde dans la perspective des municipales de mars. « Une nation, un drapeau, un peuple, un Etat... Ceux qui ne sont pas d'accord avec ce principe peuvent quitter le pays » a lancé M. Erdogan. Il a également pris parti en faveur d'un « citoyen turc » qui dimanche, à Istanbul, a ouvert le feu au fusil à pompe sur un groupe de manifestants. « La patience a ses limites », a-t-il dit.

« Le peuple kurde perçoit ce qui est fait à Öcalan comme une atteinte à sa propre intégrité »

Hasip Kaplan,
député de Sirkak

La Turquie pensait pourtant en avoir terminé avec Abdullah Öcalan lorsqu'en 1999, « Apo » fut capturé à Nairobi, au Kenya, au terme d'une cavale rocambolesque.

Condamné à mort, Öcalan a finalement vu sa sentence commuée en prison à vie, en 2002, après l'abolition de la

peine capitale par Ankara. Mais depuis sa cellule, sur l'île-prison d'Imrali, au milieu de la mer de Marmara, son aura demeure intacte et son sort provoque régulièrement des poussées de fièvre.

En 2007, une analyse de son sang avait révélé la présence d'une quantité importante de chrome et de strontium. Ses avocats avaient évoqué un empoisonnement. « Le peuple kurde perçoit ce qui est fait à

Öcalan comme une atteinte à sa propre intégrité, estime le député de Sirkak, Hasip Kaplan. Nous voulons qu'une commission parlementaire examine les conditions de sa détention. »

Les défenseurs des droits de l'homme dénoncent l'isolement total auquel est soumis le leader kurde. « Quand nous allons le voir, il y a deux vitres entre nous, jamais de contact physique, décrit son avocate. Les conversations sont surveillées par une dizaine de gardiens. Son courrier est épluché et censuré. Il est enfermé 23 heures sur 24 et a droit à une radio qui tombe régulièrement en panne. »

Le quotidien *Zaman* estime à environ 60 000 euros par jour le coût de cette détention sous haute sécurité. Un millier de soldats sont mobilisés pour garder ce prisonnier « VIP » devenu encombrant pour la Turquie et qui, selon le gouvernement, continue de dicter ses ordres par l'intermédiaire de ses avocats. D'autres soulignent les incohérences de ses déclarations récentes et évoquent une possible manipulation par les forces de sécurité. La question d'un transfert se repose. « Le maintien dans une prison spéciale, constate le chercheur Sedat Laçiner, contribue à sa légende. » ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

IRAQI PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS ARE CRUCIAL

Deputy Governor tells Arab parties to give minorities "five seats each"

By Qassim Khidhir
The Kurdish Globe

The Ninewa deputy governor predicts one million people will participate in the provincial election in Ninewa province.

Khasro Goran, Ninewa Deputy Governor, told The Kurdish Globe that around one-and-a-half million people in Ninewa province have the right to vote in the coming provincial elections, and he believes that one million people will vote.

Goran said, "There will be 37 seats in Ninewa province council, and for each seat we need 27, 000 votes." Goran is a Kurd on the Kurdistan Alliance list, also known as the Ninewa Brotherhood list.

He said that up to now 37 lists have registered their names to participate in the provincial elections in Ninewa province. Some of the lists belong to former members of the Baath Party, and some belong to tribal leaders. Goran believes many Sunni Arabs in Ninewa will vote for tribe lists and national lists rather than religion lists.

The Kurdistan Alliance List in Ninewa consists of the two main Kurdish political parties, Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriot Union Kurdistan (PUK), as well as the Kurdish Shabak community, the Kurdish Yezidi community, Christians, Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG), and Iraqi Communist Party. Iraqi Parliament decided on Monday to allot one seat each for Christians, Yezidis, and Shabaks in Ninewa provincial council.

Christians strongly criticized Iraqi Parliament and said their share doesn't represent their real size.

Meanwhile, last Sunday Shabaks demonstrated in Ninewa province and said they want their area to be merged with Kurdistan Region.



An Iraqi soldier watches over Ninewa Governor Durid Kashmola while he visits Mosul city, the capital of Ninewa province. GLOBE PHOTO \ Qassim Khidhir

They also criticized Arab Shiite political parties for trying to separate them from Kurds. Shabaks are Shiite Kurds mainly live in Ninewa province.

"We don't like Shabaks and Yezidis to be separated from us," said Goran, who said if that happened Iraqi Parliament should give them all their rights.

Goran tells Arab political parties: "You want Christians, Shabaks, and Yezidis to have their own seat in Mosul province council. OK: Let's give them five seats each."

Security in Ninewa Ninewa Governor Muhammad Dur'id Kashmola said currently Ninewa is the most dangerous province in Iraq because most of the insurgents in Iraq are now in Ninewa; also, Ninewa has a wide and unprotected border with Syria. Kashmola said unemployment is one of the reasons people do not cooperate with security forces.

A shopkeeper in Mosul city capital of Ninewa who requested anonymity said insurgents give 70, 000 dinars (US\$60) to teenagers to

plant roadside bombs on the streets. "People are asking compensations for the damage of their shops and houses destroyed by insurgents," Kashmola told the Globe while visiting some streets in Mosul to encourage people to open their shops.

Ganim Karim, whose sweet shop was shattered by a suicide bomb a year ago, said he has been jobless since then. He wants compensation for the damage so that he can reopen his shop.

The streets, intersections, and neighborhoods in Mosul now have different names, like Death Street, which people dare not walk at night because insurgents will kill them. Burnt Intersection is one of the intersections in the city where several car bombs have exploded. And there are several neighborhoods now which people call "assassination neighborhoods." Here, insurgents assassinate security officers and members of political parties in the daylight.

Brig. Gen. Thia Jalal Tofiq, Operation Commander in Ninewa prov-

ince, explained that security is improving little by little in the province. He said people are complaining that Baghdad doesn't give enough help to improve security in the city.

Lack of trust Deputy Governor Goran said there is lack of trust among security forces in the province, which consist of Arab Sunnis, Arab Shiites, and Kurds. Goran told Globe that there are insurgent infiltrators inside military and police forces, but not so much in the military.

He said police asked a family to evacuate their house the other day; after the family refused, one of the policemen threatened the family. The policeman said: "You don't evacuate. That's alright. We know that your son is an interpreter with U.S. troops." The family then left, said Khasro.

On Monday, a number of former Iraqi high-ranked officers in Ninewa held a seminar where they requested to join the military again; they also requested that security in the province be under their control. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has ordered to transfer Kurdish forces, which are part of the Iraqi Defense Ministry, to the provinces in the south and middle. But Kurdish forces have rejected the order; they said there is a political purpose behind al-Maliki's order.

The Kurdish forces in Ninewa see the order as an insult, since they were the only and first forces who were ready to fight insurgents in Ninewa after toppling Saddam's regime in 2003. They say a lot of their lives were taken and blood spilled trying to sustain security in Ninewa.

PKK issues celebratory message for Obama

İSMAIL AVCI DIYARBAKIR

Two high-level members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) have released a message to Barack Obama congratulating him on his election as the next president of the United States and asking for his help in solving the Kurdish problem. The PKK's Murat Karayılan and Zübeyir Aydar said in their message they are not enemies of Iraq or the United States and that Obama should contribute to the finding of a democratic solution to Turkey's Kurdish issue.

Internet sites close to the PKK published the open letter, which said:

"Your election campaign and your calls for change, peace, freedom, equality and justice based on high moral values have been followed by our people with interest and sympathy, as they have been all over the world. During the time of President George W. Bush our movement was placed on the list of terrorist organizations without justification. To please Turkey, Mr. Bush declared our movement the enemy of Iraq and Turkey. He gave

Turkey high-technology weapons and intelligence support. We are not enemies of anyone, especially not Iraq or the United States. We have never directed our actions against the United States or the American people. We want to solve the problem with Turkey through dialogue and in a peaceful and democratic way. Your country has multilateral relations with Turkey. We don't demand that you disturb those relations for us. We ask you to use your relations to help solve the problem through dialogue."

As Obama takes U.S. elections by storm, the legacy of Bush is not lost on the Kurds

Barack Obama swept to victory in the U.S. presidential elections, marking a momentous day in American history.

By Bashdar Pusho Ismaleel
The Kurdish Globe

The appointment of the first black U.S. president represents more than just this iconic and ground-breaking significance. Indeed the world, gripped with the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, facing a growing threat of fundamentalism, and reeling from cynicism caused by recent U.S. foreign policy, has been crying out for fresh impetus and new hope.

Perhaps no individual has greater expectations right now than that on Obama's broad shoulders. Obama may well represent the energy that the globe is lacking, but he is no miracle worker. Obama can only work with the tools at his disposal and maneuver within constraints that the political stage allows.

Obama would do well to get people's feet back on the ground and quell a level of expectation that if unchecked may ironically cripple his tenure before it has even started.

Obama's appointment certainly stole the world's gaze. However, as the world's attention turned to historic elections, the heated U.S. presidential contest between Barack Obama and John McCain was observed with as much interest in Kurdistan as any part of the world. After recent Republican legacy in Kurdistan and the more clear-cut promises of McCain over the U.S. course in Iraq, arguably Obama was not the first choice of the Kurdish people.

The name "Bush" in Kurdish folklore

If George Bush Senior can be viewed by the Kurds with eternal gratitude for the establishment of the no-fly zone and onset of Kurdish liberalization from tyranny in 1991, it is perhaps the actions of his son George W. Bush that is forever etched in Kurdish folklore.

Conceivably, in later generations the Kurds may even view the decision by Bush Junior to oust Saddam Hussein from power in the same breadth of Newroz folklore when Kawa the blacksmith defeated Zehak the evil ruler of these mystical lands, to free a nation in captivity thousands of years ago. The significance of the new dawn in Kurdish existence cannot be over-estimated.

Although the Kurds have been betrayed far too many times, par-

ticularly by successive U.S. governments, to take future American support for granted, the change of fortune in the 17 years and particularly the last 5 since the liberalization of Iraq, have been truly remarkable for an ancient, battle weary, and emotionally scarred people.

Not all the policies of the U.S. government have bode well with the people of Kurdistan, and U.S. presidents throughout their new-found autonomy have stopped short of full-fledged backing and support for the Kurdish nation; however the symbolic nature in which the Kurds were afforded their first opportunity to guide their future and look ahead to a new prosperous and unmolested path can and will never be forgotten by the ever-grateful Kurds. The Kurds, cold-heartedly sliced into pieces like disposable by-products in the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, waited many decades to be rid of mass oppression at the hands of their occupiers.

U.S. intervention in 1991 may ironically have been forced and not wilfully decided by the U.S. administration at the time, and the world superpower could have acted years before the massacre of thousands of Kurdish civilians rather than persevere in their own selfish strategic interests; nevertheless, an invaluable opportunity was given to the Kurds to begin new chapters in their existence.

Kurdish anxiety

Kurdish trepidation and weariness at seeing their hard-fought gains vanish is all too common, especially when their gains have not quite been encapsulated in protection and guarantee. Such mistrust, particularly toward their former Arab rulers in Iraq, cannot simply vanish in a small period of time.

Pain and mourning are not concepts that just disappear, least of all from mentally scarred citizens who have lost many a loved one and witnessed the razing of their villages. So when an end of era arrives in America, a country on the path of ground-breaking political change, Kurdish anticipation of the electoral results was understandable.

As thousands of Kurds watched with intent, it was the candidate that represented the next best thing to George W. Bush that dominated



their gaze. In this context, John McCain was in a way the default man of choice in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Where Obama has raised Kurdish tension, by declaring his open intent to withdraw troops from Iraq as soon as possible, McCain had remained defiant to stay the course and not allow their hard-won security gains in Iraq to disappear.

Now Kurds watch developments in the White House with close interest, and anticipate with anxiety the policy Obama adopts toward the Kurds. As U.S. foreign policy in Iraq becomes destined for a shakeup under Obama, whether the Kurds will be given commitment and protection, as American attention turns elsewhere, is uncertain.

U.S. bases in Kurdistan

The willingness and encouragement for the establishment of permanent U.S. bases in Kurdistan Region may have stoked national sentiments further south in recent times; however, the concept is nothing new.

Kurds have campaigned and supported the idea of some form of residual U.S. presence in Kurdistan, regardless of any greater U.S.-Iraqi security pact.

It's hardly a secret that the majority of Kurds in Iraq are pro-Western. However, such blatant endorsement of Kurdish autonomy by the new Obama administration may be nothing short of wishful thinking.

Just as the Kurds rely heavily on the U.S. in the present and the future, in the quest to end their five-year nightmare and to safeguard the seeds of their greater Middle Eastern project, the U.S. relies heavily on broader Iraqi endorsement and Arab support.

Kurdistan President Massoud

Barzani, recently in Washington for talks, emphasized the warm welcome the idea of the stationing of U.S. troops in Kurdistan would receive, if the security pact was not signed by year end.

His remarks drew strong rebuke somewhat unsurprisingly from anti-U.S. hardliners, namely from Moqtada al-Sadr's bloc, but also ironically from leading Kurdish figures and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani. Talabani's statement that all Iraqi constitutional laws apply to the Kurdistan Region was inevitable. He may be an influential Kurdish leader, but as the symbolic figurehead of Iraq, he was hardly going to embrace the idea in public with open arms.

Status of Forces Agreement (Sofa) stalled

With the chances of passing the security pact under the remaining stewardship of Bush now slim, the chances of an agreement before year end, when U.S. forces will find themselves in a legal vacuum, are now also diminishing.

What was deemed a final document awaiting vote by Iraq's Parliament, the draft has now been returned, somewhat disappointedly in the eyes of the Bush administration, with a fresh set of proposals and request for further rework.

U.S. officials had previously labeled the chances of further revisions as unlikely. Despite more recent encouragement from Bush that a deal will be struck before year end, the U.S. analysis of Iraqi recommendations, coupled with scepticism of high-ranking U.S. officials, may well mean that the pact will become one of the first testing challenges facing Obama as new U.S. president.

The attitude of a majority of Iraqi

politicians to be seen standing up for national pride and not to cede under U.S. influence, has meant an agreement, that was already a product of dilution, may require further downgrading to the annoyance of the U.S.

However, as much as Baghdad can ill-afford to lose the support of the U.S. in such a short period of time, conversely Washington without common agreement to remain in Iraq will suffer huge humiliation come January 1, 2009, with the absence of symbolic legal cover.

Greater Iraqi view

Other than the Kurdistan Region, where the next U.S. president and more importantly his moves and motives for the country, have taken

much more significance, the general view in the rest of Iraq is less intensive.

Obama's appointment will bode well with large sections of the Iraqi population who favored a quick departure of American forces, and remained unmoved from a perception of Bush as their own Western tyrant. The significance of Obama's skin-color and his distinct origins is not forgotten on most Iraqis (or the great Middle Eastern landscape for that matter). However, most Arab sceptics generally believe that the choice of presidency will hold little sway, in light of more encompassing strategic institutions that will determine greater U.S. policies.

This view may hold some weight; after all, to a large extent the arms of the new U.S. president will still in

some way, shape or form be constricted by the legacy of the Bush administration. No U.S. president, however gallant, can escape from this fact.

Furthermore, U.S. foreign policy has always been long term, especially with certain regards; for example, the strong support for Israel becoming almost constitutional over the years. Decades of foreign ideals and strategic maneuvering for a world order in the vision of the U.S., cannot be altered greatly or at the pace many demand. Even the effervescent and bold Obama may struggle to conjure wholesale and controversial changes.

Untangling of this web by Democrats now in power will take time and may consume their first term. In light of this, Obama can ill-afford to

bring down Bush's principles in Iraq with a lack of remorse. If he does and the Iraqi project derails badly, the nails in his presidential coffin may have been sealed before it even began. The security pact, even if modified further, will clearly see U.S. presence in Iraq for at least four years.

However, regardless of the differing camps of view on Bush's eight-year tenure at the helm and the capacity of Obama to enact real change, there is a broad and energized consensus in the U.S. and the international stage, that a fresh outlook was required and a new page can now be turned. A jubilant Obama hopes to provide just that.



06 November 2008.

Obama's running mate elates Kurdish citizens

Biden's proposals concerning Kurdistan get Kurds excited about outcome of U.S. election

By Sarbaz Salih
The Globe- Erbil

U.S. vice-presidential-elect Joe Biden, Barack Obama's running mate, is popular among Kurds because of his call for transforming Iraq into three federal regions.

Prominent Kurdish lawmaker Dr. Mahmoud Othman said Kurds prefer Obama because of the next U.S. Vice President, Delaware Sen. Joe Biden, who once proposed to divide Iraqi into three federal regions—a Sunni Arab region, a Shiite Arab region, and a Kurdistan region. Othman believes that Democrats have a better understanding of federalism in Iraq than Republicans.

Iraqi MP Sa'di Barzinji of the Kurdistan Alliance list said he is happy that Obama recorded the victory because he believes Biden supports a system of federalism in Iraq. As Iraq descended into chaos in mid 2006, Sen. Biden co-authored a plan to divide the country into three semi-autonomous regions with a limited central government.



Joe Biden meets American soldiers in Iraq in this file photo.

But Iraqi Arab political parties condemned Biden's proposal.

Lately Biden said his proposal is working in Iraq because Sunni Arabs, Shiite Arabs, and Kurds have been automatically divided; each of them has their own region. Biden has visited Kurdistan Region twice.

"I think the situation will be better with the presence of Biden," said Kurdish legislator Nouri Talabani.

Safeen Dzayee, chief of Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party's foreign relations, said that "the victory of Obama is the victory of democracy." Dzayee also believes that the basic strategy of the U.S. in Iraq will not change.

Iranian Kurds also are happy of Obama's victory. Hassan Rastgar, a high-ranking official of the Iranian Kurdistan Democratic Party, said an Obama administration will pro-

tect the rights of Kurds in the Middle East.

"Democrats are always with the protection of rights of all ethnicities and religions," Rastgar told the Globe.

Sazan Abdullah, a university student in Erbil, said she supports Obama because he earlier proclaimed that he will bring Kurds and Turks closer to each other.

Iraqi foreign minister Hoshiyar Zebari on Wednesday said that Iraq's cabinet does not expect the new U.S. administration under Obama to make surprising changes toward Iraq or immediately withdrawal from Iraq's lands unless they consult the Iraqi government first.

"The Iraqi cabinet does not look at who won the U.S. elections, but at his policies toward Iraq and level of mutual foreign relations," Zebari said.

"Dialogue with the U.S. side is still underway concerning the proposed security pact, and within the coming few days, we would be receiving the U.S. response concerning the amendments suggested by the Iraqi government to withdraw coalition forces from Iraq," he said.



Institute for War and Peace Reporting
November 7, 2008

Kurdish Singer Breaks Sound Barrier

MEMBERS of Syria's Kurdish minority were amazed to hear a singer performing in their language at an event in Damascus last month, are wondering whether this signals an improvement in the way the government regards their community.

Mazkin Tahir al-Naqash sang in Kurdish, her native tongue, at an Arab cultural event in Damascus last month.

Syrian Kurds, of whom there are thought to be between 2.5 and three million, have long sought official recognition of their language and culture, but the law does not recognise them as a separate ethnicity.

Not all Kurds are granted Syrian citizenship, and this restricts their civic rights and ability to travel.

Many Syrian Kurds are bilingual in Arabic and Kurdish, but speak their own language within the community and would like to build cultural centres and native-language private schools.

The relationship between Kurdish groups and the government has deteriorated since a decree was issued in September requiring official approval before property sales could go through in border areas. In a statement last month, Kurdish political parties said the rules would prevent Kurds, who live mainly in north-east Syria, from acquiring new property, and formed part of a broader pattern of discrimination.

Naqash's performance at an event celebrating Arab culture and held in the capital was notable because the authorities often permit Kurdish cultural activities to go ahead, but do not accord them any formal recognition.

Badrkhan Ali, a university student and Kurdish activist, hailed the event as "an important step that has had a positive impact on Kurds", adding that some community members believed the government was "using culture to open up to the Kurds".

Naqash said she was surprised to receive an invitation that, while it did not explicitly use the word "Kurdish", asked her to "sing songs from the north-eastern heritage of Syria".

It was, she said, a "wonderful and important" decision.

At the same time, Naqash said she was somewhat disappointed to see that her audience was primarily made up of Kurds, as she wants to sing for "absolutely everyone".

"I'd like to be heard by Arabs and Assyrians, too," she said.

Abu Shirin, a Kurd who lives in Aleppo, went to the concert with his family, and said he never expected to hear songs in Kurdish during the event.

"I said to myself that the authorities would not allow her to sing all her songs in her native language, and if they did, it would be just one or two," he said.

"What I heard will ease things between us [Kurds] and the government."

Abdo Khalil, a writer in Damascus, believes the authorities may have embarked on "a project of reconciliation with the Kurds".

But he cautioned that a cultural event could not in itself be seen as a step toward ending the problems between Kurds and their government.

Jakrihween Ali, a university student, said he thought the reason Naqash was allowed to sing in Kurdish was because she was connected to the cultural establishment in Damascus. Naqash studied in the capital and has performed in Arabic, including at events sponsored by the culture ministry.

While he hoped Naqash might "act as a bridge for reconciliation and open a door for dialogue between the Kurds and the authorities", he insisted that "serious changes at political level" would be needed for the Kurds to acquire full rights.



VOICE OF AMERICA
07 November 2008

Arab-Kurdish Tensions Seriously Complicate Iraqi Politics

By Judith Latham Washington

MILITARY and civilian deaths from violence in Iraq declined in October to the lowest level since May 2004. Still, regional analysts worry that the political situation is deteriorating. The struggle over Kirkuk and other disputed territories represents a major area of contention.

The International Crisis Group, a private international research organization, recently warned that the long-festering conflict over northern Iraq could have what it called a devastating impact on efforts to rebuild Iraq's fragmented state. The ICG says the conflict potentially matches, or even exceeds, the Sunni-Shi'a divide that spawned the 2005 to 2007 sectarian war. **An Arab**

Perspective

Nadia Bilbassy, senior news correspondent with the Middle East News Center, says that dramatic assessment is unfortunately not without merit. Speaking with host Judith Latham of VOA News Now's *International Press Club*, Ms. Bilbassy says many parties are vying for power, trying to maximize their representation and access to the oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

According to the ICG report, Iraq's legislative agenda is bogged down by a dispute over territories that the Kurds claim as historically belonging to them. The ICG says Kurdish leaders have signaled an intention to hold politics in Baghdad hostage. Furthermore, it notes Iraqi Arabs fear that the Kurds' long-term goal is independence. Nadia Bilbassy calls the political



President Bush and Massoud Barzani, head of the Kurdish Regional Government, at the White House, 29 Oct 2008

impasse very troubling, particularly in view of the recent U.S. failure to reach a security agreement with Baghdad. She says the rationale for the U.S. troop surge was to give the political parties in Iraq "breathing space" so they would be able to reach an agreement. However, the tension between Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds has not diminished.

A Kurdish Perspective

But Kurdish journalist Omar Sheikhmous, speaking from Sulaymaniya in Iraqi Kurdistan, says Arab concerns over Kirkuk are exaggerated. He says the Kurds have no intention of provoking violent conflict, but are instead trying to find a political solution through dialogue and compromise, not through pressure. He says they would like to reach a settlement as soon as possible. According to Sheikhmous, the idea of the Kurds going it alone is simply not a realistic option.

Furthermore, Omar Sheikhmous calls *untrue* the reports of strained relations over the issue of

Kirkuk between Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and Massoud Barzani, the head of the Kurdish Regional Government. The disagreement, he says, mainly concerns the power of the central government vis-à-vis that of the regional governments. Sheikhmous notes that the United States favors a strong central government like the one that existed in Iraq before, whereas the Kurds prefer a federal government that is loosely connected to the regional governments.

An Impasse

Nadia Bilbassy of the Middle East News Center says the bottom line is that politicians on both sides are unwilling to compromise, and they are jockeying for maximum gain. She suggests that the Kurds are "waving the independence card" in the hope that in return for dropping it they will gain more control over Kirkuk. In addition, U.S. commanders in Iraq have expressed growing concern that the city of Mosul could degenerate into a battleground and threaten the fragile Iraqi state. Bilbassy says Washington needs to put pressure on Baghdad to reach an agreement that is inclusive and representative of all the political factions in Iraq. And she

predicts President-elect Barack Obama is going to inherit what she calls a "huge headache." Bilbassy says the problem is that Washington doesn't have many cards to play at this point because there are neighboring countries that are interested in filling in if American troops withdraw. So, it is really a tough situation. So tough, in fact, that Kurdish journalist Omar Sheikhmous suggests U.S. troops may need to remain in Iraq until the political situation stabilizes. And he estimates that could take another five years.

The Boston Globe | Writer | November 8, 2008

Iraq official urges approval of US security accord

By Robert H. Reid, Associated Press

BAGHDAD --A top Iraqi official warned Saturday that time is running out to sign a new security agreement with Washington, saying the country still needed U.S. troops despite improved security.

Also Saturday, a U.S. soldier was killed and two others were wounded by a roadside bomb in north Baghdad -- the first combat death in the capital area in three weeks. A suicide bomber killed eight people Saturday and wounded 17 west of Baghdad, Iraqi police said.

Both attacks show that militants have still not given up the fight despite setbacks at the hands of U.S. and Iraqi forces.

"I hope that we can settle this matter as soon as possible because time is running out," Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh said of the long-delayed security pact. "The security improvement that has been achieved is very important. The support of U.S. forces in the coming period will still be very important."

Iraq's parliament must approve the agreement by the end of next month when the U.N. mandate expires. The new agreement would keep U.S. forces in Iraq until 2012 and give the Iraqis broader authority over military operations until then.

Without an agreement or a new U.N. mandate, however, the U.S. military has warned it will have to suspend operations in the country.

But strong opposition to the agreement has emerged, especially within the majority Shiite community that is the support base for Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Last Thursday, the U.S. responded to Iraqi requests for changes in the draft to address opponents' concerns.

Al-Maliki's government has not said whether it is satisfied with the changes or whether it will submit the draft to parliament soon. One senior official told The Associated Press that it could take a month to decide on the agreement once the draft goes to parliament.

He spoke on condition of anonymity because the issue is politically sensitive. Saleh, a Kurd, cautioned that Iraq would enter a "period of a legal vacuum" if the U.N. mandate expires without the agreement having been approved.

"So we have to ... settle this issue as soon as possible," he said.

Many Iraqi officials and lawmakers privately acknowledge that the country's army and police are still unable to maintain security on their own. But they find it politically risky to support an agreement that would continue what most Iraqis consider U.S. military occupation -- even though the deal includes a date for the mission to end.

But the Iraqis rely heavily on the U.S. military not only for fighting insurgents but for a range of services including air traffic management, training, air surveillance and infrastructure improvements.

All that would cease after Dec. 31 without an agreement or a new mandate.

"The most important thing is that politicians must spell out what is the alternative if the agreement is refused," Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi told reporters Saturday. "This is a serious point that the public needs to understand."

Uncertainty about the security agreement simply adds to the confusion over the future of the Iraq mission since Tuesday's election victory by Barack Obama. The president-elect pledged to remove all combat troops within 16 months of taking office -- well ahead of the departure date in the draft agreement.

However, Iraqi officials say Obama has assured them he will take no hasty decisions and will consult with the Baghdad government and U.S. commanders first.

Violence is down sharply across the country since the U.S. troop surge of 2007, and Iraqi security forces have taken responsibility for security in most of the 18 provinces.

But attacks continue, indicating that extremists remain a threat.

The suicide bombing occurred at an Iraqi checkpoint near Ramadi in Anbar province, the former al-Qaida stronghold that was transferred to Iraqi control Sept. 1.

Police Col. Yassin Duweich said the bomber stopped his car at the checkpoint and was ordered to step out for a security search. As he waited to be searched,



Residents inspect the site where a roadside bomb went off, in SulaiKh neighborhood, northeastern Baghdad, Iraq, Saturday, Nov. 8, 2008, killing a civilian and injuring seven others included a police officer, police said. (AP Photo/Hadi Mizban)

he detonated a suicide vest, which triggered another explosion in the car, Duweich said.

U.S. officials believe the key to lasting peace is for Iraq's religious and ethnic communities to reach power-sharing agreements.

However, deep-seated rivalries remain, and recently new tension has flared between Arabs and Kurds in the north.

Many Arabs believe the Kurds want to expand their three-province self-ruled region, known as Kurdistan. Last September, clashes nearly erupted between Iraqi soldiers and Kurdish defense forces that moved outside the self-ruled region, allegedly to defend Kurds living in villages under central government control.

Many Kurds fear the Shiite-led government in Baghdad is trying to encroach on Kurdish rights to self-rule which they have enjoyed since 1991 and which were enshrined in the 2005 constitution.

Those fears were heightened Saturday when al-Maliki called for amendments to the Iraqi constitution to give more power to the central government.

Al-Maliki said the constitution, which he helped draft, was written in haste and needed to be revisited to protect Iraq's national unity.

"A strong federal government must be built which has full responsibility over security, sovereignty and other issues," al-Maliki told a conference in Baghdad. "Basically, responsibility should be given to the federal government, which undertakes building and protecting the country."

Kurdish politicians promptly dismissed al-Maliki's proposals.

"We reject any attempts to limit the powers of the Kurdistan region or any other province," said Falah Mustafa Bakir, in charge of foreign relations in the Kurdish regional government.

Another prominent Kurdish lawmaker, Mahmoud Othman, said the central government should be strong enough, but "this does not mean that the government should be the controller of everything while regions and provinces have no power to do anything."

Al-Maliki's remarks were also directed at his main coalition partner -- the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council -- which wants to create a similar self-ruled region in the nine-province Shiite south.

Al-Maliki's Dawa Party, which is also Shiite, and the movement of radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr both oppose the autonomous region as a threat to national unity.



Turquie : rapport de la Commission européenne

LES NEGOCIATIONS d'adhésion avec la Turquie ont été engagées le 3 octobre 2005 et ont progressé au cours de la période de référence.

À ce jour, 8 des 33 chapitres de négociation ont été ouverts. Un chapitre a été provisoirement clôturé³. En outre, des critères de référence ont été fixés comme conditions à remplir pour l'ouverture de négociations relatives à 13 autres chapitres. 4

Critères politiques

La Turquie continue à remplir suffisamment les critères politiques de Copenhague. Les progrès sur le plan des réformes sont cependant restés limités en 2008. Des avancées législatives ont été réalisées dans le domaine de la liberté d'expression et du renforcement des droits de propriété des communautés religieuses non musulmanes. Le gouvernement s'est, en outre, engagé à accroître les dépenses affectées au projet du sud-est de l'Anatolie qui vise à remédier aux difficultés économiques et sociales de cette région.

À présent que la Turquie a évité une crise politique liée au recours contre le parti au pouvoir déposé devant la cour constitutionnelle, elle doit relancer le processus de réforme politique. L'absence de dialogue et d'esprit de compromis entre les principaux partis politiques a eu des retombées négatives sur le fonctionnement des institutions - politiques et sur les réformes politiques. La Turquie a continué à être la cible d'attentats terroristes perpétrés par le PKK, qui figure sur la liste des organisations terroristes de l'UE.

Le pays doit à présent mettre au point un programme cohérent et complet de réformes politiques prévoyant notamment une réforme de la constitution et du pouvoir judiciaire. Il doit en outre déployer des efforts conséquents dans la plupart des domaines relatifs aux critères politiques.

Critères économiques

En ce qui concerne les critères de Copenhague, la Turquie constitue une économie de marché viable. Elle devrait être à même de faire face à moyen terme aux pressions concurrentielles et aux forces du marché au sein de l'Union, pour autant qu'elle mette en œuvre son programme global de réformes afin de remédier aux faiblesses structurelles.

L'économie turque a continué d'enregistrer de bons résultats,

même si la croissance a été inférieure au potentiel, ce qui s'explique par un tassement de la demande intérieure consécutif à la mise en œuvre d'un programme de stabilisation rigoureux.

La stabilité macroéconomique reste précaire en raison des besoins considérables de financement externe, ce qui rend la Turquie vulnérable aux changements d'humeur des investisseurs. Les résultats sur le plan budgétaire ont été satisfaisants mais les rigidités structurelles du marché du travail freinent la création d'emplois, en particulier en ce qui concerne les femmes et les jeunes.

Le gouvernement a mis place de nouvelles initiatives destinées à dynamiser les investissements dans les infrastructures, afin de réduire les fortes disparités régionales. Des progrès sensibles ont été réalisés en matière de libéralisation des prix dans le secteur de l'énergie.

Ordre juridique de l'UE

La Turquie a continué d'améliorer son aptitude à assumer les obligations liées à l'adhésion à l'UE. L'alignement de la législation sur l'ordre juridique de l'UE a progressé dans un certain nombre de domaines, en particulier pour ce qui est des chapitres consacrés aux réseaux transeuropéens, à l'énergie ainsi qu'à la science et à la recherche. Des progrès limités ont été observés dans le domaine du contrôle financier. L'alignement est avancé dans certains domaines tels que la libre circulation des marchandises, les droits de propriété intellectuelle, la politique des entreprises et la politique industrielle, la politique relative aux ententes, la protection des consommateurs et de la santé, la science et la recherche, de même que l'énergie. Il doit être poursuivi dans les domaines de l'agriculture, de la pêche, des politiques vétérinaires et phytosanitaires, des aides d'État, de la justice et des affaires intérieures ainsi que des politiques sociales et de l'emploi. Les capacités administratives générales du pays doivent être améliorées.

Du fait du non-respect par la Turquie des obligations lui incombant en vertu du protocole additionnel à l'accord d'Ankara, l'Union européenne a décidé, en décembre 2006, de geler les négociations sur huit chapitres mais de les poursuivre pour les autres chapitres⁵.

LE TEMPS

6 novembre 2008

Face aux actions violentes du PKK, le Conseil fédéral sévit

SECURITE. Les agissements menés récemment contre des intérêts turcs en Suisse sont bien le fait de l'organisation séparatiste kurde.

Denis Masmejan

LE CONSEIL fédéral a décrété mercredi une série de mesures contre le PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) et ses organisations apparentées en Suisse. Le gouvernement réagit ainsi à la série d'actions violentes qui ont visé des intérêts turcs dans plusieurs cantons alémaniques ces quinze derniers jours. Des actes analogues à ceux qui se sont produits dans d'autres pays européens, notamment en Allemagne, et que le Conseil fédéral condamne «avec la plus grande fermeté», a-t-il indiqué dans un communiqué.

Collectes de fonds bannies

Ces attaques, commises le plus souvent au moyen de cocktails Molotov et qui ont fait un blessé

grave à Bâle, parmi les clients du café «Istanbul», peuvent désormais être attribuées avec certitude au PKK et son organisation de jeunesse, relève Jürg Bühler, chef suppléant du Service d'analyse et de prévention, le renseignement intérieur suisse. Les autorités ont authentifié des messages de revendication adressés à des destinataires en Suisse et à l'étranger. Des enquêtes judiciaires sont en cours dans les cantons concernés.

Le gouvernement a interdit les collectes de fonds lors des deux grandes fêtes kurdes du mois de novembre - le 30e anniversaire de la création du PKK et les 5 ans du Kongra-Gel, le nom qu'a pris temporairement l'organisation. Les collectes ne seront autorisées que si la destination humanitaire des

fonds «ne fait aucun doute». L'argent ne pourra être versé qu'à des fondations soumises à la surveillance des autorités fédérales et dont le but humanitaire est l'unique objectif. Les services de police de la Confédération et des cantons seront chargés de s'assurer du respect de cette interdiction, en contrôlant notamment les salles où doivent se dérouler ces événements.

«Potentiel de violence»

Par ailleurs, le Conseil fédéral a donné la consigne aux autorités compétentes de se montrer plus vigilantes lors de l'octroi de permis de séjour ou de la naturalisation à des personnes liées aux organisations en question. A l'inverse, le «potentiel de violence manifeste des groupes concernés» devra

aussi être davantage pris en compte lorsque les autorités seront appelées à se prononcer sur le renvoi des personnes visées.

La situation nouvelle, née des actions violentes de ces deux dernières semaines, doit également conduire les autorités à ne donner leur accord que de manière restrictive à la tenue d'éventuelles manifestations. Le renseignement sur les activités du PKK en Suisse devra aussi être intensifié.

Pas d'interdiction

Le Conseil fédéral se réserve en outre la possibilité d'adopter une ordonnance permettant de séquestrer des avoirs destinés à financer des activités relevant de l'extrémisme violent.

Dans l'édition de dimanche dernier du *SonntagsBlick*, l'ambassadeur de Turquie en Suisse, Alev Kiliç, avait déploré l'inaction de la Confédération, regrettant que Berne, contrairement à l'UE, persiste

à refuser de considérer le PKK comme une organisation terroriste. «Dans notre système, l'interdiction d'une organisation est l'ultima ratio. Les mesures prises jusqu'ici ont permis de contrôler la situation», souligne Jürg Bühler, qui rappelle que jusqu'aux actes de violence de ces deux dernières semaines, «la situation était très calme»



MILICES PRO-GOUVERNEMENTALES: DÉSACCORD ENTRE LE GOUVERNEMENT ET LES KURDES

BAGDAD, 12 nov 2008 (AFP) –

LE TON est monté mercredi en Irak entre le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki et les chefs kurdes sur l'épineuse question des milices pro-gouvernementales, dont les Kurdes ne veulent pas dans des territoires qu'ils contrôlent.

M. Maliki a exprimé sa "profonde tristesse" après la polémique sur ces groupes formés avec le soutien des tribus locales alliées au gouvernement pour assurer la sécurité en Irak.

Les Kurdes ont critiqué la formation de ces milices dans des régions majoritairement kurdes. Ils accusent le Premier ministre de se servir de ces suppléments pour empêcher l'expansion du Kurdistan hors des trois seules provinces kurdes reconnues.

"Il était nécessaire de créer ces groupes pour assurer la loi et l'ordre dans les provinces qui ont connu l'insécurité avant le retour des forces armées venues rétablir la stabilité", s'est défendu le chef du gouvernement dans un communiqué.

Ces milices, souvent plus connues sous le nom de "Sahwa" ("Réveils" en arabe) sont essentiellement constituées de combattants tribaux.

Le phénomène, encouragé par l'armée américaine, a commencé dans la province majoritairement sunnite d'Al-Anbar à la fin de 2006, quand des tribus locales, financées par les Etats-Unis, ont chassé de leurs territoires les insurgés anti-américains.

Ces groupes, appelés aussi "Fils de l'Irak" ou "conseils de soutien" avaient été accueillis favorablement par toutes les parties, y compris les deux partis kurdes", a assuré M. Maliki.

"Mais ce soutien s'est transformé en opposition quand, et c'est regrettable, certains égoïstes ont vu que ces conseils locaux pouvaient constituer une menace pour leurs projets, qui étaient en contradiction avec l'intérêt national",

a-t-il ajouté.

Au début de la semaine, les deux principaux partis kurdes, l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) du président Jalal Talabani et le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) du président de la région kurde Massoud Barzani ont dans un communiqué commun estimé que ces conseils étaient des groupes armés "anticonstitutionnels".

"Nous nous opposons fermement à la constitution de quelque groupe armé que ce soit, pour quelque raison que ce soit en Irak et au Kurdistan, et en particulier dans les régions disputées", ont-ils déclaré, faisant référence à des régions peuplées majoritairement de Kurdes mais situées en dehors du Kurdistan irakien.

Les deux partis ont même comparé ces milices pro-gouvernementales aux milices kurdes formées par l'ancien dictateur Saddam Hussein qui avaient combattu les partis kurdes depuis les années 80 jusqu'à la chute du régime en 2003.

Les Kurdes sont particulièrement hostiles à la formation de milices pro-gouvernementales dans des régions disputées, comme les régions de Mossoul et de Kirkouk, riches en pétrole et où vivent de nombreux kurdes.

Massoud Barzani, président du Kurdistan irakien, a déclaré mercredi: "Les Kurdes refusent la formation de ces +conseils+ là où ils sont majoritaires. S'ils sont justifiés dans certaines régions, ils ne sont pas nécessaires ailleurs. Ils n'ont aucune raison d'être au Kurdistan et dans les régions disputées. C'est juste jouer avec le feu".

Le principal parti chiite, le Conseil suprême islamique en Irak, avait exprimé la même opposition à la formation de groupes armés pro-gouvernementaux dans le sud majoritairement chiite du pays, estimant qu'il s'agissait là d'une extension illégale du pouvoir fédéral.

Ces milices pourraient jouer un rôle important lors des prochaines élections provinciales, prévues le 31 janvier dans 14 des provinces irakiennes.



IRAK: CONFLIT ENTRE DES TRIBUS PRO-GOUVERNEMENTALES ET LES KURDES

TIKRIT (Irak), 15 nov 2008 (AFP) –

DÉS TRIBUS chiites et sunnites d'Irak ont manifesté samedi pour rejeter les critiques adressées par les dirigeants kurdes contre la création de "comités de soutien" favorables à un Etat central dans des régions où les Kurdes estiment être majoritaires.

Fait inimaginable autrefois, des centaines de manifestants ont applaudi le nom du Premier ministre chiite Nouri al-Maliki à Tikrit, le berceau sunnite de l'ancien dictateur Saddam Hussein. Des défilés ont également eu lieu dans la ville sunnite de Hawija et dans les villes chiites de Karbala, Najaf, Nassiriyah, Samawah, et Hilla.

"Nous voulons un Irak unifié", "Kirkouk, Mossoul et Diyala sont irakiennes" ont scandé les manifestants à Tikrit faisant allusion aux villes et région que les Kurdes considèrent comme faisant partie de leur territoire et veulent les rattacher à leur trois provinces du nord.

"Les tribus irakiennes soutiennent les positions patriotiques de Maliki en faveur de la préservation de l'unité de l'Irak, de l'établissement d'un Etat de droit et en faveur de la réécriture de la Constitution", a assuré le député Farhan al-Aoud, conseiller du Premier ministre pour la province.

Le chef du gouvernement a déclaré récemment qu'il souhaitait une modification de la Loi fondamentale pour donner plus de pouvoir à l'Etat fédéral par rapport aux provinces.

"Il n'existe pas de régions contestées, il y a un seul pays", a ajouté M. al-Aoud.

Dans le nord de l'Irak, en raison de la politique d'arabisation menée par Saddam Hussein durant les années 1980, les Kurdes estiment avoir été lésés au profit de tribus arabes.

"Ceux qui s'opposent au plan de Maliki souhaitent un Irak faible et ambitionnent de diviser le pays", assure Ahmad al-Doulaimi, membre du "conseil de soutien" dans la province de Salaheddine, dont Tikrit est la capitale.

Dans le stade de Hawija, une autre ville sunnite près de Kirkouk, qui fut surnommée autrefois la "Kandahar d'Irak", en raison de la présence de nombreux insurgés, des milliers de personnes ont crié "Maliki est l'honneur de notre pays", un slogan à la mode à l'époque de Saddam Hussein.

Le Premier ministre a affirmé cette semaine que ces "conseils de soutien" aidaient les forces de sécurité à défaire les insurgés mais les Kurdes y voient un moyen pour le Premier ministre d'accroître son influence et de réduire leurs aspirations à un élargissement de leur zone autonome.

Des centaines de membres des tribus, dont des chefs en habits traditionnels, ont manifesté dans les rues de la ville sainte chiite de Kerbala, à 110 km au sud de Bagdad, et plus au sud à Najaf.

Le gouverneur de la province de Kerbala, Aqil al-Khazali a rejeté l'allégation des Kurdes selon qui ces comités sont anti-constitutionnels.

"Y a-t-il un problème si le gouvernement tend la main aux tribus irakiennes pour l'avenir du nouvel Irak? Veulent-ils que nous parlions des violations qu'ils commettent? Les peshmergas (combattants kurdes) sont-ils constitutionnels?", a-t-il lancé aux manifestants.

THE KOREA TIMES

November 10, 2008

Iraqi Kurdistan: South Korean troops pullout to begin Nov. 24

By Jung Sung-ki Staff Reporter

The withdrawal of South Korean troops and military equipment from Iraq will begin Nov. 24, the Ministry of National Defense announced Monday.

The troop pullout after four years of humanitarian and reconstruction work in the northern Iraqi city of Irbil will be completed by Dec. 20, it said in a news release.

Troops will return home aboard chartered airplanes, while equipment will be transported to the country via cargo ships, it said.

"As a coalition partner, South Korea's Zaytun Division has successfully contributed to restoring peace and stability in Kurdish-controlled Irbil through civil support operations," a ministry spokesman said. Zaytun operations have also laid the groundwork for closer ties between South Korea and Iraq and their future economic cooperation, he said.

Since the first deployment in September 2004, over 19,100 South Korean soldiers have served in the war-torn nation, according to the release.

In 2004, Seoul dispatched about 3,600 troops to Irbil to support the U.S.-led Operation Iraqi Freedom initiated in 2003, marking the second largest coal-



ition partner of the United States after the United Kingdom. The division now has about 520 members, the fourth largest in troop numbers. There are about 160 South Korean soldiers of the Dayman transport unit in Kuwait, also subject to the forthcoming troop pullout.

Zaytun Division, whose name means "olive" in Arabic, has conducted successful reconstruction missions, including construction of schools, hospitals and public buildings. The unit has also provided free medical services and vocational trainings to

locals. The unit is also participating in missions guarding the U.N. Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) building and escorting the organization's members.

At the Zaytun Hospital inside the unit's compound, more than 88,800 patients have been treated since it opened on Feb. 26, 2005, according to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).

The Korean contingent has carried out its civil support operations codenamed Green Angel in 40 villages and for 60 institutions, the JCS said. Green Angel operations call for constructing schools and infrastructure facilities, such as water wells, power transmission lines, public parks and paved roads, and holding friendship festivals.

The Zaytun Vocational Training Center has trained about 2,300 residents in computers, baking, the operation of heavy trucks, and maintenance and repair of home appliances, generators and cars, it said.

Coalition troops in Iraq have been said to be seeking to conduct "Zaytun-like" civil military operations, including operating vocational training schools. The division has also run literacy programs and trained Iraqi army and police units.

United Press International

Kurdish PJAK rebels suspend Iranian attacks

November 11, 2008 - UPI

TEHRAN, Iran, — The Kurdish Iranian rebels Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) claims that it has halted its campaign in the Kurdish regions of Iran (Iranian Kurdistan) and will begin fighting the Turkish military, Iranian media reported.

The Iranian Press TV said Monday the group had issued a statement to Kurdish media, "PJAK has completely stopped its military activities in Iran's Kurdish regions," the Kurdish Rojhelat website reported, citing a statement released by the militant group.

Rojhelat did not give any further details regarding the announcement.

The group, known as PJAK, is allied with a number of Kurdish separatist organizations, including the Turkey's Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, seeking an autonomous state in the mainly Kurdish southeast of Turkey.

Since 2004 the PJAK took up arms for self-rule in Kurdistan province northwestern of Iran (Iranian Kurdistan, Eastern Kurdistan). Half the members of PJAK are women.

The PJAK announcement comes at the onset of winter. The militant group has previously reduced its military activities in the mountainous regions of western Iran due to harsh weather conditions.

In September, PJAK called on the international community to stand in solidarity with the group in protest of alleged human rights abuses perpetrated against its prisoners in Iran. PJAK in October killed three Iranian fighters in the north-west province of Zanjan.

The group on Oct. 9 called for an end to a 45-day hunger strike in response to prisoner abuse, saying Iran had relaxed its positions on the prisoners through indirect negotiations.

In a report released in July 2008, the human rights organization, Amnesty International expressed concern about the increased repression of Kurdish Iranians, particularly human rights defenders.



The PJAK took up arms for self-rule in Kurdistan province northwestern of Iran (Iranian Kurdistan, Eastern Kurdistan). Half the members of PJAK are women.

The report cited examples of religious and cultural discrimination against the estimated 12 million Kurds who live in Iran.

"We urge the Iranian authorities to take concrete measures to end any discrimination and associated human rights violations that Kurds, indeed all minorities in Iran, face," Amnesty said in its report.

"Kurds and all other members of minority communities in Iran, men, women and children, are entitled to enjoy their full range of human rights."

Area of Iraq subsumed by influx of Kurds

Yazidis' protection comes at a cost

By Campbell Robertson

QAHTANIYA, Iraq: When an American platoon rolled into this dusty Yazidi town in the country's northwest corner, a few kilometers from the Syrian border, the soldiers were greeted by dozens of people holding out pink and yellow Post-it notes. The notes appeared so quickly, it seemed the people must have been carrying them at all times, just in case. On each was a name, written carefully in the Roman alphabet, and each came with a question: Can you tell me where this person is?

On the evening of Aug. 14, 2007, four truck bombs exploded here in Qahtaniya and in the nearby towns of Jazira and Azair, killing 313 people and wounding 704, local officials said. Nearly 400 houses were destroyed in the attack, the largest coordinated bombing of the Iraq war. The explosions were so huge that dozens of those closest to the bombs vanished without a trace, leaving their relatives to wonder, more than a year later, where they could have gone.

"We just want to know if they're alive or dead," said Ismail Zandin Jindo, 70, who was holding out two wrinkled birth certificates.

Iraqi and American officials pinned responsibility for the bombings on Sunni Arab extremists, to whom the Yazidis, adherents of an ancient religion with roots in Zoroastrianism, are devil worshippers.

The year that followed was one of rebuilding, and still the center of the village appears as one enormous construction project. But after the violence, tensions have only gotten worse.

Immediately after the attacks, Kurdish security forces, having already made a fortress of the city of Sinjar to the north, moved into Qahtaniya and other Yazidi villages. They surrounded the towns with earthen berms, set up checkpoints and created an effective wall between the Yazidi areas and the Arab villages to the south, towns that have been crippled by drought and become dominated by Sunni insurgents.

While Qahtaniya lies far outside the boundaries of Kurdistan, the Kurds have a long history in the area, which had a significant Kurdish population until 1975, the year of a failed Kurdish uprising.

Just as Saddam Hussein would do decades later in the fractious city of

Kirkuk, the Baathist government pursued a policy of ethnic and sectarian mixing, moving Yazidis into towns around Sinjar and Arabs into towns

farther south, near the rich wheat and barley fields on the edge of the desert. Many Kurds in Sinjar were kicked out, leaving the area mostly devoid of Kurdish influence for the next three decades.

The Kurds returned to the Sinjar area in 2003, almost simultaneously with the American invasion of Iraq. Since then, they have made Sinjar a striking example of Kurdish military and economic efficiency. BMWs are not uncommon sights. They have also taken harsh measures against the Arabs — not, they claim, without reason.

"We could throw all the Arabs out of the city," said Karim Sinjari, the Kurdish minister for internal affairs, whose own family was forced out in 1976 after his participation in the Kurdish uprising. "But the Americans told us we have to wait."

Kurdish officials say that without the tight security, the residents of small towns like Qahtaniya would be left vulnerable to slaughter. They further argue that the Kurdish-speaking Yazidis, if allowed to vote in a constitutionally mandated referendum, would choose to be administered by the Kurdistan regional government.

Most Yazidis would agree — in public.

Hamed Ido Hammo, a village elder in Qahtaniya, is one of the few willing to speak out openly against the Kurds. Surrounded by approving listeners in his quiet courtyard on a hot afternoon, Hammo said the Kurdish security presence was nothing less than a power grab, an opinion not hard to find in conversations around the town. In a sign of the profound distrust that exists between Kurds and some Yazidis, Hammo even claimed that the bombings had been provoked by Kurdish troops.

"Now they have an excuse to rule the area and say it's not safe," he said. "They say the bad people are Arabs so they can take over."

Local Yazidi residents complain that the Kurds pay tribal leaders for their loyalty — an accusation the Kurds deny — and that they arrest anyone who opposes their presence. As evidence they point to several people who were detained after

once supported the town now sits idle, have suffered severely in the last five years. Reeling from the drought, the towns were overrun in 2004 and 2005 by insurgents who used them as bases for attacks on Mosul, Tal Afar and other cities in the region. A strict form of Islam was enforced, and extortion was rampant.

Since then, American and Iraqi forces have tried to clean out the insurgents and rebuild the towns, but "terrorists still exist" said Abdurraheem Jassim Mohammed, the mayor of Baaj, the largest of the villages. "Even in the police."

Hopes of revitalizing the economy have not been helped by the presence of the Kurdish security forces, local residents and American military officials say. Since the Kurds' arrival, Arabs have been afraid to go to Yazidi towns like Qahtaniya, even to draw water from the wells, and it has become nearly impossible for Arabs to buy real estate or find jobs in Sinjar.

With tensions between Yazidis and Sunni Arabs growing, even Yazidis who bristle under the Kurdish presence say they would vote to join Kurdistan in a referendum, if only for the security.

There is a further problem, though. The Sinjar area is separated from Kurdistan by a vast stretch of land occupied by Arab tribes that maintain friendly relationships with the Kurds but have no intention of joining Kurdistan.

The near-impossibility of attaching the Sinjar area to Kurdistan has prompted some local Yazidis — as well as some American military officials — to suspect that the Kurds are using these areas as leverage, a bargaining chip for political negotiations over the status of Kirkuk. Kurdish officials deny that this is the case, insisting that a popular referendum is the only way to redress Saddam Hussein's demographic manipulation.

All of which leaves the largely peaceful Yazidis of Qahtaniya in the all-too-familiar position for Iraqi minorities of existing between two antagonistic forces. As the 2007 bombings made horrifyingly clear, that can be an extremely dangerous place to be.

"We have nobody to ask for help," said Hammo, the village elder, "except God and the American Army."

Atheer Kakan contributed reporting from Baghdad.

Hopes of revitalizing the economy have not been helped by the presence of Kurdish security forces.

talking to a team from the United Nations about the situation in Sinjar.

But even if Yazidis would like to, it is impossible to return to the situation before 2003.

The Arab villages to the south, towns like Baaj, where a hulking granary that

Le Monde
12 novembre 2008

Commémoration et polémique autour de « l'icône » Atatürk



Des visiteurs devant le lit où Atatürk est mort en 1938, au palais Dolmabahçe, à Istanbul. Deux minutes de silence ont été observées à 9 h 05 dans tout le pays, lundi, pour lui rendre hommage. OSMAN ORSAL/REUTERS

A 9 h 05 précises, comme chaque 10 novembre, la Turquie se fige. Les conversations s'interrompent, la circulation s'arrête net. Les sirènes des bateaux sur le Bosphore et les klaxons des voitures retentissent pendant deux minutes. Tout le pays a commémoré, lundi matin 10 novembre, la mort de Mustafa Kemal, le fondateur de la République turque et héros national. Au palais de Dolmabahçe, à Istanbul, une foule compacte était venue se recueillir, là où, en 1938, « Atatürk », le père des Turcs, s'est éteint, rongé par une cirrhose du foie.

Soixante-dix ans après sa mort, Mustafa Kemal reste l'objet d'une vénération qui ne faiblit

pas. Les caméras de télévision se sont attardées sur les larmes des soldats ou sur les sanglots de citoyens turcs émus, défilant dans le mausolée d'Anitkabir, à Ankara, un monument dédié au leader, où se déroulaient des cérémonies officielles.

Un film contesté

L'anniversaire coïncide cette année avec la sortie, dans les salles de cinéma, d'un documentaire événement consacré à Atatürk. Réalisé par le journaliste Can Dündar, *Mustafa* a attiré plus de 500 000 spectateurs dès la première semaine, mais il a aussi soulevé son lot de polémiques. Le sponsor du film et principal opérateur de téléphonie mobile du

pays s'est retiré au dernier moment, par crainte de perdre des clients.

Dresser le portrait d'une icône nationale dont le portrait trône dans les salles de classe et dans les boutiques est un exercice périlleux en Turquie. Sans véritablement écorner le mythe, le film présente un Atatürk humain, tourmenté et alcoolique, qui ne laisse personne indifférent. Le président du Parlement, Köksal Top-tan, trouve qu'il est trop souvent montré en train de fumer. D'autres regrettent qu'on le voie s'isoler, douter, pleurer, ou encore qu'un Grec ait été choisi pour l'interpréter dans sa jeunesse.

« J'ai voulu montrer un Atatürk plus humain que celui que l'on

nous enseigne à l'école ou au service militaire, s'est justifié Can Dündar. Il a été transformé en dogme, statufié par certains de ses partisans, et je voulais montrer un Atatürk réaliste, avec des soucis, qui aimait les femmes, qui a fait des erreurs, qui avait parfois peur et qui a réalisé des choses. » Un quasi-blasphème pour les « laïcs » qui y perçoivent une tentative d'affaiblissement de l'Etat. Le président du Parti républicain du peuple (kémaliste), Deniz Baykal, estime cette vision « tout simplement fausse ».

Un éditorialiste du quotidien *Vatan* a appelé au boycottage du film : « Tenez vos enfants éloignés pour éviter de leur instiller les germes de l'humiliation d'Atatürk. » La très kémaliste Association pour la pensée d'Atatürk n'a pas aimé non plus : « Depuis des années, les valets de l'impérialisme, les opposants à l'Etat-nation, les supporteurs de la charia [loi islamique] et les faux républicains essaient d'insulter Atatürk et de détruire sa révolution. Ils ne réussiront pas », indique son communiqué.

Dans un article publié, lundi, dans *Milliyet*, Can Dündar rejette ces critiques, estimant qu'« il est temps pour nous de laïciser notre manière de considérer le leader qui a apporté la laïcité à la Turquie ». L'image d'Atatürk est protégée par la Constitution de 1982, et toute atteinte est sévèrement punie par la loi. Plusieurs sites Internet et hébergeurs de blogs en ont récemment fait les frais. Le populaire YouTube, notamment, est censuré depuis six mois pour avoir diffusé une vidéo mettant en doute l'orientation sexuelle du père des Turcs. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER
(ISTANBUL, CORRESPONDANCE)

L'ESPRESSO

14 novembre 2008

Nucléaire : Téhéran provoque Washington

IRAN

La Maison-Blanche a condamné hier le test de missile de « nouvelle génération » effectué la veille par le pouvoir iranien.

Beyrouth

APRÈS l'espoir d'une « détente » irano-américaine facilitée par l'élection de Barack Obama aux États-Unis, la rhétorique belliqueuse est en train de reprendre le dessus. Mercredi, la Maison-Blanche a vivement réagi au test d'un missile de « nouvelle génération » annoncé par Téhéran, en estimant qu'il allait à l'encontre de ses obligations internationales. Elle s'est empressée d'appeler la République islamique d'Iran à cesser « immédiatement » de développer des engins balistiques.

La condamnation américaine fait suite à la diffusion, un peu auparavant, d'images du lancement d'un nouveau missile sol-sol par la télévision d'État iranienne. Selon Téhéran, ce missile serait d'une portée de 2 000 kilomètres – et pourrait théoriquement attein-

dre Israël, allié des États-Unis dans la région. Constitué de deux étages sous la coiffe, il ressemble fortement au Shahab-3, mis à part une séparation visible à mi-corps.

« L'Iran doit s'abstenir de nouveaux tests de missiles s'il veut vraiment gagner la confiance du reste du monde. Le régime iranien doit aussi cesser immédiatement de développer des missiles balistiques, qui pourraient servir de vecteurs à une arme nucléaire potentielle », a prévenu un porte-parole de la Maison-Blanche, Gordon Johndroe. Cette nouvelle démonstration de force de la part de Téhéran est venue renforcer les inquiétudes d'une partie de la communauté internationale, les États-Unis en tête, devant le programme nucléaire iranien. L'Iran, en butte à des sanctions du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies pour son refus de suspendre ses activités nucléaires les plus sensibles, assure, pour sa part, que son programme nucléaire est purement civil.

« Affaiblir les radicaux »

Mais l'annonce de ce missile iranien d'un nouveau genre méri-

te, cependant, d'être considérée avec prudence, d'après certains observateurs proches du dossier, qui y voient un possible signe de faiblesse des conservateurs au pouvoir à Téhéran. Depuis l'élection de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad en juin 2005, les annonces d'exercices militaires combinées à de nombreuses déclarations guerrières de hauts gradés de l'armée et des gardiens de la révolution – l'armée d'élite du régime – sont devenues monnaie courante à Téhéran. En juillet dernier, la retouche, par Téhéran, d'une photographie illustrant le tir réussi de missiles sol-sol, avait cependant semé le doute sur la fiabilité des engins présentés par les autorités iraniennes. « Il semblerait que l'Iran ait retouché la photo pour dissimuler ce qui était apparemment l'échec d'un tir de missile », avait alors commenté Mark Fitzpatrick, un expert de l'Institut international d'études stratégiques (IISS), basé à Londres, en y voyant « un signal » provocateur de Téhéran, plus qu'une véritable avancée technologique iranienne.

Au lendemain de la victoire d'Obama, les spéculations se sont multipliées sur la possible reprise d'un dialogue entre les États-Unis et l'Iran, qui ont rompu leurs relations diplomatiques il y a près de trente ans. Or, selon l'analyste iranien Saeed Leylaz, la perspective d'un tel rapprochement a pour effet « d'affaiblir les radicaux du régime », car les « déclarations « va-t-en-guerre » de George W. Bush représentaient un alibi idéal pour justifier les slogans extrémistes et provocateurs de Téhéran ».

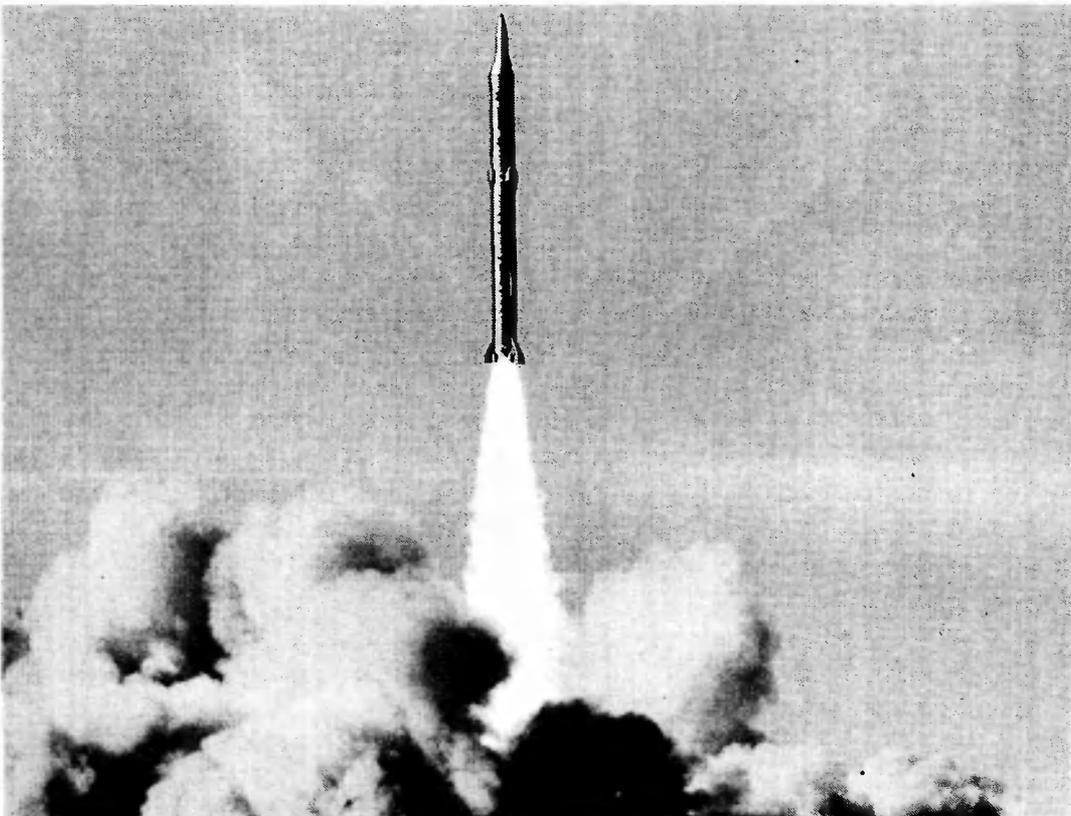
« Inacceptable »

Pour assurer leur survie, et à l'approche des futures élections présidentielles de juin 2009 – au cours desquelles la faction réformiste espère participer – ces radicaux auraient donc, d'après lui, tout intérêt à entretenir un semblant de climat de guerre.

Lors d'un rassemblement qui s'est tenu, mercredi, dans la ville de Sari, au nord de l'Iran, le président Ahmadinejad n'a pas manqué d'avertir que « toute personne qui parle au grand peuple iranien avec la langue de la force ou sur un ton grossier, égoïste et impoli pourrait recevoir une réponse claire de la nation iranienne ». Avant de préciser que « des changements superficiels des gouvernements ou des administrations n'auront aucun effet sur nous ».

Côté américain, la porte reste ouverte, mais sous condition. Dans un entretien publié mercredi par le *New York Times*, le premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a annoncé que son pays était prêt à jouer les médiateurs entre l'Iran et les grandes puissances, dont les États-Unis. Pendant sa campagne électorale, Barack Obama, lui-même, avait laissé entendre qu'il était disposé à dialoguer avec Téhéran. Mais lors de sa première conférence de presse, à l'issue de sa victoire électorale du 4 novembre, il a également tenu à préciser que le développement iranien des armes nucléaires était « inacceptable ».

DELPHINE MINOUI



Mercredi, la télévision iranienne diffusait les images du lancement réussi d'un nouveau missile sol-sol. Selon Téhéran, ce missile d'une portée de 2 000 kilomètres pourrait atteindre Israël, allié des États-Unis dans la région. AFP

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL NOVEMBER 12, 2008

Kurdistan Is a Model for Iraq

Our path to a secular, federal democracy is inspired by the U.S.

By MASOUD BARZANI

Iraq's Kurds have consistently been America's closest allies in Iraq. Our Peshmerga forces fought alongside the U.S. military to liberate the country, suffering more casualties than any other U.S. ally.

And while some Iraqi politicians have challenged the U.S.-Iraq security agreement, Iraq's Kurdish leaders have endorsed the pact as essential for U.S. combat troops to continue fighting terrorists in Iraq.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is committed to a federal, democratic Iraq that is at peace with its neighbors.

We have benefited enormously from the service and sacrifices of America's armed forces and their families, and we are deeply grateful. We are also proud to have shared in such sacrifices; my brother was among those severely wounded during the liberation of Iraq.

Last year, following a U.S. request, we deployed Kurdish troops to Baghdad. These troops played a decisive role in the success of the surge. Last month I once again visited Baghdad to meet with the leadership of the federal government. We stressed our commitment to developing an Iraqi state that abides by its constitution and that is based upon a federal model with clearly delineated powers for its regions.

In spite of all this, some commentators now suggest that the Kurds are causing problems by insisting on territorial demands and proceeding with the development of Kurdistan's oil resources. These allegations are troubling. We are proceeding entirely in accord with the Iraqi constitution, implementing provisions that were brokered by the U.S.

In the constitutional negotiations that took place in the summer of 2005, two issues were critical to us: first, that the Kurdistan Region has the right to develop the oil on its territory, and second, that there be a fair process to determine the administrative borders of Iraq's Kurdistan Region -- thus resolving once and for all the issue of "disputed" territories.



Unfortunately, ever since the discovery of oil in Iraq in the 1920s, successive Iraqi governments have sought to keep oil out of Kurdish hands, blocking exploration and development of fields in Kurdistan. Saddam Hussein's government went even further, using Iraqi oil revenues to finance the military campaigns that destroyed more than 4,500 Kurdish villages and to pay for the poison gas used to kill thousands of Kurdish civilians.

The Kurdish leadership agreed to a U.S.-sponsored compromise in 2005 in which the central government would have the authority to manage existing oil fields, but new fields would fall under the exclusive jurisdiction of the regions. Since then, the KRG has taken the lead with Baghdad in negotiations on a hydrocarbon law that is faithful to Iraq's constitution and is conducive to modernizing Iraq's oil infrastructure and substantially increasing its oil production.

We have awarded contracts for foreign oil companies (including some American ones) to explore our territory. In so doing, Kurdistan is not threatening the unity of Iraq. It is simply implementing the constitution.

The "disputed territories" have a tragic history. Since the 1950s, Iraqi regimes encouraged Arabs to settle in Kirkuk and other predominantly Kurdish and Turkmen areas. Saddam Hussein accelerated this process by engaging in ethnic cleansing, expelling or killing Kurds and Turkmen, or by requiring nationality corrections (in which non-Arabs are forced to declare themselves to

be Arabs) and by moving Arabs into Kurdish homes.

The dispute between Baghdad and the Kurds over Kirkuk has lasted more than 80 years and has often been violent. All sides have now agreed to a formula to resolve the problem, to bring justice to Kirkuk, and to correct the crimes against Kurds committed by Saddam Hussein's regime. Iraq's constitution requires that a referendum be held in disputed territories to determine if their populations want to join the Kurdistan Region. Conducting a plebiscite is not easy, but it is preferable to another 80 years of conflict.

If the pro-Kurdistan side should lose the referendum in Kirkuk, I promise that Kurdistan will respect that result. And if they win, I promise that we will do everything in our power to ensure outsized representation of Kirkuk's Turkmen, Arabs and Christians both on the local level and in the parliament and government of the Kurdistan Region.

Regional stability cannot come from resolving internal disputes alone. That is why expanding and deepening our ties with Turkey is my top priority.

My meeting last month in Baghdad with the Turkish special envoy to Iraq was a historic and positive development. There should be further direct contacts between the KRG and Turkey, as well as multilateral contacts that involve the U.S. We are eager to work with Turkey to seek increased peace and prosperity in the region.

I am proud that the Kurdistan Region is both a model and gateway for the rest of Iraq. Our difficult path to a secular, federal democracy is very much inspired by the U.S. And so we look forward to working with the Obama-Biden administration to support and defend our hard-fought successes in Iraq, and to remain proud of what the Kurdistan region is today: a thriving civil society in the heart of the Middle East. When we insist on strict compliance with our country's constitution, we are only following America's great example.

Mr. Barzani is the president of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Kurdistan: the other Iraq

By Anna Fifield

In one of the oldest tea houses in Irbil, a cavernous room of hissing kettles that spills into the spice and shampoo shops of the souq, Ali and his friend Mohammad personify the Kurdish dilemma. Ali, a Kurd with a plush moustache dressed in the region's traditional baggy open suit, sits on a bench drinking tea with Mohammad, an Arab electrical goods merchant who has driven from Baghdad in search of cheaper supplies.

"Kirkuk is Kurdish – the population is Kurdish, so Kirkuk is Kurdish," says Ali, referring to the oil-rich city that lies just outside the northern Iraqi province but was historically part of Kurdistan. Asked his opinion, Mohammad looks around warily as the half-dozen tea-drinking Kurds stop their conversations to listen in and simply says: "I think our leaders know better than I do."

This diplomatic answer belies the potential of Kirkuk to become the next big flashpoint in Iraq. For while sectarian violence has dropped sharply this year, stemming the slide into civil war and relieving pressure on the US military, the dispute over Kirkuk underlines the fragility of the country and the challenge that Barack Obama, the president-elect, will face in Iraq. Whether Mr Obama will be able to fulfil his campaign promise of bringing US troops home within 16 months of taking office will partly depend on what happens in the oil-rich city – and therefore on the

ability of the US to mediate a lasting compromise over Kirkuk's status. But tensions are rising over whether the city belongs in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region or in Iraq proper. "For many Kurds, it has become a rallying point for an autonomous Kurdistan and for the rights of Kurdish people inside Iraq. And for many Arabs, it has become a rallying cry for the unity of the country," says a senior US official in Baghdad. "The challenge is to get both sides to calm down and have a rational discussion."

This will become a pressing foreign policy concern for the next US administration not just because the Kirkuk dispute has the potential to pit Arab against Kurd and provoke intervention from neighbouring states. It could also harm Washington's relations with its closest allies in Iraq – the Kurdish authorities.

Kirkuk, together with other nearby oil towns, was "Arabised" by Saddam Hussein, who forced Kurds to leave and moved in Arabs from Iraq's south in an effort to change the demographics. Now Kurdistan, whose people were killed by the thousands under Saddam, wants the cities back. "For us it's not about the oil – the oil revenue will go back to the Iraqi people – it's symbolic, it's about the injustices that have been done to us," says Fuad Hussein, chief of staff to Masoud Barzani, the Kurdish president. "When we think about the situation of Kirkuk, we all feel Kirkuki."

Kurdistan, a fertile, rocky region where Iraq meets Iran and Turkey, already has several big oil deposits but several more lie just outside its current borders. The Kirkuk field is thought to have a production capacity of about 1m barrels a day. Under the constitution's revenue-sharing formula, Kurdistan receives 17 per cent of all Iraqi oil revenue, but many Kurds think their economy deserves more. Some Arab politicians, meanwhile, are calling for the Kurds' share to be reduced to 12 per cent.

The Kurdistan regional government is pushing for a vote to allow

Kirkuk residents to decide whether they become part of the northern region. But the disputed territory has become so sensitive that Kirkuk will be excluded from nationwide provincial polls due to be held before January 31 as an Iraqi parliamentary commission examines the demographic changes that have taken place there. It is due to report back by March.

Rochdi Younsi, Middle East analyst at the Eurasia Group think-tank, says the electoral delay benefits the Kurds, who will retain control over the disputed areas during the deadlock. "Unless there is a concrete international effort to address the Kirkuk question, the risk of instability in the northern part of Iraq will heighten and the dispute among various sectarian groups claiming historical ownership of the city will erupt again," Mr Younsi wrote recently.

The disputes have stoked ethnic tensions in northern Iraq. Kurdish troops, known as peshmerga, have reportedly moved beyond the boundaries of the Kurdistan region and into ethnically mixed areas, erecting Kurdish flags at checkpoints in acts that worry Arab residents of these areas.

Some diplomats in Irbil question suggestions of any land grab, saying peshmerga have been patrolling outside the region's boundaries for some time. Mr Hussein, the president's aide, says that Kurds simply serve in the national security forces. He characterises the common view as: "When a Kurd is in the police, he is a peshmerga, but when an Arab is there, he is an Iraqi



On the march: Kurd peshmerga forces bearing Iraqi and Kurdish flags



soldier."

The United Nations has suggested giving 32 per cent of the Kirkuk council to Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen, leaving 4 per cent for Christians. Kurdish factions would also get the first pick for governor, deputy governor, and head of the provincial council.

But Kurds oppose any power-sharing arrangement that would not reflect what they believe is their majority. Kurdish officials are acutely aware of the issue's potential to explode. "We have made a lot of concessions for the sake of greater Iraq but now, instead of supporting us, some people are trying to blame the Kurds for the problem remaining unsolved," says Falah Mustafa, head of the department of foreign relations.

Kurdish leaders have long held up their region as a role model for the rest of Iraq. It has functioning democratic institutions, the government is relatively secular and its economy is ticking over. Irbil became a partner in the US-backed central government in Baghdad following the 2003 invasion of Iraq – the national president, Jalal Talabani, is Kurdish – and the US wanted to champion Kurdistan as an example of how democracy could be made to work in the Middle East.

But, five years after the invasion, Kurds are feeling short-changed by the Bush administration, which they say has not sufficiently rewarded them for their support. "They have done nothing for us," says one senior Kurdish official, calling for Washington to encourage American companies to invest. "We are the success story of the US in Iraq. All of Iraq could be like us."

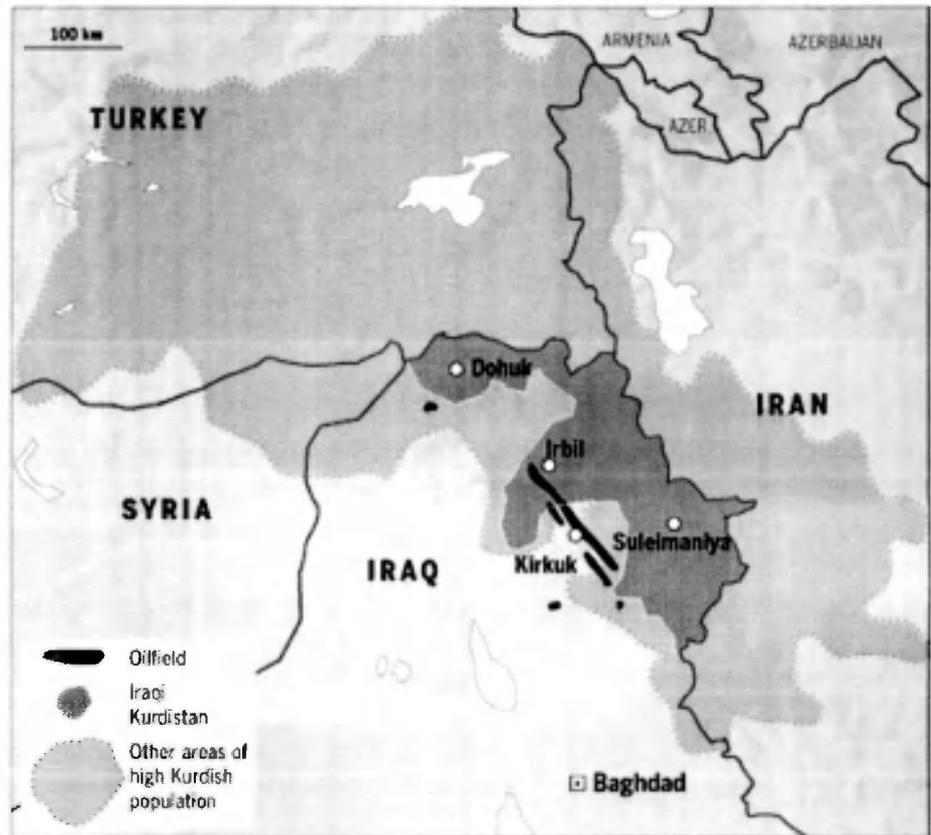
Washington cites a lack of democratic development and endemic corruption as threats for the future of Kurdistan. "A lot of people in Baghdad are looking at Kurdistan not as a model for the future but for the mistakes they have to avoid," says one senior American official in Baghdad. The Kurds, he adds, are "without a doubt . . . in the best position in their history. The big question among Kurds right now is, what next for us?"

The way that Irbil exercised its authority in Kirkuk has not been encouraging. Analysts say that the Kurdish government was given an opportunity to prove its ability to govern when the US in effect handed them control of the city in 2003. But the Kurdish authorities sidelined the Arab and Turkmen minorities rather than bringing them

into the fold.

The extent of corruption has undermined confidence in the Kurdish parties ruling the north. Ordinary Kurds privately complain that, to succeed, they must belong to one of the "two circles" – that revolving around the Talabani family and their Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, or that associated with the Barzanis and the Kurdistan Democratic party.

The two families largely control business and politics in the region, offering preferential treatment for their relatives and allies. "Some people are living the high life but other people are so desperate," Ali says in the tea shop. "Kurds don't like it but what can we do about it?" So sensitive has the issue become, even foreigners know where the red lines are. One British businessman working in Irbil becomes visibly angry when asked about corruption. "Why do you ask such questions?" he asks, his voice rising several decibels. "These kinds of questions can create a lot of problems for us." The government says it will introduce laws and educational programmes to tackle the problem. But Karam Rahim, editor of *Hawlati*, the region's biggest independent paper, suggests the US could have an influence when provincial and regional parliamentary elections are due to be held.



"We thought that the Americans would make our government more democratic and more transparent," says Mr Rahim. "The US must choose between two options – they can support Talabani and Barzani, or they can support the Kurdish people."

TEHRAN STRENGTHENS ECONOMIC TIES

By backing Shia groups, Iran has long exerted influence over Iraqi politics. But the parties of Iraqi Kurdistan have also been allies of Tehran, whose reach is growing. "There is a lot of concern about Iran and Iran's interests in Kurdistan," says one US official.

Of the \$7bn (£4.5bn, €5.6bn) in goods that Iran sent to Iraq last year, about \$1.2bn-worth was destined for Kurdistan, according to Iran's Fars News Agency. The figure is projected to rise to \$3bn this year. Two of the three transit routes between Iran and Iraq are in Iraqi Kurdistan. Flights between Irbil and Urumia, capital of the Iranian province of Western Azerbaijan, are set to begin soon.

The US accuses Tehran of sending arms into Iraq, which Iran denies. Kurdish officials say they welcome the right involvement. "If they can help the people of Iraq, then that's

one issue," says Falah Mustafa, head of the department for foreign relations. "But if they meddle in Iraqi affairs, we don't believe that is in keeping with our policies of non-interference."

A LONG SEARCH FOR STATEHOOD

- An estimated 15m to 20m Kurds, a largely Sunni Muslim people, live in the area straddling Iraq, Iran, Syria, Turkey and Armenia.

- Iraqi Kurdistan – slightly larger than the Netherlands and with a population of 4m – enjoys relative economic stability, helped by investment in construction and oil.

- Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons against Iraqi Kurds in retaliation for their support of Iran during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.
- After the 1991 Gulf war, Iraqi Kurds gained significant autonomy; this was later formalised under Iraq's 2005 constitution.

- Rivalry between the Kurdish Democratic party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan led to civil war in the mid-1990s. In 1998 the two sides came to a power-sharing agreement.

- Kurdistan is a cause of friction between Iraq and Turkey, which has carried out military raids on northern Iraq against the separatist Kurdish Workers' party (PKK).

Kurd-Arab tensions may threaten Iraq calm

REUTERS

November 12, 2008 . By Missy Ryan . (Reuters)

MOSUL, Iraq - In battle-scarred Mosul, Kurds and Arabs trade accusations rooted in ethnic rivalry and a battle for oil and power that many fear threaten security in Iraq.

Kurds make up about a quarter of Mosul's residents and represent a powerful minority in this northern Iraqi city still shaken by car bombs and assassinations.

The army in Mosul is mainly Kurdish, which angers Sunni Arabs who make up about 60 percent of the 2.8 million population of the province of which Mosul is the capital.

Mosul, a strategic city where cultures, religions and ethnicities collide, saw an exodus of thousands of Christians last month following a campaign of threats and violence against them, although some have since returned.

U.S. military officials blamed Sunni Muslim al Qaeda or similar



Islamist groups in Mosul, which they say is the last big city in Iraq still with a large al Qaeda presence.

Kurds control the provincial governing council after most Sunnis boycotted local polls in 2005, but the balance of power in Mosul could change in elections due by late January.

Christians, who are believed to number around 250,000 to 300,000 in the province, could be a swing vote, wooed by Kurds or Arabs in a fight for power.

Local Iraqi Army units in Mosul are mainly made up of Kurds. Arabs in the area scornfully refer to them as "Peshmerga," the name for former guerrilla fighters that make up the security forces of the autonomous Kurdish region further north.

Bashar Fahdil, a shopkeeper in Mosul, like other Arabs says Kurdish soldiers share blame for ongoing violence. When civilians are attacked, he said, "Kurdish soldiers just watch."

Kurds bristle at such insinuations.

"The Arab families in our neighborhood know we have no fault in any sectarian or ethnic treason," Um Reezan, a Kurdish housewife in eastern Mosul said. "But there are people who think only superficial thoughts, and sometimes they hint at us."

Colonel Dildar Jamel Mohammed, a Kurd who commands an Iraqi Army battalion in western Mosul, said insurgents were stoking ethnic tension and trying to sabotage security.

"Al Qaeda uses this as a tool," he said, referring to the Sunni Islamists who, in Iraq, are almost all Arabs.

Ambassador Thomas Krajeski, a senior U.S. official in Baghdad, described the ancient city on the Tigris River as "where all the fault lines that exist in Iraq come together."

"It is a place where Kurd and Arab officials can solve some of these

key issues: what does it mean to be a federal Iraq?"

'SOMETHING HAS TO GIVE'

That question takes on a new urgency as Kurds, who make up a fifth of Iraq's mainly Arab population, vie for control of disputed cities, towns and villages along the "green line" that divides Kurdistan from the rest of Iraq.

Iraqi Kurds, who have long dreamed of their own state, hoped to strengthen their hand within Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein, who killed tens of thousands of Kurds in the 1980s.

Their economic and territorial ambitions appear more at risk as the U.S.-backed government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, a Shi'ite Arab, grows more assertive and Washington charts a course for withdrawing its 150,000 troops in Iraq.

Masoud Barzani, president of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region, described the gathering resentment some Kurds feel toward Baghdad.

"We seem to still be under the influence of a totalitarian regime. The one that takes over power thinks he has the last word in everything ... He forgets coalitions, commitments and the constitution," he said in a recent newspaper interview.

Kurdish and central government officials set up a special commission this summer to try to defuse such tensions.

Gareth Stansfield, a Kurdistan expert at the University of Exeter, said the standoff is really about defining what the Kurdish position will be, politically and geographically.

"It can't be put off any longer. The pressure has become so intense that something has to give," he said.

U.S. diplomats and senior military officials have been sitting down with Kurdish and Arab officials to encourage them to mend differences over explosive issues like Khanaqin, a largely Kurdish town in Diyala province northeast of Baghdad.

Conflict nearly broke out in late summer when Iraqi troops tried to replace Peshmerga in Khanaqin. The standoff was defused, but left Kurdish leaders even more suspicious.

Brigadier General Tony Thomas, the top U.S. commander in Mosul, said Maliki increasingly "sees the Kurds, specifically the Peshmerga, as a militia, unauthorized, shouldn't be there."

What many forget, he says, is that Peshmerga were invited to help keep the peace in some of Iraq's most troublesome areas.

Thomas said Kurds are more nervous about what they see as Baghdad's growing unilateralism as U.S. troops prepare to leave.

"They literally said, 'We must be armed because as soon as you leave, we see this coming ... (Maliki) is going to attack us as soon as you turn away,'" Thomas said.

LAND, OIL, POWER AT STAKE

Behind the quarrels is oil. Many of the disputed areas along the "green line" have promising reserves, especially Kirkuk, an ethnically mixed city that accounts for a quarter of Iraq's oil exports. Kurds consider Kirkuk their historic capital.

Iraq's constitution provides for a referendum on control of the city. That vote has been postponed indefinitely, but Kurds think they would win it, undoing Saddam's "Arabization" of one of Iraq's main oil-producing areas.

Arab-Kurdish disputes have so far held up legislation on how to share oil wealth. Meanwhile, Kurdistan has signed oil deals of its own, which Baghdad considers void. Companies pumping in Kurdistan cannot export oil without Baghdad's permission.

The impasse affects not just Iraq's oil sector, but all investment, casting a shadow on the U.S. project in Iraq.

"The United States cannot afford a conflict to break out between Kurds and Arabs if they want to withdraw their forces and claim success," Stansfield said.

Le Monde
18 novembre 2008

Le gouvernement irakien vote la prolongation de la présence militaire américaine jusqu'en 2011

Editorial

Irak : cinq ans après

Approuvé par le gouvernement de Bagdad, dimanche 16 novembre, l'« accord de sécurité » irako-américain marque une étape essentielle, pour l'Irak et les Etats-Unis, plus de cinq ans après le déclenchement de la guerre lancée par l'administration Bush contre le régime de Saddam Hussein. Si tout se déroule comme prévu – et, d'abord, si les 275 députés de l'Assemblée irakienne ratifient cet accord –, les troupes de combat américaines se retireront des villes et villages irakiens d'ici au 30 juin 2009. Il est prévu que le corps expéditionnaire, estimé à 146 000 soldats, ait quitté le pays le 31 décembre 2011.

Rendu possible par l'amélioration des conditions de sécurité depuis environ un an – notamment la fin de la guerre civile entre majorité chiite et minorité sunnite –, le calendrier des replis et retraits à venir s'articule assez bien avec le programme annoncé par le président américain élu, Barack Obama. Celui-ci a répété, dimanche, qu'après son entrée en fonctions, le 20 janvier 2009, il entendait « appeler l'état-major et les responsables de la sécurité nationale [à préparer] un plan de retrait [des troupes d'Irak] ». Pendant les primaires démocrates, M. Obama avait précisé, pour se démarquer d'Hillary Clinton, qu'élus président il rapatrierait toutes les « troupes de combat » dans un délai de seize mois après son élection. Il a ensuite cessé de marteler ce calendrier, évoquant plutôt un retrait « responsable » conditionné par les développements sur le terrain.

La surenchère rhétorique des hommes politiques irakiens, préparant des élections régionales capitales fin janvier, masque une vérité : cette évolution du programme américain les satisfait. Aucun responsable, à Bagdad, ne souhaite un départ précipité de l'armée américaine. Les principaux chefs des forces irakiennes, à commencer par les ministres de l'intérieur et de la défense, répètent que les besoins logistiques et de formation de leurs 700 000 hommes demeurent importants « pour les années qui viennent ».

D'ici à la fin 2011, il est possible que les termes de l'accord soient révisés et que des forces américaines demeurent stationnées en Irak au-delà de cette date. Le calendrier arrêté aujourd'hui n'en signifie pas moins le passage de la guerre à la coopération militaire. C'est un progrès notable. ■

Le Parlement doit à présent se prononcer sur ce texte, qui précise le statut juridique des troupes américaines après l'expiration, en décembre, du mandat des Nations unies

Il aura fallu près de neuf mois d'âpres négociations pour y parvenir. Dimanche 16 novembre, sous la conduite de son chef, Nouri Al-Maliki, le gouvernement de coalition, qui regroupe les principaux partis politiques irakiens, a approuvé un accord capital aux termes duquel les soldats américains, qui occupent le pays depuis l'invasion du 20 mars 2003, devront avoir plié bagages avant le 31 décembre 2011.

Ce document de 31 articles, qui codifie les conditions juridiques et opérationnelles dans lesquelles les 146 000 militaires américains stationnés en Irak pourront y rester trois années supplémentaires, doit encore être approuvé, dans les dix jours, par une majorité simple des 275 élus du Conseil irakien des représentants.

Lorsque ce vote sera acquis, ce qui, théoriquement, ne devrait pas poser problème puisque la coalition gouvernementale contrôle les deux tiers des élus, le texte sera soumis au Conseil présidentiel, composé du président de la République, Jalal Talabani (Kurde), et de ses deux vice-présidents, Tarek Al-Hachémi (Arabe sunnite), et Adel Abdel Malidi (Arabe chiite). Cet accord ne concerne pas les 5 000 autres soldats étrangers, dont 4 000 Britanniques basés à Bassora, qui devraient quitter l'Irak dans les mois qui viennent.

Prudemment saluée par la Maison Blanche comme « une étape importante et positive », la décision du gouvernement, acquise à main levée et à l'unanimité moins une voix des 28 ministres présents – les neuf autres ministres ayant été « excusés » pour diverses raisons –, devrait permettre à l'Irak, si le processus d'approbation est clos avant le 31 décembre, de retrouver, à partir du 1^{er} janvier 2009, l'essentiel de sa souveraineté nationale. Ce qui inclut, notamment, plusieurs dizaines de milliards de dollars retenus par le Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies au titre des dettes, réparation et indemnités dues aux pays agressés par le régime déchu de Saddam Hussein.

La décision gouvernementale n'a pu être obtenue qu'après que les Etats-Unis ont accepté de préciser qu'ils n'entendaient conserver ni soldats ni bases militaires en Irak au-delà du 31 décembre 2011. Jugée « trop vague » par certains membres de la coalition, et surtout par le grand ayatollah Ali Sistani, la plus haute autorité religieuse chiite du pays à

laquelle la majorité fait allégeance, la formulation précédente laissait la porte ouverte à un éventuel maintien des troupes américaines au-delà de cette date.

Les sceptiques remarquent cependant que rien n'interdira à un autre gouvernement irakien – les prochaines élections générales auront lieu fin 2009 – de négocier un nouvel accord. Intitulé SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) par les Etats-Unis, sur le modèle des accords similaires conclus avec l'Allemagne ou le Japon au lendemain de la seconde guerre mondiale, le document a été rebaptisé « accord de retrait des forces » par un pouvoir irakien qui n'ignore pas l'impopularité de ce que l'immense majorité des citoyens continue d'appeler « l'occupation américaine ». ■

PATRICE CLAUDE

LE CALENDRIER D'APPLICATION DE L'ACCORD

1^{er} janvier 2009 : les 16 500 citoyens irakiens détenus par les Américains passent sous juridiction irakienne. Aucun citoyen irakien ne peut plus être arrêté et détenu plus de vingt-quatre heures par des forces étrangères sans l'intervention d'un juge irakien. Aucune opération militaire offensive ne peut plus être lancée par l'armée américaine sans l'accord préalable des autorités irakiennes. Les Etats-Unis s'engagent à n'utiliser ni le territoire ni l'espace aérien ou maritime irakien pour « attaquer

un pays » voisin de l'Irak.

L'immunité des soldats coupables de crimes perpétrés « hors de leur service » contre des Irakiens est susceptible d'être remise en cause par une commission conjointe irako-américaine.

30 juin : toutes les troupes américaines de combat devront avoir quitté les villes et agglomérations irakiennes pour se cantonner dans des bases situées hors des zones peuplées.

31 décembre 2011 : départ de « toutes les troupes américaines » d'Irak.

Le Monde

18 novembre 2008

Ecofrictions La Turquie peut-elle se passer du FMI ?

Les marchés s'impatientent. Depuis le début de la crise financière mondiale, les milieux d'affaires turcs réclament un peu de bon sens de la part du premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. « La Turquie devrait signer un nouvel accord avec le Fonds monétaire international (FMI), a répété Arzuhan Yalçın-dag, la présidente de la Tüsiad, le patronat turc. Cela ne blesserait pas son honneur. »

Malgré les pressions, le chef du gouvernement se montre réticent à l'idée de s'engager avec le FMI. Le dernier prêt, d'un montant de 10 milliards de dollars (8 milliards d'euros), a pris fin au mois de mai. Depuis, c'est le statu quo. « Pas question d'assombrir notre avenir en cédant au FMI », a claironné, fin octobre, M. Erdogan. Il accuse l'institution de vouloir « étrangler la Turquie ». « Nous signons des accords uniquement si nos intérêts sont satisfaits », a-t-il ajouté.

Changement de ton, ce week-end, au sommet du G20, à Wash-

« L'économie locale montre des signes de faiblesse. Un prêt de 20 milliards de dollars donnerait un peu d'air. Mais Ankara renâcle »

ington, auquel la Turquie, 17^e économie mondiale, était convoiée. En marge de la réunion, M. Erdogan a multiplié les entretiens. Avec le patron de la Banque mondiale, mais surtout avec Dominique Strauss-Kahn, samedi. « La rencontre a été fructueuse, il pourrait y avoir un accord dans un futur proche », a déclaré le directeur général du FMI. Un prêt à moyen terme de la Réserve fédérale américaine (Fed) à la Turquie est également à l'étude.

En octobre, les discussions avec la délégation du FMI ont viré au dialogue de sourds. Une recommandation adressée à la Turquie a déplié : « Mettre en place un contrôle plus strict des dépenses publiques au niveau local. » Ce que refuse Ankara, à quatre mois d'élections municipales à fort enjeu. Le Parti de la justice et du développement au pouvoir espère confirmer sa percée dans le sud-est, à majorité kurde, et mène une politique dispendieuse dans les fiefs à conquérir. Un coûteux plan d'action pour cette région déshéritée est programmé. Le but est donc de gagner un peu de temps avant de signer.

Les dirigeants turcs soulignent volontiers que le système bancaire résiste bien au choc mondial. Mais, selon la plupart des analystes, l'économie turque montre d'inquiétants signes de faiblesse et risque, à trop tarder, de perdre son « avantage compétitif ». Un prêt de 20 milliards de dollars donnerait un peu d'air. Le représentant de la Banque mondiale en

Turquie, Ulrich Zachau a souligné, la nécessité de réduire l'endettement. Le déficit de la balance des paiements devrait atteindre 50 milliards de dollars en 2008 : la conséquence d'un retrait important des capitaux étrangers, moteurs de la bonne santé de l'économie turque depuis 2003.

Le gouverneur de la banque centrale, Durgun Yilmaz, a annoncé une baisse de 5,5 % de la production industrielle pour le mois de septembre, le plus fort recul depuis 2002. Des milliers d'emplois disparaissent déjà dans le textile ou l'automobile, avertissent les entreprises. Et les prévisions de croissance officielles pour l'année 2009 (+ 4 %) semblent intenables : une croissance nulle, voire négative, est attendue pour la fin d'année. Dans ces conditions, une aide du FMI « n'est pas nécessaire mais serait bénéfique à l'économie turque », a déclaré M. Yilmaz. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER
(ISTANBUL, CORRESPONDANCE)



L'accord de partenariat américano-irakien empêche à la Turquie de lutter contre les séparatistes

ANKARA, 18 novembre 2008- RIA Novosti.

L'ACCORD de partenariat stratégique signé lundi par les États-Unis et l'Irak et donnant le contrôle de l'espace aérien irakien à Bagdad à partir du 1er janvier 2009 empêchera l'aviation turque de lutter contre les séparatistes kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak, a annoncé mardi le quotidien turc Hurriyet.

"Conformément au nouvel accord, la Turquie sera obligée de demander l'autorisation de l'administration irakienne pour effectuer ses raids aériens dans le nord de l'Irak à partir du 1er janvier prochain", rapporte le journal. "Compte tenu de l'influence de l'administration régionale de l'Irak du Nord de Massoud Barzani au sein du gouvernement irakien, la Turquie aura du mal à obtenir une autorisation pour ses raids", selon le quotidien.

La Turquie peut lancer une opération transfrontalière dans le nord de l'Irak sans demander l'autorisation de Bagdad, indique le journal se référant à un responsable turc. "L'Irak ne dispose pas d'un système de défense antiaérienne puissant. La Turquie peut donc lancer une opération en cas de nécessité", note le quotidien.

En novembre 2007, le président américain George W. Bush et le pre-

mier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan se sont mis d'accord sur l'organisation des opérations aériennes turques dans l'espace aérien irakien qui est actuellement contrôlé par la partie américaine, rappelle le journal. Selon les militaires turcs, les raids visent l'infrastructure terroriste du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) considéré comme une organisation terroriste par l'Organisation des Nations unies et l'Union européenne. Le PKK mène depuis près d'un quart de siècle une lutte armée pour l'autonomie des Kurdes dans le sud-est de la Turquie. Ce conflit a déjà fait plus de 40.000 morts.

Depuis décembre 2007, l'armée turque a effectué plus de 30 opérations militaires - principalement aériennes - dans le nord de l'Irak dans le cadre d'un mandat d'un an délivré par le parlement turc en octobre 2007 et prolongé d'un an le 8 octobre dernier.

Aux termes du nouvel accord signé par Washington et Bagdad, les troupes américaines cesseront de patrouiller les villes et villages irakiens après le 30 juin 2009 et quitteront l'Irak avant fin 2011. L'accord, qui a été approuvé par le gouvernement irakien, doit être ratifié par le parlement le 24 novembre prochain.



IRAN: PLUSIEURS REBELLES KURDES TUÉS DANS UN ACCROCHAGE AVEC LA POLICE

TEHERAN, 18 nov 2008 (AFP)

LES FORCES de sécurité iraniennes ont tué un nombre indéterminé de rebelles kurdes dans l'ouest de l'Iran, a indiqué mardi l'agence de presse iranienne Fars.

"Lors d'une opération, plusieurs membres du groupe terroriste Pejak, tous des turcs, ont été tués", a déclaré à l'agence Hojatollah Damyad, un responsable de la sécurité au bureau du gouverneur dans la province de Kermanshah.

Il n'a pas précisé la date de l'opération mais a ajouté que quatre membres du Pejak, dont une fille de 16 ans, avaient été arrêtés dans la ville de Sanandaj.

Le parti indépendantiste Pejak, acronyme du "Parti de la vie libre au Kurdis-

tan", a des liens étroits avec les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), un mouvement séparatiste basé en Turquie et dans le nord de l'Irak, qui mène une lutte armée contre Ankara depuis 1984.

Ces dernières années, les affrontements meurtriers ont été fréquents entre les forces iraniennes et les militants du Pejak, qui opèrent depuis des bases arrières du nord-est de l'Irak.

L'Iran est le théâtre d'une montée des violences dans plusieurs régions où vivent d'importantes minorités ethniques, comme le Sistan-Balouchistan (sud-est) ou le Khouzesan (sud-ouest), ainsi que dans les zones kurdes.

L'Iran accuse la Grande-Bretagne et les États-Unis, qui démentent, d'être derrière ces violences.



L'IRAK, LA TURQUIE ET LES ETATS-UNIS FORMENT UN COMITÉ ANTI-PKK

BAGDAD, 19 nov 2008 (AFP) -

L'IRAK et la Turquie, avec le soutien actif des États-Unis, ont franchi mercredi une étape supplémentaire dans leur collaboration contre les rebelles kurdes du PKK, avec la création d'un comité conjoint destiné à contrecarrer leurs activités.

Une rencontre tripartite de haut niveau a eu lieu dans la Zone verte à Bagdad, en présence du ministre turc de l'Intérieur Besir Atalay, du Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki et de l'ambassadeur des États-Unis à Bagdad, Ryan Crocker.

Selon le porte-parole du gouvernement irakien Ali al-Dabbagh, "le gouvernement irakien, le gouvernement turc et les États-Unis ont décidé de former un comité pour travailler sur la menace que constitue le PKK pour la sécurité et la stabilité de la Turquie et de l'Irak".

"Ce comité va prendre les mesures nécessaires pour empêcher toute activité possible de cette organisation en territoire irakien ou dans la zone frontalière entre la Turquie et l'Irak", a-t-il ajouté.

A l'issue de cette réunion, M. Maliki a déclaré: "Tout ce qui nuit à la Turquie nous nuit à nous aussi. Le gouvernement irakien tient à faire progresser ses relations avec la Turquie. Cette visite marque une étape importante dans l'effort des deux pays contre l'organisation terroriste du PKK".

Pour sa part, le ministre turc de l'Intérieur a assuré que "la création de ce comité va favoriser la coopération entre nos deux pays" et que "la Turquie soutient les efforts de sécurité et de stabilité de l'Irak".

Côté irakien, ce comité sera dirigé par le ministre d'Etat pour la Sécurité nationale, Shirwan al-Waïli, et comprendra notamment le ministre de l'Inté-

rieur de la région autonome du Kurdistan, Karim Sinjari.

Ankara dénonce régulièrement l'utilisation par les rebelles du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), actifs depuis 1984 dans le sud-est de la Turquie, de bases situées dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak pour lancer leurs attaques en Turquie.

Quelque 44.000 personnes ont été tuées dans les affrontements entre rebelles kurdes et forces de sécurité turques depuis 1984.

La Turquie a souvent accusé Bagdad de tolérer, voire d'aider le PKK, considéré par les États-Unis, l'Union européenne et la Turquie comme une organisation terroriste.

Le gouvernement du Kurdistan irakien (nord), en particulier, est régulièrement soupçonné par Ankara de condamner publiquement mais de tolérer dans les faits les activités du PKK.

Selon les autorités de la province, qui jouit d'une très large autonomie au sein de l'Etat fédéral irakien surtout en matière de sécurité, les rebelles du PKK opèrent dans des régions si reculées, si inaccessibles, qu'ils sont hors d'atteinte de son armée ou de sa police.

Toutes les routes de montagne menant aux zones où le PKK est actif sont étroitement contrôlées par les forces kurdes d'Irak mais, selon les villageois des environs, de multiples pistes de contrebande existent dans la région, qui permettent tous les trafics.

Au début du mois, le Parlement turc a prolongé d'un an son mandat au gouvernement l'autorisant à mener des opérations militaires transfrontalières contre les bases irakiennes du PKK. La première opération de ce type de l'armée turque a eu lieu en octobre 2007.

L'armée turque mène régulièrement des raids, aériens ou terrestres, et bom-

barde les positions du PKK dans ces montagnes très escarpées.

Fin octobre, le chef des forces américaines en Irak, le général Raymond Odierno, s'était rendu en Turquie pour discuter avec les responsables militaires turcs des moyens de combattre le PKK.

Les Etats-Unis ont indiqué à plusieurs reprises fournir à la Turquie des renseignements militaires, notamment des relevés satellitaires très précis, sur les positions du PKK.



n° 942 - 20 nov. 2008

En couverture / Irak, Afghanistan, Pakistan : Les plans d'Obama

Que deviendra l'Irak si les GI s'en vont ?

Dans ce pays livré aux affrontements ethniques et confessionnels, la présence militaire américaine constitue le seul élément de stabilité, estime un journaliste irakien.



Il n'y a pas un Irakien qui ne souhaite pas le retrait des armées étrangères. Il ne se trouve plus personne pour justifier leur présence et prendre leur défense. Tout le monde a pâti de leurs erreurs, de leur ignorance des réalités et de leur vision stéréotypée du Moyen-Orient. C'est pourquoi presque toutes les forces politiques irakiennes demandent leur départ, même si des motivations divergentes se cachent derrière ce slogan.

Or ces mêmes forces politiques sont aujourd'hui au pied du mur. Il n'est en effet pas exclu qu'un tel retrait se fasse effectivement, et plus rapidement qu'on ne l'avait envisagé. Les Américains ont annoncé qu'ils pourraient rapatrier leurs troupes et mettre un terme à toute coopération dans le cas où les Irakiens refuseraient de signer leur projet de traité de coopération militaire [le gouvernement irakien a adopté ce texte le 16 novembre]. Or les conséquences risquent d'être considérables. Depuis le renversement de Saddam Hussein, l'effondrement de l'Etat et la déstructuration confessionnelle, ethnique et régionaliste de la société irakienne, les Américains sont dans le pays le seul pôle de stabilité.

Les Irakiens ne se sont pas préparés à ce tournant historique. Si l'avenir reste à ce point incertain, chacun des innombrables dossiers en suspens est susceptible de dynamiter le processus politique et de ramener la situation sécuritaire à son point de départ. Ils sont impuissants à élaborer un projet national acceptable pour tous. Pis, ils n'arrivent même pas à parler un langage commun. La définition de termes tels que terrorisme varie d'un parti à l'autre, de sorte que la loi antiterroriste est appliquée selon le plus petit dénominateur commun. Le fédéralisme signifie-t-il des quotas pour les postes de gouvernement ou une autonomie des provinces ? Qu'est-ce une "minorité" et une "majorité" ? L'identité de l'Irak est-elle arabe ou plurielle ?

Les citoyens ont constaté, au cours des dernières années, que l'armée américaine était le seul recours pour arbitrer entre les forces politiques concurrentes et trancher. La plupart des acteurs politiques irakiens y ont consenti. A Bagdad, centre névralgique du pays, ce sont les Américains qui ont eu l'idée de séparer les quartiers sunnites et chiites par des murs de béton afin d'éviter les attaques.

Ce sont eux qui ont élaboré une alliance contre Al-Qaida dans la province d'Al-Anbar et qui ont constitué la Sahwa, ces milices composées d'anciens insurgés reconvertis dans la lutte contre Al-Qaida. Ce sont eux qui ont mis fin aux pillages de l'Armée du Mahdi [de Moqtada Al-Sadr, chiite radical]. Et ce sont encore eux aujourd'hui qui empêchent les tensions entre les groupes armés de dégénérer en conflit armé à Kirkouk, où les forces politiques sont hantées par le spectre de l'épuration ethnique et prêtes à dégainer au moindre signe.

Chaque faction a sa milice, ce qui contribue à diviser le pays en fiefs. Ces milices ne reculent devant rien, malgré d'innombrables conférences de réconciliation, de fatwas interdisant de verser le sang et d'appels au calme lancés par les autorités religieuses. La plupart du temps, les conflits ne portent pas sur le projet politique mais sur le partage des richesses, des ressources et des postes. L'attrait du pouvoir, des petits avantages, de l'argent, des privilèges et des postes est plus fort que tous les principes patriotiques professés dans les médias.

En cas de retrait soudain des Américains, il n'y aura ni armée nationale, ni police, ni services de renseignements irakiens pour contrôler le terrain. En effet, les différents gouvernements qui se sont succédé depuis la chute de l'ancien régime n'ont pas su former une armée capable d'intervenir dans toutes les régions du pays. L'armée de l'air est inexistante et l'armée de terre sous-équipée, la corruption est endémique et le commandement est divisé en clans, factions et courants politiques, régionaux et confessionnels, chaque groupe ayant ses colonels et ses bataillons. Il en va de même pour la police, qui est infiltrée par des miliciens confessionnels. Chaque province a ses propres services de sécurité et sa propre police, susceptibles de se transformer à tout instant en force d'appoint confessionnelle afin de défendre des intérêts catégoriels.

L'imbroglio politique est parfaitement illustré par l'étrange débat qui s'est déroulé au Parlement sur les jours fériés. La proposition de faire passer le jour de repos hebdomadaire du samedi au jeudi a soulevé les passions. Certains députés ont alors demandé que chaque province puisse fixer ses propres règles

pour les jours fériés annuels, pour la plupart religieux. Il ne fallait pas s'étonner que d'autres demandent que chaque quartier et chaque rue puisse instaurer son propre calendrier.

Le pays est confronté au choléra, à l'effondrement des services publics, à l'absence d'hôpitaux et de services médicaux d'urgence, à l'accumulation des ordures, au chômage, à la peur des assassinats, aux coupures d'électricité, à la pollution causée par des millions de générateurs au mazout, à l'exode de millions de personnes instruites, au pillage par les soldats d'occupation et les sociétés de sécurité privées, à l'infiltration par des services de renseignements étrangers et à l'effondrement du civisme. Tout cela exige des réponses rapides de la part des forces politiques. Or celles-ci ne s'y sont pas préparées durant les six années qui se sont écoulées depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein. Qui garantira que les luttes confessionnelles ne reprendront pas quand les Américains seront partis ?

Le problème des quotas confessionnels dans les forces de l'ordre, par exemple, n'a pas été résolu par le gouvernement. De même, les divisions confessionnelles et ethniques dans les ministères menacent l'unité du pays. Le confessionnalisme détruit la cohésion sociale et prépare le terrain à d'autres campagnes d'épuration. Ainsi, à Mossoul, le déploiement de l'armée irakienne n'a pas empêché que des voitures circulant dans la ville ne diffusent par haut-parleurs menaces et injonctions de quitter la ville à l'adresse des chrétiens.

Personne ne souhaite le maintien des forces d'occupation dans le pays, mais l'Etat n'est pas suffisamment fort pour combler le vide que créerait le départ des près de 150 000 soldats américains avec tout leur matériel et leurs services de renseignements. En revanche, les pays voisins, et notamment l'Iran, se tiennent en embuscade pour étendre leur influence. Dans cette situation embrouillée, que peuvent faire les Irakiens sans les "barbares" ? Au moins sont-ils une partie de la solution, comme le disait le poète grec Cavafy.

Shaker Al-Anbari
Al Mustaqbal

TODAYS ZAMAN

NOVEMBER 12, 2008

Defense minister's remarks on nation-state spark criticism

AYŞE KARABAT

Remarks made by Defense Minister Vecdi Gönül on Turkey's nation-state building, which defended deportations of Greeks and Armenians from Anatolia at the beginning of the last century, have been met with harsh criticism from intellectuals and civil society organizations.

Gönül, who was in Brussels to participate in a European Union defense ministers' meeting, gave a speech at the Turkish Embassy there on the occasion of the anniversary of the death of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on Nov. 10. In his speech Gönül claimed that if Greeks and Armenians were still living in the country, Turkey would not be the same nation-state it is today. He hinted that Armenia is supporting the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Gönül also complained that there was not even one single Muslim among the founders of the Izmir Chamber of Trade. Gönül said on Tuesday that he had been misunderstood.

Gönül was an unofficial candidate for the presidency in 2007. It has been claimed that he had told his close circle that his wife does not wear a headscarf and that his relationship with the military is good so that he could become president. His role in the April 27 memorandum issued by the armed forces also led to questions. It was claimed that Gönül knew about the memorandum but did not inform the government at that time. On April 27, 2007, the General Staff posted a declaration on its Web site in an attempt to discourage the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) from nominating Abdullah Gül, minister of foreign affairs at the time, for the presidency. The government decided to hold early elections after the memorandum.

Gönül, who is a former governor, claimed that reform efforts during the last years of the Ottoman Empire were ineffective and were unable to "save the country." He suggested that the "success" of the republic lies in the nation-building process:

"If there were Greeks in the Aegean and Armenians in most places in Turkey today, would it be the same nation-state? I don't know with which words I can explain the importance of the population exchange, but if you look at the former state of affairs, its importance will become very clear," Gönül said.

The Lausanne Treaty signed in 1924 called for a population exchange between the



Greek Orthodox citizens of the young Turkish Republic and the Muslim citizens of Greece, which resulted in the displacement of approximately 2 million people.

The Armenian population that was in Turkey before the establishment of Turkish Republic was forced to emigrate in 1915, and the conditions of this expulsion are the basis of Armenian claims of genocide.

In the same speech, Gönül hinted that Armenians are supporting the PKK. "We cannot deny the contribution of those who consider themselves the victims of this nation-building, especially the forced emigration, to the struggle in the southeastern Anatolia," he said.

He added that in those days Ankara was composed of four neighborhoods -- Armenian, Jewish, Greek and Muslim -- and claimed that after the nation-building process, it was possible to establish a national bourgeoisie.

Solü Özel from Istanbul Bilgi University underlined that Gönül's remarks about nation-building are correct from a historical point of view but are very unfortunate because they show that Gönül is not aware of the loss Turkey has experienced due to the homogenization of the population. Özel underlined that Gönül's hints about the Kurdish question and forced Armenian emigration clearly show that the defense minister does not understand the Kurdish question and the effect of failed poli-

cies towards it.

Professor Baskın Oran said Gönül's remarks are nonsense in all of their dimensions.

"The expulsion of Greeks and Armenians led a delay of industrialization for at least 50 years. There is no such thing as a national bourgeoisie; naturally, the bourgeoisie are cooperating internationally," Oran said.

According to Oran, Gönül's remarks are also connected to the positions of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Referring to recent claims that the AK Party is losing its Kurdish supporters due to Erdoğan's remarks on the Kurdish issue, Oran said, "The others in the party are just following him."

Professor Doğu Ergil from Ankara University, a Today's Zaman columnist, said Gönül's remarks are very unfortunate and that society is under threat. "We are all threatened by discriminatory perspectives that support ethnic cleansing," Ergil pointed out.

Öztürk Türkođan, the chairman of the Human Rights Association (İHD), said Gönül's remarks are a reflection of a very flawed understanding of the nation-state. "The existence of different ethnicities in a country does not mean a unitary state is impossible. Gönül's remarks reflect the ideas of World War II," he said.

TODAYS ZAMAN

NOVEMBER 13, 2008

Repercussions of remarks by defense minister on the 'nation-state'

Turkish Press Review

First Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said on various occasions that those who do not like Turkey's "one nation, one flag" structure can leave and go anywhere they like better.

Defense Minister Vecdi Gönül took this threatening discourse to new heights on Monday with a speech he gave at the Turkish Embassy in Brussels. "Would we be the nation-state we are today if the Greeks in the Aegean

region or the Armenians here and there continued to stay in Turkey?" he asked. Gönül drew harsh criticism from intellectuals and civil society organizations for expressing ideas in a way that could be taken for justifying ethnic cleansing.

Ali Bayramođlu of Yeni Şafak criticizes Gönül for implying that the nation-state [of Turkey] managed to exist by deporting Armenians, Greeks and other minorities. "This is an unacceptable discourse. Gönül's remarks re-

mind me of one of my previous interviews with a [Turkish] Istanbulite. He said Istanbul had a population of around 1 million in 1955. 'A considerable number of this population comprised minority groups. They acted as if they were the real owners of the city. They were not sympathetic. At every opportunity they made you feel they were different,' the man told me. Now I see that this mindset [to see minorities as an enemy] is still alive. This is the mindset that tore us and Hrant Dink, a Turkish-

Armanian journalist who was shot dead by an ultranationalist Turk in 2007, apart. This mindset carries the sorrow of the Sept. 6-7 incidents [a state-sponsored campaign designed to intimidate Turkey's non-Turkish communities into leaving their homeland to clear the way for a homogeneous Turkish state] to our day. The fact that this mindset has grabbed the opportunity to be represented by a prominent figure of the ruling party is a misfortune for all of us," Bayramoğlu states.

Star's Eser Karakaş says he is surprised to see that a defense minister who did not utter a single word on the Oct. 3 Aktütün terrorist attack that left many Turkish soldiers dead and who does not brief the nation on issues directly

related to national defense has now delivered a speech on nation building. "He says: 'Before the foundation of the republic, there were four districts in Ankara, where Jews, Armenians, Greeks and Turks lived. Minorities owned the fertile lands in the Aegean region. The most important step in building this nation was the population exchange. Mind you, would we be such a nation-state if the Greeks in the Aegean region or Armenians here and there [in Turkey] continued to stay?' Everything he said was politically and legally scandalous," remarks Karakaş, adding that Gönül violated the Constitution and committed a crime with these remarks. "According to Article 66 of the Constitution, Armenians [who number around

70,000] and Greeks [who number around 3,000] live in Turkey as our citizens. Gönül made a blunder by considering these citizens a 'threat to the nation-state.' This is a crime according to the Constitution. The defense minister should either resign or be removed from office. He should, furthermore, be tried in accordance with Article 216 of the Turkish Penal Code [TCK] since he declared Armenians and Greeks, who are our citizens, non-national elements. This absurdity cannot have anything to do with freedom of expression," Karakaş concludes.

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TURKEY AND IRAQI KURDS: CONFLICT OR COOPERATION?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AT A TIME when rising Arab-Kurdish tensions again threaten Iraq's stability, neighbouring Turkey has begun to cast a large shadow over Iraqi Kurdistan. It has been a study in contrasts: Turkish jets periodically bomb suspected hideouts of the banned Kurdistan Workers Party (Pariya Karkerên Kurdistan, PKK) in northern Iraq, and Ankara expresses alarm at the prospect of Kurdish independence, yet at the same time has significantly deepened its ties to the Iraqi Kurdish region. Both Turkey and Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG, a term Turkey studiously avoids) would be well served by keeping ultranationalism at bay and continuing to invest in a relationship that, though fragile and buffeted by the many uncertainties surrounding Iraq, has proved remarkably pragmatic and fruitful.

Ankara's policy toward Iraq is based on two core national interests: preserving that country's territorial integrity and fighting the PKK, whose rebels use remote mountain areas on the border as sanctuary and staging ground for attacks inside Turkey. From Turkey's perspective, Iraq's disintegration would remove a critical counterweight to Iranian influence and, more ominously, herald the birth of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq, thus threatening to inflame Kurdish nationalist passions inside Turkey. As a result, it has sought to prevent the sectarian conflict in Iraq's centre from escalating, Iraqi Kurds from seceding and the PKK from prospering.

There is broad consensus in Turkey regarding these goals. However, opinions diverge on how best to achieve them. Members of the Kemalist-nationalist establishment – the Turkish armed forces, powerful parts of the bureaucracy, the Republican People's Party and the Nationalist Movement Party – view the KRG and the Kurdish national ideal it represents as an existential threat. They are convinced that a far more aggressive posture toward the KRG is required to force it to stop protecting the PKK. As a result, they advocate isolating it diplomatically, limiting its authority to the pre-2003 internal boundaries and keeping it economically weak.

Pro-European liberal circles, the ruling religious-conservative Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) and Kurdish elites take a different view. They see the landlocked Kurdistan federal region as vulnerable and having little choice but to rely on Turkey for protection (for example, from a resurgent central Iraqi state) and economic prosperity. They view the area as a potential buffer between Turkey and the rest of Iraq which, in the event of a U.S. withdrawal, could revert to civil war. They believe the best way to combat the PKK is to persuade the KRG to do so. For these reasons, they advocate stronger diplomatic, political and economic ties with the KRG in order to extend Turkish influence, cement the Kurdistan federal region more solidly within Iraq and ensure action is taken against the PKK.

Divisions have yielded a measure of confusion, but the end-result has been a strikingly pragmatic and largely effective compromise between the AKP and the more traditional establishment, combining military

pressure, politics, diplomacy and economic incentives. On the issue of Iraq's political future, Turkey has come to accept that the question no longer is whether it will be a federation or a unitary state but rather what type of federation will arise and with what degree of decentralisation. It also has steered a middle course in the struggle over Kirkuk, disputed between Kurds, Arabs, Turkomans and others. In particular, it stopped relying on the Turkoman population for its main leverage points, instead insisting on preserving the city's multi-ethnic/religious fabric. In so doing, it can hinder the Kurds' exclusive claim to the oil-rich region without which the KRG would probably lack the economic autonomy necessary for genuine independence.

Turkey has proved adroit in other ways too. It has deepened economic ties with the Kurdish area while holding back on providing material aid to its energy sector or allowing the KRG to export oil and gas through its territory until Iraq has adopted a federal hydrocarbons law – a step which Ankara considers critical to that country's territorial integrity. Finally, Turkey has mounted limited military cross-border operations against the PKK, designed more to pressure the KRG to take action and convince the U.S. to use its own leverage than to crush the Kurdish movement – overall, a far more effective way of dealing with this perennial challenge than serial Turkish bombing, whose military impact (as opposed to any temporary political benefits) is highly questionable. In short, Turkey has both pressured and reached out to Iraq's Kurdish authorities, concluding this is the optimal way to contain the PKK, encourage Iraqi national reconciliation and tie the Kurds more closely with the central state.

There have been real benefits for the KRG as well. The slowly warming relationship is based on its realisation that U.S. forces may draw down significantly in the next two years, leaving the Kurds increasingly dependent on the federal government and neighbouring states such as Turkey and Iran. Under this scenario, Turkey would be a more useful partner to the Kurds than either Baghdad or Tehran, because of the prospect it offers of access to the European Union (which, even at Ankara's current customs union relationship to Brussels, would exceed as an economic magnet anything even an oil-rich Iraq would offer); its availability as a trans-shipment country for Kurdish oil and gas; its ability to invest in major infrastructure projects; and the better quality of the goods it sells to Iraq's Kurdistan federal region.

The result has been a (still fragile) victory for pragmatism over ultranationalism on both sides of the border. Rapprochement between Turkey and the KRG will not solve all problems, nor root out the unhelpful spasms of nationalist rhetoric that intermittently contaminate political discourse. More is required to lay the foundations of a lasting, stable relationship, including a peaceful, consensus-based solution to the Kirkuk question. But, amid the many uncertain prospects facing Iraq, this at least is one development to be welcomed and nurtured.

Istanbul/Brussels, 13 November 2008



NOVEMBER 13, 2008

Q&A: MASSOUD BARZANI AND JAY GARNER

Doubts About Withdrawal From Iraq

THE IRAQI KURDISTAN PRESIDENT & THE ARMY'S FORMER RECONSTRUCTION CHIEF ON THE FUTURE OF THE OCCUPATION

THE IRAQI government is set to vote this weekend on the Status Of Forces Agreement with the United States, which would allow U.S. troops to stay in Iraq for three more years while outlining benchmarks for withdrawal from certain regions. A United Nations mandate currently governing the presence of the 140,000 U.S. troops in Iraq is set to expire on Dec. 31.

After meeting with President Bush, Iraqi Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani visited National Journal on Oct. 30 with U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Jay Garner, who was formerly in charge of reconstruction in Iraq. Barzani, using a translator, and Garner spoke with NJ staff about the new agreement and the future of the U.S. presence in the country. Excerpts of the conversation, edited by NationalJournal.com's Theresa Poulson, follow. Visit the archives page for more Insider Interviews.

NJ: Will the Status Of Forces Agreement be approved or not? If not, what are the implications?

Barzani: We have expressed our position clearly that we are for this agreement, and we see it in the interests of both sides, Iraq and the United States, and it's in the interest of the Iraqi people and the United States people. Our position has been expressed clearly in favor of the agreement, and the efforts are continuing, but at the same time there are still obstacles in the way, and there are doubts, and there are possibilities of not having the agreement, or at least to have it delayed.

NJ: What would be the consequences if there is no agreement? U.S. forces have said they will stand down and stop operations and retreat to their bases.

Barzani: Indeed, the agreement is the best option that we have. All the other alternatives are not good; therefore the options are not good. Whether to have an extension of the status quo or to have the withdrawal of the forces -- with the agreement or without the agreement -- we're expecting bad consequences, not good ones.

NJ: General Garner, please explain the situation as far as getting oil out of Kurdistan under Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution.

Garner: The disagreement with the government stands on who has the authority to let people come in and drill oil. The Kurdish government says, "We have the right to let the contracts," but what they're doing as they do that, they pay 83 percent of the revenues to the Iraqi government. They're filling the Iraqi government's coffers.

... So what 140 says is, we'll have a democratic process, where we have a referendum, and let the people choose what they want to do. And what we've continually done here is put that off; where the constitution called for that referendum by the end of 2007, we put it off. We said, OK, we'll have it in six months. We still put it off.

NJ: President Barzani, if indeed that obstacle is cleared, would Kurdistan be willing to sell its oil to the United States as a preferred customer? In other words, we would pay the market price, but we would be first to be able to tap into the Kurdistan oil supply?

Barzani: Rest assured that our preferred customer would be the United States.

NJ: Are you concerned by Barack Obama's plans for withdrawal?

Barzani: As we have heard and seen, Senator Obama has a plan to withdraw the forces within 16 months. Of course, we will be seeing elections taking place in Iraq as well. As a result of the elections in Iraq, there will be change in Iraq before the end of 2009. Of course the Iraqis have to try to find a solution for their problems and to manage their country, because they should not wait forever to see the U.S. forces to remain there. It's true that within the 16 months that's critical for us -- to withdraw the troops by the end of 2011 -- but the events in Iraq would also determine how things go.

NJ: What does the United States need to do to stabilize when the troops begin the pullout at some level?

Barzani: Sometimes there are cases when you can do things to avoid problems, but the problems have happened, and now it's too late to talk about it. I believe with the fall of the regime, when the U.S. forces were



liberation forces, when they turned themselves into an occupation force and the issuance of U.N. Security Council [Resolution 1483](#) -- that has been the biggest mistake, and we are dealing with the consequences of this. And now it's too late to talk about what's to be done.

NJ: During a withdrawal, what does the United States need to do to avoid Iraq completely falling apart?

Barzani: Indeed, we have to be honest, and the United States has to come up and say clearly... whether Iraq would remain as the top priority of the United States and would be at the top of its agenda or not. Otherwise, having 140,000 troops on the ground, how would you be acting in that way? While you have liberated that country, you have brought these people to be in power.

NJ: How long should U.S. troops stay in Iraq?

Barzani: Of course we do not want the troops to stay there forever. And we want them to come back to their homes [as soon as possible]. But of course if you leave the business unfinished and leave Iraq, that would be the biggest success and victory for the terrorists, and will be a big defeat for the United States and the allies of the United States....

We believe that there is room for the forces to be gradually decreasing.



It's not necessary for this size of the troops to remain on the ground there. But of course if there would be a withdrawal from the country, without having the agreement and without having a proper alternative, there is the fear that once again the terrorists would be encouraged and the situation in Iraq would deteriorate, and Iraq once again will become a safe haven for the terrorists, and that would lead to more deterioration.

NJ: Would Iraq then move toward civil war if the U.S. troops withdrew?

Barzani: That possibility is there.

NJ: Is your regime providing protection for PKK bands operating out of Iraqi Kurdistan?

Barzani: We refute such kind of accusations. We challenge if there is one evidence for us to be protecting these groups. The problem of PKK is an internal, domestic Turkish problem.

Recently we have seen some positive change on the attitude of Turkey. And in the last week, within a week, I have met for two times the special representative of the Turkish government, and both sides have agreed that we will continue in this dialogue and that we try together in order to find a solution to this problem.

NJ: Can you dispute that Kurdistan Workers Party guerrillas are largely based in the territory, in Kurdistan?

Barzani: One has to know the geography and the topography of that area when talking about this issue. So we are talking about a border strip... a border triangle between Iraq, Iran and Turkey. These are tough and rough mountainous areas. The majority or the bulk of the PKK forces are inside Turkey; probably they have some presence on this border strip. We have neither villages nor our forces present in these areas, and we have never prevented Turkey from doing any operations in these border areas of this triangle. PKK is not present in any populated village or city or areas that have road access to it.

NJ: What's your assessment of the sustainability and competence of the Maliki government?

Barzani: The situation in Iraq is a complicated one. In fact, we are not happy with the performance of the Maliki government, nor are we satisfied with our own performance. But the issue is not personally Maliki... It is true that there are differences and also disputes, but we believe that so long as we have the constitution, the constitution is where we should go, in order to find solutions within the framework of the constitution.

NJ: How close is it to sustainability in the long term without large-scale foreign support?

Barzani: Of course any government would not be able to function properly if there is no stability and security in the country and would not be able to implement any program or any plan that they have. Also, the secu-

urity situation in Iraq cannot be sustained without the support and the assistance of the multinational forces in Iraq; the Iraqi forces themselves would not be able to provide that kind of stability or security.

NJ: And how long until that situation changes?

Barzani: Certainly it needs time; probably it needs a few years.

NJ: Could and should the surge have worked three or four years earlier?

Garner: Would the surge have worked three years earlier? Possibly, yeah. We didn't do a lot for those three years except just sit around and watch. ... What helped the surge was, in Anbar of course the tribes decided they were so tired of al-Qaida, they decided to cooperate. **Muqtada al-Sadr** decided he'd be a little bit quiet during this time, so those two things helped. Whether those would've occurred three years earlier, I don't know.

But where I think we missed the boat, what really would have worked, is if when we went in there, instead of trying to rubber-stamp a democracy... if we had let them go to a federal system, where you could have still had a government in Baghdad, but where you put the people in their own tribal, ethnic and religious comfort zone. So you could have had a federal system -- like in Kurdistan, where they elect their own leader, they have their own security forces, they have their own constitution, and they could report back to Baghdad, just like they do in Kurdistan -- but where the velvet fist of government felt by the people would have been from their federal district, not from Baghdad.

NJ: What policy could the U.S. take toward Iran that would be helpful to the future of Iraq?

Barzani: There is no doubt that Iran has influence in Iraq. And Iran wants to have a role in Iraq and also in the region. And at the same time, Iran wanted assurances that the situation in Iraq would not have a negative impact and that Iraq would not be utilized to launch attacks. Of course Iran has its own agenda.

As for the next president of the United States, what Iran wants is that role to play, so it depends on both the next president of the United States and Iraq, and to what extent the U.S. is ready to give that role, or to what extent that role would be given, to Iran.



Peter Galbraith backs ethnically divided Iraq

Peter Galbraith, a former U.S. ambassador to Croatia, says that Iraq should split into three countries, one for each of the ethnic groups in the region: Sunni, Shiite and Kurd.

The senior diplomatic fellow with the Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation tells NPR's Robert Siegel that the country has already broken up in partitions along these lines and the U.S. should not be in the business of putting it back together.

Galbraith says the ethnic factions have started taking on distinct roles in Iraq. "We have, in the north Kurdistan, which is, in all regards, an independent country, www.ekurd.net with its own army and its own government. And now between the Shiites and the Sunnis there are two separate armies — there's a Shiite army — it's the Iraqi army, but it's dominated by the Shiites — and in the Sunni areas there's now the Awakening — a 100,000-man strong militia. And it is because of the Awakening, and not so much the surge of U.S. troops, that there's been this decline in attacks by al-Qaida."

Galbraith says that the Sunni Awakening still remains very hostile to the Iraqi government, and the government sees the Awakening as a bigger threat than al-Qaida.

The incoming Obama administration will bring Vice President-elect Joe Biden into the fray, which Galbraith calls "very encouraging."

Biden "has been the prime proponent of a decentralized Iraq, and although in the campaign Sen. McCain described [Biden's] plan as a 'cockamamie' idea," Galbraith says, "it is in fact what the Bush administration has done."

In 2007, the Bush administration financed a Sunni army — the Awakening — and Galbraith says this is responsible for the success so far in Iraq. Biden



would take this to the next step and encourage the Sunnis to form their own region, which would control that army, just as the Kurdistan region controls the Peshmerga, or the Kurdistan army, Galbraith says.

A decentralized, loosely federalized partitioned Iraq might eventually be capable of defending its own interests against its larger neighbors of Iran and Turkey, but right now, Galbraith says, that's not happening.

"Iraq is not, today, defending its interests," he says. "The Iranians wield enormous influence because the United States actually paved the way for Iran's allies to become the government of Iraq."

"With regard to the Kurds, actually there's been a change in attitude on the part of Turkey," Galbraith says. "There was a time when they thought the idea of an independent Kurdistan was an almost existential threat to Turkey. But increasingly, www.ekurd.net Turks recognize, first, that this is an accomplished fact — it's already happened; and second, that there are opportunities — after all, they share in common that they're secular, they're pro-Western, and, like the Turks, they aspire to be democratic and they're not Arabs." Galbraith says there are two things the U.S. can do to enhance stability in Iraq as it leaves.

"First, try and solve the territorial dispute over Kirkuk and other disputed areas between the Kurds and the Arabs. Secondly, to work out a modus vivendi between the Iraqi government and the Shiite-led army and the Sunni Awakening as to who will control what territory," he says.

"If we can minimize the kinds of things that Sunnis and Shiites are going to fight over, it may be, over time, that they will find it in their interests to have much greater cooperation and that voluntarily they'll build a stronger Iraqi state," Galbraith says. "I think it's unlikely the Kurds would ever join that, but I think it's quite possible between the Sunnis and Shiites."

THE DAILY STAR

November 18, 2008

A 'grand bargain' might unlock Kirkuk

By Michael Wahid Hanna and Joost R. Hiltermann

The struggle for oil-rich Kirkuk threatens to paralyze Iraq's legislative agenda and block political accommodation, destabilizing fragile security gains that have put the issue of troop withdrawals on the American and the Iraqi political agenda. The competition to control Kirkuk, whose oil field contains 13 percent of Iraq's proven reserves, has exposed a deep fault line between Arabs and Kurds.

In addition to the intermittent ethnic violence in the city, Kirkuk is at the center of national parliamentary gridlock. In July, Iraqi Kurdish parties and their ally in the ruling coalition, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, blocked a provincial election law - legislation seen by the United States and key regional actors as critical to recalibrating Iraq's shaken political system. The Parliament approved a revised law in September on the basis of a compromise proposed and encouraged by the United Nations, whereby a separate parliamentary committee would address disputes on Kirkuk outside the framework of provincial elections, allowing voting to proceed in the rest of the country. So the fundamental disputes over the city remain, and the feasibility of future legislative efforts and the country's future depend on addressing the "Kirkuk veto."

Paradoxically, this dispute also holds the potential for political compromise on the future shape of the Iraqi state. If the country's leaders can get Kirkuk right, there is real hope that Iraq can stabilize into something more closely resembling a governable state.

Beyond the basic territorial issue, Kirkuk's future status touches by permission of the authors.

on fundamental issues that divide Iraqis, including the nature of federalism, prospects for provincial elections and the management of oil wealth. The scope of these concerns and the difficulty of reaching piecemeal agreements complicate legislative progress, as do shifting parliamentary alliances and the Kurdish parties' ability to hold federal legislation hostage to their aspirations in Kirkuk.

The interlocking nature of the issues involved suggests that a comprehensive deal - a grand bargain - makes political sense. And it seems quite possible given the precedent set by a package deal earlier this year, when national legislators agreed on a national budget, an amnesty and provincial powers all at once.

The key aspects of a grand bargain are widely understood. All sides would agree that the process will fulfill the requirements of the Iraqi Constitution and reflect the will of those affected by any agreement on disputed territories. The broad outlines of the deal would include: passage of a provincial election law for Kirkuk and agreement on the city's special status as a standalone federal region for an interim period with provisions for power sharing; adjustment of provincial boundaries; agreement on oil and gas management and revenue distribution; and constitutional revision to reflect the terms of a negotiated solution. In keeping with constitutional requirements, the terms of any such negotiated solution would be submitted to a popular referendum.

The snag may well be that, aside from their historical claims,

Kurds have understood incorporation of Kirkuk and its oil wealth as a first step toward viable independence. Toward this end and through their alliance with the US military, they have established their political and military supremacy in the city. For Kurdish leaders who have staked much of their legitimacy on their push for control of Kirkuk, such a compromise would be difficult to sell to their own people, who have not forgotten the "Arabization" and expulsion campaigns under Saddam Hussein.

However, the undeniable blow felt by Kurds would be softened by the legal right to develop their own oil and gas wealth, legal assurances on the equitable distribution of all Iraqi hydrocarbon wealth, and secure and recognized boundaries for the Kurdistan region. Moreover, by soothing the sensibilities of neighbors hostile to their aspirations, such as Turkey and Iran, the Kurds would limit opportunities for outside interference. Finally, in light of increasing tensions and splits within the Iraqi ruling coalition over Kirkuk, compromise would guarantee the Kurds a continuing and vital role in affecting policy decisions in Baghdad.

As for the Kurds' opponents - a motley alliance of Turkmen, Sunni Arabs and the majority of Shiites, who have been hostile to Kurdish territorial claims and maneuvering on hydrocarbon legislation - agreement on a special status for Kirkuk might bring them around on other legislation as well. In turn, agreement on an oil and gas law would help cement cohesion of the Iraqi state and help

guarantee equitable distribution of oil wealth, particularly to areas bereft of natural resources. American leaders should encourage current United Nation-led efforts to establish a clear process for resolving the status of Kirkuk and power relations within it, as well as in other mixed-population areas claimed by the Kurds.

The struggle over disputed territories has also stoked tensions in other areas of the country. In the eastern city of Khanaqin, Kurdish troops who control security in the city recently engaged in a standoff with Iraqi security forces that raised the prospect of Arab-Kurdish violence and threatened to undermine the governing coalition.

Although rising tensions highlight the fragility of the current situation, the Kirkuk conflict also offers a unique opportunity to seek a broad-based compromise. The prospects for advancing a "grand bargain" are far from assured. However, recent progress on security will prove ephemeral if the major political disputes roiling Iraq are not dealt with expeditiously.

Michael Wahid Hanna is a program officer at The Century Foundation in New York. Joost R. Hiltermann is deputy program director for the Middle East at the International Crisis Group in Istanbul. This commentary first appeared in Toronto's *The Globe and Mail*, and is published

Iraq announced date for long-delayed elections, but disputed Kirkuk left out of vote

November 18, 2008

By SAMEER N. YACOUB | Associated Press Writer

BAGHDAD (AP) - Iraq said Tuesday that it will hold long-awaited provincial elections on Jan. 31, a step forward for U.S.-backed efforts to promote national reconciliation even though a key northern area will not participate in the vote.

Government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh said the Cabinet decided on the date, which had been widely expected, at a meeting Tuesday. The announcement of the election date comes as parliament prepares for a Nov. 24 vote on a U.S.-Iraqi security pact to allow American troops to stay in Iraq for three more years.

Both developments followed months of painstaking negotiations to balance the interests of Iraq's rival factions, reflecting continued sectarian and ethnic tensions in the country despite a decline in violence. The elections had been hoped for as early as Oct. 1. They will be the first provincial elections since 2005, when Iraq's insurgency was far stronger than it is now.

While the security situation has improved, Iraqi politics are still vulnerable to sectarian divisions among the country's major factions: Shiites, Sunni Arabs and Kurds.

The elections will not take place in Tamim province, which includes the oil-rich city of Kirkuk. Lawmakers had decided to postpone a decision on how to resolve a power-sharing dispute over Kirkuk, which Kurdish leaders believe should be incorporated into their semi-autonomous region in the north.

Tahir Mohammed, a Kurdish elections official, also said no date has been set for elections in the three provinces in the Kurd-administered region. Iraq has 18 provinces. Faraj al-Haidari, a senior electoral official, said the Cabinet decided on the date after consulting the Iraqi High Electoral Commission.

"We have completed all our preparations for the elections and we are fully ready and we have no problem with this date," al-Haidari said. U.S. officials hope the election will give greater representation to minority Sunni Arabs. Many Sunnis and some Shiites boycotted the last provincial election in January 2005, enabling Shiite religious parties and the Kurds to win a disproportionate share of the seats.

AP Associated Press

Iraq cabinet approves pact with U.S. on forces

Ministers approve withdrawal by end of 2011 after tense talks

By Campbell Robertson

BAGHDAD: The Iraqi cabinet voted overwhelmingly Sunday to approve the security agreement that sets the conditions for the continued U.S. presence in Iraq from Jan. 1, 2009, until the end of 2011.

All but one of the 28 cabinet ministers at the session Sunday voted for the agreement and sent it to Parliament for consideration, a huge relief to the United States, which had been in intense negotiations for nearly a year.

The White House welcomed the vote as a "positive step," Reuters reported from Washington.

"While the process is not yet complete, we remain hopeful and confident we'll soon have an agreement that serves both the people of Iraq and the United States well," said Gordon Johndroe, the White House spokesman.

The United Nations Security Council resolution that allows U.S. troops to operate in Iraq expires Dec. 31, and, without an extension of the resolution or a separate agreement with the Iraqis like that approved by the cabinet Sunday, forces of the U.S.-led coalition would have no legal mandate to operate.

"This is the best available alternative," the Iraqi government spokesman, Ali al-Dabbagh, said soon after the vote. "We have always said this is not a perfect solution for the Iraqi side and it is not a perfect solution for the American side. But it is a procedure which was forced by circumstances and necessity."

The draft approved Sunday requires coalition forces to withdraw from Iraqi cities and towns by the summer of 2009, and from the whole of Iraq by the end of 2011. An earlier version had language giving some flexibility to that deadline, with both sides discussing timetables for withdrawal, but the Iraqis managed to have the deadline set in stone. The United States has about 150,000 troops in Iraq.

For months, the fate of the pact has been in doubt as Iraqis pressed for more changes, including jurisdiction over operations by U.S. troops and the flexibility of the withdrawal date. The United States, which had wanted the pact concluded by midsummer, gave significant concessions. Iraqi officials said minor tweaks were being made last week.

Under the agreement, U.S. soldiers are still guaranteed immunity, except in cases of serious felonies committed while off duty outside their bases.

"We welcome the cabinet's approval of the agreement today," said a representative of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. "This is an important and positive step."

Many members of Parliament from Tawafiq, the Sunni bloc, said they were still undecided on the pact, arguing that a national referendum was crucial to approval. Parties representing about a third of that bloc's members have indicated that they would support the agreement in its current form.

The Kurds, who had recently expressed hesitation about the agreement despite weeks of solid support, seem to have decided on approval.

"We have already expected that the cabinet would pass this agreement, because this is the best option," said Mahmoud Othman, an independent Kurdish member of Parliament. "Our Kurdish leaders are with the agreement."

Leaders of some of the smaller blocs, like Iraqia, a secular group representing 24 lawmakers, and Fadhila, a Shiite party that includes 15 members of Parliament, said Sunday that they had not yet taken a stance on the agreement because they had not seen the final draft.

In a crucial development, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the most influential Shiite cleric in Iraq, indicated Saturday that he would support whatever decision is made in Parliament as representative of the will of the Iraqi people.

Shiite officials who met with the ayatollah said he found the latest draft acceptable, if not perfect. Sistani also made clear that he did not side with politicians who refused any agreement with the United States out of hand.

"The people who reject this agreement did not give us a logical alternative," an official in the ayatollah's office

said Sunday. "We respect their position, but we support the majority decision."

The anti-U.S. Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr had called for armed resistance against any agreement that allowed a continued U.S. presence in Iraq.

"I repeat my demand to the occupier to leave our land without keeping bases or signing agreements," Sadr said in a text read to thousands of supporters at Friday prayers. "If they keep bases, then I would support honorable resistance."

Sistani is enormously influential among the majority Shiite population. In 2004, when he wanted to put pressure on the Americans to hold direct elections,

he called upon his followers to march by the hundreds of thousands in a peaceful but powerful demonstration of force.

Dabbagh said of the Sadrists: "You cannot guarantee a 100 percent approval of anything. They are performing and they are practicing their role in Iraqi democracy right now, and they are expressing their opinion in a peaceful way and not a violent way, which we encourage."

Stephen Farrell, Tariq Maher, Riyadh Muhammed, Muhammed Hussein, Suadad al-Salhy and Abeer Mohammed contributed reporting.

■ Suicide car bomb in Diyala

The Iraqi police said Sunday that seven people died in a suicide car bombing at a police checkpoint in Diyala Province, The Associated Press reported from Baghdad.

Colonel Ahmed Khalifa, chief of the Jalula police station, said one police officer and six civilians were dead. The attack, in Jalula, also wounded five police officers and two civilians. The checkpoint that was targeted is near a military base and an office of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, a Kurdish political party.

AFP

TURQUIE: UN SOLDAT TUÉ DANS DES COMBATS AVEC DES REBELLES KURDES (ANATOLIE)

ANKARA, 19 nov 2008 (AFP)

UN SOLDAT turc a été tué et cinq autres ont été blessés mercredi au cours d'affrontements avec des rebelles kurdes dans une région montagneuse de l'est du pays, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Les combats ont éclaté entre des soldats de l'armée turque qui patrouillaient dans une zone rurale de la province d'Agri, près de la frontière iranienne, et des membres du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), selon l'agence turque qui cite le gouverneur de la province, Mehmet Cetin.

Le PKK est un mouvement séparatiste basé principalement dans le sud-est de la Turquie à majorité kurde et dans le nord de l'Irak, et qui mène une lutte armée contre Ankara depuis 1984. Considéré par la Turquie et par une grande partie de la communauté internationale comme une organisation terroriste, le PKK est au cœur d'un conflit qui a causé la mort, selon des estimations, d'environ 44.000 personnes.

Les autorités d'Ankara accusent les rebelles kurdes d'utiliser les régions du nord de l'Irak comme bases arrière pour commettre des attentats en territoire turc, et mènent régulièrement des raids aériens contre ces positions situées dans des régions montagneuses et peu peuplées.

AFP

LES CORPS DE 150 KURDES VICTIMES DE SADDAM HUSSEIN RENTRENT AU KURDISTAN

NAJAF (Irak), 19 nov 2008 (AFP) -

LES AUTORITES irakiennes ont organisé mercredi le rapatriement dans leur région d'origine des dépouilles de 150 Kurdes tués dans les années 80 par le régime de Saddam Hussein et qui avaient été enterrés dans une fosse commune près de la ville sainte chiite de Najaf, dans le sud du pays.

Lors d'une cérémonie à l'aéroport de la ville, récemment rouvert au trafic civil, le ministre irakien des Droits de l'homme Wejdan Mikhail et le gouverneur de Najaf Assad Abou Gulal ont rendu hommage aux victimes.

"Aujourd'hui les crimes de l'ancien régime apparaissent en pleine lumière. Ce sont les restes d'hommes, de femmes, d'enfants, de familles entières", a dit le gouverneur.

Selon lui, dans le seul gouvernorat de Najaf au moins 45 fosses communes ont déjà été découvertes.

Les dépouilles sont celles de Kurdes tuées par les forces irakiennes pendant la terrible campagne Anfal à la fin des années 80, quand des dizaines de milliers de Kurdes ont été massacrés et des milliers de villages bombardés ou rasés.

"Il y avait 150 corps de Kurdes sur un total de 250 corps qui ont été découverts", a précisé le ministre des droits de l'Homme. "Nous en avons identifié vingt grâce à leurs papiers et cartes d'identité, mais 130 corps ne l'ont pas encore été".

Il a ajouté que dès le rapatriement des corps au Kurdistan des tests ADN seraient effectués sur des familles kurdes pour qu'ils soient identifiés.

Lors de la campagne Anfal (1986-1988), les troupes de Saddam ont tué environ 182.000 Kurdes et détruit quelque trois mille villages en représailles à des soulèvements kurdes pendant la guerre Iran-Irak.

Pendant cette campagne, un nombre inconnu de Kurdes ont été déportés de leurs régions d'origine dans le Nord de l'Irak vers des régions désertiques où ils étaient tués et enterrés en masse.

Jeudi, une cérémonie doit être organisée en leur hommage à Erbil, la capitale de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, avant que les corps soient inhumés dans le village de Kalar, à la lisière des provinces de Kirkouk et Soulemanyah. Dans cette localité, est érigée un monument à la mémoire des victimes d'Anfal.

TRIBUNE
DE GENÈVE

21 novembre 2008

La Turquie pourrait mettre fin à l'isolement total du chef kurde Abdullah Öcalan

ANKARA (AFP) - Le gouvernement turc envisage de mettre fin à l'isolement total du chef rebelle kurde Abdullah Öcalan, détenu depuis 1999 dans une île-prison du nord-ouest de la Turquie, a affirmé vendredi le ministre de la Justice Mehmet Ali Sahin.

"Nous avons lancé une construction à Imrali (l'île sur laquelle est détenue Öcalan, ndr) (...) nous pourrions y transférer 5-6 détenus, c'est une question à l'étude", a-t-il dit à des journalistes, cités par les chaînes de télévisions.

Le Comité antitorture (CPT) du Conseil de l'Europe qui a visité à plusieurs reprises Abdullah Öcalan, 59 ans, a demandé en mars dernier au gouvernement turc de mettre fin à son isolement, préjudiciable à sa santé mentale, mais la Turquie a refusé, selon un rapport publié à Strasbourg.

Lors d'une visite en mai 2007 dans l'île Imrali, le CPT a examiné les conditions de détention et la santé d'Öcalan, unique pensionnaire de l'île-prison de haute sécurité depuis le 16 février 1999.

Les experts s'étaient alarmés de la notable dégradation de l'état mental du chef

kurde, depuis leurs précédentes visites en 2001 et 2003.

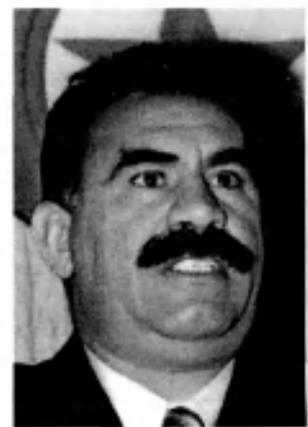
Le Comité avait demandé pour le prisonnier le droit d'avoir la télévision, de téléphoner régulièrement à ses proches, de voir ses avocats sans la présence d'un membre de l'administration, d'avoir des visites plus fréquentes et de partager sa prison avec d'autres détenus.

Une avocate de M.Öcalan, Hatice Korkut, interrogée par téléphone depuis Istanbul, s'est dite sceptique au sujet de cette décision d'Ankara: "Je ne trouve pas cela convainquant", a-t-elle souligné, indiquant que le gouvernement aurait pu jusqu'à présent faire beaucoup de choses pour alléger l'isolement carcéral de son client comme améliorer le transport à l'île.

seule un ferry-boat opérée par des militaires peut s'y rendre, et lui autoriser l'accès aux journaux et aux médias en général.

Mais, a-t-elle ajoutée, "si le gouvernement met en oeuvre cette décision ce serait une bonne chose et pourrait calmer les Kurdes" qui manifestent régulièrement en Turquie et en Europe pour demander de meilleurs conditions de prison pour Öcalan.

Fondateur et chef du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit), Öcalan a



été arrêté le 15 février 1999 au Kenya par des agents turcs avec l'aide des services de renseignement américains.

Transféré en Turquie, il a été condamné à mort pour "séparatisme", peine commuée en 2002 en prison à vie après l'abolition de la peine capitale.

Le PKK, classée organisation terroriste par la Turquie, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis, mène depuis 1984 une rébellion armée qui a coûté la vie à plus de 40.000 personnes.



TURQUIE: 7 MORTS DANS DES AFFRONTEMENTS AVEC DES REBELLES KURDES

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 19 nov 2008 (AFP) -

TROIS SOLDATS turcs et quatre rebelles kurdes ont été tués mercredi au cours de deux affrontements séparés dans l'est et le sud-est de la Turquie, ont annoncé des responsables et les médias.

Quatre militants et deux soldats ont été tués au cours de combats entre les forces de sécurité et des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) près de la localité de Lice, dans la province de Diyarbakir, (sud-est) ont annoncé des sources sécuritaires locales. Quatre membres de forces de sécurité ont été blessés.

Par ailleurs un soldat a été tué et cinq autres blessés au cours d'affrontements avec des rebelles kurdes dans une région montagneuse de l'est du pays, a

rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Les combats ont éclaté entre des soldats de l'armée turque qui patrouillaient dans une zone rurale de la province d'Agri, près de la frontière iranienne, et des membres du PKK, selon l'agence turque qui cite le gouverneur de la province, Mehmet Cetin.

Le PKK est un mouvement séparatiste basé principalement dans le sud-est de la Turquie à majorité kurde et dans le nord de l'Irak, et qui mène une lutte armée contre Ankara depuis 1984.

Les autorités d'Ankara accusent les rebelles kurdes d'utiliser les régions du nord de l'Irak comme bases arrière pour commettre des attentats en territoire turc, et mènent régulièrement des raids aériens contre ces positions situées dans des régions montagneuses et peu peuplées.



MILICES TRIBALES EN IRAK: POLÉMIQUE ENTRE LA PRÉSIDENTIE ET M. MALIKI

BAGDAD, 21 nov 2008 (AFP)

LE CONSEIL présidentiel irakien a demandé solennellement vendredi au Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki de cesser de constituer des milices tribales pro-gouvernementales appelées "comités de soutien" à travers le pays.

"Notre responsabilité constitutionnelle nous contraint à vous demander d'intervenir afin d'arrêter l'action de ces comités jusqu'à ce qu'il y ait un accord (entre les institutions constitutionnelles) et que leur action soit régie par une loi", affirme un communiqué publié vendredi sur le site du Conseil présidentiel.

Le Conseil présidentiel est composé du Kurde Jalal Talabani, du chiite Adel Abdel Mahdi et du sunnite Tarek al-Hachémi. Les rivaux du Premier ministre soupçonnent ce dernier de constituer ces "comités de soutien" pour élargir son pouvoir avant les élections provinciales du 31 janvier.

Ces derniers jours, les "comités de soutien" ont été à l'initiative dans plusieurs villes sunnites et chiites de manifestations de chef tribaux en faveur du Premier ministre et de l'accord de sécurité avec les Etats-Unis sur le retrait des troupes américaines.

Le Parlement irakien doit se prononcer lundi sur l'accord de sécurité, déjà approuvé par le gouvernement.

"Les institutions officielles n'ont été informées sur les véritables buts de ces

comités que par la presse (...) Ils ne ressemblent pas aux initiatives lancées par les tribus de (la province sunnite) Al-Anbar avec la formation des Sahwas et des "comités de soutien" qui ont combattu Al-Qaïda et seulement Al-Qaïda", ajoute la communiqué.

Fin 2006, les tribus de la province occidentale d'Al-Anbar avaient constitué, avec la bénédiction des Américains, des milices armées pour chasser al-Qaïda de cette région. Fort de ce succès, des milices du même type avaient été constituées dans d'autres régions où l'insurrection était présente, notamment Salaheddine, Diyala et dans la capitale.

"Mais pour nous, commencer aujourd'hui à créer des +conseils+ payés par le budget et leur demander de jouer un rôle alors qu'ils n'ont aucune base légale, est une affaire importante. Il faut faire une pause car c'est une responsabilité que nous partageons", assure le Conseil.

Inscrit dans la Constitution, le Conseil présidentiel est une instance collective où les principales communautés sont représentées et qui a droit de veto sur les lois votées par le Parlement.

"Il n'y a aucune justification à créer de tels comités alors que le pays connaît une énorme amélioration de la situation. Si nous en avons besoin dans certains endroits où la sécurité est menacée, alors nous devons nous mettre d'accord sur leur tâche, leur avenir afin que nous puissions les défendre ensemble", souligne le Conseil.



Défilé à Bagdad contre l'accord de sécurité irako-américain

21 novembre 2008 - Aous Koussaï - Reuters

DES MILLIERS DE partisans de l'imam radical chiite Moktada Sadr ont défilé vendredi à Bagdad pour dénoncer le pacte de sécurité irako-américain qui prévoit le maintien de l'US Army dans le pays jusqu'à la fin 2011.

Lire la suite l'article

Place Firdous, à l'endroit même où l'imposante statue de l'ancien raïs Saddam Hussein, haute de 12 mètres, avait été mise à bas par les GI's victorieux le 9 avril 2003, les manifestants, hurlant des slogans et agitant des drapeaux irakiens, ont érigé une effigie du président américain George W. Bush qu'ils ont à leur tour renversée.

Le mannequin portait une mallette sur laquelle était écrit "Pacte de l'asservissement et de la honte".

Les sadristes ont bombardé de bouteilles l'effigie, l'ont renversée, mise en lambeaux pour finalement y mettre le feu.

"Je suis avec vous pour chasser l'occupant, de quelque façon que vous jugiez appropriée", a assuré Moktada Sadr à la foule dans un message lu par un dirigeant religieux enturbanné. Les manifestants ont salué ce message de leur leader aux cris de "Dieu est grand".

Des tireurs d'élite de l'armée irakienne étaient postés sur les toits des maisons environnantes pour surveiller le cortège et parer à tout débordement.

"JOUR D'UNITÉ"



Après s'être mis à genoux, tournés vers La Mecque, pour la prière, les manifestants ont défilé à travers les rues en criant leur refus de l'accord conclu la semaine dernière avec les Américains et actuellement en discussion au Parlement irakien.

"Aujourd'hui marque un jour d'unité pour toutes les communautés d'Irak, Arabes, Kurdes, qui rejettent ce pacte de sécurité. Les gens sortent pour dire que cet accord ne vaut rien", a déclaré à Reuters Hazim al Aradji, l'un des collaborateurs de l'imam Sadr.

La police irakienne a fait savoir que la manifestation n'avait donné lieu à aucun incident majeur.

En vertu de l'accord conclu après dix mois de difficiles négociations, les forces américaines d'Irak seront placées pour la première fois sous l'autorité du gouvernement irakien.

Le texte prévoit qu'à partir de la mi-2009, les troupes américaines ne patrouilleront plus dans les rues des villes et villages.

Les forces américaines restitueront leurs bases à l'Etat irakien dans le courant de 2009 et ne pourront plus décider elles-mêmes de mener des raids contre des habitations sans en avoir reçu l'ordre d'un magistrat irakien ou sans avoir obtenu l'autorisation du gouvernement.

LA RÉBELLION KURDE DE TURQUIE REVENDIQUE L'ATTAQUE D'UN OLÉODUC

ANKARA, 22 nov 2008 (AFP) –

LES REBELLES séparatistes kurdes de Turquie ont revendiqué samedi l'explosion qui a provoqué vendredi un incendie dans un oléoduc reliant l'Irak au sud de la Turquie, a rapporté une agence proche de la rébellion.

Le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) a déclaré que l'explosion était "un acte de sabotage", dans un communiqué cité par l'agence de presse pro-PKK Firat sur son site internet.

L'oléoduc reliant Kirkouk, dans le nord de l'Irak, au port turc de Ceyhan, sur la Méditerranée, est toujours en proie aux flammes, selon Firat. De leur côté, des responsables locaux cités par l'agence turque Anatolie ont assuré que l'incendie était circonscrit samedi.

L'explosion s'est produite à 20h30 (18h30 GMT) vendredi sur un tronçon de l'oléoduc situé près de Midyat, dans la province turque à majorité kurde de Mardin (sud-est), provoquant un incendie.

Le gouverneur local avait indiqué que l'explosion avait provoqué une fuite de pétrole.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, a déjà saboté dans le passé des gazoducs et des oléoducs.

L'oléoduc Kirkouk-Ceyhan, dont la capacité de transport est de 70 millions de tonnes de pétrole par an, a aussi été saboté sur la partie irakienne de son parcours par des insurgés irakiens.

En août, le PKK avait revendiqué le sabotage de l'oléoduc Bakou-Tbilissi-Ceyhan (BTC), coupé par une explosion dans la station de pompage de Refahiye (est de la Turquie), et avait menacé de poursuivre les attaques contre les intérêts économiques de la Turquie. L'acheminement du pétrole avait été interrompu pendant trois semaines.

Le PKK mène une rébellion armée contre la Turquie depuis 1984, un conflit qui a fait plus de 44.000 morts.

TODAYS ZAMAN

23 November 2008

Kurdistan PM and Turkish MPs attend the opening of Ishik University in Erbil

By KRG

Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, several Turkish Members of Parliament, and Turkey's Consul General to Mosul along with Kurdistan Regional Government and other officials attended the opening of Ishik University, a private Turkish university in Erbil. Prime Minister Barzani said that he considers the university, which is affiliated with the Fezalar Education Consortium, to be of great importance to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. "I hope that Ishik University will become a centre where both the academic aspirations of our students and the aspirations of our government for a strong relationship with Turkey are realised."

The Prime Minister's administration has stressed education as a strategic aspect of capacity development in the Kurdistan Region. "Today we are preparing the establishment of a progressive and advanced society. Therefore we are trying hard to prepare thousands of our young people in the fields of foreign language, engineering, medicine, technical and computer sciences and other scientific fields, while also creating a new focus on the increase in skills which will support private sector development."

The Prime Minister also commented on the good progress being made in relations between the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Turkey, noting that the relationship is being built on a strong foundation of understanding, cooperation and growing trust.



Turkey's Consul General Mr Ahmed Yildiz read a congratulatory letter from Turkey's Foreign Minister marking the inauguration of Ishik. Mr. Yildiz said he is hopeful about the future relationship, and explained the value of cooperation in educational and commercial fields.

Ishik University President Salih Hoshoglu opened the ceremony. "Ishik University will promote a culture of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. We can work together in our study of scientific programmes." He explained that there would be four principle colleges in the university, all taught in English: an IT college, a college of administration and economics, and a college for mathematics and education. In addition,

evening classes will be available for courses in English, computer science and business administration.

Preparations are underway to open a humanities college as well. Currently 450 students have been accepted, and enrolment is continuing.

Mr Huseyin Chalik, Turkey's General Director of Higher Education, and these Members of Turkey's Parliament attended the ceremony: Vahit Kirishchi, Selahattin Aydin, Ibrahim Hasgur, Halil Mazicioglu and Abdulhadi Kahya. Former MPs Cavit Torun, Galip Ensarioglu and Hashim Hashimi were also present.

Iran said to have material for atom bomb

By William J. Broad
and David E. Sanger

Iran has now produced roughly enough nuclear material to make, with added purification, a single atomic bomb, according to nuclear experts analyzing the latest report from global atomic inspectors.

The figures detailing Iran's progress were contained in a routine update Wednesday from the International Atomic Energy Agency, which has been conducting inspections of the main Iranian nuclear facility at Natanz. The report concluded that as of early this month Iran had made 630 kilograms, or about 1,390 pounds, of low-enriched uranium.

Several experts said that was enough for a bomb, but they stressed that the milestone was mostly symbolic, because Iran would have to take additional steps. Not only would it have to breach its international agreements and kick out the inspectors, it would have to further purify the fuel and put it into a warhead design — a technical advance that Western experts are unsure whether Iran has yet achieved.

"They clearly have enough material for a bomb," said Richard Garwin, a top nuclear physicist who helped invent the hydrogen bomb and who has advised Washington for decades. "They know how to do the enrichment. Whether they know how to design a bomb, well, that's another matter."

Iran insists that it wants only to fuel reactors for nuclear power, but many Western nations, led by the United States, suspect its real goal is to gain the ability to make nuclear weapons.

While some Iranian officials have threatened to bar inspectors, the country has made no such moves, and many experts in the Bush administration and at the international atomic agency believe it will avoid the risk of attempting "nuclear breakout" until it possesses a larger uranium supply.

Even so, for President-elect Barack Obama, the report underscores the magnitude of the problem that he will inherit Jan. 20: an Iran that not only has solved many technical problems of uranium enrichment but also can credibly claim to possess enough material to make a weapon if negotiations with

But several obstacles remain, experts say

Europe and the United States break down.

American intelligence agencies have said Iran could make a nuclear weapon sometime between 2009 and 2015.

A U.S. national intelligence estimate made public late last year concluded that around the end of 2003, after long effort, Iran had halted work on an actual weapon. But enriching uranium and obtaining enough material to build a weapon are considered the most difficult parts of the process.

Siegfried Hecker of Stanford University, a former director of the Los Alamos weapons laboratory in New Mexico, said the growing size of the Iranian stockpile "underscored that they are marching down the path to developing the nuclear weapons option."

In the report to its board, the atomic agency said the main Iranian enrichment plant was now feeding uranium into about 3,800 centrifuges, machines that spin extremely fast to enrich the element into nuclear fuel. That count is the same as in the agency's last quarterly report, in September. Iran began installing the centrifuges in early 2007.

The reported total of 630 kilograms, an increase of about 150 kilograms, shows that Iran has been making progress in accumulating material to make fuel, the agency said.

That uranium has been enriched to the low levels needed to fuel a nuclear reactor. To further purify it to the highly enriched state needed to fuel a nuclear warhead, Iran would have to reconfigure its centrifuges and do a few months' worth of additional processing, nuclear experts said.

"They have a weapon's worth," said Thomas Cochran, a senior scientist in the nuclear program of the Natural Resources Defense Council, a private group in Washington that tracks atomic arsenals.

He said the amount was suitable for a relatively advanced implosion-type weapon like the one dropped on Nagasaki, Japan, at the end of World War II.

Its core, he added, would be about the size of a grapefruit. He said a cruder design would require about twice as much weapon-grade fuel.

"It's a virtual milestone," Cochran said of the Iranian stockpile. It is not an imminent threat, he added, because the further technical work required to make fuel for a bomb would tip off inspectors, the United States and other powers about "where they're going."

The agency's report made no mention of the possible military implications of the size of the Iranian stockpile, and some experts said the one-bomb milestone was still months away.

In an analysis of the report, the Institute for Science and International Security, a private group in Washington, estimated that Iran had not yet reached the mark but would do so "within a few months." It added that other analysts estimated it might take as much as a year.

Whatever the exact date, it added, "Iran is progressing" toward the ability to quickly make enough weapon-grade uranium for a warhead.

Peter Zimmerman, a physicist and former U.S. government arms scientist, said the Iranian stockpile fell slightly short of what international officials conservatively estimate as the minimum threatening amount of nuclear fuel.

"They're very close," he said. "If it isn't tomorrow, it's soon," probably a matter of months.



November 22, 2008

Kurdish legislator says SOFA necessary for Iraq's future

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: A Kurdish lawmaker on Saturday said that the security pact between Baghdad and Washington is necessary for the future of Iraq now that Iraqi forces are not yet ready to take care of security.

"Some blocs do not have fundamental reservations but fears for the period after the agreement," Khaled Shawani, a member of parliament from the Kurdistan Alliance (KA), told Aswat al-Iraq.

The Iraqi cabinet on Sunday had approved with an overwhelming majority of 27 votes to one the security deal between Iraq and the United States, also known as the status of forces agreement (SOFA), and was referred to parliament for voting.

SOFA should legalize the presence of U.S. forces on Iraqi territories after the end of this year, when the deadline given for a UN Security Council mandate for the U.S. army to intervene in Iraq is scheduled to expire.

"There should be deliberations among the blocs to get to know the remarks in order to study them and reach for solutions," said Shawani, who is also a member of the parliament's Legal Committee.

Shawani's bloc, headed by Fouad Maasoum, is the second largest with 53 out of a total 275 seats.

SOFA had drawn wide-scale local popular and political controversy after the cabinet endorsed it on Sunday, particularly from the Sadrist bloc of Shiite leader Muqtada al-Sadr. In accordance with the Iraqi constitution, SOFA cannot be effective before the parliament approves it.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani had agreed on Friday evening with the representatives of political blocs on a call to reach consensus over the deal in a way serving Iraq's higher interests.



November 22, 2008

Iraq's al-Maliki, president in public quarrel over tribal councils, Kurdish region

By HAMZA HENDAWI, Associated Press

BAGHDAD - Iraq's presidential council has taken the unusual step of publicly criticizing the Shiite prime minister after he berated them for their opposition to councils of loyal tribesmen in several Iraqi provinces.

The quarrel is the latest in a series of political setbacks that underline enduring rivalries between Iraq's political factions as the country struggles to find its footing after years of brutal violence.

The dispute between Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, President Jalal Talabani and Talabani's two deputies comes with Iraqis already polarized by a proposed security agreement with the United States that would allow American troops to stay in Iraq for three more years.

Groups opposed to the pact say it enshrines what they see as Iraq's occupation. Proponents, like al-Maliki, say it is the only viable way for Iraq to regain its full sovereignty by 2012.

At the center of the new dispute between al-Maliki and Talabani are the "support councils" made up of pro-government tribesmen that began to spring up earlier this year when the prime minister took charge of military operations against Shiite militias in southern Iraq.

The councils were seen by many as an attempt by the prime minister ahead of Jan. 31 provincial elections to create a support base in areas where his Shiite rivals dominate or, in Sunni areas, to counter the weight of U.S.-backed groups made up of tribesmen and former insurgents.

Al-Maliki has said the councils are needed as a backup for official security forces — similar to the Sunni groups that joined forces with the Americans against al-Qaida in Iraq.

But Talabani's office disagrees. In a letter to al-Maliki dated Nov. 18 and issued late Friday after al-Maliki made their quarrel public, the presidential council said the resources being funneled to the councils would be better used to bolster Iraq's security forces.

"It is our constitutional duty to demand that you intervene and order the relevant authorities to suspend the work of these councils until we arrive at an agreement that provides them with legal and administrative cover," according to the



letter.

Al-Maliki did not specifically mention that letter in his televised news conference on Thursday. But he said Talabani and his two deputies were picking on the support councils while ignoring what he said was a long list of constitutional violations by the self-rule Kurdish region government in northern Iraq.

In response, Talabani, a Sunni Kurd, and his two deputies — vice presidents Tariq al-Hashemi, a Sunni Arab, and Adel Abdul-Mahdi, a Shiite — issued a statement late Friday criticizing al-Maliki for airing their differences in public.

The statement said the presidential council had decided to publicize its letter to al-Maliki "to avoid misunderstandings among members of the public about an issue (the support councils) on which it is exercising its right, indeed its duty, to supervise the workings of the state and its concern that the constitution and the law must be implemented."

If al-Maliki felt strongly about organizing pro-government tribesmen into groups, they should be part of civil society and not involved in security, it said.

Al-Maliki has for months been at loggerheads with Kurdish authorities. He said the presidential council should respond to Kurdish "violations" instead of criticizing the support councils.

He cited a decision by Kurdish authorities to

sign contracts with foreign oil companies without the knowledge of the central government, to set up diplomatic representation offices in foreign capitals and to offer to host U.S. military bases on its territory.

The Kurds have faced persecution under successive Arab governments in Iraq. But many Iraqis now complain the Kurds are flexing their muscles too much, running their region as an independent nation and insisting on a representation in government that's disproportionate to the size of their community, which is about 20 percent of the population.

Massoud Barzani, the nationalist president of the self-rule Kurdish region, has complained that creating support councils in disputed areas, like the oil rich northern Kirkuk region claimed by the Kurds, has stoked conflict. The Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, the country's largest Shiite party and a close ally of the Kurds, has ordered the provincial governments it dominates in the Shiite south not to cooperate with the support councils.

Al-Maliki, like Sunni Arabs, objects to that plan and has recently called for amendments to the constitution to give the central government more powers.

The call riled the Kurds as well as their friends in the Supreme Council.

"We believe al-Maliki is trying to impose a tyranny of a sort," said Kurdish lawmaker Abdul-Khaleq Zangana.

The Washington Post November 23, 2008

Kurds in N. Iraq Receive Arms From Bulgaria

3 Planeloads of Munitions Worry Officials in Baghdad

By Ernesto Londoño Washington Post Foreign Service

BAGHDAD -- Kurdish officials this fall took delivery of three planeloads of small arms and ammunition imported from Bulgaria, three U.S. military officials said, an acquisition that occurred outside the weapons procurement procedures of Iraq's central government.

The large quantity of weapons and the timing of the shipment alarmed U.S. officials, who have grown concerned about the prospect of an armed confrontation between Iraqi Kurds and the government at a time when the Kurds are attempting to expand their control over parts of northern Iraq.

The weapons arrived in the northern city of Sulaymaniyah in September on three C-130 cargo planes, according to the three officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the information.

Kurdish officials declined to answer questions about the shipments but released the following statement: "The Kurdistan Regional Government continues to be on the forefront of the war on terrorism in Iraq. With that continued threat, nothing in the constitution prevents the KRG from obtaining defense materials for its regional defense."

Iraq's ethnic Kurds maintain an autonomous region that comprises three of the country's 18 provinces. In recent months, the Shiite-led central government in Baghdad, which includes some Kurds in prominent positions, has accused Kurdish leaders of attempting to expand their territory by deploying their militia, known as pesh merga, to areas south of the autonomous region. Among other things, the Kurds and Iraq's government are at odds over control of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, which lies outside the autonomous region, and over how Iraq's oil revenue ought to be distributed.

The Kurds of northern Iraq have run their affairs with increasing autonomy since 1991, when U.S. and British forces began enforcing a no-fly zone in northern Iraq to protect the region from President Saddam Hussein's military. The U.S.-led invasion in 2003 sparked concern that Iraqi Kurds would seek independence, but the Kurds have insisted that they wish to remain part of a federal Iraq.

Neighboring countries with large Kurdish minorities, including Turkey and Iran, have said they would oppose the emergence of an independent Kurdistan, as the autonomous region is known.

Iraq's interior minister, Jawad al-Bolani, said in an interview that central government officials did not authorize the purchase of weapons from Bulgaria. He said such an acquisition would constitute a "violation" of



Iraqi law because only the Ministries of Interior and Defense are authorized to import weapons.

Experts on Iraq's constitution said the document does not clearly say whether provincial officials have the authority to import weapons. However, Iraqi and U.S. officials said the Ministries of Interior and Defense are the only entities authorized to import weapons. The Defense Ministry provides weapons to the Iraqi army, and the Interior Ministry procures arms for the country's police forces.

The Iraqi government has acquired the vast majority of its weapons through the Foreign Military Sales program, a U.S.-run procurement system, Brig. Gen. Charles D. Luckey, who assists the Iraqi government with weapons purchases, said Saturday. He said he knew of no instances in which provincial authorities had independently purchased weapons from abroad.

With thousands of American military officials involved in the training of Iraq's security forces, there is little the U.S. government does not know about weapons that are legally imported to Iraq. The shipments from Bulgaria in September caught the American military off guard, the three officials said.

They first learned of the shipments from a source in Bulgaria, the officials said.

The three said they did not know whether U.S. officials had confronted Kurdish leaders about the shipments or alerted Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's government.

"Yes, the Kurds have this autonomous region and they're authorized to keep the pesh," one of the officials said, referring to the militia. "But arming themselves and bringing in weapons stealthily like that -- if I were the Iraqi government, I'd be pretty concerned."

While violence in Iraq has decreased markedly in recent months, political tension is rising as Iraqi leaders gear up for provincial and national elections scheduled to take place next year, and as they prepare for an era in which the U.S. military will have a smaller presence there.

Of the primary fault lines -- which include tension between Sunnis and Shiites and rivalry among Shiite political parties -- the rift between Kurds and the Arab-dominated Iraqi government has become a top concern in recent months. Senior government officials have engaged in a war of words, and Iraqi army and pesh merga units have come close to clashing.

"You could easily have a huge eruption of violence in the north," said Kenneth B. Katzman, a Middle East specialist at the Congressional Research Service in Washington. "Nothing having to do with the Kurds is resolved."

Because Arab Sunnis largely boycotted the 2005 election, Kurds obtained disproportionate political power in key provinces such as Tamim, which includes Kirkuk, and Nineveh. Both about the Kurdish autonomous region. Kurds also control 75 of the 275 seats in parliament.

This year, violence broke out in Kirkuk amid political squabbling over an Arab proposal that seats on the Tamim provincial council should be divided evenly among ethnic Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen. In the end, Iraqi lawmakers had to shelve plans to hold provincial elections in Tamim because the sides were unable to reach a deal.

In August, U.S. officials narrowly averted an armed confrontation between an Iraqi army unit and pesh merga fighters in the town of Khanaqin, in Diyala province.

In recent weeks, Maliki and Kurdish leaders have exchanged sharp words over Maliki's creation of so-called support councils. Maliki has said the councils, which are made up of pro-government tribal leaders, are the central government's eyes and ears in provinces. But Kurdistan Regional Government President Massoud Barzani and other Iraqi leaders have accused the prime minister of using the councils to bolster Maliki's influence in areas where he has little political support. In a recent news conference, Barzani said Maliki was "playing with fire." President Jalal Talabani, who is a Kurd, recently sent Maliki a letter saying the money being spent on councils should go to the country's armed forces.

The pesh merga, which began as a militia controlled by powerful Kurdish families, fought Iraqi troops when Hussein was in power. Since the 2003 invasion, its primary role has been to patrol predominantly Kurdish areas in the north. However, pesh merga units were deployed to the northern city of Mosul in 2004 to help quell an insurgent up-

rising, and others were dispatched to Baghdad as part of the 2007 buildup of U.S. troops.

Recently, the Iraqi government has refrained from using pesh merga forces outside of the Kurdish region and has taken steps to replace predominantly Kurdish forces with Sunni and Shiite soldiers in Nineveh, one of the most violent areas in Iraq.

Central government officials recently bristled at Barzani's offer to allow U.S. troops to establish bases in the Kurdish autonomous region, saying the regional government had no authority to make such an overture, especially as Iraqi officials are calling for a gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops.

"There is a lot of tension," Kurdish parliament member Mahmoud Othman said. "Maliki and his administration are accusing the Kurdish authorities of violating the constitution. And the Kurds are accusing Maliki of violating the constitution."

Chicago Tribune November 23, 2008

In Mosul, a battle for Christians

Small community has a long history in Iraq, but many wonder what the future can hold here after coming under a spate of violence recently

By Gary Marx Tribune correspondent

A month after thousands of Christians fled this northern Iraqi city in terror, many of the refugees have returned home, but some fear a new wave of sectarian violence, church leaders say.

Iraqi police now guard churches throughout this tense, battle-scarred city, where once-dominant insurgents have lost ground in the face of a large-scale offensive by U.S. and Iraqi security forces.

While parts of Mosul appear normal—men dine outdoors at a kebab restaurant, shoppers browse for fruit and vegetables at a market and children playfully stroll home from school—a few miles away, multistory buildings lie in ruins, the streets are empty and most stores are shuttered, their twisted metal facades riddled with bullet holes.

But the battle in Mosul, a city of 1.8 million, is not just against Al Qaeda and other extremists who continue to lay deadly mines and carry out car bombings. It also is a conflict among the nation's religious and ethnic groups for dominance as provincial elections, scheduled for January, approach. A small but ancient community, Iraq's Christians appear powerless against greater forces, and the community in Mosul is divided between those who believe they still have a place in Iraq and those who fear their days here may be numbered.

Even those Christians who returned home to Mosul after the latest attacks are keeping a low profile.

"We normally have about 200 to 300 people attend mass," said Rev. Peter Gethea, a priest at the Seda al-Bashara Assyrian Catholic Church in Mosul. "Last Sunday we only had about 20 people. People are still scared." Neither Christian leaders nor U.S. military officials in Mosul are certain who is behind the attacks, which received widespread international attention and were condemned by the Vatican.

The outcry from abroad has put pressure on Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite, and other

officials to end the bloodshed. He ordered an investigation into the killings and sent a special envoy to Mosul to meet with Christian leaders.

Rumors and theories about who targeted the Christians range from Islamic extremists bent on extinguishing Christianity in Iraq to Kurds conspiring to control the Christians in a bid to expand Kurdistan, an autonomous region in northern Iraq. Kurdish officials vehemently deny any involvement in the violence. Mosul Mayor Zuhair al-Aaraji blamed the attacks on Al Qaeda.

"Their goal is to make Iraq unstable," he said. Also in dispute is the exact number of dead. This month, a U.S. military officer in Mosul said that only four or five Christians had been killed, but one church leader put the death toll at 16, including two women who were shot dead Nov. 12. In addition to the two women, those slain include two physicians, a pharmacist, a construction worker and a blacksmith, said Rev. Rony Bakos, a priest at Mosul's St. George Chaldean Catholic Monastery.

The violence comes as Iraq's government this month approved an election law that reserves only six of 440 seats on provincial councils for Christians and three smaller minority groups. The legislation angered Christian leaders, who said it failed to give their community sufficient representation.

Iraqi Christians have a long and difficult history, and hundreds of thousands of them have fled to neighboring countries and the West since the Persian Gulf War in 1991. Experts say the outflow of Iraqi Christians has accelerated in recent years as the insurgency gained strength. Iraqi Christians now make up about 3 percent of the country's 28 million people, and most live in northern Iraq.

In February, Paulos Faraj Rahho, the archbishop of Mosul's Chaldean Catholic community, was kidnapped; his body was found weeks later. Bakos said eight Christian priests have been slain in Mosul since 2003.

First Lt. John Nimmons of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, whose platoon operates in areas with a significant number of Christian families, said the recent wave of violence began after a car drove around, warning Christians to leave or die.

The attackers also approached individuals and ordered them to hand over their Iraqi identification cards, which contain information about religious affiliation. "After they saw they were Christians, they killed them,"

Nimmons said. Maj. Adam Boyd, an intelligence officer with the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, estimated that 1,400 Christian families fled the city after the attacks. About 70 percent of the refugees have returned, the two priests said.

Standing in the parking lot of his walled-in church compound, Gethea pointed to three tidy homes within view.

"That family now lives in Turkey," he said.

"That family went to Jordan. And that family went to Qaraqosh," one of several predominantly Christian villages just east of Mosul where many took refuge.

One member of Gethea's congregation who returned to Mosul is Yousif Khalil, a 21-year-old university student who fled the city with his parents, brother and sister after the attacks began in October. Khalil said his family returned to Mosul two weeks after Muslim neighbors guaranteed their safety.

"My neighbors are very good. I grew up with them," Khalil said. "They said that if you need anything, we will help you."

But Gethea is less sanguine. Fearing for his life, he now removes his clerical collar whenever he leaves the church grounds.

"I can't wear it," he said. "They would do this to me."

REUTERS

Iraq in breakthrough to link Kurd oilfields to export

November 24, 2008 - By Shamal Agrawi (Reuters)

ARBIL, Iraq - Iraq's oil minister and officials from its largely autonomous Kurdistan region agreed on Monday to link two Kurdish oilfields to the main northern export pipeline to the Turkish port of Ceyhan, the minister said.

"Concerning this issue, we have agreed to prepare and link the pipeline to the Iraqi strategic pipeline, but regarding the exporting process there are still some unresolved points which will be discussed ... in coming days," Oil Minister Hussain al-Shahristani said.

He had been asked by reporters in the Kurdish capital Arbil when the Oil Ministry would grant an export license for Kurdistan's Tawke oilfield, on which Norwegian firm DNO has the concession, and for its Shiwashuk field.

DNO shares surged on the news and last traded up 18 percent.

Disputes between the Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have held up development of oilfields for export in Kurdistan. DNO pumps oil from Tawke but has not managed to gain a license to export it.

Without a license, it has to sell oil on the domestic market at a fraction of the world price.

Analysts said the news was an unexpected breakthrough.

"It's a big step as far as the KRG is concerned," said Muhammad-ali Zainy of the Center for Global Energy Studies in London.

"It's a surprise given that he (Shahristani) was adamant these contracts were illegal ... We don't know what's going on behind the scenes."

ONGOING DISPUTE

Shahristani was in Arbil for talks with Kurdish officials aimed at resolving the disputes over contracts the KRG signed with foreign oil firms on its own initiative. Baghdad has said such contracts are illegal, without central government consent.

"We have agreed on the principle that oil remains for all Iraqi people," Shahristani said at a joint news conference with KRG Prime Minister Masoud Barzani.

Iraq's cabinet agreed a draft oil law in February last year, but it has failed to get it through parliament partly because of rows between the KRG and Baghdad over control of oil contracts.

"There are differences not only between the federal government and the (Kurdish) region on some articles in this law, but also among various political blocs," Shahristani said.

Iraq has the world's third largest proven reserves at around 115 billion barrels. In the absence of an oil law, Baghdad has been negotiating contracts with oil majors under old laws.



Dr. Hussein Al Shahristani, the Iraqi minister of oil (L), and Nechirvan Barzani, prime minister of the Kurdistan region, speak to reporters after a meeting in Erbil, on Monday, Nov. 24, 2008.

The KRG says the constitution gives it the right to also do deals in its territory, but the dispute has kept the majors away.

"We still believe that all differences can be resolved through dialogue and consultation," Barzani told the joint conference.

Shahristani said a top priority was the development of Kurdistan's Khurmala field to supply an Arbil refinery.

The Washington Post November 24, 2008

As Kurdish North Grows, Some Are Left Out UNSEEN IRAQ

By Andrea Bruce

Hyder Hassan Aziz, 46, walks the damp streets of Irbil with his hands thrust in his coat pockets and his shoulders tense, close to his ears. His clothes are faded gray, like the overcast early-morning sky, and he looks at the ground when he walks, kicking small stones with every step.

The bakery is a block from the apartment building where Hyder has lived with his family for 12 years. His morning routine, buying fresh bread for breakfast, has changed very little in that time. But in the past five years, the street has become barely recognizable. Although most people in Iraq have been suffering because of the war, the Kurdish region in the country's north has been growing, becoming unaffordable for the working class.

Here in Irbil, the storefront windows are new and the treeless street looks freshly

paved. Walking back to his apartment, Hyder steps over a red carpet, swollen with rain, rolled out to greet customers at the new Bijan Plaza hotel. There are many new hotels in the Kurdish areas, Hyder says. Most are designed for foreigners.

An empty plot sits like a missing tooth next to his apartment -- where an apartment building once was and a hotel will be. The new sidewalks, flagged and marked, should be finished soon. Jackhammers echo around the corner. Hyder's vegetable cart sits idle at the construction site, its wooden wheels deep in mud. He won't be using it today, he says. The rain keeps people from shopping.

Selling vegetables is Hyder's second job. He is also a police officer.

His apartment stands at the end of the block, the only site that doesn't suggest growth. It is weathered and crumbling,

above a row of mechanic shops. Water drips disturbingly close to generator wires. The landlord wants Hyder and his family to move out in a week. They say the building will become a hotel.

The city no longer has room for his family, he says. And he doesn't have a plan. He says this without emotion, beyond worry.

He slips off his shoes before entering his apartment. Rainwater spreads like an ink stain on the ceiling. It forms a drip and falls, missing a bowl. The family is quiet and busy with the bedding that is rolled out every night and folded away every morning.

When the smell of bread enters their home, the family members gather around Hyder, half-awake and hungry. Avoiding the wet areas, they sit on the floor, in a quiet circle, and eat bread with yogurt and tea.



Iraq says Kurds can seek arms, but must inform govt

November 24, 2008 - By Michael Christie

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - The Iraqi government has no objection to semi-autonomous Kurdish authorities purchasing weapons and ammunition to arm their security forces, but it wants to be informed, a government spokesman said Monday.

The Washington Post reported that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) had quietly shipped in three C-130 cargo planes loaded with guns and bullets from Bulgaria, stirring concerns among U.S. officials over possible armed confrontation between the Kurds and the government.

The newspaper quoted federal Interior Minister Jawad al-Bolani as saying such a purchase of weapons by the ethnic Kurdish authorities in northern Iraq would be a violation of the law.

Government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh, however, said the government would not oppose the Kurds arming their police if it were aimed at strengthening national or regional security.

"I don't deny there is some tension between the KRG and the federal government due to many issues," Dabbagh said. "It won't reach to a level of conflict."

The reported arms purchase -- which a Kurdish official denied and Dabbagh said he knew nothing concrete about -- came as tensions between the KRG and the Shi'ite-led government in Baghdad appear to be on the rise.

That has stoked fears of a resurgence of bloodshed at a time when anti-American attacks and conflict between Shi'ites and Sunnis have dropped to their lowest level in four years.

FUZZY LAW

Relations between Kurds and the government of mainly Arab Iraq have been especially strained over Kirkuk, a city that sits on potentially vast oil fields outside of Kurdistan, but which Kurds consider their ancestral home.

In August, Kurdish Peshmerga fighters and government troops almost came to blows over the ethnically mixed town of Khanaqin in the restive northern province of Diyala.

Dabbagh said regional governments did not have the authority to arm themselves, but the law was unavoidably fuzzy while Iraq was in the process of building a federal system in the aftermath of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein.

The Kurds, who have enjoyed virtual autonomy in the north since the first Gulf War in 1991, should have asked the central authorities for equipment. "Either that or they should be informing the federal government," Dabbagh said.

"We understand there is a threat ... and they need to have equipment and weapons for their own police. I don't think the federal government will object to it so long as this comes in those circumstances."

Kurds, who make up less than a fifth of Iraq's population, were killed by the thousands under Saddam. Kurds became partners in the U.S.-backed Baghdad government after the invasion.

Jabbar Yawer, undersecretary for Peshmerga affairs in the Kurdistan Regional Government, denied the Washington Post story.

"As a region we don't have the right to buy any weapons without the consent of the central government, and they haven't allocated any amount in the budget for buying weapons," he said. "All our weapons come from old Iraqi army warehouses."



Sunni bloc demands referendum on Iraq-US pact, other concessions, in exchange for support

November 25, 2008 - By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA - AP

BAGHDAD (AP) — A key Sunni bloc demanded Tuesday a national referendum on the Iraqi-US security pact and other concessions in exchange for its support for the agreement, something the government keenly wants to give the plan a broad victory in an upcoming parliamentary vote.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's Cabinet has already approved the agreement that would allow American troops to stay in Iraq through the end of 2011.

But the ruling coalition's main Shiite and Kurdish partners would only muster a slight majority in the 275-seat legislature if the largest Sunni Arab group, also represented in the ruling coalition, remains opposed to the agreement. The vote is scheduled for Wednesday.

The 44-seat Sunni bloc, the Iraqi Accordance Front, says it would only support the agreement if the government meets its demand to put the same deal to a vote in a nationwide referendum in 2009.

It also wants the government to accept a package of reforms designed to give the minority Sunni Arabs a bigger say in the running of the country and better representation in the security forces.

"The national division over the agreement is very clear," said Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, a Sunni Arab who leads the Iraqi Islamic Party, the largest of three groups in the Accordance Front. "Consensus appears to be very difficult, if not impossible."

U.S. State Department adviser David Satterfield, who led the American team that negotiated the deal, was at parliament Tuesday to meet Deputy Speaker Khalid al-Attiyah, a senior Shiite lawmaker who is a key figure in negotiations with the Sunni bloc.

Vice President Adel Abdul-Mahdi, a Shiite, met with U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker and Gen. Ray Odierno, the top American soldier in Iraq. If parliament passes the deal, the three-man presidency must then ratify it.

The White House expressed hope parliament would approve the pact.

"If you look at the violence that took place there yesterday — that was indiscriminate and killed many people — it reminds us that the Iraqis have come a

long way," White House press secretary Dana Perino told reporters. "But they're not quite there yet to be able to take care of all their security needs on their own, and they continue to need our support."

At least 22 people were killed Monday in three bombings in Baghdad, according to Iraqi officials.

If the agreement passes with a narrow majority, it could prompt country's most influential Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, to publicly express his dissatisfaction. That would likely sink the deal.

Al-Sistani is revered by Iraq's majority Shiites. He has indicated that the agreement was less than ideal but would not object to it if it passes by a comfortable majority.

Two hard-line Iranian newspapers urged Iraq's parliament Tuesday to reject the pact, a stand that indicates opposition to the pact remains strong among key circles in the Iranian government.

Iran, Washington's longtime adversary, had for months harshly denounced the pact but toned down its opposition last week after the Iraqi Cabinet approved it.

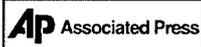
But the daily Jomhuri-e-Eslami warned in an editorial that a popular uprising would erupt in Iraq if parliament approved the deal, while Kayhan, which is run by a representative of Iran's top leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, described the agreement as a "sellout of Iraq."

Al-Maliki's two deputies warned that alternatives to the deal — requesting the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops or extending the expiring U.N. mandate governing their presence — posed a danger to Iraq's security and interests.

"The alternatives are dangerous," Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh said. "They will push Iraq and its young political experiment into the unknown. ... Let us not play with the future of this country."

The deal provides a timeline for the withdrawal of U.S. forces — from the cities by June 30 and from the entire country by Jan. 1, 2012 — and places them under strict Iraqi oversight. It also gives Iraq limited judicial rights over U.S. soldiers and civilian Pentagon employees in the case of serious crimes off-duty and off-base. It bars U.S. forces from using Iraqi territory from attacking neighboring nations.

Thirty lawmakers loyal to anti-American Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr have rejected the deal outright.



Iraqi Shiites, Kurds agree to referendum on U.S. pact

November 26, 2008 - By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA - AP

BAGHDAD — Iraq's ruling Shiite and Kurdish blocs have made a key concession to a large group of Sunni Arab legislators in hopes of securing a big majority in a parliamentary vote on a U.S.-Iraqi security pact, a senior Shiite lawmaker and a close aide to the prime minister said today.

The proposed deal would let American troops stay in Iraq through 2011, meeting a longtime Iraqi demand for a clear timetable for their exit.

But the intensity of political maneuvering among Iraqi factions contributed to deep uncertainty about the outcome of a vote scheduled for today that will determine the status of 150,000 troops in Iraq after years of war.

Lawmakers planned to vote in a session beginning at 6 a.m. CST, but past meetings have often been delayed.

Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki's ruling coalition appears to be assured of at least a slim majority in the 275-seat legislature. But the prime minister seeks a bigger win that transcends Iraq's factionalism and sectarian divisions and reinforces the legitimacy of the pact, which could lead to full Iraqi sovereignty and close the bloody chapter that began with the U.S.-led invasion in 2003.

Shiite Lawmaker Ridha Jawad Taqi said the government's Shiite and Kurdish blocs, which account for about 140 seats, or a slight majority in the legislature, were willing to hold a national referendum on the deal in 2009. That amounts to a concession to many Sunni Arab legislators, who have said they would support the security pact Wednesday if it was put to a nationwide vote next year.

So the deal, if approved in the parliamentary vote, could still be rescinded if it fails in the popular referendum.

A referendum would give the Iraqi people a chance to evaluate "whether their interests have been achieved," said Alaa Makki, a member of parliament's biggest Sunni Arab bloc, the 44-seat Iraqi Accordance Front.

A senior al-Maliki aide confirmed the concession by the Kurdish and Shiite blocs. Speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject, he said a draft bill containing provisions for the referendum and a package of political reforms demanded by the Sunnis would be voted on separately in parliament, also on Wednesday.

Under the deal, U.S. forces will withdraw from Iraqi cities by June 30 and the entire country by Jan. 1, 2012. Iraq will also have strict oversight over U.S. forces. The U.N. mandate that currently governs the conduct of American troops gives them freer rein, leading to Iraqi complaints that they are an occupying force intent on preserving U.S. interests in the Middle East.

The vote count will be as important as the overall result because the country's most influential Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, has indicated that the deal would be acceptable only if it's passed by a big margin. He could scuttle the deal if he speaks against it.

If parliament approves the pact, it must be ratified by the three members of the Presidential Council, each of whom has veto power. Two members support the deal. The third, Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, is a Sunni Arab who could support it if he believes that parliament's biggest Sunni bloc, the Iraqi Accordance Front, has secured enough political gains in pre-vote dealmaking.

The Presidency Council, which also includes President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, and Adel Abdul-Mahdi, a Shiite, has led a flurry of contacts with political leaders over the past week to fashion a compromise that would push through the security pact.

A lot of the negotiations barely relate to the security pact because political groups are seizing the opportunity to trade their support for concessions on other issues.

In addition to the referendum issue, the Sunni Arabs and smaller groups in parliament have made their agreement to the pact conditional on a package of sweeping political reforms for a more equitable power-sharing formula between the country's Shiite, Kurdish and Sunni Arab communities.

Violence has dropped sharply in Iraq since last year, but attacks continue. On Wednesday, hours before the scheduled vote in parliament, a roadside bomb killed two civilians and wounded four others wounded in central Baghdad, Iraqi officials said.

Police and hospital officials said the blast targeted a minibus and those killed were passengers. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to release the information.

The Washington Post November 26, 2008

IRAQI KURDS TO BEGIN SOLO EXPORTS OF CRUDE OIL

By SINAN SALAHEDDIN -(AP)

BAGHDAD -- Iraq's self-ruled Kurdish regional government will export crude oil for the first time by early next year, a Kurdish official said on Wednesday.

Ashti Hawrami, the natural resources minister in the Kurdistan region, said an initial 100,000 barrels per day of crude oil from two northern Iraqi fields would be sent through a pipeline to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. Exports would eventually be ramped up to 250,000 bpd by the end of 2009, he said in a statement.

Hawrami did not say when the exports would begin, but noted they would be coordinated with the Iraqi Oil Ministry.

The announcement appeared to take the national government by surprise, with a ministry spokesman saying the Kurds had not yet received approval to unilaterally begin exports.

An "export license has not yet been granted, and is still under discussion," Assem Jihad told The Associated Press in a phone interview. "Only a technical agreement has been reached on how to link these two fields to the Iraqi strategic export pipeline."

The distribution of Iraq's vast oil reserves has been a major sticking point in the ratification of a national hydrocarbons law, which has been stalled in parliament since February 2007.

That delay has drastically slowed the pace of investments in the country's battered oil sector, hampering Iraq's ability to ramp up production of a resource whose export revenues account for upward of 90 percent of the government's budget.

Iraq, which sits atop the world's third-largest proven oil reserves with more than 115 billion barrels, cur-

rently produces about 2.4 million barrels per day. The overwhelming majority is exported through its southern port.

The Kurds, whose territory sits atop vast reserves, argue the Iraqi constitution gives them the right to unilaterally negotiate and sign oil deals, without consulting with the central government in Baghdad. Since the U.S.-led invasion, they have signed nearly two dozen production-sharing contracts with international oil companies.

The oil ministry, however, considers those agreements illegal, and has threatened to exclude and blacklist companies that sign deals with the Kurds.

To ease the dispute, Baghdad has proposed granting export licenses relating to only four deals struck before February 2007. The Kurds, however,

have yet to agree to this compromise.

The government's relatively hard-line stance stems from concerns that affording the Kurds too much independence in the oil sector could further stoke unrest among the Sunni Muslim population in resource poor central Iraq – a region which had once been the epicenter of the insurgency.

The announcement Wednesday comes two days after Oil Minister Hussain al-Shahristani and the Kurds agreed to link the Tawke and Taq Taq oil fields to the main export pipeline in the north that feeds crude to Ceyhan.

At a press conference after the meeting, al-Shahristani did not provide de-

tails on the export mechanism, which Baghdad has insisted previously be handled by SOMO, the state's oil marketing arm.

Tawke is being developed by independent Norwegian oil company DNO, while Turkey's Genel Enerji and Canada's Addax Petroleum Corp. are jointly operating Taq Taq.

REUTERS

Iraq central gov't, Kurdistan agree oil exports

November 27, 2008 By Mohammed Abbas BAGHDAD (Reuters) -

IRAQ'S oil ministry and the country's largely autonomous northern Kurdish region have agreed to export oil from Kurdistan to Turkey, an Oil Ministry spokesman said on Thursday.

The initial agreement represents a breakthrough in a dispute between the two Iraqi authorities. Disagreement between the Baghdad central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government has held up development of oilfields for export.

"There has been an initial agreement to export Iraqi oil from the Tawke oil field," Iraqi Oil Ministry spokesman Asim Jihad said.

Exports of 100,000 barrels per day are expected to begin from the Tawke oil field, where Norwegian oil firm DNO (DNO.OL: Quote, Profile, Research, Stock Buzz) has a concession, at the beginning of next year, KRG Natural Resources Minister Ashti Hawrami said.

Tawke is expected to be connected to Iraq's main northern export pipeline, which reaches the Turkish port of Ceyhan, by the end of this year. A second Kurdistan oil field, Taq Taq, is due to be linked to the pipeline three to four months later, Harami said.

Exports from Tawke and Taq Taq combined are expected to reach 250,000 barrels per day by the end of next year, he added.



The right to sign oil deals with foreign oil firms has been a sore point between the KRG and the central government. Baghdad does not recognize deals the KRG signed without its consent.

Earlier on Thursday, South Korea's SK Energy (096770.KS: Quote, Profile, Research, Stock Buzz) said it would not raise investment in Kurdistan without central government approval.

The firm is a member of a consortium developing the region's Bazian oil field. It said it would not join a separate \$2.1 billion oil-for-infrastructure package that Korea National Oil Corp signed with the KRG in September.

An oil law, which could help ease the passage of foreign deals, has been held up by its link to other legislation contended by the KRG and the central

government. Tensions have appeared to rise between the two authorities in recent months as they struggle to assert their authority.

Iraq's oil minister met with KRG officials on Monday to discuss the disputed foreign contracts and they agreed to link the Ceyhan pipeline to two Kurdish oil fields.

Iraq has the world's third-largest proven reserves, at around 115 billion barrels. In the absence of an oil law, Baghdad has been negotiating contracts with oil majors under old laws.

REUTERS

Iraq says Kurdish contracts not legal

CAIRO, November 28, 2008 (Reuters) -

Oil contracts signed by the Kurdish regional government (KRG) with foreign oil companies are not recognised by central government in Baghdad, Iraqi Oil Minister Hussain Shahristani said on Friday.

The comments come despite an initial agreement on Thursday between the central Iraqi oil ministry and the largely autonomous Kurdish authorities to allow exports from Kurdistan to Turkey.

Norwegian oil company DNO (DNO.OL: Quote, Profile, Research, Stock Buzz) has a concession with the KRG from which it hopes to start exports of 100,000 barrels daily in the first quarter of next year.

But Shahristani said the revenues from oil produced anywhere in Iraq belonged to central government for redistribution around the country.

"Those contracts have not been reviewed by the ministry of oil and have not been recognised by the federal government," he told reporters in Cairo.

"The decision is that any oil that is produced in any part of the country has to be handed over to the federal government and the ministry of oil will export it. The revenues will go to the central budget for distribution inside the country."

Shahristani was speaking to reporters before a Saturday OPEC meeting.

Le Monde
22 novembre 2008

Turquie Recep Tayyip Erdogan paye sa proximité avec les militaires et sa gestion du dossier kurde Fin de l'état de grâce pour le premier ministre turc

ISTANBUL
CORRESPONDANCE.

Assiste-t-on à la fin de l'état de grâce du premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan ? Bousculé par les critiques, M. Erdogan se raidit depuis quelques jours. « Il est arrivé au pouvoir comme Obama. Il est devenu comme Bush », a lancé Fehmi Koru, éditorialiste du journal pro-gouvernemental *Yeni Safak*, au cours d'un débat télévisé.

La formule, venue d'un habituel supporteur de la politique du parti au pouvoir, le parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), a fait mouche. « Ce que j'ai voulu dire, précise Fehmi Koru, c'est que Tayyip Erdogan, qui avait gagné les législatives en 2002, n'a pas pu être élu député avant 2003. L'Etat a multiplié les obstacles sur sa route, comme pour les Noirs aux Etats-Unis. Il est donc arrivé comme un Obama turc. Maintenant, il conduit parfois le style de politique que Bush a mené en Irak. Notamment sur la question kurde. »

Cette critique a rendu M. Erdogan furieux. Car Fehmi Koru est aussi l'ami d'enfance du président de la République Abdullah Gül, dont il est resté très proche, et cette petite phrase semble illustrer un profond désaccord entre les deux têtes de l'Etat, notamment sur la question kurde.

Au moment où le président lance un rapprochement diplomatique avec les Kurdes d'Irak, le premier ministre, lui, radicalise son discours, reprenant à son compte les habituels slogans nationalistes. « Nous disons : "une nation, un drapeau, une patrie et un Etat". Ceux qui ne sont pas d'accord avec ça devraient partir », a-t-il lancé, le 3 novembre, à Hakkari, un fief kurde proche de la frontière irakienne. A mille lieues du discours historique qu'il avait prononcé en 2005, à Diyarbakir, reconnaissant l'existence d'un « problème kurde [qui] ne peut se résoudre que par plus de démocratie ».

Récemment, il s'est aussi illustré pour avoir pris la défense d'un forcené qui venait d'ouvrir le feu, en plein centre d'Istanbul, en direction d'un groupe de manifestants kurdes... Ce changement de ton a valu à M. Erdogan un accueil glacial lors de sa dernière tournée régionale dans le Sud-Est alors que son parti se prépare à une rude bataille pour les élections municipales, prévues en mars 2009. Le quotidien de



Manifestation contre M. Erdogan (voilé sur la pancarte) de défenseurs de la laïcité à Ankara, le 9 novembre. ADEM ALTAN/AFP

gauche *Taraf* l'a même accusé d'être devenu « le premier ministre des généraux ».

Penchant autoritariste

Comme à son habitude, M. Erdogan répond à ses détracteurs par le rapport de force. Début novembre, sept journalistes turcs se sont vus retirer leur accréditation par ses services, au motif qu'ils publiaient « des mensonges ». En 2007, représenté en chat empêtré dans une pelote de laine par un journal satirique, il avait fait condamner le caricaturiste à une lourde amende. Certains de ses anciens collaborateurs soulignent volontiers son penchant autoritaire pour expliquer ce virage. L'AKP est aux ordres depuis 2002 et ceux qui n'ont pas pris le pli ont été priés de prendre du recul.

« Il a une gestion très personnelle du pouvoir mais nous l'acceptons comme il est », hésite Yasar Yakis, député et membre de la commission des affaires européennes. « Au cours du premier mandat, il formait un duo avec Gül, qui est un peu plus âgé que lui et qui a toujours essayé de le tempérer, témoigne Mehmet Dülger, ancien député AKP qui a quitté le mouvement en 2007. Erdogan est bouillant, il a peu de patience, il veut toujours avoir le dernier mot et il a cet air de donner des sermons. Il fait des bêtises parce qu'il dit ce qu'il pense. Mais aussi ce qu'il ne pense

pas. » Son parler des faubourgs d'Istanbul et ses manières parfois rustres bousculent souvent les usages du milieu politique. « En Turquie, cela plaît à un certain nombre de gens qui ont besoin d'un berger, quitte à ce qu'il les mène à l'abattoir », ajoute Mehmet Dülger.

Le triomphe électoral de l'AKP, en juillet 2007, a renforcé le premier ministre et son emprise sur le parti au pouvoir. Et la décision de la Cour constitutionnelle, cet été, de ne pas dissoudre le parti, n'a pas provoqué l'électrochoc espéré. Selon certains analystes, un compromis pourrait même avoir été trouvé avec l'armée.

Depuis cette élection, le gouvernement a fait peu de concessions sur les réformes à mener dans le cadre des négociations d'adhésion à l'Union européenne, achevant de décourager les intellectuels libéraux qui, jusqu'alors, soutenaient son action. « J'avais critiqué son manque de sincérité au moment de la réforme de l'article 301 du code pénal [article qui limitait la liberté d'expression en réprimant le "dénigrement de l'identité turque"] », glisse Fehmi Koru. La refonte de la Constitution et le sort des minorités kurdes ou alévis, par exemple, demeurent en suspens. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Les limites de la diplomatie des « bons offices » pratiquée par Ankara

ISTANBUL

CORRESPONDANCE

Depuis deux ou trois ans, il y a peu de conflits au Moyen-Orient et à ses confins qui n'aient fait l'objet de bons offices turcs. Contentieux syro-israélien, inter-palestiniens, indo-pakistanaï, afghano-pakistanaï ou caucasiens, tous ont eu droit à des efforts publics de médiation des dirigeants « post-islamistes » d'Ankara. Ceux-ci, tout en démentant vouloir ainsi compenser leurs déboires avec l'Union européenne, se sont activement tournés vers leurs « *profondeurs stratégiques* » orientales, oubliées à la chute de l'Empire ottoman. Mais on ne leur a pas – ou pas encore – décerné des lauriers pour autant.

Leur contribution au dégel des relations entre la Syrie et Israël fut certes applaudie, mais leurs invitations lancées à des « parias », comme le chef du Hamas, Khaled Meshaal, ou le président soudanais, Omar Hassan Al-Bachir, ont fait grincer bien des dents. Les espoirs d'Ankara de voir ces deux hommes assouplir en retour leurs positions furent déçus ; il en fut de même pour le président iranien, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, invité en Turquie en août et qui en a surtout profité pour consolider ses positions chez lui.

Mais les dirigeants turcs persévèrent, non sans admettre que tout succès dépend de Washington. L'arrivée de Barack Obama

ouvrant les espoirs, le chef du gouvernement turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a relancé, en marge de son invitation au sommet du G20 le 15 novembre, une offre de médiation turque dans le dossier iranien, à laquelle Téhéran s'est déclaré « *non opposé* ». Mais d'autres déclarations de M. Erdogan lors de cette visite ont brouillé son message. Il a appelé « *les pays qui pressent l'Iran d'abandonner son programme nucléaire militaire* » à renoncer d'abord à ces armes eux-mêmes. Ce qui n'est pas la position de son pays, membre de l'OTAN.

Gaffe ? Inexpérience ? Ses opposants ont mis cela au compte de ses emportements habituels, pouvant mettre à mal toute bonne initiative de la Turquie.

Car son nouvel activisme diplomatique est vu avec espoir, surtout dans le monde arabe et musulman. Le principal atout de ce pays hybride qu'est la Turquie – sa capacité à traiter avec « tout le monde » – se renforce avec l'éclaircie attendue de l'arrivée de M. Obama.

Signe des temps, alors que Washington s'était fermement opposé au partenariat gazier Turquie-Iran, ces deux pays l'ont encore renforcé par un nouvel accord signé lundi 17 novembre. Ankara faisant maintenant valoir qu'il pourra ainsi réduire non seule-

ment sa propre dépendance au gaz russe, mais aussi à terme celle de l'Europe.

Les handicaps ne manquent pourtant pas aux ambitions de la Turquie. Elle a déployé des efforts coûteux pour devenir, en octobre, membre non permanent du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU. Ce qui devrait l'obliger, lors des votes, à indisposer soit les Etats-Unis, soit la Russie, alors qu'elle en dépend et veut les ménager pareillement. La Turquie aurait-

elle voulu ce siège par « *simple fierté nationale* », comme le dit l'expert Gareth Jenkins ? Son déploiement tous azimuts, avec l'ouverture de multiples ambassades en Afrique et en Asie, dépasse ses capacités, ne fut-ce qu'en expertise.

Mais cette recherche d'un poids international découle aussi de deux impératifs : le besoin économique de voir se stabiliser son environnement régional et, plus encore, son désir de s'assurer le maximum d'appuis diplomatiques sur la question kurde, son problème crucial. C'est une compli- cité tacite contre tous les Kurdes indépendantistes qui cimente son rapprochement avec la Syrie et l'Iran. De même que celui qu'elle vient d'opérer, sous pression des Etats-Unis, avec l'Irak.

Mercredi 19 novembre, a été créé à Bagdad un « comité anti-rebelles kurdes du PKK (Parti des travailleurs kurdes) » entre Américains, Turcs et Irakiens, comprenant pour la première fois un représentant de la région autonome du Kurdistan d'Irak, ostracisée jusque-là par Ankara. Ce qui laisse espérer que les dirigeants turcs sauront un jour traiter leurs propres conflits internes, avec les Kurdes avant tout, en usant de la même sagesse que celle qu'ils apprennent à déployer hors de leurs frontières. ■

SOPHIE SHIHAB

LES TENTATIVES DE MÉDIATION TURQUES

Israël-Palestine.

En février 2006, visite à Ankara du dirigeant du Hamas Khaled Meshaal.

En novembre 2007, le président israélien Shimon Pérès et celui de l'Autorité palestinienne Mahmoud Abbas s'adressent ensemble au Parlement d'Ankara.

Israël-Syrie-Liban.

En mai 2008, Syriens et Israéliens annoncent un premier

round de négociations indirectes sous l'égide de diplomates turcs, qui ont aussi œuvré au rapprochement syro-libanais qui permettra la visite du président français Nicolas Sarkozy à Damas.

Russie-Géorgie.

En août 2008, la Turquie propose une « *plate-forme de stabilité et de coopération pour le Caucase* » et son président fait une visite historique en Arménie.

Le Monde
24 novembre 2008

IRAK MANIFESTATIONS À BAGDAD CONTRE LE MAINTIEN DES TROUPES AMÉRICAINES JUSQU'EN 2011



MOHAMMED KHALID / AP

Des milliers d'Irakiens, la plupart chiïtes, protestent dans les rues de Bagdad, vendredi 21 novembre, contre l'accord de sécurité avec les Etats-Unis, qui doit être ratifié par le Parlement. Ils ont répondu à l'appel du dirigeant radical chiïte Moqtada Sadr, hostile à un accord qui ne prévoit un départ de toutes les troupes américaines que d'ici à la fin 2011. Des banderoles, parfois en anglais, parfois en arabe, proclamaient : « *Non à l'accord de sécu-*

té qui fait de l'Irak un prisonnier sans souveraineté » ou « *Les forces d'occupation doivent quitter l'Irak mainte-*

nant ». Place Ferdaous, au centre de Bagdad, des manifestants ont suspendu un mannequin à l'effigie du président américain George Bush à la statue qui a remplacé celle de Saddam Hussein et qui avait été renversée à l'arrivée de l'armée américaine dans Bagdad, en avril 2003. – (AFP.)

AFP

BAGDAD SOUHAITE EXPORTER LE PÉTROLE KURDE EN UTILISANT DES OLÉODUCS IRAKIENS

ERBIL (Irak), 24 nov 2008 (AFP)

LE MINISTRE irakien du Pétrole, Hussein al-Chahristani, a affirmé lundi que son gouvernement était d'accord pour développer les forages dans la province autonome du Kurdistan mais souhaitait que l'exportation se fasse par le biais du réseau national d'oléoducs.

"Nous avons étudié la question du développement du champ pétrolier de Khorman, sa connexion avec le réseau national irakien et son exportation par le biais des principaux oléoducs", a affirmé aux journalistes M. Chahristani qui effectuait une visite à Erbil (nord).

Il a ajouté que le gouvernement central était intéressé par le développement de deux champs pétroliers supplémentaires au Kurdistan mais a insisté sur la nécessité d'exporter le brut par les oléoducs existant, pour une redistribution équitable des revenus pétroliers.

L'Irak n'arrive pas à se mettre d'accord sur une loi nationale sur le Pétrole

à cause d'interminable disputes entre les communautés (chiïte, sunnite, kurde) sur le partage des revenus du pétrole entre les 18 provinces.

Les débats se sont envenimés après que la signature par le Kurdistan de contrats avec des firmes étrangères pour doper la production de pétrole dans le nord, kurde, qui avec le sud chiïte concentre la grande majorité des réserves de pétrole irakienne, les 3e plus importantes au monde (115 mds de barils estimés).

M. Chahristani a assuré lundi que ses discussions avec les responsables kurdes n'avaient pas concerné les contrats.

Pour sa part, Nechirvan Barzani, le Premier ministre de la région autonome, a indiqué lors de la même conférence de presse que "les deux parties ont étudié les moyens de connecter les oléoducs et d'exporter le pétrole du Kurdistan par les principaux oléoducs" existant.

Il a précisé qu'un comité avait été créé à cet effet.

AFP

DEUX POLICIERS TURCS TUÉS LORS D'UNE ATTAQUE DE REBELLES KURDES (AGENCE)

ANKARA, 27 nov 2008 (AFP) -

DEUX POLICIERS turcs ont été tués jeudi et quatre autres ont été blessés dans le sud-est de la Turquie par des rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Trois assaillants ont ouvert le feu contre une équipe de policiers régulant le trafic sur une autoroute près de la ville d'Iskenderun, tuant un officier sur le coup, ont affirmé des sources policières à Anatolie.

Trois civils dont un enfant en bas âge et un policier ont été blessés.

Les rebelles se sont emparés d'un véhicule et se sont enfuis, mais ont été pris en chasse par la police, selon les mêmes sources.

Une fusillade s'est produite lors de la course-poursuite dans une zone montagneuse proche, au cours de laquelle un second policier a été blessé. Celui-ci a succombé à ses blessures à l'hôpital.

L'opération pour arrêter les assaillants se poursuivait.

Considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis, le PKK mène depuis 1984 une lutte armée pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait environ 44 000 morts, selon des chiffres officiels.



Turkey's liberals fear drift to right

Hopes for reform lose momentum

By Sabrina Tavernise

ISTANBUL: When Recep Tayyip Erdogan was first elected prime minister of Turkey six years ago, his policy moves were brave and new, and this country's liberals quickly lent him their support.

He started accession talks with the European Union, stopped aggressive rhetoric on age-old disputes like the island of Cyprus, and told Turkey's oppressed Kurdish minority, in a groundbreaking speech, that it existed.

And while liberals had grown anxious in recent years, waiting for reforms that kept being deferred, in part because Erdogan's party was tied up in legal battles for survival, they supported him, hoping he would return to his agenda.

Now, that seems to be changing. Liberal columnists and intellectuals have begun criticizing Erdogan for what they say is a shift away from his reformist ways toward a more nationalist line, closer to Turkey's powerful military.

"Erdogan changed the whole discourse," said Hasan Cemal, a columnist for the daily newspaper *Milliyet*. "This is the kind of disillusionment we have been having."

One of the most glaring examples of the shift, liberals say, is a speech Erdogan gave this month in the predominantly Kurdish city of Hakkari in the southeast. His language there, liberals said, resembled the tone of Turkey's nationalists, hard-line patriots whose message to Kurds, nearly a fifth of Turkey's population, is accept Turkish identity or get out.

"These were not the words of a reformer," said Yasemin Congar, deputy editor in chief of *Taraf*, a liberal newspaper.

Turkey's dismal relationship with its Kurdish population has been at the heart of politics in this country ever since the state was founded in 1923, and liberals argue that Turkey will be never become a truly free democracy if it is not improved.

An adviser to Erdogan said that the contents of the speech were not new, and that the liberals' frustration came more from their high expectations for a solution to the Kurdish problem than from any change in direction by Erdogan. The problem has existed for decades, he argued, and untangling it will take time.

"They want the government to create a miracle," said the adviser, who was not authorized to speak publicly on the issue.

But liberals use the argument in reverse, saying that the Turkish state has spent years dragging its feet on the issue,



Levent Harman/Anatolian, via Reuters

A Kurdish protest in eastern Turkey. The prime minister's tough talk about the Kurds has disillusioned many liberals.

which led to a war in the 1980s between a separatist group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and the military.

The violence quieted over the years, but Kurds' basic demands — like recognition as an ethnic group — were never met. Liberals say they threw their support behind Erdogan because they believed that he would be the one with the courage to change that, but six years after his election, little has been done.

"People expected him to come up with some major political promises," said Altan Tan, a Kurdish intellectual from Diyarbakir, the largest city in the Kurdish southeast, "but his strengthened rhetoric was the straw that broke the camel's back. People are still in shock."

The speech was particularly painful for liberals because they compared it with one he gave in August 2005, when he acknowledged that Turkey had a "Kurdish problem" and that the state was partly responsible, shattering many taboos.

"This is a different Erdogan from the Erdogan of 2005," said Yavuz Baydar, a columnist for the daily *Today's Zaman*. "This one issues threats. This one does not sound conciliatory."

But his language needs to be seen in the context of what happened on the day he made it, Erdogan's adviser argues. Local elections are scheduled for March, and the PKK is applying pressure.

Erdogan said in an interview this month that when he reached Hakkari on the day of the speech, "it was absolutely silent," because PKK supporters warned residents to turn off their car engines.

Protesters had broken shop windows and set cars on fire before his arrival to give the appearance of chaos.

"I have no problems with my citizens of Kurdish origin," Erdogan said. "The thing to be questioned is violence."

Erdogan has promised work and better services in his speeches, Tan said, but has said nothing about ethnic rights, an approach that has given Kurds the impression that they must give up their cultural demands for economic ones.

Although the majority of Kurds do not want a separate state, jobs alone will not be enough to make a real change, he said.

"Kurds sincerely want to be a part of the country as equal citizens with democratic rights," he said.

Erdogan has not had it easy. For almost two years his Islamic-inspired party, Justice and Development, or AKP, has been tossed from one political crisis to another as Turkey's secular establishment has fought it over power.

After his party narrowly missed being abolished in the summer, many liberals believe that Erdogan struck a compromise with the military — a powerful institution that has pressed elected governments for decades — calculating that to stay in power meant dropping reforms.

"He probably thinks, 'If they catch me again, they will ban me,'" Congar said. "He can't lead with this fear. He has to be brave with reforms."

Mehmet Altan, a columnist for the daily *Star*, was more pessimistic about AKP, saying, "Now Ankara's status quo has it by the neck, and a change is almost impossible."

The result, Baydar argued, is "a new, sort of confused, aimless, AKP."

Perhaps the most bitter disappointment has been over the accession talks with the European Union, which have drifted. Plans for rewriting the Constitution, a central requirement, were shelved this spring after a court struck down Parliament's repeal of a headscarf ban in universities. Some liberals described Erdogan's push to allow the head scarf as an early break, because it left the impression that he was putting religious freedoms over issues like freedom of expression.

When asked about plans for the Constitution in an interview in *Today's Zaman*, Cemil Cicek, a top AKP official, said, "Desire is one thing, and reality is another."

Cemal, of *Milliyet*, said: "The important thing is whether Erdogan is still sincere about Turkey's membership accession to EU. I started having doubts about that."

Tan said some still believed that the party would get back on the European Union track, "like a final jump from a dying man."

"He's banking on the fact that there's no alternative to him right now," Congar said. "If he creates a vacuum, somebody is going to fill it."

Sebnem Arsu contributed reporting.

**OPINION
& LETTERS**

The pullout

Frederick W. Kagan

**Iraq
winds
down**

WASHINGTON

Iraq offers the Obama administration an extraordinary opportunity. Overall violence and American casualties have dropped remarkably since the surge began last year.

Iraqi security forces have grown in size and effectiveness. U.S. and Iraqi troops have inflicted a series of defeats on insurgents and militias. The slow but steady construction of a new post-Saddam Hussein state structure will lift the burden of securing Iraq against internal disorder from U.S. forces in the next couple of years, if current trends continue.

The situation remains delicate, however, as Iraq moves into provincial elections in January and parliamentary elections at the end of 2009. Although Iraqi forces increasingly bear the burden of fighting (and, increasingly, peacekeeping), they will need continuing American support.

The government of Iraq has recognized all these facts by forging the status of forces agreement with Washington, which was endorsed by the Iraq Cabinet a week ago and sent to the Council of Representatives for approval.

The agreement encapsulates the basic reality in Iraq today: Iraq is an independent, sovereign state able to negotiate on an equal basis with the United States; Iraqis and Americans both want U.S. troops to leave Iraq as quickly as possible and believe that a withdrawal will be feasible by 2011. Above all, the agreement highlights Iraq's desire to become a strategic partner with the United States, an opportunity the Obama administration can seize.

Leaving aside the debate in America about what ties global Al Qaeda has to Al Qaeda in Iraq, Iraqis overwhelmingly think that they have indeed been fighting an arm of Osama bin Laden's organization. Every major political grouping in Iraq rejects Al Qaeda and supports the fight against its ideology. Iraqis increas-

Facing high stakes, Iraqis battle over U.S. exit pact

By Alissa J. Rubin and Campbell Robertson

BAGHDAD: Intensive last-minute negotiations were under way Tuesday to corral votes in the Iraqi Parliament for a historic security and strategic-framework agreement that, if approved, would provide a road map for the complete withdrawal of American troops from Iraq in three years.

The stakes are high for the country, which in a number of hot spots still depend on American forces to fight the remnants of the insurgency, but they are especially high for Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, who spent eight months negotiating the pact with the Americans and has waged a strong lobbying campaign for its passage.

Under Iraqi law, the Parliament must approve the agreement. For the Americans as well, parliamentary approval is critical to ending a war that has been unpopular at home and abroad.

During the long negotiations over the pact's provisions, Iraqis often worried that they would get the short end of the deal, but even they admit that the final version gives them more than they expected from a superpower. They said that hard bargaining, and the damage the war has done to the United States' reputation, forced the Americans to give ground on several of the most important points.

"Because of the mistakes of the Bush administration, the situation in of the U.S. in Iraq became very weak," said Mohammed al-Daini, a Sunni lawmaker. "That meant that we could deal with them."

Both Iraqis and Western analysts say that the pact being discussed goes far beyond a typical status-of-forces agreement in giving significant oversight

powers to the Iraqis for American military maneuvers.

In practice, however, this may not make an enormous difference. While such arrangements are indeed rare for status-of-forces agreements, they are common in other types of international agreements that the United States has negotiated, and, in recent months of the war, many combat operations have been jointly planned and executed anyway.

"I don't share the concern that we are constrained by this agreement," said Michael O'Hanlon, a senior fellow in defense strategy at the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank. "We always have constraints in our agreements with our allies."

■ Sunni bloc seeks referendum

A key Sunni bloc demanded on Tuesday a national referendum on the Iraqi-U.S. security pact and other concessions in exchange for its support for the agreement, The Associated Press reported from Baghdad.

Though Maliki's cabinet has approved the agreement, the ruling coalition's main Shiite and Kurdish partners would only muster a slight majority in the 275-seat legislature if the largest Sunni Arab group, also represented in the ruling coalition, remains opposed to the agreement. The 44-seat Sunni bloc, the Iraqi Accordance Front, says it would only support the agreement if the government meets its demand to put the same deal to a vote in a nationwide referendum in 2009.

It also wants the government to accept a package of reforms designed to give the minority Sunni Arabs a bigger say in the running of the country and better representation in the security forces.

ingly pride themselves on being the first Arab state to reject the terrorists.

This summer, leading members of Anbar Awakening, a group of Sunni leaders who have joined forces with the United States and the Shiite-led Baghdad government, circulated a memo about how they could help Afghans develop their own "awakenings" to fight Al Qaeda on their territory. As we look for allies in the struggle

against Al Qaeda, Iraqis are our most natural and eager partners.

America and Iraq also have common interests vis-à-vis Iran. Iraqis want to remain independent of Tehran, as they have now demonstrated by signing the agreement with the United States over Iran's vigorous objections. They want to avoid military conflict with Iran, and so does America. Iraqis share our fear that Iran may acquire nuclear weapons, which would threaten their independence. And they resent Iran's efforts to maintain insurgent and terrorist cells that undermine their government.

Of course, the Iraqis recognize, as we do, that Iraq and Iran are natural trading partners and have a religious

bond as majority Shiites. This may be to our benefit: The millions of Iranian pilgrims who will visit Iraqi holy sites at Najaf and Karbala over the coming years will take home a vision of a flourishing, peaceful, secular, religiously tolerant and democratic Muslim state.

The reintegration of Iraq into the Arab World is also under way.

Many Arab states have already begun to open embassies in Baghdad. We should keep in mind that Iraq also shares interests with America regarding Saudi Arabia and Syria. Increasingly, Iraqi leaders speak quietly of replacing the Saudi kingdom as the dominant Arab state.

Iraq also knows that Syria has allowed Al Qaeda fighters free passage across their common border for years, and has served as a staging base for Iranian support to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Washington and Baghdad have a common interest in persuading the Syrian regime to abandon its support of terror groups.

America will withdraw its forces from patrolling in Iraq and will significantly reduce the number of soldiers there over the coming years — that is not and never has been in question. The timing and nature of that withdrawal, however, is extremely delicate.

It is vital that we help see Iraq

through during its year of elections, and avoid the temptation to “front-load” the withdrawal in 2009. It is equally vital that we develop a broader strategic relationship with Iraq using all elements of our national power in tandem with Iraq’s to pursue our common interests. President Obama has the chance to do more in Iraq than win the war. He can win the peace.

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INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

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Parliament in Baghdad backs pact on troops

American forces must withdraw by 2011 under deal

By Alissa Rubin and Campbell Robertson

BAGHDAD: With a substantial majority, the Iraqi Parliament on Thursday ratified a sweeping security agreement with the United States that sets a course for the end of the war and marks the beginning of a new relationship between the two countries.

The pact, which still must be approved by the three-person Iraqi presidential council, a move expected in the next few days, sets the end of 2011 as the date by which all American troops must be out of the country.

Its passage in Parliament, with 149 out of roughly 200 members who were present, was a victory for the Iraqi government as well as for the often-fractious legislative body, which hammered out a political compromise in an intensive 10-day negotiation.

The accord on the pact and accompanying measures was a coming of age for the Parliament, a body born only in the last three years with the support of the United States, but which now has the wherewithal to ratify America’s departure.



Ali Youssef/Agence France-Presse

Iraqis watched the parliamentary proceedings live on television Thursday at a café in Baghdad. “This is the day of our sovereignty,” the prime minister said.

“This is the day of our sovereignty,” said Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki.

“Together we will go forward toward a free, prosperous and glorious Iraq, where Iraqis can live with pride and dignity and can be proud that they are sons of this beloved country,” he said.

Since the cabinet approved the final version of the security agreement Nov. 16, the government has waged an intense effort to urge approval of the measure, which goes into effect Jan. 1, 2009, when the United Nations mandate that now governs U.S. troop operations in the country expires.

In a sharp contrast with the atmosphere during the drafting of the Iraqi Constitution in 2005, there was relatively little violence on the street during the parliamentary negotiations despite intense disagreements among political leaders.

Within the halls of Parliament, Shiite religious clerics in swirling

robes and turbans and women in long black abayas huddled in consultation with secular Sunnis and Kurds in tailored suits. There was far less of the mutual distrust that marked discussions three years ago.

Ambassador Ryan Crocker and General Ray Odierno, the top U.S. military commander in Iraq, issued a statement congratulating the Parliament on the vote.

President George W. Bush said the approval of the accord “affirms the growth” of democracy in Iraq. The Associated Press reported.

“Two years ago, this day seemed unlikely,” Bush said in a statement from the presidential retreat at Camp David, Maryland. “But the success of the surge and the courage of the Iraqi people set the conditions for these two agreements to be negotiated and approved by the Iraqi Parliament.”

The security agreement and an accompanying document that outlines America’s relationship with

Iraq in areas such as economics, health care and education, would grant Iraq considerable authority over American troop operations, requiring court orders to search buildings and detain suspects.

The timetable set out in the document requires U.S. troops to withdraw from cities and towns by June 30, 2009, and for all troops to leave by the end of 2011 unless the Iraqis and Americans negotiate a separate pact to govern an extension of the American military presence.

Amidst the broad support for the agreement, however, there remained vocal opposition from followers of the anti-American Shiite cleric Moktada al Sadr, who banged on their desks and held aloft handwritten signs condemning the pact during the vote Thursday. Also opposing the pact were some hard-line Sunni Arabs who disagree vehemently with the idea of striking a deal with the United States, a country that they view as having waged an illegal war.

"America couldn't gain international legitimacy before the war," said Mohamed al-Dayni, a member of the National Dialogue Front, one of the Sunni parties. "And they didn't have it until a few seconds before the vote, but unfortunately they got it from the Iraqi Parliament."

Nevertheless, the agreement enjoyed broad support across sectarian lines, due in large part to the insistence of the preeminent Iraqi religious leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who from his modest office in Najaf has reached out to leaders from every faction. The ayatollah told members of the Iraqi government and legislators that they needed a broad consensus on a measure of such national significance. That meant that the Shiite and Kurdish lawmakers who supported the deal from the outset had to craft several ac-

companying measures to bring on board a number of wary Sunnis.

The measures approved Thursday along with the pact were a nonbinding resolution that included a commitment to address longstanding grievances of minority blocs in the Parliament as well as a law requiring a referendum on the pact to be held in July, 2009. Many Sunnis and independents in Parliament cited the referendum as a reason for their decision to support the agreement.

With provincial council elections coming at the end of January, none of the political parties wanted to be accused of making an agreement against the will of the Iraqi people with the United States, which is viewed here as an occupier.

The referendum was seen as a way to ensure that the Americans respected the pact's terms — at least in the coming months, said Adnan Pachachi, a senior member of the secular Iraqiya party. The referendum will make the Americans "more careful and they will not make mistakes that will cause the Iraqi people to reject the agreement."

Although Sunni lawmakers were the most vocal about their concerns, many parties, even some of the early supporters of the pact, submitted lists of demands to the government exposing a chasm between Maliki's circle and most of the political blocs.

While the final political document was in large part a general commitment to carry out existing laws and adhere to the Constitution, in the preceding days, lawmakers drew up several laundry lists of specifics. Sunnis called for the enforcement of an amnesty law for thousands of detainees in Iraqi custody and for a greater sectarian balance in the security forces, two of several concerns that were explicitly addressed in the resolution.

Throughout the negotiations, even some of the toughest holdouts acknowl-

edged that their objections were not to the pact itself, but the likelihood that its passage would bolster Maliki's government.

Throughout the government's negotiations on the pact, which officially began Aug. 26, 2007, but were renewed in earnest last spring, neighboring countries, especially Iran, have been invisible but influential players. As recently as Wednesday night, lawmakers said messages had come from Iran expressing disapproval and saying that Iran no longer approved of the political deal that would be essential to the pact's ratification.

But they nevertheless pushed on with the negotiations, and the final compromise, arrived at less than an hour before the Parliament vote, differed little from the version rejected by the Iranians.

Over the past few days Iraqi lawmakers had been a tense, chain-smoking, and sleep-deprived group. But on Thursday afternoon as they prepared to vote, they appeared relieved and even exhibited a measure of pride that they had come together, and, despite accusations that they lacked patriotism, decided to approve the pact that they have come to call "The Withdrawal Agreement."

"In 2003 we didn't have a right to decide, but now we have a chance to deal with reality and to deal with the occupation forces," said Dhi'aa al Deen al-Fayeh, a member of the Shiite majority bloc in Parliament.

"Now we can regain our sovereignty gradually and now we have a timetable and the whole world is a witness to this agreement."

Reporting was contributed Stephen Farrell, Suadad Salhy, Atheer Kakan and Riyadh Muhammed.



Qassem Zein/Getty Images-AFP

Iraqi supporters of the cleric Moktada al-Sadr in Najaf on Friday protesting the pact that sets 2011 as the date for a U.S. troop pullout.

Turkey

The worrying Tayyip Erdogan

ANKARA - Turkey's prime minister once promised big reforms to bring his country closer to the European Union. He seems no longer to be pushing them



WHEN Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and his Justice and Development (AK) Party narrowly escaped banning by the constitutional court in July, the big question was which Erdogan would then come to the fore. Would it be the non-ideological pragmatist, whose bold reforms had helped Turkey to secure the start of membership talks with the European Union in 2005? Or would it be the dogmatic and erratic leader who had provoked Turkey's meddlesome generals, always anxious to undermine the AK Party because of its Islamist roots, by seeking soon after his election victory in July 2007 to ease the ban on the Islamic-style headscarf in universities?

The question of which version of Mr Erdogan is in charge has gained extra urgency because Turkey is grappling with mounting violence in the mainly Kurdish south-east. It also matters to the financial markets as the government tries to protect its fragile economy from the global financial typhoon. Worryingly, the answer seems to be: the second version. Mr Erdogan appears increasingly autocratic and out of touch. And because he lacks any credible political opponents, either within or beyond the AK Party, this is making Turkey look stagnant and adrift—and further away from EU membership than ever.

Mr Erdogan's odd behaviour was on display during his most recent trip to America. When asked in Washington for his view about Iran's nuclear ambitions he retorted that "those who possess nuclear weapons do not have the right to tell others to not acquire them too." This comment did not go down well with American officials, whose memories are seared by Turkey's refusal in March 2003 to let America use its soil to launch a second front against Iraq. A recent gas deal struck by the Turks with Iran has not helped. For all of

Turkey's assistance over Iraq since 2003 (some 70% of non-combat materiel for American troops goes through Turkey) and in Afghanistan (where Turkey has 1,200 troops), America is asking new questions about Turkish dependability as a Western ally.

Another thundercloud is gathering over demands by the Armenian diaspora in America, most of whom strongly supported Barack Obama's election as president, that he stick to the view he expressed as a senator that the massacre of Ottoman Armenians in 1915 should be seen as "genocide". Turkey's recent efforts at reconciliation with Armenia, motivated in part by hopes of staving off a formal recognition of genocide by the Obama administration, seem to be making little progress. Some Western diplomats ascribe this to the pressure hawks in the diaspora have applied to the Armenian president, Serzh Sargsyan.

But it is at home that Mr Erdogan is causing the most concern. The hope was that, with his legal travails behind him, the prime minister would resume much-delayed political and economic reforms. Instead he has adopted an increasingly strident nationalist line. There is talk of his having struck a deal with Turkey's new, hardline chief of staff, Ilker Basbug, according to which Mr Erdogan has promised to freeze reforms that dilute the army's power in exchange for his party's not being attacked in court again.

Mr Erdogan's new approach was most evident in a speech he gave earlier this month in the predominantly Kurdish town of Hakkari. Responding to a wave of bloody protests that has racked the Kurdish region, he invited those who were not happy to "go wherever they please". Ibrahim Guclu, an independent Kurdish politician, says that "in other words, he was telling the Kurds to get out." This is a far cry from a ground-breaking

speech Mr Erdogan made in Diyarbakir three years ago, when he admitted that the Turkish state had made mistakes with the Kurds.

Now he is giving the army much freer rein in its 34-year campaign against the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). When *Taraf*, a liberal Turkish newspaper, exposed army negligence in a recent PKK attack that killed 17 soldiers at an outpost in Hakkari, he chose not to order an investigation and attacked the newspaper instead. His aides are reported to have blamed leaks of the intelligence reports cited by *Taraf* on Israel and the CIA.

Meanwhile EU-inspired work on drawing up a new constitution to replace the current one, drawn up by the generals after a military coup in 1980, has stalled. Reports of police torture and extra-judicial killings are on the rise. Turkey's liberal intelligentsia, long among Mr Erdogan's stalwart supporters, is grumbling, as is the European Commission. Mr Erdogan's response has been to rescind the press accreditation of several journalists who cover the prime ministry. All of this is giving more ammunition to those EU members that have never wanted Turkey to join their club.

Mr Erdogan owes much of his electoral success to the unprecedented economic stability of his time in office. By sticking firmly to IMF prescriptions Turkey helped foreign investment to soar, tamed inflation and narrowed the budget deficit. But the IMF standby arrangement expired in May. And although Mehmet Simsek, the economy minister, has repeatedly hinted that it should be extended, a deal remains elusive. Foreign investors, who hold as much as 70% of the Istanbul Stock Exchange, have been pulling out, and the lira has tumbled by more than a third against the dollar this year. Growth of GDP has dipped sharply, to below 2%. Turkey's huge current-account deficit makes it more vulnerable than many other emerging markets. Although it has so far been relatively unaffected by the world financial malady, it is only a matter of time "before it catches the bug", says one Istanbul-based banker.

Mr Erdogan's supporters insist that the government's inertia is mainly to do with municipal elections being held next March. An IMF deal would preclude a pre-electoral spending spree. Being too nice to the Kurds might strengthen the nationalist opposition in the face of spiralling PKK terrorism. "Once the elections are over, you'll see the old AK," promises Abdurrahman Kurt, an AK deputy from Diyarbakir.

But such promises are beginning to ring hollow. When Mr Erdogan won power a second time, with an even bigger share of the vote, in July 2007, he promised to reach out to all Turks "including those of you who didn't vote for me." He seems now to be alienating such voters. And as corruption also starts to infect the AK's ranks, it is beginning to resemble many of the tired old parties that it buried at the polls.

Iraq

Is it really coming right?

BAGHDAD, ERBIL AND MOSUL - In most of Iraq, violence has plummeted and the Americans under a new president look set gradually to withdraw. But will the battered country hold together?



IT SHOULD be momentous. In Baghdad in the middle of this week, after fierce debate and protests on the streets, Iraq's fractious parliament at last voted to approve a withdrawal agreement with the United States, under which all American troops will leave the country by the end of 2011. And yet the mood of this exhausted country is far from jubilant.

In Mosul, 320km (200 miles) north of Baghdad up the Tigris river, the governor of Nineveh province, Doraid Kashmoula, furrows his brow, fiddles with his worry-beads in one hand, stubs out yet another cigarette with the other and reels off a litany of woe in his dankly curtained office. The scion of a prominent Sunni Arab family, he took the job two years ago after his predecessor, his cousin, was assassinated.

Since then he has survived half a dozen murder attempts. His son, a brother and four cousins have been killed by insurgents. His house has been burnt down. He is protected both by the Kurdish guerrillas, who control the eastern half of the city and a clutch of fortified government buildings in the western half, and by the Iraqi army and police, with American forces at their shoulder, when he ventures farther afield.

"Security is slowly getting better," he says, without much conviction. At present the insurgents carry out about ten attacks a day in his province, including car bombs and ambushes, mostly in the vicinity of Mosul. In each of the past four months, more than 100 civilians and about a score of army and police have been killed, according to official figures.

The provincial council's chairman, another Sunni Arab, tells a similar tale. From a drawer in his desk he takes a sheet of paper displaying 12 coloured photographs of "martyrs": four brothers and eight cousins, all murdered because of their kinship to himself. A councillor representing the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), a

long-established Sunni outfit which heads the main Sunni block in the national parliament and is led by one of the country's two vice-presidents, Tariq al-Hashemi, says that 420 of his party members in Mosul have been killed in the past two years. Nineveh's deputy governor, a Kurd, says that 1,600 of his people in Mosul have died at the hands of insurgents since the American invasion—as have "many more Arabs".

Nobody knows how many insurgents operate in the area. Maybe 5,000, says the council chairman, describing a spectrum from al-Qaeda fanatics to secular Baathists. "Plus a million supporters," he adds, with a mirthless laugh. As the Americans and their Iraqi army allies successfully hunt them down elsewhere in Iraq, many have gravitated to Mosul. It is close to Syria, from which foreign jihadists still infiltrate. The city has a history of Baathist loyalty to Saddam Hussein and hostility to the Shias, who count for barely 5% of its people.

Iraq's multiple fault-lines are especially visible—and occasionally bloody—in Nineveh and Mosul. Some towns in the province have a record of Shia-Sunni enmity. Nineveh has Iraq's largest minority of Christians, themselves divided into various sects, some speaking Aramaic, the language of Christ. In a northern arc dwell the Yazidis, more than 500,000-strong they claim, who follow an ancient religion that reveres a Peacock Angel; many Muslims damn them as devil-worshippers. Then there are the Shabaks, who claim descent from Persians and follow various brands of religion, including Islam. There are also the Turkomans, stay-behinds from the days when Mosul was the capital of one of the three Ottoman *vilayets* (administrative regions) that were crudely lumped together to form Iraq when the Turkish empire collapsed after the first world war.

Perhaps the biggest and currently the scratchiest division is between Arabs and

Kurds, who control most of the east and north of Nineveh, and account for about one-third of its population. Most of the Sunni Arabs, the province's largest group, boycotted the last elections in 2005, so the Kurds ended up with a disproportionately large chunk of the provincial government (31 out of 41 seats in the council) and hold sway over the hapless Mr Kashmoula and the council chairman, whom the insurgents curse as puppets and traitors.

But this may soon change dramatically because the Sunnis are set to contest provincial elections due on January 31st, when they may well oust the Kurds from local power. To minimise their expected losses, the Kurds are bent on ensuring that all the non-Sunni minorities, such as the Christians, Yazidis and Shabaks, vote for a Kurdish-led list of candidates.

Many people from these small minorities, together perhaps more than a tenth of the province's people, say that the Kurds, who control the territory where most of them live, are trying to intimidate them into voting their way. The Kurds, they say, are even attempting to frighten them into fleeing east into areas more firmly controlled by the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) from its headquarters in Erbil, capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

In Sinjar, west of Mosul, some Yazidis, who predominate there, say the Kurds want to force them to vote for the Kurdish list. Not only would that mean increasing the Kurds' chances of holding on to the provincial council. It would also strengthen their case to have such places as Sinjar, which are technically part of Nineveh, eventually transferred formally to Iraq's Kurdistan region, whose area the Kurds seek to widen as much as possible.

The Christians have been hammered, in Nineveh as in the rest of Iraq: their numbers throughout the country are said to be down from 800,000 in 2003 to around 250,000 today. Earlier this year the archbishop of the ancient Chaldean church was abducted in Mosul and murdered. In October, some 10,000 Christians fled into Kurdish-held areas from close to Mosul after a dozen of them had been killed. No one is certain who the culprits were.

In any event, tension is rising across the ethno-sectarian board: between Kurds and Arabs; between Sunnis who have co-operated with government and the larger number who have not; between Kurds and minorities; and within the minorities themselves. "If we [Christians] had guns we'd kill each other too," says a prominent Chaldean Christian. "If Mosul was peaceful, we'd want to stay in Nineveh," says a leading Christian businessman in the town of Bartulla, just east of Mosul. "But if it isn't, we'd like to be part of Kurdistan."

But there is a gleam of hope that in Nineveh, as elsewhere in Iraq, the coming provin-

cial elections may shift the dynamic of Iraqi politics, pave the way for more genuinely representative government and make it harder for the insurgents to hold the loyalty of the disgruntled. The key is that, unlike last time, the Sunni Arabs are expected to vote en masse. If Nineveh's council took on a Sunni nationalist hue, the insurgents might be in trouble.

Shaking the political kaleidoscope

Nuri al-Maliki, Iraq's Shia prime minister, is said to be reaching out to Sunni politicians, military men and tribal leaders in the hope of widening his narrow base in the Islamic Dawa party. But Iraq is entering an even more frenetic political phase than usual. The provincial elections should point, for the first time in three years, to whom the Iraqis want to run their country.

The poll will also serve as a dry run for a general election due at the end of next year. Moreover, under the tutelage of an energetic UN team in Baghdad, the system for the provincial elections provides for open lists, whereas last time they were closed. This time parties will win representation on a proportional basis in each of the 18 provinces (bar the three Kurdish ones and the disputed Kirkuk province, where elections will not take place), but voters will also be able to mark their order of preference for individual candidates on their chosen party list. Some 400-plus parties have been registered, more than 150 in Baghdad alone, with more than 14,600 candidates and 36-odd coalitions.

The main shift will be towards much stronger representation for Sunni Arabs, who have been sorely under-represented since Saddam's demise. A battle is brewing between the established Sunni parties and an array of groups emerging out of the tribal councils that have played so crucial a part in beating back the insurgency, including al-Qaeda, especially in the western province of Anbar and along the Euphrates valley northwest of Baghdad.

A fight for supremacy within the new Shia establishment has also begun. A striking development is the emergence of Mr Maliki as a would-be strongman. Despite his wooden persona on the dais and on television, he has surprised everyone by his increasingly ruthless determination to tighten his grip. He was boosted by his success, earlier this year, when he personally directed the Iraqi army to sweep the Shia militias loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr, a radical cleric, out of Iraq's then chaotic second city, Basra. The army promptly replicated that success in the hitherto lawless Shia slums of Baghdad, known as Sadr City. Mr Maliki is also interfering with senior appointments in the armed forces: the new divisional army commander in Mosul, for instance, is said to be a brother-in-law.

He has also gained ground, even among Sunnis, by his increasingly acerbic attitude towards the Kurds, who many Arabs think have overreached themselves in the past few years. In August he sent Iraqi army units into Khanaqin, a mainly Kurdish district that is controlled by the Kurdish authorities but falls within Diyala province. He and Massoud Barzani, president of the Kurdistan Regional Government, who heads the KDP, one of two rival parties that jointly run Iraqi Kurdistan, are increasingly rude to each other. Mr Barzani is said to have recently told Mr Maliki to his face:

"You smell like a dictator."

And he is rattling a lot of fellow Shias with his powers of patronage and purse. His own Dawa party has split, with his predecessor as prime minister, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, promoting himself as a stalking horse for the Sadrists, whose party has been barred from the lists. The other leading Shia party, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, led by the ailing Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, is equally worried by what it sees as the prime minister's authoritarian bent. In particular, Mr Maliki's assorted rivals have complained about his setting up of "support councils" among various tribes, both Sunni and Shia, to help his party get out the

No one knows what the new electoral picture will be like. Some say that Mr Maliki's Dawa will do badly, whatever the advantages of incumbency. The Sadrist movement, internally divided like so many others, is widely thought to have lost ground yet still commands the sympathy of hordes of poor Shias in such places as Sadr City and in the southern provinces. The tribal parties have never been tested.

Back to independence

Mr Maliki will naturally take as much credit as he can from the withdrawal agreement with the Americans. He, or so it will be claimed,



vote—by means of bribery and intimidation, according to his detractors.

Competition among the Sunnis is no less fierce, especially in the tribal movement known as the *Sahwa* (Awakening) and the Salvation Front, which are bidding to oust candidates tied to the largest Sunni block in parliament, the National Accord Front, or *Tawafuq*, whose leading party is the IIP. Here too Mr Maliki has been weaving controversial alliances, backing one group against another. The political emergence of the tribes, many of which had previously supported the insurgents, is part of a new dynamic that has seen al-Qaeda and other rebel groups beaten back if not completely defeated. Mr Maliki has also been accused of having hundreds of IIP members arrested, especially in the mixed-sect Diyala province.

has nailed down the occupiers and made them promise to leave within three years. Under the agreement, American forces, now about 146,000-strong in Iraq, will withdraw from the cities by the middle of next year. All military operations will require the assent of Iraqis. Americans will be barred from using Iraq as a launch pad to attack other countries.

There is, in fact, considerable wiggle-room in the agreement. The timing can be extended by mutual consent. Even the requirement for American troops to withdraw from city centres may be open to an elastic interpretation. The Joint Security Stations, where American troops are entrenched in mini-forts scattered across the cities, have been an essential part of the military surge which, since early last year, has stanchied the terrible sectarian bloodletting, especially in Baghdad. Already they

are jointly manned by Americans and Iraqis. Iraq's generals may well be loth to remove the Americans, perhaps relabelling them as "advisers".

The Iraqi army and national police (a kind of gendarmerie) have improved out of all recognition in the past two years and at last count numbered 266,000, alongside 257,000 local police, 36,000 border guards and more than 100,000 "Sons of Iraq", the militias formed by the mainly Sunni tribal councils. But even their best units still rely heavily on the Americans for air support, not least the helicopters that are crucial in counter-insurgency, and for other technical skills, including communications, intelligence and logistics.

Despite the continuing horrors in Nineveh, bitter fighting in parts of Diyala, rising tension between Arabs and Kurds, and a continuing if less frequent cycle of bombs in Baghdad, the violence overall has greatly subsided from its level of two years ago. In the second half of 2006, violent civilian deaths, mostly in Baghdad, amounted to around 20,000, counted in morgues and hospitals. The latest estimates put the monthly figure at under 500 a month, still a shocking number, but an eighth of what it was. Fewer than 50 Iraqi soldiers and police were killed in October compared with 300-plus in April last year. The American military death toll has dived from 126 in May last year to 14 last month; the total since the invasion in 2003 is nearing 4,200.

But 20,000 out of Iraq's 34,000 doctors have left (after 2,000 were murdered) and few of the 2m-plus Iraqis now living abroad (many of them middle-class professionals) are yet willing to return. In the past few weeks, suicide-bombers have killed people at the checkpoints into Baghdad's international zone, on

the road to the airport, by one of the main bridges and outside the Ministry of Trade, where eight female employees were killed. The country still offers nothing approaching a secure environment where foreigners can come and do business. A number of foreign companies, especially in the oil sector, have signed big deals. But no major foreign banks or businesses have thought it feasible to set up shop in the open in Baghdad. Though safer than it was, Baghdad is still the most dangerous capital in the world.

In any event, as the recently departed American mastermind of the surge, General David Petraeus, repeatedly said, the gains remain "fragile and reversible". The coming elections at the beginning and end of next year will give a vivid picture of Iraq's political balance of power. But a potentially devastating lack of consensus among the main political groups and their leaders still prevails. Corruption is rife. Many ministries are still fiefs of patronage. Family and tribal ties are what count in getting jobs. Intrigue and deceit seem to dog the management of just about every political party. No culture of tolerance or pluralism has yet emerged.

A fundamental three-way split still prevents Iraq from coming together as a country. Though it is hopeful that the Sunni Arabs, probably some 20% of the population, seem set to be drawn back into the heart of parliamentary and provincial politics next year, few of their leaders seem willing yet to acknowledge that they have lost the power that they had always held.

A former deputy prime minister, a Sunni, insisted last week that his fellow Sunnis represent "at least 50% of Iraqis, by God!" Some of the leading Shias, who by most calculations

represent more than 50% of the total population, seem prepared to reach out to the Sunnis, especially the biddable tribal sheikhs, provided they accept their new position as second fiddlers. But most Shias still regard the Sunnis with suspicion. "Maliki's worst nightmare is still waking up to find a Sunni general in charge of the country again," says a seasoned Western observer in Baghdad.

No national harmony yet

The Kurds are enjoying a golden age of near-independence that they have never had before. Their region still feels the perkier and safest in Iraq, though its leaders have yet to acquire truly democratic instincts. But the Kurds remain loth to make the sort of compromise over the bitterly disputed mixed Arab-Kurdish-Turkomen city of Kirkuk and the surrounding province which might in turn allow them to have more say over the oil in the area they control. Both Shia and Sunni Arabs habitually refer to the Kurds with ill-disguised contempt. American and UN diplomats fear that the Kurdish leaders, wary of being outflanked by each other on such issues as Kirkuk, are in danger of overplaying their hand—at a risk of losing much that they have already achieved.

In short, the new establishment of Shias, Sunnis and Kurds sorely needs to build a sense of nationhood. The withdrawal agreement means that it will soon be for the Iraqis alone to define their destiny. For the next few years the Americans may yet find themselves holding the ring. But once the occupiers have left, the chances that the Iraqis will entrench and cherish a stable, federal, pluralist democracy must still be rated at less than even.

INTERVIEW:

UN delays report on Kirkuk to avoid tensions

REUTERS

November 29, 2008 By Michael Christie BAGHDAD. (Reuters) -

The United Nations has delayed a report on disputed areas in Iraq, including the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, until after local elections next year because it might have stirred tensions, the U.N. envoy to Iraq said on Saturday.

"The U.N. is there to pour water on fire and not oil on fire," Staffan de Mistura, head of the U.N. mission in Iraq, told Reuters in an interview.

He said the U.N. analysis of Kirkuk, a city contested by Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs, might have been used before the January 31 election to stoke discord, rather than as the tool for finding a resolution that it was meant to be.

"And therefore the water will come after the election," de Mistura added.

The fate of cities claimed by different ethnic and sectarian groups remains a powderkeg issue that could trigger a resurgence of the bloodshed that tore through Iraq after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion and ousting of former dictator Saddam Hussein.

Bodies piled up by the hundreds as majority Shi'ites battled minority Sunni Arabs who had dominated Iraq under Saddam and who initially sided with al Qaeda in confronting the invaders.

While car bombs and suicide bombings remain common, the violence has fallen to four-year lows, feeding hopes that Iraq has begun to tread a path of increasing stability ahead of the local elections and also a general election next year. But disputes over cities like Kirkuk are far from resolved.

Sitting over potentially rich oil fields, Kirkuk is claimed by ethnic Kurds as their ancestral home although it lies outside the semi-autonomous region run by the Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq.

Kurds say Kirkuk was heavily repopulated by Arabs moved there by Saddam to try to invalidate Kurdish claims to the city. Turkmen residents there also oppose Kurdish efforts to have Kirkuk included in Kurdistan.

Tensions between the increasingly assertive Shi'ite-led coalition of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and its Kurdish partners are viewed as one possible roadblock to stability.

The dispute stalled efforts to hold provincial elections in Kirkuk. The rest of the country will vote in January but Kirkuk will have to wait for its own ballot.

Iraq's constitution calls for a referendum on Kirkuk's fate, but that has been postponed. The U.N. report on Kirkuk and 30-to-40 other disputed areas consists of analyses of demographics, histories, geographies, ethnic makeup, politics and economies. It published its findings on the first four, less-contested districts in June.

De Mistura had said earlier this year that one report on Kirkuk would be published by October in a bid for a "grand deal" to end tensions. The date was then moved to end-November.

March now seemed a more logical date, after the elections that will determine the political makeup of Iraq on the ground, in its cities, towns and governorships, de Mistura said.

"The timing of the presentation of the report before elections take place could have been interpreted, or used, instead of as ... part of the road map for a political calm, as an opportunity for some tensions," de Mistura said.

He said the U.N.'s aim was to continue working on the reports so they can be handed to Iraqi officials when they are ready to sit down and negotiate the destiny of the areas.

"In other words, the reports are an ingredient which should be feeding the political dialogue, and the time that you feed the political dialogue needs to be well-timed," he said.

That position might frustrate Kurdish authorities, eager for a decision. The United Nations was taking too long, the Kurdistan Regional Government said on Saturday.

Mixed feelings on security pact

Iraq ponders future after ratification

By Campbell Robertson

BAGHDAD: In the 36 hours after the Iraqi Parliament's decision to ratify a security agreement that sets a 2011 deadline for the presence of U.S. troops, Iraqis across the country were still trying to absorb the meaning of the ratification, for the country and their own near future.

Some were elated that a date for the American departure had officially been set; others were angered that the Iraqi government had been, in their view, bullied into an deal by an occupying force; others worried that the agreement would leave the central government with too much power, and still others were not at all convinced that a superpower would voluntarily withdraw from a much weaker country.

Opposition to the pact was most virulent from senior leaders loyal to the anti-American Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr, who issued a statement Friday declaring three days of mourning to mark the pact's ratification.

At Friday prayers in Sadr City, the sprawling Shiite district in northeastern Baghdad, Sayyid Hassan al-Husseini thundered against the pact's supporters, delivering specific critiques of the agreement's provisions and criticizing the fact that it was made with the Bush administration rather than with President-elect Barack Obama, who has proposed a shorter timetable than the one outlined in the agreement.

"Obama might change his opinion because of the signing of the agreement," Husseini said. "But now the Iraqi Parliament has signed on; they want the American forces to stay, to give them three more years."

But in interviews with Iraqis in cities around the country, there was less concern about the agreement itself than a widespread skepticism that the Americans would actually adhere to it.

Iraq has a long history of foreign occupation, by the Persians, Ottomans and British, all of which lasted for decades if not centuries. To many in Iraq, a country where the past is durably present, it is simply unimaginable that a foreign occupation would last only eight years.

"In the security agreement much has been achieved," said Khadum al-Quraishi, 40, a teacher from Diyala Province. "But as to ending the occupation in three years, that's implausible. America occupied Iraq for its interests, and it would not leave Iraq after so many enormous losses."

Far more important than Sadr's opin-

ion on the pact is the view of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the enormously influential Shiite cleric who has conditioned his support for the agreement on several issues, including support across sectarian lines.

A number of Sunni lawmakers voted for the so-called status of forces agreement in Parliament on Thursday, but one of the most pressing questions being asked by the pact's mostly Shiite and Kurdish supporters has been exactly how much Sunni support was needed for the ayatollah's approval. That remained unclear on Friday, as a representative of Sistani's offered only vague statements.

"Iraq's sovereignty remains incomplete with the presence of the foreign forces," said Ahmed Saafi in a sermon in Karbala. "But supporters of the agreement are optimistic that it will give Iraq eventually the full sovereignty. Some are pessimistic, for our previous experience proves the opposite."

Opposition to the agreement was by no means universal. Even among the inhabitants of Sadr City opinion was mixed, with some quietly celebrating what they saw as a display of Iraq's strength in the face of American pressure.

"God willing it will be good for Iraq and Maliki," said Ayad Mohammed, 27, a grocer in Sadr City, referring to President Nuri Kamal al-Maliki. "We are not interested in politics; we are simple people, and that's why we are counting on him and the representatives to make decisions."

More surprising were the words of approval from Iran, which many lawmakers said had interfered in Parliament deliberations and almost derailed the pact's ratification the night before the vote.

"This was a very good decision by the Iraqi Parliament," said Ahmad Jannati, a senior Iranian official, during Friday prayers at Tehran University, specifically citing the Parliament's decision to put the agreement up for a nationwide referendum in July.

"Then the ball would be in the court of the Americans who claim that they are after democracy," he said.

But some Iraqis who support the pact were so disillusioned by the spectacle of lawmakers brawling, shouting and grandstanding during the 10 days of deliberations that they were beginning to have second thoughts.

"Frankly speaking, the agreement is very clear," Alaa Mohammed, a 29-year-old journalist from the southern city of Basra, said Thursday, shortly after seeing the ratification vote on television. "But some members of Parliament disagreed with it just to attract attention. They have no idea about what benefits the people. What I saw today made me

Bomber hits Shiite mosque south of Baghdad

By Alissa J. Rubin

BAGHDAD: A suicide bomber wearing an explosive vest blew himself up just inside the courtyard of a Shiite mosque in a town south of Baghdad on Friday, killing 12 people and wounding 19, according to eyewitnesses and officials.

The attack took place in Mussayib, a town about 80 kilometers, or 50 miles, south of Baghdad, as about 700 people were attending Friday prayers and preparing to hold a peaceful march in protest at the ratification in the Iraqi Parliament on Thursday of a new security agreement with the United States.

Mussayib, a predominantly Shiite town, has many Sunni villages nearby and has been struck several times in the past by suicide bombings and attacks on local government officials.

The mosque, the Sadrists Hussainiya, was a Sunni mosque under Saddam Hussein. But after he was ousted supporters of the anti-American cleric Moktada al-Sadr took it over and turned it into a Shiite mosque and an office for the local Sadrists.

The bomber made it past the main checkpoints where worshippers were searched, said an Iraqi Army officer, who said he could not be quoted because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

"I was standing inside the Hussainiya and do not remember anything except feeling something like the blast of a storm," said Nema Adnan, 18, a day laborer.

On Thursday, Parliament ratified a sweeping security agreement that sets the course for an end to the United States' role in the war and marks the beginning of a new relationship between the countries.

feel I want the forces to stay longer, because without these forces we will eat each other."

Nazila Fathi contributed reporting from Tehran, Tariq Mahir, Anwar J. Ali and Mohammed Hussein from Baghdad, and Iraqi employees of The New York Times from Basra, Karbala and Diyala.

Le Monde
29 novembre 2008

Les députés irakiens approuvent l'accord sur le départ de l'armée américaine d'ici fin 2011

L'Assemblée nationale irakienne a approuvé le texte négocié par le gouvernement avec les Etats-Unis. Il devrait cependant être soumis à un référendum avant fin juillet 2009

Le suspense a duré jusqu'à la dernière minute. L'histoire retiendra que le jeudi 27 novembre 2008, après une dizaine de mois de récriminations réciproques, l'Irak et les Etats-Unis ont décidé d'ouvrir, à partir du 1^{er} janvier 2009, une ère nouvelle dans leurs relations, plus équilibrées que jamais depuis l'invasion de mars-avril 2003. D'ici à cinq semaines, l'Irak aura recouvré l'essentiel de sa souveraineté nationale et ne sera plus sous la coupe du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies dont la résolution concernant son occupation par les Etats-Unis depuis près de six ans arrive à son terme le 31 décembre 2008.

L'accord a été obtenu à l'arraché par le chef chiite du gouvernement, Nouri Al-Maliki, dont la stature nationale ne ces-

LES POINTS FORTS DE L'ACCORD

Voici les principaux points de l'accord irako-américain voté, jeudi 27 novembre, par les députés irakiens.

Etapas du retrait : « Toutes les forces de combat américaines devront se retirer des villes, villages et localités d'Irak (...) au plus tard le 30 juin 2009 ». « Toutes les forces américaines devront avoir quitté le territoire irakien le 31 décembre 2011 au plus tard. »

Souveraineté : « Le territoire irakien, ses espaces aérien et maritime ne pourront être utilisés comme point de départ ou de passage pour des attaques contre d'autres pays (...). En cas de menace ou d'agression interne ou externe contre l'Irak (...), les Etats-Unis prendront toutes les mesures, diplomatiques ou militaires nécessaires, pour y faire échec. »

Coordination : « Toutes les opérations militaires (américaines en Irak) devront être entreprises en pleine coordination avec les autorités irakiennes. »

se de grandir depuis la guerre qu'il avait osé lancer – et remporter – en mars contre les milices de ses adversaires chiites. Il a été approuvé jeudi par les trois quarts des 220 élus irakiens – sur 275 – présents ce jour-là au Conseil représentatif (l'Assemblée nationale) et prévoit le départ des troupes américaines de combat de « toutes les localités irakiennes » d'ici au 30 juin 2009. Il prévoit aussi le retrait total « de tous » les soldats du corps expéditionnaire (146 000) d'ici au 31 décembre 2011, étant entendu que les deux parties peuvent se mettre d'accord pour accélérer le calendrier.

Salué comme un succès « de la démocratie grandissante » en Irak par le président George Bush – qui ne voulait pas entendre parler d'un calendrier de départ des troupes avant une « victoire militaire » complète –, le vote très majoritaire des élus irakiens, qui doit encore être entériné par le Conseil présidentiel composé du président de la République et de ses deux vice-présidents, n'a pu être obtenu qu'au prix d'une ultime concession. A savoir l'engagement du gouvernement de soumettre le texte à un référendum national avant fin juillet 2009.

Réclamé par le principal parti politique sunnite qui dispose notamment d'une des deux vice-présidences de l'Etat et de 44 élus, cet exercice « permettra de faire le point » sur les conditions de mise en œuvre

de l'accord, sept mois après son coup d'envoi, s'est consolé un conseiller de M. Maliki pour qui « l'essentiel est la date de départ des soldats ».

En réalité, les concessions acceptées par M. Maliki, comme d'ailleurs celles qui ont été agréées par les Américains, ne constituent pas, a priori, « une remise en cause fondamentale de l'accord », a bien noté Condoleezza Rice, la secrétaire d'Etat de l'administration Bush. D'autant qu'il n'est pas du tout certain que ce référendum ait vraiment lieu – d'autres sujets, notamment des points constitutionnels controversés, avaient été promis à révision et approbation « populaire » en 2005 sans voir le jour.

Intitulé « Status of Forces Agreement »

par les Américains, sur le modèle de ceux conclus avec le Japon ou l'Allemagne après la deuxième guerre mondiale, et « Accord sur le retrait des troupes étrangères » par le pouvoir irakien de manière à mieux le « vendre » à son opinion publique, ce texte de 31 articles fait déjà l'objet d'interprétations différentes selon qu'il est lu en arabe ou en anglais.

Le texte de 31 articles fait déjà l'objet d'interprétations différentes selon qu'il est lu en arabe ou en anglais

Les Américains qui n'ont rendu publique leur propre version qu'après le vote de jeudi – « pour éviter de rajouter des divergences possibles », selon un diplomate – estiment par exemple que l'article qui les obligera à informer les Irakiens « avant » toute opération militaire sur leur territoire ne les contraint pas à prévenir de la date ou du lieu exact d'une

offensive. « Sachant que les autorités irakiennes sont infiltrées par toutes sortes de gens, y compris des Iraniens, ce serait suicidaire », confiait mercredi un officier à un journaliste du groupe américain McClatchy.

En définitive, aux termes de l'accord approuvé, le seul point indiscutable est qu'à partir du 1^{er} janvier 2009 le gouvernement irakien peut exiger le départ des troupes étrangères de son territoire sans être automatiquement contredit ou corrigé par le Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies. Pour Bagdad, c'est une victoire politique majeure. ■

PATRICE CLAUDE



Les députés fidèles à l'imam chiite Moqtada Al-Sadr disent « Non à l'accord » lors de la séance parlementaire du jeudi 27 novembre. AP

Un rapport de l'AIEA met la Syrie sous pression pour ses activités nucléaires présumées

L'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique confirme des soupçons pesant sur Damas à propos d'un programme nucléaire clandestin mené jusqu'en 2007 avec la coopération de la Corée du Nord

Alors que la Syrie s'efforce de normaliser ses relations avec les Occidentaux tout en guettant l'installation, en janvier, de la nouvelle administration américaine, le dossier du nucléaire vient compliquer la donne, et de manière de plus en plus pesante, constatent des diplomates.

Enquêtant depuis plusieurs mois sur les activités nucléaires présumées de la Syrie, l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA) a, pour la première fois, rendu un rapport sur ses recherches qui a été discuté, jeudi 27 et vendredi 28 novembre, lors du Conseil des gouverneurs de l'Agence, à Vienne. L'existence d'un tel rapport (que réclamaient les Occidentaux avec insistance) ainsi que les éléments qu'il contient inscrivent désormais la Syrie, et sans doute pour longtemps, à l'ordre du jour de l'AIEA, le bras d'inspection de l'ONU pour les questions de prolifération.

L'enquête porte sur le site de Dair Alzour, près de la localité d'Al-Kibar, sur les rives de l'Euphrate. Selon les services de renseignement de plusieurs pays occidentaux, qui ont fourni des données à l'AIEA, la Syrie construisait là, depuis 2001, un réacteur nucléaire, avec l'aide clandestine de la Corée du Nord. Le site, un bâtiment isolé, a été bombardé le 6 septembre 2007 par l'aviation israélienne, qui l'a réduit à l'état de gravats.

Dans son rapport, qui met Damas sous pression, l'AIEA note que les « caractéristiques » du bâtiment de Dair Alzour, ajoutées aux capacités de pompage d'eau attendues, « sont similaires à ce que l'on pourrait trouver en relation avec un site de réacteur » nucléaire.

L'Agence affirme par ailleurs que les échantillons de sols prélevés sur place par ses inspecteurs ont révélé « un grand nombre de particules d'uranium artificiel », issus d'un traitement chimique (mais pas de l'uranium enrichi). La Syrie, qui avait procédé après le bombardement israélien à divers travaux de maquillage du site – et construit sur le même emplacement un autre édifice – a affirmé que cet uranium provenait des missiles israéliens qui se sont abattus sur l'installation. L'AIEA a demandé à Israël de fournir des éléments de réponse à ce sujet.

La Syrie a refusé de communiquer les plans du bâtiment détruit. Elle n'a pas, non plus, autorisé l'AIEA à inspecter

trois autres sites dans le pays, qui pourraient être liés à Dair Alzour. Il s'agit en l'occurrence, pour les inspecteurs, d'établir si Damas a cherché à se doter d'installations de retraitement, ce qui représenterait un fort élément de preuve de desseins nucléaires militaires. Sur les trois sites concernés, après que l'AIEA eût formulé sa demande de visite, des travaux de terrassement ont eu lieu et des grands conteneurs ont été évacués. Des images satellitaires obtenues par l'AIEA ont mis en évidence divers efforts de dissimulation.

Le dossier du nucléaire syrien pourrait compliquer les efforts de rapprochement engagés par Damas auprès des Occidentaux

L'enquête porte aussi sur les efforts syriens d'acquisition à l'étranger d'équipements pouvant entrer dans la construction ou le fonctionnement d'un réacteur nucléaire. Damas, qui répète que Dair Alzour était une simple structure militaire sans dimension nucléaire, n'a pas apporté de réponse.

Les discussions sur la Syrie à Vienne ont donné lieu à des échanges très tendus entre le directeur de l'AIEA, Mohamed ElBaradei, et des pays occidentaux, en premier lieu les Etats-Unis, qui le taxent de vouloir minimiser l'ampleur des soupçons pesant sur Damas.

M. ElBaradei, comme il l'a déjà fait par le passé à propos des activités nucléaires de l'Iran, craint la manipulation des données issues du renseignement – en invoquant le cas irakien – et s'insurge contre l'utilisation de l'option militaire par Israël. Il demande que l'Agence puisse recevoir plus d'informations des Etats qui en disposent. Contre l'avis des Occidentaux, mais avec le soutien des pays non alignés, il a en outre obtenu que la Syrie puisse bénéficier d'une « coopération technique » de l'AIEA dans le domaine du nucléaire civil, en dépit de l'enquête qui la vise. ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

IRAK: LES KURDES CRITIQUENT VERTEMENT LE CHEF DE L'ONU À BAGDAD



ERBIL (Irak), 30 nov 2008 (AFP) –

LE GOUVERNEMENT autonome du Kurdistan irakien a accusé dimanche le représentant spécial du secrétaire général de l'Onu en Irak, Staffan de Mistura, de poursuivre "la politique d'arabisation" initiée par l'ancien dictateur Saddam Hussein.

Dans un communiqué, le ministère kurde chargé des "régions disputées" (entre différentes communautés, dans le nord de l'Irak) affirme que l'ONU "avalise la politique d'arabisation mise en place par le précédent régime chauvin" et n'a "aucune feuille de route pour établir un plan d'assistance puisqu'elle devait remettre ses recommandations à l'automne et nous sommes presque à la fin de l'année et rien n'est venu".

Interrogé par l'AFP, M. de Mistura a affirmé "ne pas vouloir entrer dans une polémique avec les responsables kurdes" mais qu'il "avait effectivement décidé de reporter jusqu'à l'an prochain l'annonce de ses propositions afin d'éviter de créer des tensions avant les élections provinciales" du 31 janvier.

Le 20 août, l'ONU avait déclaré qu'elle proposerait à l'automne une série

d'options pour trouver un accord global sur les régions qui sont l'objet de contestations, notamment la riche ville pétrolière de Kirkouk, où un conflit oppose Kurdes, Arabes et Turcomans.

"Nous allons proposer entre septembre et octobre des options pour un accord global sur les régions disputées, dont bien sûr Kirkouk, qui est le problème le plus chaud actuellement en Irak", avait alors dit aux journalistes M. de Mistura.

Il s'agit de tractations sur douze secteurs qui se trouvent dans le nord de l'Irak, qui sont l'objet de conflits à la suite de mouvements de population ordonnés par l'ancien dictateur Saddam Hussein, dans le cadre de sa politique "d'arabisation" et de répression contre les populations qu'il jugeait hostiles.

Un différend sur la répartition du pouvoir entre les trois communautés de la région de Kirkouk, à 250 km au nord de Bagdad, a repoussé les élections dans cette province. Une commission réunissant toutes les parties doit se réunir sous les auspices de l'ONU en février et mars pour trouver le moyen d'organiser des élections et une répartition des sièges entre communautés.